

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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March 13, 2025

Start: 10:11 a.m.

Recess: 9:55 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Rita C. Joseph, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Jennifer Gutiérrez
Shahana Hanif
Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Farrah N. Louis
Mercedes Narcisse
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Lynn C. Schulman
Althea V. Stevens

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale A. Brewer
Alexa Avilés
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Jumaane Williams

A P P E A R A N C E S

Melissa Avilés-Ramos, Chancellor at New York City Public Schools

Daniel Weisberg, First Deputy Chancellor of New York City Public Schools

Emma Vadehra, Deputy Chancellor of Operations and Finance at New York City Public Schools

Seritta Scott, Chief Financial Officer at New York City Public Schools

Danika Rux, Deputy Chancellor for Division of School Leadership at New York City Public Schools

Christina Foti, Deputy Chancellor of the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning at New York City Public Schools

Cristina Melendez, Deputy Chancellor for Family and Community Engagement at New York City Public Schools

Dr. Miatheresa Pate, Chief Academic Officer at New York City Public Schools

Flavia Puello-Perdomo, Chief of Schools for Community Supports and Wellness at New York City Public Schools

Monique Scales, Senior Director - Operations, Division of Early Childhood Education at New York City Public Schools

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Kleber Palma, Executive Director, Office of
Language Access at New York City Public Schools

Robin Davson, Executive Director of Safety,
Culture, and Climate at New York City Public
Schools

Paul Thompson, Executive Director of the Arts
Office at New York City Public Schools

Mark Rampersant, Chief Security Director at New
York City Public Schools

Trevonda Kelly, Chief Enrollment Officer at New
York City Public Schools

Liz Vladeck, General Counsel for New York City
Public Schools

Jeff Klein, Chief-of-Staff, Early Childhood
Education at New York City Public Schools

Dale Kelly, Executive Vice President of the
Council of School Supervising Administrators

Glenys Rivera, Second Vice President of Local
372

Michael Mulgrew, President of United Federation
of Teachers

Christina Karahisarlidis, Program Manager at
Generation Citizen

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Martin Gloster, teacher at Global Learning Collaborative

Djeneba Toure, student at Global Learning Collaborative

Alix Torres, student at Global Learning Collaborative

Lorens Rodriguez, student at Global Learning Collaborative

Soleidy Marte, student at Global Learning Collaborative

Logan Vanhoutte, student at Brooklyn Brownstone School

Ihel Nunez, student at Young Women Leadership School of the Bronx

Mololuwa Fasola, youth leader at Circle Keepers

Nora Ayuba, youth leader at Circle Keepers

Orla Flynn, youth leader at Circle Keepers

Hadia Ali, student on behalf of YA-YA Network

Janice Chong, youth organizer at YA-YA Network

Chaplain Sandra Mitchell, parent leader from New Settlement Parent Action Committee

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Sirahi Drame, student from Young Women's
Leadership School in the Bronx

Amber Colon, youth leader from Circle Keepers

Kira Healy, youth leader from Circle Keepers

Becky Yang, student and member of Circle Keepers

Amina Jallow, high school student advocate from
YA-YA Network

Emily Duenas, youth leader from Circle Keepers

Mamouna Doumbia, youth advocate from YA-YA
Network

Nicolas Lipscomb, youth leader from Circle
Keepers

Blaise Lamisha, youth advocate from YA-YA
Network

Aislinn Cao, youth leader from Circle Keepers

Kai Lin, student from YA-YA Network

Marilyn Perez, student and youth leader for CAE
PAC Activists

Edward Sanchez, Coalition for Equitable
Education Funding

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Andrea Ortiz, Member and Campaign Director of
Dignity in Schools Campaign New York

Anyinel Santana, youth leader from Make the Road
New York

Jania Witherspoon, Co-Founder and Director of
Youth Voices at The Circle Keepers

Abrar Bhuiyan, youth leader from Make the Road
New York

Kimberly Gil, youth leader from Brooklyn School
for Social Justice

Andrea Alonso Rodriguez, youth leader from Make
the Road New York

Trinity Williams, student from Brooklyn
Environmental Exploration School

Sebastian Espinal, youth leader from Urban Youth
Collaborative and Make the Road New York

Holiday Woodside, youth leader from Make the
Road New York

Jeylin Frias, youth leader from Future of
Tomorrow and Urban Youth Collaborative

Darialias Infanten, youth leader from Sistas and
Brothas United

Esther, youth leader from Make the Road New York

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Joe Titus, CEO and Co-Founder of Hiveclass

Dhaliem Alban, youth leader from Make the Road
New York

Anderson Guaman, youth leader from Make the Road
New York

Chauncy Young, Director of New Settlement Parent
Action Committee

Kyae Sin Linn Lat, youth advocate from Asian
American Student Advocacy Project

Waiza Irshad, youth advocate from Asian American
Student Advocacy Project

Brandon Lee, youth advocate for Language Access
Campaign at Asian American Student Advocacy
Project

Ayesha Tasnim, youth advocate from Asian
American Student Advocacy Project

Paulette Healy, District 75 parent

Sarah Jonas, Vice President of Youth Division at
Children's Aid

Nikesha Francis, Policy and Advocacy Manager at
Good Shepherd Services

Randi Levine, Policy Director of Advocates for
Children of New York

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy at YMCA of Greater New York

Molly Senach, Education and Employment Community Organizer from Center of Independence of the Disabled New York

Michelle Kraus, Social Work Manager of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Debra Freeman, Chair of Education Working Group at Four Freedoms Democratic Club

Aaron Sanders, Deputy Director of Government and Community Relations at Grand Street Settlement

Megan Nordgren, Director of Development and Government Relations at New York Sun Works

Allison Marino, Director of Public Affairs at Edible Schoolyard NYC

Tyra Vanriel, graduate intern at Tisch Food Center

Briana Black, Executive Director and Lead Educator of Leave It Better Foundation

Natalie Greaves-Peters, researcher at Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education and Policy

Gregory Brender, Chief Policy and Innovation Officer of Day Care Council of New York

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Trenton Price, Executive Director of Salvadori Center

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Angelina Alshaar., parent from Queens

Beth Reisman, New York Edge

Michael Rands, researcher at Class Size Matters

Espa Zigouris, Senior Vice President of Education at Birch Family Services

Takiyah Tinsley, parent from Manhattan

Jolene Gunther-Doherty, Director of Guild for Exceptional Children's 4410 Preschool Special Education Program

Fiodhna O'Grady, Director of Government Relations at Samaritans of New York

Brett Saffer, parent from the Bronx

Dr. Eduardo Antonetti, Senior Director of Advancement at Internationals Network

Jeanine Schoen, parent from PS321

Brittany Kaiser, NYC Community Organizer from Alliance for Quality Education

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to today's New York City Council Preliminary Budget hearing for the Committee on Education.

At this time, we ask that you silence all electronic devices, and at no time are you to approach the dais.

If you would like to sign up for in-person testimony or have any other questions throughout the hearing, please see one of the Sergeant-at-Arms.

Chair Joseph, we're ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. [GAVEL]
Before I start, I want to shout out PS270 DeKalb School, who's here with us in the gallery, studying the 19th Amendment, so they're here. This is perfect for Civic for All Week. Good to see you all.

Good morning, and welcome to the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget hearing for the Committee on Education. My name is Rita Joseph, and I'm the Chair of the Committee on Education.

This morning, we will be discussing the Department of Education's 33.5 billion Fiscal 2026 budget as presented in the Preliminary Financial Plan. This afternoon, we will be discussing DOE's

Capital Plan with the School Construction Authority.

Thank you to everyone present here and to those of you who are testifying remotely.

DOE has the largest budget among City agencies at 29 percent of the City's overall budget of 116.3 billion for Fiscal 2026. It also has the largest headcount among City agencies currently budgeted at 138,098 positions, which is 46 percent of the entire City budgeted headcount. As the Chair of this Committee, I continue to push hard for accountability and accuracy to ensure that the budget for the largest City agency and the largest school system in the country actually reflects the needs and interests of its residents and students.

As we sit here today, there are a number of issues that are in flux. Many important programs currently DOE's budget are not funded in Fiscal 2026. The future framework for Foundation Aid remains uncertain. We have a president hell-bent on eliminating the Federal Department of Education. This week, the president made it clear his plan to eliminate half of the federal DOE workforce. Make no mistake, this misguided decision will only harm children and families and undermine the ability of

the states and school districts to provide an education to all students. Rather than seek to strengthen education, the White House is seeking to abandon its responsibility and place at risk the future of core funding streams that New York City has relied on for years.

As DOE navigates potential threats to financial funding, the Council remains committed to protecting public education and we hope to work together with New York City Public Schools to do so. At the State level, the process of updating and retooling the Foundation Aid formula since its inception in 2007 is underway. These changes will dictate how much funding school districts such as New York City will receive for education now and in the future. While the State looks to use updated data to more accurately reflect poverty levels, there is an opportunity to update other metrics in the formula that could benefit school districts. Additionally, the City has three years to be in full compliance with Class Size Law. Next year, New York City Public Schools will need to be 60 percent compliance for class size, and it will take dedication, concerted efforts to achieve that. And at the City level,

crucial programs again find themselves at risk in the Mayor's budget. Last year, with advocacy of parents, families, and students and support from our State partners, the Council worked with New York City Public Schools and the Administration to cover over 500 million in expiring federal stimulus dollars. While some of these fundings was baselined, 223 million was included in Fiscal 2025 only. This includes funding for arts education, restorative justice, tutoring, among other programs our students and families rely on. The future of these programs is in jeopardy. Our schools are still recovering from the effects of COVID. Our level of chronic absenteeism are still higher than before the pandemic. Students are still recovering from learning loss and mental health issues are still of high concern. Now is not the time to slow down our investments. While we look to support our teachers, students, and families, there are multiple vital programs that the Council must fight for every year. This includes funding for mental health continuum, teacher recruitment, and community schools. Baselining these programs will allow for the New York City Public Schools to focus on expansion and other

areas for improvement instead of having the same fight every year.

Through oversight hearing, investments, outreach, and works with our partners, this Council is working diligently to stabilize our early childhood education system. We thank the New York City Public Schools and the Administration for working with us over the past year on stabilizing and improving early childhood system. We have appreciated the biweekly meeting and have seen that the positive effect programs and initiatives like reinstatement of marketing outreach the Council fought for. The Council Extended Day Seat pilot has converted over 1,700 standard day seats for children whose families now have extended hours of childcare each day.

Still, there's significant work yet to do to ensure all our children are being served. Data shows that vacancy rates in the system are still high and even though the Council helped secure 55 million to fund preschool special education seats, there are still too many children and families waiting for placement and services, yet this funding is currently missing from the Mayor's budget in the Fiscal 2026.

Ensuring that the City continues its commitment and does not abandon these families is paramount.

The City sits in a position, but there's also an opportunity in the chaos. By funding and baselining the many vital and critical programs that are currently unfunded next year, the City can continue to champion New York City Public Schools as not only unquestionably the biggest, but also the best public school system in the country.

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure the City's budget is fair, transparent, and accountable to the needs of New Yorkers. It is essential that the budget that we adopt this year is also reflective of the priorities and interests of the Council and the people we represent. This hearing is a vital part of the process and I expect the DOE to be responsive to the questions and concerns of Council Members. I look forward to an active engagement with the Administration over the next few months to ensure Fiscal 2026 adopted budget meets the goals the Council has set out and continue to providing our New York City kids with the education that they deserve.

I would also like to acknowledge my Colleagues who are present here, Council Member Narcisse, Council Member Louis, Council Member Schulman, Council Member Dinowitz, Public Advocate Williams, Council Member Brewer, and Council Member Gutiérrez, remote, and Council Member Restler.

Now I'd like to turn it over to Public Advocate Jumaane Williams for opening statement after which we will hear from the Administration. Public Advocate.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I just want to say I love these comic books, so I'd love to know how to be received, but they're pretty dope.

Good morning. My name is Jumaane Williams. I'm Public Advocate for the City of New York. I'd like to thank Chairs Joseph and Brannan and Members of the Committees for holding this hearing. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that the federal relief funding given to schools during the pandemic, elementary and secondary schools, their emergency relief expired last year. This funding was crucial for a number of school programs, and the City stepped up to provide continued funding that otherwise would

have been scaled down or ended. While some programs were baselined, others were only extended for a year. The Mayor's Preliminary Fiscal Year '26 budget extended funding for Learning to Work and summer programming for another year, but does not include long-term funding. New York City is currently failing many of its students with disabilities, in particular preschoolers with disabilities. Though the Mayor has promised a special education preschool seat for every child who needs one and is legally entitled to one, it has yet to materialize for many children with disabilities. There are about 450 children who are sitting at home instead of in a classroom where they will receive the support and services they need. Though NYC Public Schools confirmed this number, the Preliminary Budget does not renew 55 million dollars in funding for new classrooms. It is important to reiterate that these seats are legally required and students' rights are being violated every day, that they are not receiving special education services. Last year, more than 14,400 preschoolers with disabilities ended the school year without ever receiving at least one of the types of services the

City was legally required to provide, and that's just unacceptable.

It is now more urgent than ever to ensure that our undocumented students and newest New Yorkers have access to the services and support they need as well. In January of 2023, the City launched PromiseNYC, which helps families who previously didn't qualify for other state or federal programs due to their immigration status, including undocumented parents and asylum seekers. It is especially important for recently arrived children to have access to early childhood services, as many are English language learners and many have experienced significant stress and trauma on their way to New York. The City increased funding in Fiscal Year '25 for PromiseNYC, extending access to 1,000 children, but the full 25 million funding will expire at the end of June if not renewed in the budget. I also want to mention that many of these students helped with our budget because we had a loss in population in our school system, and without some of the newly arrived children, it would have been even worse.

In August of 2023, Advocates for Children found that only 31.1 percent of New York City schools

are fully accessible for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments ensure people with disabilities have equal access to public programs and services, including public education. However, many students with disabilities are barred from attending their neighborhood schools because of inaccessible infrastructure. The City must allocate 450 million dollars in addition to the 750 million investment in the 2020-2024 Capital Plan, totaling 1.25 billion to make at least 45 percent of schools that serve as a primary location for a school fully accessible by 2030.

Public schools are the main youth mental health system in our city, and an audit published last year by the State Comptroller found that too many public schools are understaffed with mental health professionals or not adequately trained and staffed, and only a few have services readily available. School-based mental health clinics provide a range of on-site mental health services to students during the school day, and most of their current funding comes from Medicaid, which is insufficient to cover the range of supports and services that

students and schools need. To cover this gap, the City should invest and baseline at least 3.75 million dollars. Additionally, the Mental Health Continuum, a cross-agency partnership to serve students with the greatest mental health needs, requires a renewal of 5 million dollars in the Fiscal Year '26 budget.

I do look forward to working with the Department of Education and Mayor's Office and City Council to ensure the city's students have the support and services they need to learn and be successful. I also hope this is an opportunity for the Mayor to step up against what's happening in Washington, as the Chair alluded to. He hasn't said much, but I do know money speaks even louder, and so if he is opposed to some of the things, this is an opportunity for us to step up and protect our young people.

I also just want to mention that the NYPD was never defunded, but most of the services were. Education, our young people's services were defunded. We've never had a conversation about the impact of that, but we have an opportunity here to really make some folks whole, and as I hear the NYPD speaking about their plans to deal with quality-of-life

issues, I know with services like this that we're talking about here today, we can do some stuff on the front end and not have to ask NYPD to do stuff on the back end. Those need to be fully funded and structured, even though we have a difficult time, and I just want to make sure I mention I understand how difficult it is, but we have to make the best decisions for our young people so they can be safe and grow to be good adults. Thank you so much. Peace and blessings. Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Public Advocate. First, let me acknowledge some of my Colleagues that have joined, Council Member Lee, Council Member Hanif, and Council Member Avilés.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: We will now hear from the Administration. Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand, and this includes anybody here for Q and A. I will read the affirmation once and then call on each of you individually to respond.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION 22
2 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
3 questions? Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos.
4 CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: I do.
5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Emma
6 Vadehra.
7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I do.
8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Seritta
9 Scott.
10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: I do.
11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Danika
12 Rux.
13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR RUX: I do.
14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS:
15 Christina Foti.
16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: I do.
17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Cristina
18 Melendez.
19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR MELENDEZ: I do.
20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Dan
21 Weisberg.
22 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I do.
23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS:
24 Miatheresa Pate.
25 CHIEF DR. PATE: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Flavia

3 Puello-Perdomo.

4 CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Monique

6 Scales.

7 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Kleber

9 Palma.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PALMA: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Robin

12 Davson.

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Paul

15 Thompson.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Mark

18 Rampersant.

19 CHIEF RAMPERSANT: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Trevonda

21 Kelly.

22 CHIEF ENROLLMENT OFFICER KELLY: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Is there

24 anybody I missed? If you could please fill out

25 another witness slip, and then we'll get you.

You may begin your testimony.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much, Chair Joseph and Public Advocate Williams, for your support and for your comments, and we are very happy to be here with you and all of Members of the Council. Thank you for making time for us today.

I am New York City Public Schools Chancellor Melissa Avilés-Ramos, and I am joined by my first Deputy Chancellor, Daniel Weisberg, Deputy Chancellor of Operations and Finance, Emma Vadehra, and Chief Financial Officer Seritta Scott.

As Chancellor of New York City Public Schools, I have the honor of serving over one million students and staff. This role is the culmination of my nearly two-decade career in education, which I began as a high school English teacher in 2007. Throughout my tenure in New York City Public Schools, as I moved into the roles of Principal, Deputy Superintendent, Acting Superintendent, Chief-of-Staff, Deputy Chancellor, and ultimately Chancellor, I have aimed to be not only a leader, but a changemaker, navigating times of crisis and pushing our schools to new heights. When I became a

Principal, for example, only about a quarter of the senior cohort in my school was on track to graduate. I was determined to work in lockstep with my team and the school community to change that, and by June of that same year, 66.7 percent of seniors had earned their diplomas, and the following year, we raised that graduation rate to nearly 82 percent. Then in 2020, the pandemic struck, and I transitioned my school to remote instruction. Later during the pandemic, I stepped up to serve at the district level as the Deputy Superintendent and then Acting Superintendent for Bronx High Schools. After joining our central team, I launched and led Project Open Arms, working across our department and other agencies to enroll and support tens of thousands of our newest New Yorkers and their families. And as Chief-of-Staff to former Chancellor Banks, I was also one of the key architects of New York City Reads, which I immediately envisioned as a transformational initiative for our schools. In my own time as a high school English teacher and literacy specialist, I saw just how many of our kids struggled to read long into their teenage years.

To this day, these experiences enable me to lead with a deep understanding of what it takes to build bold futures for our students. To me, the key ingredients are strong and clear instructional priorities. New York City Reads, New York City Solves, and Student Pathways to be specific, bolstered by a foundation of safety and wellness, teacher support, and family and community partnerships.

This morning, I'd like to update you on the progress of these initiatives, starting with NYC Reads. I'm proud that we have successfully rolled out New York City Reads to our elementary schools and early childhood programs, but the work is far from over. As I know from my years in the classroom, research-based tier one instruction must be paired with appropriate and effective tier two and tier three interventions. That is why we have turned our focus to consistent high-quality implementation and streamlined targeted interventions directing our schools to focus on a handful of proven strategies for supporting diverse learners. This approach ensures that all children, including students with

disabilities and multilingual learners, receive the support they need to access curriculum.

Through our investments in NYC Solves and Student Pathways, we are also ensuring that our older students have the real-world skills and experiences to thrive beyond high school. As New York State revises its graduation requirements and reconsiders what it takes to be prepared for adult life, we at New York City Public Schools are ahead by leaps and bounds. We have been reimagining the high school experience since the start of this Administration, providing cutting-edge opportunities for our students to prepare for high-demand careers. I'm proud that over half a million students are benefiting from NYC Reads and NYC Solves this year, and that 15,000 students are participating in our signature Future Ready NYC program, gaining 21st century skills and earning real wages.

These instructional priorities are and will continue to be our major long-term focus. Our goal is that by 2035, all students will be on grade level in reading and math, and that by 2030, 100,000 students will be in market-aligned pathways with access to paid work experience, and all students will

graduate with a strong plan enabled by advising, career readiness skills, and access to early college classes. I am more confident than ever that we will get there.

In part, this is because, as Chancellor, I have introduced three commitments to students, families, and staff, commitments that I believe are prerequisites for learning and will amplify the impact of our instructional work. Those commitments are ensuring safety and wellness, supporting educators, and empowering families and communities.

My first commitment is focused on safety and wellness. We have a wide range of programs to meet this commitment, including our violence prevention program, Project Pivot, our mindfulness work in classrooms, our social workers and school counselors, our partnerships with community-based organizations, our school-based mental health clinics, and we are adding 20 more this year, and our expansion of community schools. We are also making sure to reaffirm both our values and our commitment to supporting all students and families. We've sent out communications to families about our supports for immigrant students and LGBTQ+ students, and we have

reaffirmed our values to staff, encouraging them to continue their excellent work in our classrooms. We have reiterated and will continue to reiterate, none of our policies have changed.

New York City Public Schools remains committed to protecting the right of every student to attend public school, regardless of immigration status, national origin, religion, or any aspect of their identity. We have also led extensive training sessions for principals, school counselors, safety agents, and more on our longstanding protocols for access to our buildings. Additionally, we remain steadfast in our support for LGBTQ+ students, and in 2021, as just one example, we updated our guidelines on gender inclusion to enshrine this support and policy. We recently held Respect for All Week, and are currently celebrating Civics Week, both annual events that help us achieve our mission of building graduates with bold futures. We also continue to promote safety and civil discourse through our Meeting the Moment initiative. I'm proud to share that religious bias incidents in schools are down approximately 44 percent since this time last year.

My second commitment is to uplift our educators. Now that we have completed the initial launch of New York City Reads and Solves, it is essential that we support our educators to implement these initiatives with fidelity, which is why we have provided unprecedented levels of professional development. We anticipate that by the end of June, New York City Reads and Solves schools will have received a cumulative 18,500 plus days of coaching this school year. And in partnership with the UFT and CSA, we have introduced flexibilities in response to educator feedback, and we are continuing to refine and enhance our implementation strategy, investing in an additional year of job-embedded coaching and support for our New York City Reads educators.

My third commitment is to empower our parents, families, and communities. To that end, I announced our new Division of Family, Community, and Student Empowerment, and I also hosted a five-year-old listening tour at the end of 2024 with over 1,000 students, families, and staff in attendance. This month, we'll be releasing a report detailing our findings from that listening session. Relatedly, I have continued to champion programs that are beloved

by families. For example, applications are ready open for our Summer Rising program. Our program evaluation recently revealed that Summer Rising 2024 had a statistically significant impact on stemming summer learning loss for K-8 students in math and K-2 students in reading. It especially impacted students in temporary housing and English language learners in both subjects, and students with disabilities in math. As this analysis shows, we are building bold futures for children year-round.

Now let me speak about our finances. Our Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget totals approximately 41.2 billion dollars, which includes 33.5 billion dollars in operating resources and another 7.7 billion for education-related pension and debt service funds. We are grateful that there are no additional PEGs included in this proposed budget, and I want to thank the Mayor for backfilling critical stimulus-funded programs that would otherwise expire, such as Summer Rising and Learning to Work. City tax levy money is our largest source of revenue, projected to be 59 percent in Fiscal Year '26, and both the Mayor and City Council play an essential role in allocating these funds. To that end, however,

I want to be clear that we still face key financial challenges, including significant Fiscal Year '26 cliffs for stimulus-funded programs that have not been fully backfilled, such as early childhood education, and other gaps, including due process cases, nursing, IT costs, and preschool special education classes, just to name a few. Even funding for Summer Rising and Learning to Work is only for FY26 and is not guaranteed in the outyears. While the City has invested in filling some of these gaps, it is critical to baseline these dollars to ensure we can provide all families with the appropriate programs and supports.

We also have major expenses looming on the horizon, most significantly compliance with the class size mandate. Currently, over 46 percent of classes are at or below the class size caps, well above the 40 percent requirement for 24-25, and we received well over 750 plans from schools for improving their compliance with the class size caps next year. We are reviewing these requests with the UFT and CSA, which include additional requests for hundreds of millions of dollars annually and the hiring of over 4,000 additional teachers, beyond our

regular hiring, to achieve compliance next year. This funding and head count are not currently in the Preliminary Budget.

As we grapple with this new and significant financial need, we are also faced with a proposed budget from the Governor that could severely impact our ability to serve the students and families of New York City. Top on our list of concerns are the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid Formula. While it's clear that the Foundation Aid Formula needs a significant revision, the proposed changes would actually result in nearly 350 million fewer dollars to New York City Public Schools than we'd be entitled to under the current formula, making an already outdated and flawed formula even worse.

The Governor has also proposed a statewide cell phone ban, a much-needed step, but one that requires increased funding to make it an effective and sustainable effort. To address these challenges, I asked for this Body's continued advocacy in regards to city, state, and federal education funding. We especially want to make sure our city's educational priorities and fiscal needs are heard loud and clear by the lawmakers in Albany.

On Foundation Aid, we ask that you urge the legislature to continue the changes we proposed last summer to the Rockefeller Institute of Government. These include updating regional cost metrics to better reflect the cost of living in New York City, and updating and enhancing support for our high-needs students, such as students with disabilities who require access to highly specialized programs, and our multilingual learners. If we deliver this message consistently from across City government, I believe it will have enormous impact.

In closing, I am committed to working hands-in-hands with our elected officials. I feel fortunate to have collaborated with you even before I took on the role of Chancellor. You all have been huge supporters and advocates for our children, and we appreciate you. I look forward to your questions.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Chancellor. Also would like to shout out PS20 fifth grade class here visiting City Hall today to see how government works. Welcome to City Hall. PS270, welcome again. This is what Civics for All looks like, right? Young people engaged in civics, I love it.

I'd like to acknowledge Council Member Brooks-Powers, who is on remote, and Council Member Sanchez. Thank you.

Since President Trump took office earlier this year, his administration has taken aggressive steps towards significantly cutting federal funding, including education funding through rapid executive orders moved by the Department on Government Efficiency to cut spending and how Republicans' early efforts to draft a budget bill. It has been difficult to ascertain that what federal funding is in danger and what funding may have already been targeted. To date, has New York City Public School had or heard of any issues in submitting claims for reimbursement for funds across any of the federal funding streams or programs?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thank you for the question. Good to see you all. Thank you, Chair Joseph. We are, as the Chancellor said, keeping as close an eye as we can on the daily confusing set of pronouncements coming out of the federal government. As of now, we don't believe any of the cuts or reductions have directly hit our budget, but we are keeping an eye on anything else that comes down and

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2 checking to make sure we can claim for anything that
3 is relevant.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. The
5 nation is keeping an eye on that.

6 How often does New York City Public
7 Schools submit claims for programs such as Title I?

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Good
9 morning.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good morning.

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: I can get
12 back to you on a frequency of when we submit the
13 claims.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Clearly, cuts in
15 education funding, either from the Trump
16 Administration or this upcoming federal budget, would
17 be detrimental to New York City Public Schools and
18 services. Has New York City Public Schools had any
19 internal analysis or collaborated with OMB on any
20 analysis on which areas of the New York City Public
21 School budget would be the most vulnerable, or which
22 services would be most impacted given possible cuts?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, we get
24 about 2.3 billion dollars in federal funding each
25 year. This year, a bit over one billion of that is

from the U.S. Department of Education. The other chunks are our School Food Program, which is from the USDA, which is over 500 million dollars, and then funding from HHS for Medicaid and for our early childhood programs. So, that's the full suite of what we get. The single largest funding stream in there is Title I, which is about 700 million dollars, then school food, and it goes down from there. Any of these programs being cut would be extremely disruptive to our schools of course. We are lucky in that federal funding is not our largest funding source. City funding is by far our largest funding source, but it obviously would be critical, and those funds, as you know, are usually dedicated for our most vulnerable students, our low-income students, our students with disabilities, our students in temporary housing. So, we are watching closely. It's truthfully hard to know which of those funding streams is at greatest risk because it's very unclear what is happening. Those large funding streams have not been impacted yet. The Republican budget bill does take a swing, potentially, at Medicaid, which would be a very big deal, but right now, we're just

2 keeping an eye on all of it. It's hard to tell where
3 they'll actually act.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a
5 contingency plan in place?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: At this point,
7 there is not a contingency plan because we are
8 hopeful we will continue to receive all the funding
9 we deserve from both the federal and state level. I
10 will say it is one of the reasons we are most
11 concerned about the reduction in Foundation Aid. That
12 reduction from the State is half of our entire Title
13 I allocation from the federal government, right? Just
14 to put things in perspective here, just the cut is
15 half of our Title I allocation. So, the fact that we
16 might see a reduction in State funding compared to
17 what we should have gotten, even as we're looking at
18 this federal situation, is very frustrating.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, and we have
20 been going to Albany and holding briefings so folks
21 could know about this.

22 It's being reported this week that the
23 U.S. Department of Education is firing 1,300 workers.
24 The impact to New York is not yet clear, but this
25 would cut their workforce significantly. Have you

heard anything from the federal DOE counterparts since the news or have any sense of how it might affect your work?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We do not yet have a sense of how it will affect our work. It's certainly quite disappointing on behalf of the public servants and the work they do and the work they do to enforce our kids' civil rights in schools, to ensure we get the funding our kids in school systems need and deserve, to have a trillion dollars in federal grants and loans helping our students and students around the country go to college. We don't know yet what the impact will be on all of those programs of this reduction in force, but we are watching.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Earlier you said, when I asked about a contingency plan, you said none is in place yet. I think we shouldn't have to wait 'til it happens to be scrambling. I think we should plan. As educators, we plan. We don't sit and wait for it to happen and wonder what are we going to do. Go ahead, Chancellor. I knew you'd take this one.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you, Chair, and I'm still going to make Emma, you know, give you all the more details because this is her

wheelhouse. But what I will say is that it's not necessarily that we're waiting to make a contingency plan. We're having internal conversations around all the possibilities, but we cannot enact on a plan with certainty when there are so many moving pieces, including our budget, including what happens with Foundation Aid, including waiting to see which cuts actually happen from the federal government. So, for us, it's really a case of scenarios and what are some of the plans that would be attached to those scenarios. We are not in a place where we can share those because, again, they are scenario-based and internal conversations, but we are watching closely and, as things continue to unravel, we would obviously brief you and have more detail for you. But Emma, you should add.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I was just going to add that it's of course early in the budget process for next year, right, and we are of course here to talk about our City funding. We're up at the State level talking about State funding and you all will be our partners in whatever it is we need to address together if these cuts actually do hit us.

And I will also pass it to Serrita who has an answer on the claims question.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yep, so just wanted to make sure I got back to you. We draw down on funds on a monthly basis for Title I.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Can you detail areas in which way New York City Public Schools and the U.S. DOE work together to collaborate on research and tracking outcomes in schools?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. So, of course, some of the most drastic cuts that have already been made at the federal level, which started well before this week, were to the Institute of Education Sciences, which is the federal government's research entity and those continued this week. I would say we along with, that's not direct funding to us or our schools, but we along with districts around the country benefit from the research that comes from those entities. It's also the funding for NAEP, which is our national assessment that we participate. We just got our results recently that lets us know how we are doing nationally and across the state so the information we glean from that research is critical.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. The data from that information also inform how you make policies and how you serve New York City students. A lot of folks don't know that it comes from D.C. and how you look at this data and then that's how you determine your tutoring, your afterschool, and how you support schools.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Across the board, we use research. Yes, that's true. Dan, go ahead.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: In addition, Chair, it's a terrific point. You're absolutely right. We use that data to help shape policy. Some of the largest cuts we've heard about are in the Office of Civil Rights, and they have a very important data collection and analysis function as well that we rely on in part to see how we're doing on equity issues versus the rest of the country and versus other large cities and states, so that's another area that's at risk that while it doesn't involve direct grants to us, that office does produce data that's very helpful to us.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, First Deputy Chancellor.

So, the Department of Education Fiscal 2025 budget includes many important programs that are not currently part of the Fiscal 2026 budget. These include crucial programs formally covered by federal stimulus dollars such as arts education, restorative justice, the core of ECE funding for 3K, preschool special education seats, marketing outreach and vital programs that have been funded one year at a time like community schools, mental health continuum. Getting these programs funded in 2026 and baselined moving forward is a key priority for this Council. Can you speak to the logistical difference in administering programs that are baselined as opposed to the one that do not have funding in the outyears, and how does that affect hiring and staff?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yep, so essentially a part of our negotiations with OMB is to ensure that we advocate for those dollars to be baselined in our budget so that we can have sustainable funding to support headcount and other OTPS funds that are crucial for those programs so all of the things that you listed are all of the things that are always a part of our conversations. Extremely important and want to ensure that we are

able to continue to provide those resources to our students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: As a Council would love to see these things baselined so we can do improvements in other areas and stop doing the budget dance every year. We're doing this two-step. We want to stop the two-step. We want to make sure these programs are baselined and we can look in areas where we need improvement and where we can also expand.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yep, totally agree with you. We would love to see it baselined as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, I'm not alone in this. All right, so I'm going to be a different Chair, and I'm going to start allowing my Colleagues to start asking questions.

First member, Council Member Schulman. And I'd like to acknowledge Council Member Krishnan.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Hi, Chancellor. Thank you, Chair, very much. And I too look forward to hearing the plans around the budget.

I also want to say that one of the things that I would like to see too is some of the really

good programs that we have in all of our different districts replicated throughout the system.

I wanted to ask you about Carter cases. I always ask about this. What is the average tuition payment per Carter and Connor case student in Fiscal 2025, and what was the average cost per student in Fiscal 2024 and Fiscal 2023?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Let me just swear you in.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions? Liz Vladek.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADEK: Yes, I do. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Go ahead.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADEK: Good morning, Chair. Good morning, Members. Thank you for the question. And just give me a moment to turn to our exact figures. The average tuition cost in 2021-22, and this is now a flat average, not the median. The average in 21-22 was \$86,991.43. The average in school year 22-23 was \$93,274.45. Last school year, the average was \$99,710.19. The median costs were

lower than that each year, but demonstrating similar large increases year over year.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: What are we doing, you know, and this comes up all the time at these hearings, what are we doing to try and get away from these cases so that we can actually in our system give education to these kids?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADEK: Thank you so much for that question. It's really the vital one. I definitely think the most qualified person to answer that is our Deputy Chancellor, Christina Foti, who leads all of our special education work, because first and foremost, when we have the excellent programs that she's building, especially for students with autism, which we're seeing as a major area of growth, including as a cost driver, you know, she and her teams are able to educate children with autism in our neighborhood schools in these pilot programs you know about so effectively with such powerful results at frankly a fraction of the cost. So, I'm happy to talk more about the legal work that my team and I are doing to try and speed the process and hold bad actors accountable and defend our programs

strenuously. Any questions about the legal process, I'm happy to answer.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Because we have, I mean, in my district, I have a program in one of my schools, the MEL School, that's an excellent program for kids with disabilities and learning challenges and all of that. And like I said, I'd really like to see any of you come out, and I would be more than happy to host, to see so we can replicate these programs in the other public schools. I mean, I think that's really important.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you, Council Member. And we'll ask Deputy Chancellor Foti to come up and talk specifically about some of the program expansions, but you bring up a very important point. First of all, I know my Chief-of-Staff is watching as we're sitting here, and so she's taking note that we'll make sure we go on the visit with you. I'd love to join you myself with Deputy Chancellor Foti. But you bring up a really good point about expansion. It's about quality expansion as well. We want to make sure that the right programs are being expanded, but also the right leadership and the right training are behind them. And that's the

multi-pronged approach that Christina and her team have taken when it comes to special education services. But I'm going to shut up and let the experts talk, because I won't stop talking about it.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: We appreciate you talking about this, Chancellor. Council Member Schulman, I want you to know that 3,140 families agree with you just regarding the NEST and Horizon program. That's the number we had apply just this year for those programs. 2,388 families agree with you on the AIMS program, which is an ABA-based program. These programs are our biggest competitors to non-public schools. And so, you know, we're talking about funding today. We have to prioritize what is most sacred and what is most important. Last time I testified, I told you that 95 percent of our NEST and Horizon students graduated within four years. We ran the numbers again. It's now 97. They're outperforming their peers by two to three times on the ELA exams, and they're coming to school more often. So, thank you for this, and I'm hoping that we can continue to keep our eye on these programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And I know, Chancellor, your staff actually contacted me about

the sustainability programs we have with New York Sun Works to do the hydroponic planning and, you know, one of the schools, I just cut the ribbon last week, an ELL class is actually doing the harvesting and everything else, and, you know, it's some... (TIMER CHIME) I want to know what you're doing to help us, like, expand that in the system.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: That's great. I appreciate that question very much. So, as you know, we have more of those springing up across our system. I don't have the exact number that we're working on for next year, which would be relevant. We can make sure we come back to you with that. But it is something that our facilities team, our sustainability team, which oversees both the building side and the working with teachers side, is continuing to expand across the system and would love to do a visit.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Yeah, I just... if I could just continue that line of questioning, yes. So, because we have limited funds that we can give as Council Members, I just wanted to see if OMB would be able to give you funds for that, because it's so important. And, by the way, these kids said to the

principal and to me that when they do these hydroponic programs, they feel it's a safe space for them and a serene space for them, and that's so important to their education.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Chair, I swear I'll be really, really quick, but I'm locking eyes with Council Member Dinowitz because we recently visited one at Clinton High School in the Bronx, and one of the amazing things is how these young people are contributing to the community by donating this food. But also, we saw graduates from New York City Public Schools come back and work with the organizations within the schools so it's also feeding the pipeline of commitments to City employment and seeing our young people continue to positively contribute so we're with you. This is why we keep saying we want to see these great things baselined in the budget so we're with you, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Let's work together to get OMB to do that. Thank you very much, Chair.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Just one quick additional comment. We'll probably be coming back to this, Chair, quite a bit, but one of

the changes in State Foundation Aid that we asked for is an updating of their formula to serve and fund programs for students with disabilities. So, these great programs that Christina is talking about, our vision is to make them universal throughout the state in every district. We don't get state funding specifically targeted towards those programs in the same way that we target it with our FSF funding. If the State made that change in Foundation Aid, that would allow us to more rapidly expand these programs so it's one of the reasons where we're really focused on that issue in Albany right now, as I know you are as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Whatever we can do to be helpful there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council Member. Council Member Avilés has an amazing program in her District. She has a model school. So, if we're looking for a field trip, we should go into this Council Member Avilés' District to see her amazing program. I went to visit the school. It's amazing. It's a brand new building, meeting all the needs of our special education students. Amazing.

Council Member Louis.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, Chancellor and to your whole team, for being here today.

Two quick questions. One is in regards to what's happening on the federal level, but I'll focus on the fiscal side. I wanted to know, has any additional funds been allocated in the FY26 budget for increasing the number of SAPIS counselors, guidance counselors, and family support staff, specifically trained to assist migrant students, and how does that compare to the current fiscal funding levels? And are there plans to increase bilingual counseling and legal resources within DOE to ensure families have access to the necessary supports? And this is in regards to Title I schools. In my own District, several of my schools are Title I schools. So, can you provide the breakdown of staffing shortages in special education services and paraprofessionals between Title I eligible schools and non-Title I eligible schools? Thanks.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you so much, Council Member Louis, and you asked some really important questions, and there are a number of folks here who can give you answers to your question, which

is thoughtful and layered so I'm going to ask to start with our CFO.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Sure. Good morning. So, for the SAPIs workers funding, I believe that's about two million, and that's in '25, but it's not baselined. That's something that usually is added one year at a time. In terms of our other supports, like the social workers, that funding is baselined in our budget. It was funded with expiring federal stimulus dollars, and then was backfilled and baselined by the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And how about family support staff?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: I'll get back to you on the family support staff.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Okay. Thank you.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Council Member, we're also working on getting you the vacancies, since we're not quite at that point yet. We're just starting to program for the upcoming school year, but we're going to get those numbers to you right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Right, and I saw that in your testimony, you mentioned a Division of Family and Community Student Empowerment so that's

what sparked some of those questions so I'm happy to hear about that new division.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Yes, and so, we are going to quickly ask Chief Rampersant to talk specifically about SAPIS workers and some of those supports, and then we're going to invite Deputy Chancellor Melendez to speak more about the division and the work we're doing.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: So, thank you. Thank you for the question, and good morning, everyone.

So, as it relates to SAPIS workers, currently there are 294 SAPIS worker positions throughout New York City Public Schools, of which 271 are actively filled in our schools, 10 are on leave, 13 positions were vacant. We are looking at three candidates now to fill those respective positions, and thank you, thank you, thank you to Council for the funding that was provided to us to hire 20 additional SAPIS workers to do the great work of which you described so thank you very much.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We're going to go to Zoom real quick with Council Member Brooks-Powers while we have quorum. Council Member?

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Chair, I think she was answering one last question.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, she was. Sorry. Okay, sorry about that. No worries.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MELENDEZ: Good morning. The Division of Family and Community and Student Empowerment is a really exciting opportunity to really streamline our stakeholders and really leverage and push into all of their expertise so that together we can actually ensure that students succeed. We know very well that it's when family expertise, community expertise, and school expertise meets, that's when students thrive. And so how do we create through this division an opportunity for all of the stakeholders to express their challenges, to get the right supports all in a space that's consistent so that we can remove those barriers that worked against their success and achievement. So that's sort of some of the work that we're really putting together here.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Is this in addition to the Family Enrichment Centers or this is separate?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Family Enrichment Centers.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: I may have the name wrong. Where parents have to go when they're having issues?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: You mean the Family Welcome Centers for the enrollment?

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yeah.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So great question. The Family Welcome Centers and First Deputy Chancellor oversees Office of Enrollment. We have our Enrollment Chief here as well. But in short, those Family Welcome Centers offer family support when they are enrolling or transfers. What we're really talking about is, in this particular division, is how do we centralize support for our families so we can standardize practices across our districts so we have our Family Leadership Coordinators. We have a number of people who are both in district and school offices. We also have our Parent Coordinators. We want to make sure that we're really working closely with our families, not only just our PTA and PA

Presidents and SLT members, but also just parents who want to be a part of New York City Public Schools decision making. And we understand that there are time constraints and so we're trying to be really flexible and creative on how we can expand those opportunities for empowerment. And when we talk about students, we want to make sure that it's not just checking a box and saying, you know, we visited a couple of schools and we spoke to kids. I mean, we clearly have amazing students with us here today and organically and authentically engaging in these processes, but we want to make sure that that's not true for some kids, it's true for all of our kids, but our school leaders and our district leaders need that support, and it's our responsibility as central to be in service of them and really standardize what some of those good practices are and provide the right support and training.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. Thank you for the clarity.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Council Member, oh, sorry, excuse me. Just wanted to get you a number that you asked for here in real time. The latest numbers we have on paraprofessional vacancies

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2 is 1,459. That's out of about 24,000
3 paraprofessionals, which has actually grown quite a
4 bit in the last five years. So those vacancies, as
5 you know, they come up during the year as we go, as a
6 student might have an IEP that requires a
7 paraprofessional or vacancies created so we're
8 filling them on a rolling basis. That number will
9 change even week to week, but the vacancy number is
10 something we track. I get a report on it myself every
11 month. It's slightly down. The number of vacancies is
12 slightly down year over year so it's something we're
13 watching carefully.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

15 Thank you, Chair.

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Can I also
17 get back to you on the family?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yep.

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: It's
20 baselined.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council
22 Member Louis. Council Member Brooks-Powers.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Hi. Can you
24 hear me?

25 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We can hear you.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Hi. Thank you,
Chair.

So, I know that you've been asking questions on IEP. I just wanted to kind of ask a couple of additional questions because many of the families in my District have shared ongoing challenges with securing special education services due to delays and bureaucratic obstacles so I just wanted to get a sense in terms of, and if you asked this earlier before I got on, I apologize, but what specific funding allocations in this budget will address the delays and ensure timely access to services for students with disabilities, and how is DOE working to improve the efficiency of IEP, evaluations and service delivery, particularly in historically underserved communities? And then in terms of the class size reduction compliance, with the new State regulations requiring the smaller class sizes, how is DOE ensuring that schools, especially those in high need areas, have the space, staffing and resources necessary to meet the requirements? I know in my District in particular, Chancellor, I've reached out about one school already that's on the campus of Far Rockaway High School, it's a middle

school that does not have the real estate capital to be able to expand in the way that they need to, and so there are other schools that face that challenge so just wanting to understand how DOE is navigating this to ensure that we are meeting the class size reduction compliance and if there's specific funding in this budget allocated to support these schools and making the necessary adjustments, I'd like to know what those are. And my last question is around the federal COVID funding and fiscal sustainability. Each year I ask this question. Now, with the expiration of the federal COVID relief funds, how does DOE plan to fill the funding gap and ensure that critical programs are not disrupted? And let me know if you need me to repeat any of the questions. Thank you.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you, Council Member.

We took notes, we think we got it all, but we're going to start going down the line to answer your responses, and we'll gladly ask you to clarify if we missed anything. Thank you so much.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Thank you, Chancellor. Thank you, Council Member. So, I know there are many parts. I want to move quickly on the

portion of mine, and then I'll give it to our CFO for the funding piece as it relates to special education. This year, we've hired 469 related service providers. Earlier we were talking about Carter cases, I know we will talk about preschool today. I want to just call out for our community school districts, that's Districts 1 through 32 with District 75. Currently our related service provision is at 93 percent, and that is thanks to the investments in those 469 additional providers. In addition to that, we've opened up 79 sensory sites opening on Saturdays and after school. You've heard a lot about that. That is currently being funded via a grant for this year and next year. So, we're excited to be able to sustain that additional service. This year for the first time, we're providing services seven days a week via Saturday and Sunday academies. Again, that's being sustained largely on grants for this year and next year. That's very exciting, but it is why we've been able to move to some of our historic highs of 93 percent. I know we'll talk about preschool later. In terms of the funding, can you repeat, Council Member, your special education funding question so that my colleagues can respond to you on that?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Brooks-Powers, can you repeat the last part of your question?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Chair, I think maybe we can-

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Okay, sorry. I needed to be let off mut. Apologies. The last question about the COVID funding was about the expiration of federal COVID relief funds and how DOE planned on filling the funding gap to ensure that critical programs were not disrupted. Was that the question you wanted me to repeat?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Sure. So, in terms of those programs that were funded with expiring federal stimulus dollars, as the Chair noted in her opening remarks, 300 million of it was baselined, and there's another 200 million that we continue to have discussions with OMB in terms of getting it baselined into our budget, so it's definitely something that we recognize as critical and want to ensure we have sustainable funding.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, and however we can be supportive, please let us know. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council Member. Council Member Gutiérrez.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Excuse me, Chair. I'm sorry, there was a class-size portion of the question. Should we...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Brooks-Powers?

Yeah, it's about class size and how are you meeting the mandate and how much funding is available for it.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yep. Thank you for the question. So as flagged, and as you mentioned in your opening, we have been doing a lot of work over the past few years, including supporting schools to hire more teachers, including looking at their programming to get to the compliance rate we are currently at for this year, which is 46 percent. Going to next year, we need to get to 60 percent. That's going to take money, that's going to take teachers, and as the Council Member mentioned, that is also going to take space. We are working closely with our colleagues at SCA to ensure the money in their capital budget for new capacity is being allocated where it's most needed for the class-size

law. We do know we have about 500 schools currently that we don't believe can comply with the class-size law with their current enrollment and their current space so those schools are a priority as we look towards where we put those capital dollars. I would say in addition to that work with SCA, which is really about the large-scale capital projects, we also know there's a set of schools that we think smaller-scale projects to convert non-classroom space into classroom space will help them make progress locally. So, we've been doing a lot of work. We surveyed all of our principals last year. We said, do you think you have rooms that can be converted into instructional space so that you can comply. We're working through the projects that came out of that. We're also running a whole new class-size grant program for next year where we allowed schools to come in and let us know what they thought they needed for compliance. Obviously, the most critical piece is teachers. We had close to 800 schools come in. They requested over 4,000 new teachers that they believe they need next year to get to compliance. But some of them also said one of the things we need is additional space. So, we're also running through

those and where those are small projects, it looks like there will be eight to 10 of those, we are also working at the school level to convert some of those spaces into instructional space as well. So that is funding that is not yet in our budget for next year. As the Chancellor mentioned, we think we need hundreds of millions of additional dollars to support that class-size work at the local level to ensure we stay in compliance, to ensure we can hire these 4,000 new teachers, and convert these rooms, but that's what we're looking towards for next year.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just want to add on a quick piece. We're also getting some feedbacks from some schools. Are these schools losing their art spaces, their dance spaces? Because we did get an art teacher, she said all of a sudden, my art was on wheel, it was no longer in the classroom. So when we talk about educating the whole child, I want a child to be able to go into an art room and do art, not art on wheels.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. Appreciate that question. And I think as we've flagged for a while now, given the amount of space that is needed to comply with the law, some of that

will be about building new buildings, which SCA is working on, but some of that is also thinking about how we can maximize the space already in our buildings, but that does come with trade-offs. So just to give you a little bit of color, we've had schools that came in through this process and said, can we convert some of our 3K and pre-K classrooms into classrooms that we can use for class size. We've had schools come in with other conversions. What I would say is from where we sit, we aren't mandating anything like that across the system. We also don't want to lose our art spaces, our dental clinics. We had a question about a dental clinic. We have early childhood. We don't want to lose that either. So where schools are coming to us, we are taking a look if they're the ones that raised it from the school level, but we're not mandating anything like that centrally as we go through. And I would also say in the early childhood questions, because I know those have come up as well, where those come in, we are taking a look and where those are well-enrolled programs and programs families want, we are also keeping those in the school buildings.

2 CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Council Member,
3 I'm sorry, Chair, if I could just say one thing. If
4 you have the specific schools, maybe we can talk more
5 offline, because I also want to see, is it a case
6 where now a teacher needs to share a classroom, and
7 we know, as teachers, we knew that's not what our
8 first choice was, but sometimes we have to share. Or
9 is it a case where it's art on a cart and it's just
10 really hard to navigate while you're setting up in
11 different spaces throughout the day? So sensitive to
12 both, and I would love to follow up on the specific
13 space so you and I can see what the root problem is.
14 Thanks.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You got it. Thank
16 you. I appreciate that. Council Member Gutiérrez.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you,
18 Chair. You can hear me okay?

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, we can.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.
21 Thank you so much. Good to see everyone virtually.

22 I just have a couple of questions. Can
23 you all share how many applicants the system had for
24 both 3K and UPK in this school year? For 2025-2026,
25 excuse me.

CHIEF KELLY: Thank you so much for that question. Good morning. Unfortunately, we just closed the 3K and pre-K application process, so we don't have the final numbers to share. What we can say is that in comparison to last year, it seems to be on par with application numbers from last year. But we'll share them once we have it, which is usually in the spring.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Thank you. And so you, and I know it's obviously pretty early, but it's one of the things that Chair Joseph shared in her remarks and something that I just want to share my gratitude for giving us the space and the Council to be a part of the ECE working group. I think you all have invested quite a lot of time and resources into marketing, and obviously the Council fought and secured for that funding. Is there anything that you can share specifically about marketing that happened this year different than years past, and do you think that that will help increase amount of applications for 3K and UPK?

CHIEF KELLY: Sure. I can start. As you may know, that this is a shared task between student enrollment as well as our Division of Early Childhood

team, and so we work very close hand in hand, in addition to working with other agencies across, including the public engagement unit. And so what I can share is for us, some of these things are tried and true things that we have already done in terms of outreach. And then we have took on a different approaches for increasing outreach in ways that we haven't done before. So, I'll start off by listing. It's a lot to list, but I'll start.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, no, no, I'm so sorry. You don't have to list it. My apologies, I appreciate it. I don't want to take up all the time. I guess my question is, you said it is on par. Do you not believe that the additional effort and funding in marketing is contributing to increased applications, I guess is what I'm asking. I know you don't have the finite numbers in front of you, but just kind of, do you have a sense?

CHIEF KELLY: Got it. The numbers are similar to last year. So, I don't want to say that these efforts weren't helpful, but it's really hard to say, it's very early on and, of course, application activity and enrollment, all of that

plays a good role in exactly where we're going to land in September so it's too early to say.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And just to say, Council Member, it's a great question. We're obviously interested in this as well. This is a partnership, as you know, with sister agencies. So HRA, DOHMH are also part of this effort. And so what we hope to do is evaluate with them the impact. Another point to make, like we certainly look at application numbers. The more important metric is actual enrollment. Because particularly when you're talking about 3K and pre-K, there's a lot of families that will put in an application and then decide not to enroll. So, all of that is to say there's a lot of data to analyze to see what's going to be most effective in filling the seats that we have. We need a little bit of time to analyze all of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Well, I'll be patient and I'll remain hopeful. And again, just want to give you all your flowers.

And my last question, because last year, obviously, you all successfully offered 3K placement to every family that applied on time. However, there were still, I believe, around 2,000 that were still

on a waitlist. And just curious, kind of the plan for this year. I know that you don't have all the numbers in just yet, but are there any additional efforts that maybe you want to share with us to avoid this waitlist of, certainly I think 2,000 is a lot, but anything that you are all working on to avoid that waitlist, anything you did differently that you want to highlight just to ensure that every kid that applies has that seat and there's just no waitlist, hopefully.

CHIEF KELLY: The commitment to give everyone a seat who applies in the main round remains this year. Your questions about the waitlist, I do want to be clear that just because families are on a waitlist doesn't mean that they don't have a seat. And so this is a very.. this is a family choice and we want to make sure that families are getting exactly what they want. And sometimes if they're offered the second, third choice, fourth choice, or fifth choice, we always put them on the waitlist automatically for programs that they had a higher choice in wanting. And so therefore, the waitlist, yes, we want to make sure that families are getting exactly what they want. Just because we will have families on a

waitlist doesn't mean that they're without. And we'll continue to use the waitlist so that families can continue to get the choice that they want. As we've seen last year, we started with 2,000 families who did not receive an offer in which they were on the waitlist, and then by the end of August, we were able to give everyone an offer, but that didn't mean that it even stopped at that point. Families were still receiving offers to more preferred choices throughout the fall.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. All right. Thank you. And we can talk more about it at the next meeting, but I know that just folks were bogged down putting down deposits in the meantime. And I get it that it was not, they were waitlisted. It was not necessarily, it might've been their second or third choices, but we'd love to continue to work through that with you all. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Council Member, I just want to thank you so much for your continued support and partnership, always asking really thoughtful questions, and giving us the space and the grace, right, to get you the most accurate

information and have these productive conversations, and so as we collect these data and do an analysis, we would love to sit down with you and anyone else who's interested to really unpack the implications.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, thank you. And Chancellor, we're ready for you at Nuestros Niños. I know your team is working with us for the visit. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: They are. I'm telling you, Chief-of-Staff, she's watching all of this right now and she's just taking note of all the visits.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair Joseph.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council Member. Council Member Dinowitz.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair Joseph. Hello, Chancellor and team.

Chancellor, first, I want to thank you. Since before you've been Chancellor, you've been a real presence in my District in Wakefield for Project Open Arms to this week at In-Tech for Civics Week and soon, I think, in Riverdale at PS24 and 141, so I look forward to continued collaboration. And I also

want to thank you for your comments in your opening about our migrant students. I think anyone who was a teacher knows that our job is to take care of the kids that walk through the doors of our classroom, and we never ask because we don't care where they came from. We care about them getting a great education and them being a good person. And I'm really pleased to see that at the top, that that value remains because it's really important that we share and hold that value, and it comes from the top throughout the entire Department of Education so I want to thank you for that.

You mentioned in your opening about literacy, including at the high school level. I know you're focused on elementary literacy. At a hearing on January 30th, though, we did discuss literacy at the high school level. This was something that I taught and a frustration I had was that schools are disincentivized from teaching literacy to high schoolers, even if they need it, because they don't get credit for it and the school's kind of dinged for the kids not getting credit. And then it was testified that there's a pilot program in Queens South, that the Queens South Superintendent is doing

to have phonics and literacy for high school students. At the hearing, I was promised some metrics and data. I did not receive it, so I'm asking today, what metrics is the DOE using to measure the success of this program and how successful is this program?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you so much, Council Member. So, before I ask our Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Pate, to join us, I wanted to say that the credit piece is an interesting one because it's not that we don't give credit for the literacy support and intervention. It's that we can't give credit for an intervention course because it's not necessarily aligned to high school standards. That doesn't mean that there isn't a way to deliver the interventions within the actual ELA class or that a support class cannot be launched in a school that aligns with high school standards and still offers remediation. So, for example, when I was a principal, I had my regular ELA 9, 10, 11, 12, but then we also had these electives that were still aligned with high school standards and we were able to embed extra supports that would help young people further develop those literacy skills. What we know doesn't work is when we live in remediation and we isolate these

interventions because then the students do not get access to accelerated learning and standards-aligned curriculum.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, I'm going to respectfully disagree because I did intervention classes and the students excelled in all their other classes. These are 9th, 10th graders once they learned how to read on their own. And it was testified at a hearing two months ago that this is something, unless it was testified incorrectly or I misunderstood what the actual intervention was, but I think the point is that if you don't provide any incentives for the high schools to do it, they're not going to do it, and so the question is what metrics you're using to measure the success of this and subsequently what investments, financial investments are being made and what financial investments are needed to make this type of program more universal.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Yes. And so again, before I just want to quickly say, it's not about the intervention and saying that the isolation of the intervention doesn't work. It's that what we don't want is for that to happen when they're supposed to be in an ELA class because then they're

not going to get access to the curriculum that they need to actually be college ready or to pass a Regents exam. So, it's about the program and making sure that it's programmed effectively, and we're always happy to have those conversations with NYSED around credit accumulation.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes. Okay, thank you.

CHIEF DR. PATE: So, thank you for the question. The district and the superintendent that you're referencing is Dr. Josephine Van Ess, who has her finger on the pulse of creating access and opportunity for high school students who have, through classroom assessments and other assessments, been identified as needing additional skills support, which goes directly to your point around interventions and interventions being a leveling set opportunity for students to one, still engage in their core content classes while also having additional opportunities such as before school, after school, and for some high school.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I just want to pause because time, other Members need to speak. My question, I want to make sure we're getting to my

question what metrics are used to measure the success of this program? How much financial, this is a budget meeting, how much financial investment is being made into Queen South? And what financial investments would be needed to make this more universal?

CHIEF DR. PATE: So respectfully, this particular program that you're referencing that Dr. Josephine Van Ess has launched is a very new program so we are still in the process of tracking its success. And from tracking the success, we are able to then identify appropriate metrics that we then can follow, measure, and then allocate resources appropriately.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And how much is being invested right now in this program?

CHIEF DR. PATE: So right now it's people capital that has been our greatest investment to this particular program. As I said, this is a newly launched program across her district. So as of now, that is the investment that we are making to determine the success of the program.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We can do a briefing with you, Council Member. We'll make sure that we do a separate briefing with Superintendent

Van Ess. But I think what, just to put a fine point on it, it's very new, we're still tracking progress. And as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we want to make sure that any intervention that we're scaling across the city is one of high quality, and that's something that can be applied to different districts. This might be perfect for this particular superintendency. We don't know if this is something yet that we can scale up, but we would love to talk more about what's happening there and get your input, especially since you're a high school teacher.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That's right.

Thank you very much, Chancellor. Thank you, everyone.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council Member. I want to talk about Head Start. Head Start is a critical federal funding stream for New York City funds providing childcare and early childhood education for families in need. With the challenges we face on a federal level, what is the anticipated funding level for Head Start for FY26? Are you anticipating any changes or reduction to the number of dollars for Head Start in the Executive Budget?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So, Head Start, Chair, as you know, and I'll ask my

colleague, Monique Scales, to jump in a second from our Early Childhood Division. Federal funding stream, we are in the middle of the process of applying for the next round of funding. We don't have a date from the feds yet on when we'll get a decision on that. We do expect that there will be changes and the changes could take several forms. One is obviously just a reduction in the number of dollars we get. The other piece of Head Start, as you well know, if we do get a reduction, which we hope we don't, but if that reduction is balanced by money going directly to providers, then the impact to community will be lessened so we're going to be looking at that very, very closely. We are doing contingency planning in our Early Childhood Division to look at that. But even if the funding is not reduced, one of the things that we are doing to try to better meet the need of community is looking to age down some of these programs where we see that it's the younger children where there's a bigger demand and we're locked into four-year-olds, for example so there will be changes. We'll have to work with our providers very carefully to make sure that those are positive changes for community. And obviously, if the amount of funds is

cut significantly, there will have to be service reductions so that's something we're very concerned about. But Monique, do you want to...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many children are you currently serving in your Head Start?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Good morning, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good morning.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Currently in Head Start, we have, one second... we currently have 3,793 enrolled students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have any vacancies?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: We do have vacancies, yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, it's approximately, just a little under 2,000 vacancies.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Under 2,000? Okay, I'm going to put my Mrs. Joseph hat on right now. So we have 3,792, but you have under almost 2,000 seats that are vacant. What are we doing to do outreach for these seats in order to fill in these seats? We know the purpose of Head Start is to make sure children

have a head start in schools so talk to me, talk to me.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Yeah. So we have been doing the outreach campaign, the initiative that City Council has so graciously helped to fund. We've been doing marketing and outreach. We had previously put out a Head Start RFI where we tried to get in new providers, new delegates to take on additional seats for our Head Start. But as First Deputy Chancellor said, we had to re-compete for the grant, so that's what's coming up. And we looked at the system. And based on the data, it's been determined that we should potentially age down so there's a re-compete. We put in an application and we looked at the seats and we decided to age down, so it's a reconfiguration of the seats that we originally had.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Age down for folks who may not understand. What do you mean by age down?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So as opposed to, we had a lot more of pre-K seats, Head Start fours, and based on the data, it looks like we need more infant and toddler seats.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In your early learn,
3 so that'd be an infant to two-year-olds, for example,
4 because there's a whole campaign for two-K?

5 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Correct.

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:
7 Exactly.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, got it. So how
9 much of these changes compare with the current
10 allocation of seats, zero, two, three, and four-year-
11 olds?

12 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'm sorry. Can
13 you repeat that?

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How would these
15 changes compare with the current allocation of seats
16 for your zero... remember we talked about infant, two-
17 year-old, three-year-olds, and four-year-olds.

18 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: For the re-
19 compete?

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yep.

21 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Sorry. Let me
22 just pull that number specifically. Originally, we
23 had 136 Early Head Start seats. And for our
24 application, we put in 4,000 Early Head Start seats.
25 And I just have to find the number for the threes and

fours. Give me one second. Okay, can I get back to you on the threes and fours, the number, specifically?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: During the course of the hearing, right?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Yes, absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Okay. What will it mean there'll be a reduction in funding for three-K and four-K and increase in zero to two? I'm following up on your question when you spoke about the reductions, so what does it mean? Will there be a reduction in funding for three-K and four-K in the Head Start?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: In Head Start. Hopefully what it means is that we won't have as many vacant seats in threes and fours. And we'll have more, I think, Monique, our fill rate right now is in the 60-plus percent, and you'll see that number go up with the same overall or similar overall number of seats. That's what we would hope. So, you would see a program that right now is serving threes and fours, let's say have two or three classrooms for each, and one of those classrooms is not filled. You would see them have infant and toddler, two sections

2 of infant and toddler, and all of which is filled.
3 That's the vision.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, the vision is to
5 age down zero to two in your early learn from infant
6 to toddler versus having three-K to four-K, and
7 that's where you're seeing the need currently with
8 the data that you're analyzing?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:
10 Exactly.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. All right. How
12 did you arrive? How did you decide this? What is the
13 breakdown? And how did you arrive to that breakdown?

14 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Looking
15 for 1,000 Early Learn, Early Head Start? Yeah, I
16 don't know. I don't know, Monique, if you have that
17 particular data.

18 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Sorry. It's
19 basically based on the data and going into the
20 community and speaking with the providers and what it
21 is that they see within their community, what they
22 needed.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Are you aware
24 of the CBOs that decided not to continue with New
25 York City Public Schools ECE systems? Have they

applied to Head Start independently, and what benefits are there for a CBO to work within the New York City Public Schools system?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: We are aware that there are delegates that decided to apply to go direct to Head Start. Some of the benefits that a delegate would have with working with New York City Public Schools is they will be able to have direct support from us. We have a host Head Start team and we provide additional services. They will be able to utilize some of our services that are provided by New York City Public Schools. So, we are there as a full support for the delegate as opposed to them going directly to Head Start as a direct grantee, and then they don't have all of that additional support and resources that New York City Public Schools could provide to them.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Have you located the areas where these seats are not being filled?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Yes. So that's part of the data set that the team has looked at to see where there are vacant seats, where there is the issue, and speaking with the providers to determine what the community needs.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what are some of the issues that you're coming across?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, I would have to get back to you on that specifically. I apologize.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. I know there's a big need for Early Learn so we're looking to see if these seats could get filled up because I'm sure in communities, that's a uniqueness to have parents that want to go back to work, right, and hopefully we would love to see that expanded to middle class families as well across the city and having early learn infant to toddlers. But those numbers, we have to work on them.

Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning. Things that you do for your children, because I went to one of my school, 207. It's just like they have some question and I'm going to get to it. But first, I want to say thank you for your leadership, Chancellor, for helping us out in crisis, and I know you're going to do very well with this process.

First, I don't know if anybody in this room have headache. I have a lot of headaches when it comes to education right now. Let's go to federal

funding. Earlier this week, the United States Department of Agriculture cut one billion in the funding for two federal programs that incentivize schools and food banks to buy food from local farms. New York is one of the states that participate in this program. How will the Department of Education be affected by this funding cut? Does this funding flow directly to New York City or does it come from the State? Does the DOE have an estimate of how much of this funding was recognized in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget and outyear? So, if you can answer those before I get to my kids' question.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thank you for the question. So yes, as you said, USDA did cut some of their programs. Just to be clear, that was not our big school breakfast and lunch programs, which as I said is over half a billion dollars and is supporting our universal breakfast and lunch. One of them was a program that we do benefit from, which was to support local food purchasing. We received about 8.4 million over two years, which was last year and this year. We do still expect to receive those funds. Most of them we've claimed, we think we'll be able to receive the rest as well, but it's 8.4 over two years. What the

announcement seems to mean is that they are canceling that program for next year and going forward and so we will no longer be able to access those funds in FY26 and going forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Wow. I'm scared. I'm crossing my finger. I recently visited 207 when the student expressed concern about the school lunch menu. Can you explain how school lunch menus are developed, who makes the decisions, and whether students are given any opportunity to provide feedback and meals they receive? That was the student government, but they were very focused on about the meals, so I'm concerned too.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So, Council Member Narcisse, I really want to thank you so much for your kind words, and school food is very important to our young people, including my own daughter, who gives me regular feedback on the ups and downs of it, but I am super proud of this Administration's approach to school food because it really has been an authentic form of civic engagement. Before Deputy Chancellor Vadehra talks about it in great detail, just to give you an overview, we have taste testings with our students.

We actually have opportunities for them to give feedback on the menu. Chris Tricarico, who heads that office, he meets with the students regularly, he meets with the Administration. Never going to be perfect, because my own daughter, she came home one day and she was like, listen, I just have to tell you, this one wasn't the move, it wasn't the vibe so we're never going to get it 100 percent, right, but we have done a lot of work in this area, and I'm really proud of it. So, Deputy Chancellor Vadehra will tell you more in detail.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Sure. Thank you. So, I would just say, just as the Chancellor keeps talking about her Chief-of-Staff, I imagine Chris Tricarico already is planning a visit to 207 now that you've shared that, so we'll be on our way soon. I will say we do provide a lot of ways for students to give feedback. We could always do more. We are even, most recently, Chris and I sat with a bunch of students who were giving us feedback on how they should be able to give feedback, and why some of the current processes weren't working for them. But we do do surveys that students can do, we do do taste

tests for schools across the city that we bring to do that. Those are really fun. If anyone has not been to one, highly recommend it. You'll get to taste the food and give your own feedback, but you also get to watch the kids who grade and survey and all of that. We also work with some of our local student advocacy groups who organize their own school communities to give us feedback, both on the school meals themselves, but also on the arrangement of the cafeteria, and our cafeteria enhancement programs and all that piece of it. So, we will go here from 207, I promise, and always happy to hear more.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Your third commitment is to empower parents, families, and communities. That's one of the things that I'm always fond of because I feel like parents have to be part of those decision-making in the school building so I want to say thank you for that. Many parents feel unheard and (TIMER CHIME) unsupported in the navigating the special education system. What funding is being allocated toward parent advocacy programs and other resources to help families better access the services that children are entitled to?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you so much, Council Member. And before we talk the specifics about the budget, I just want to note that part of this is also making sure that we are training our staff on how to help families navigate the IEP process. That's work that Christina Foti's office has done a tremendous amount in, but also making sure that we're supporting our principals and our superintendents, where they have the staffing, where they have the support, where we're troubleshooting any of these issues so it is a comprehensive support in addition to the family advocacy piece, and I just wanted to name that, because if we ignore the other aspects, then the family empowerment piece is not going to be truly supported.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I want to say thank you to you. And if you have anything you may add on that, you have something to add?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Sure. Just very quickly, Council Member Narcisse. We have three major ways that we've been engaging families of students with IEPs. Number one, we've been doing our regular Beyond Access series. We started that during COVID. We get on average about 1,500 families that join us

for those webinars regularly. We've also reinvigorated our IEP Parent Member Initiative, where we are working with the State and our Special Education Advisory Council to make sure that we're recruiting more and more parents to participate in IEP meetings with other families on their behalf, and that is a paid opportunity. It's not significant, but it is a way that we try to compensate. Saturday academies, we've been doing parent training during those as well at those SEED and Saturday academy sites.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And I want to say thank you, and don't forget mental health. Our kids been through a pandemic. When it come to mental health for high school, junior high, we cannot cut that, because we need our kids to be able to function again.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: You're 100 percent right. We are not going to forget, and we also didn't forget the other part of your question, which was not only how, but how much so we're going to get you a dollar amount of how much we've invested. We just don't have that on us right now.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. So thank
3 you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council
5 Member.

6 I have a follow-up question on the Head
7 Start. The status of the new 3K and 4K RFP, does the
8 RFP will guarantee a seat for anyone who needs it?

9 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Thank you. So,
10 there isn't currently a Head Start RFP, so we had to
11 re-compete for the Head Start grant. Currently, the
12 Head Start contract is currently in place. We're
13 waiting to hear in the spring what the decision is
14 from the application that we submitted.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that will
16 guarantee a seat for anyone who needs it? Anyone who
17 qualifies?

18 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Anyone who
19 qualifies, yes, would be able to receive a seat based
20 on what we are awarded.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. So,
22 at the newest and least established DOE core
23 programming, Early Childhood, sits at an important
24 juncture. The Council and the Administration agreed
25 to a number of improvements, initiatives related to

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2 ECE as part of the Fiscal 2025 budget adoption, and
3 the Council is committed to continuing to help
4 strengthen and stabilize the system. The DOE sent to
5 the Council FY25 terms and condition indicates the
6 ECE enrollment is down this year compared to last
7 year. For the following categories, the seat types,
8 please list the current 2025 enrollment number,
9 whether and how much they are below or above the
10 final enrollment number for 2023-2024. 3K Special
11 Education?

12 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: 3K Special
13 Education, these seats as of March 10th, the
14 enrollment, sorry, is 3,288.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 3K EDY?

16 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: 3K EDY, the
17 current enrollment is 4,418, which is up 157 from
18 last year.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Special Education, is
20 it up or down?

21 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'll have to get
22 that information for you.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 3K SDY?

24

25

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2 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: 3K SDY, the
3 enrollment is 38,326, and it is up 690 since last
4 year.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 3K total?

6 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: 3K total is
7 44,653, which is an increase of 696 from last year.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 3K vacancies?

9 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: The vacancies is
10 8,315, which is down 131.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Pre-K Special
12 Education?

13 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Pre-K Special Ed
14 is 8,498, so this is students that are enrolled with
15 IEP.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it up or down for
17 Pre-K?

18 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'll have to get
19 that information for you as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Pre-K EDY?

21 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Pre-K EDY, the
22 total is 2,601. It's decreased 141 from last year.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Pre-K SDY?

24 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: SDY is 52,623.
25 There's a decrease of 1,985.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Pre-K total?

3 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Pre-K total is
4 57,621, which is a decrease of 2,280 from since last
5 year.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And your Pre-K
7 vacancies?

8 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: 14,908, which is
9 an increase of 486.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do the enrollment and
11 vacancy numbers you provided include children
12 enrolled in family childcare centers?

13 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Yes, it does.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what were the
15 final application numbers for 3K after February 28
16 deadline?

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We're
18 still tabulating those, Chair. We'll get them to you
19 just as soon as we have numbers that we know are
20 solid.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And what about
22 the Pre-K application after February 28?

23 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Same
24 thing. We're still tabulating, Chair, but we'll
25 definitely get those to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We're also pleased to hear that there's been a concerted effort this year to help improve access to early childhood education for families living in shelters. Can you tell us about these efforts?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Sure. So, we have had the outreach and marketing that is being an initiative led by Deputy Mayor Almanzar and supported by New York City Public Schools, so we've had various events. We anticipate hosting additional events in May, but we've had six events total. One of them was a resource fair that was held in August of 2024 in East Harlem, and then there were five additional enrollment sprints across the boroughs.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many and what percentage of eligible children living in shelters are currently enrolled in 3K?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I will have to get back to you on that particular information.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, the following question will also, but I have a follow-up for you. For 3K and 4K, a major issue was moving vacant seats from one provider to another and the inability to move seats where they are needed because of the way

the contract is structured. We are funding vacancies in one location while there's a seat shortage in other areas. We've been asking for the new RFP to address this. What is the status of the new RFP? Will it include the flexibility to move seats where they are needed?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, currently we are communicating with community, with providers, with families. We're looking to see what is the need. We've had some information sessions so that we can see what are some of the things that they're looking for, what are some of the things that the current contract maybe is not nimble enough in and that we can change so they can be more nimble so that we can potentially move seats or move seats across particular contracts, vendors but, currently, since we're in the current contract, we can't do that. The contract is not nimble in that manner.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In that manner. How often do you meet with providers and find out what the needs are versus do you plan with them or you just plan for them? Just a question.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: No, in this case, again, looking at potentially looking at a new

solicitation, since our new Deputy Chancellor came on of early Childhood, we've been meeting with providers. We've had, I believe there's been three meetings with providers. We had them out at an info session and meeting with the advocates as well as parents and community to have info sessions and determine what we should be looking to put in a new solicitation.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it a survey? How do you gather your data from families and community members? Are you reaching out to churches, shelters? Are you boots on the ground trying to find that information so you know how to best serve that community where there's usually a need, but sometimes the message is not reaching the folks that needs the service.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: That is absolutely true. So yes, we are doing all of those things. We have first started with our providers that we currently have, put an information out there. I know that the team is working on a survey to get it out there to the parents and the families as well as to other providers. So yes, all of those things that you mentioned is things that we are working on.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And with the new RFP,
3 New York City Public Schools, if they apply for a
4 seat, will they get a seat?

5 SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: With any RFP, as
6 far as seats, if an individual family applies for a
7 seat, we're looking to provide them with a seat.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But we heard earlier
9 too, you still had last year about 2,000 families
10 that did not get a seat. How do we remedy that? See,
11 we can't keep having the same problem every year so
12 that's why I'm asking, who are you sitting with, who
13 are you talking to. If we're still having the same
14 problems every year, what are we looking to remedy
15 the problems? They should be less. How are you
16 looking to reduce that number of folks who did not
17 get seats? What's in place?

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Let me
19 jump in there, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Go ahead, First
21 Deputy.

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank
23 you. Thank you, Chair. Appreciate that. Yeah, listen,
24 the goal, whether it's a new RFP or just within the
25 current constraints we have, is to absolutely serve

the community and the demands that they have, which obviously shifts even month to month, day to day. We want to get as close as we can to providing not just a seat, but the seat that a family's looking for when they're looking for it. You know what, that's not easy to do. I'm actually proud that in a situation this past year where we had by far and away the largest 3K program we've ever had, the vast, vast majority of families did get one of their choices, one of their stated choices, and that's where we want to be. Now, that doesn't help the... we totally hear you. That's not a consolation for a family that didn't get one of their choices in the initial round. We learned something throughout the summer with the waitlist process, getting that number down from thousands down to under a thousand, and so we think it'll go smoother this year. I just want to insert a note of caution. I know you know this well. Same is true in high school, same is true in middle school, same is true in kindergarten. There are probably always going to be very high demand sites, whether it's schools or CBOs, where they've just got an amazing program, amazing leader, everybody wants to go there. We can't assure that there's not going to

be waitlists somewhere. There's always going to be waitlists somewhere. The question is, can we make sure if you don't get into that first choice, you get into the second or the third choice. That's where we're trying to go. Slowly, we are making progress on that. That's why we have the biggest 3K program we've ever had in terms of enrollment, not just applications, is because we're able to serve better. Next year, it will be better again. Everybody will get an offer, and the number of families that get an offer that's too far away or it's a program they really don't want, that's going to shrink. Over time, hopefully we're going to get that as close as we can to zero, but I just want to set expectations. I've been there. You know I've got kids who came through the system. It's a stressful thing if you don't get your first choice or you're worried about whether you're going to get any of your choices. We want to shrink that population as much as we can. I'm not sure we're ever going to get it to zero, but we're going to try.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm there. The new RFP that you're going to have, is it going to have flexibility to move seats around? That's been the

biggest concern I've heard, well, Chair, we can't move it because the contract is fixed this way, we can't move chairs. This new RFP will allow some flexibility?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Thank you for that question, Chair. So that is one of the things that we are looking at, and again, engaging with community to determine what it is that a potential solicitation should have and to be able to potentially have that flexibility so that we can shift seats in the immediate where it's needed. So that is one of our top things that we're looking at, yes.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And we hear that. That's one of the things we hear from providers. You know, we had a provider right when we got there who's like, listen, I've got threes and fours. I know I need infant and toddler. Why do you guys make it so hard to do? And so we were able to, in that case, modify the contract to get that done. But absolutely, when we get a new RFP, we have to make that process a year-to-year seamless process because communities change. New apartment buildings open up. Now there's infant and toddlers. Now there's

a big, you know, cry for, you know, pre-K. So, we need to get much more agile. We will definitely be more agile once we can get that RFP out.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. Wonderful to hear. Wonderful to hear. I'm going to pass it over to Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Something nice to say. District 79, I've been working with a lot of migrant students. Oh my God, social workers, teachers, small class size, call you in the night, this is my cell phone, call me on Sunday, call me on Saturday so whoever the head of it, I want to give accolades to.

Number two, the civics is great. I've done a couple of seventh graders, like 500 seventh graders with civics, and what a great idea. They all have questions, most impossible ones to answer, but I tried so I just want to say congratulations on those two.

Now my questions. Special Commissioner of Investigations. I head up the Committee that looks at these things, and I want to say that you have your own independent oversight agency, which is called Special Commissioner of Investigations, not part of

DOI. It's responsible, as you know, for criminality, corruption, and wrongdoing. It serves as also the Inspector General for the Teacher's Retirement System, the Board of Education Retirement System, etc., and what I'm concerned about is that there were 11,874 complaints in Calendar Year '24 for all these different issues. They only have 55 staff members, and DOE, of course, has about, you know better than I, 140,000. So, their budget is really small. It's 6.3 million. It's a pass-through line of DOE's overall budget of 40 billion, which you mentioned earlier. So, my question to you is, since they have such a small staff and so much work to do, are there, I believe, only four staff members for every 10,000 DOE employees? Do you have any notion of increasing their funding? Do you think those ratios are appropriate?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you, Council Member. By the way, that District 79 Superintendent, Glenda Esperanza, yes, thank you so much for shouting her out and her team. They do an amazing job.

So, SCI performs a critical function. You're 100 percent right. Although we're the pass-

through, we don't dictate their budget. That's something that I believe...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you advocate for more money for them?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We certainly could...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I didn't hear it in your testimony.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: It was not in our testimony. We did not touch on SCI. You're 100 percent right. You know, we are always open to conversations from the Commissioner should she want our help in increasing the budget, so we're there to collaborate and talk to our friends from City Hall and OMB about it. But, you know, we're not typically involved in those conversations and I could imagine some reasons why. Liz, did you want to add something?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADEK: I did. Thank you, First Deputy Chancellor. I actually asked about this, I think about a year ago, Council Member, and my colleagues who actually manage our finances should please jump in and correct me if I was misinformed at the time. My understanding is that SCI does not discuss their budget with us. They don't engage with

us on that. They speak directly to OMB. And obviously we respect that. We absolutely respect their independence. But we also agree that, you know, their ability to conduct high-quality investigations on a timely basis is incredibly important so, if they want to have that discussion with us, we're obviously open to it, but we respect their prerogative.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Because they have complained to us so we will make sure that there's some advocacy along those lines. There's a lot of complaints to be advocating and adjudicating for such a small staff.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADEK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Second question is playgrounds. For 20 years, I've been trying to get, in addition to what Richard Murphy did under Dinkins when I was there, to get more school playgrounds converted to those that are available on weekends and obviously the custodians have to be involved because they need to be clean on Monday morning so funding was added to this plan to allow for 11 schools to have playgrounds open for additional after school. We need more than that. So, does DOE have plans to further expand this program, and how many schoolyards

that are not currently open during after school and weekend hours are further than half a mile from the nearest park? That's always been the criteria. If you're further away, blah, blah, blah, you can be open, but if you're not, you cannot. To the credit of the Speaker, she mentioned this in her State of the City. The Mayor did. I said, where the hell did you get that idea? He said, from you. I said, you're full of it. I do not believe that you ever listened to my ideas, but thank you very much. And I've been talking about it for 20 years. So how are we going to get more of these playgrounds open? Thank you.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thank you for the question and for the idea. So, we were glad that we were able to get dedicated funding to open more of those. As you said, that's what the costs are, the labor costs. We would welcome additional funding dedicated to opening more of those. I don't have the number you asked for in terms of how many are left, but we can get that back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And that is the same criteria we used this year in terms of what

we prioritized as well as generally high-need neighborhoods.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, you don't know where the 770,000 figure was calculated, because I guess that's what the 11 was for.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: That is the number it takes to do those 11, and that's what we were able to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, because we want to do more. Okay. And then also my question is drinking fountains. OMB came up with this crazy idea now that they can no longer pay for drinking fountains in schools, and I don't think it's correct so we're fighting them on that. This Directive 10, I know it well. I don't think it is applicable here, but I want to know how many have a water bottle filling station in schools? How many times do you hear that students want more? If we tell people to drink water, then they have to have a place to drink it so how do we get more water bottle filling stations in schools? Many of them are broken, by the way.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: If you have specific ones that are broken, obviously our facilities teams will try to help.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I also want new ones. So, do you have any sense of... in other words, you can only put one in according to OMB's crazy new idea if it's a brand new lobby, etc.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. So, I think you're talking about OMB's reinterpretation of Directive 10.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I am. I don't agree with it.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Which has created some limitations in what we are able to use capital funds for. It also impacted our cafeteria enhancement program, looking towards the next year. That is their standing interpretation at this point. And we've obviously advocated for more flexibility in a variety of ways, but if it's not part of a larger project. I don't have the number of how many schools have and need. Most who do not have would certainly like. You're right, we hear about this all the time, and we'll get you that number.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. And then 1972 Broadway. Yes?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes, ma'am.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I know that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And there are other ones. Mr. Restler seems to have one also.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes. I don't know if Monique has an update. I know Council Member...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We had a tour. Beautiful.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We understand you were able to go take a look at it. That's great.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We want to make sure that it's completely filled in September of 2025.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes. We are working on some ideas for that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What are some of your ideas?

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2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Do you
3 have that, Monique?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This is an inside
5 joke, ha-ha.

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Okay.
7 Jeff, do you have that? Yes, I'm going to ask Jeff
8 Klein to come up...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Poor guy.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And
11 give us the latest.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Let me swear you in
13 first.

14 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
15 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
16 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
17 questions? Jeff Klein.

18 CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Go ahead.

20 CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, I know you just
21 took a walkthrough of that center with one of our
22 staff as well as DOHMH and DOB.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They were great.

24 CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Yeah, and so we're
25 committed to looking at all options. Of course, we

would have to determine what permitting is necessary if we wanted to age it down. I know DOHMH said that even though it is on the second floor...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We can do it.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: We can do infant and toddler because it's got the correct...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And the classrooms.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: And the classrooms, it's got the correct space for elevators for cribs. So, we're excited at looking at those options, but it does take time and cross-functional collaboration with the other agencies so I know that my team is working on specifics and I've got a chat here. And if I get any more, I'm happy to share.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But what's the timing on your discussion and collaboration and coordination and so on? What's the timing on all that?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: We, at least monthly, have engagement with DOHMH. I've already set up with my team tri-weekly meetings with DOB. The gentleman, actually, that was on the walkthrough with

you. So, we're excited to really engage in real discussion about what to do with that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You have to soon give me a timeframe because obviously the cutoff has already taken place for the early childhood education application so we're late.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Absolutely. These things do take time because even if we were to make it viable for childcare, we would have to contract with a CBO through a fair procurement process.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I already have a CBO.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So those things take time.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Off record, offline, please give me a time.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Absolutely. We'll get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Council Member Brewer. So wait, 1170 Flatbush Avenue. I might as well put mine in too.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So that one is fresh in my mind, 1972, because we were just there.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We could do a walkthrough. I've never done a walkthrough. I'd love that. Bring everybody, let's do a walkthrough.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Let's do it.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, offline. Giovanni will schedule that. Thank you, Council Member Brewer.

And now I'm going to pass it on to Restler. Don't go nowhere, because Council Member Restler has the same questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm going to build to it so you know it's coming. I'll firstly just thank you all for being here today and thank our great Chair Joseph for her leadership. You know, Dan, Serrita, Emma, appreciate it. Chancellor, appreciate your leadership and your presence here today.

I think that I heard, Serrita, you say that you support the baselining of critical investments like restorative justice, mental health

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2 continuum, community schools. That would be a good
3 thing for the world. Did I get that right?

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: You got
5 that absolutely correct.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I love that.
7 That's such a beautiful thing. As a former
8 (INAUDIBLE) to hear you say that today is a great
9 thing.

10 Now, how about early childhood? 112
11 million dollars cut in this budget for 3K, 5-million-
12 dollar cut for outreach, 25-million-dollar cut for
13 early childhood special ed. Does the DOE leadership
14 team also support baselining that essential
15 investment?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's great. Now
18 we got a team effort. So, we know we're going to the
19 Mayor and Jacques next, but it's good that the DOE
20 and the City Council are united in making sure that
21 these critical investments happen because I'll be
22 honest, we reviewed this morning, thank you for
23 sharing it at 8:30 this morning, some updated data on
24 enrollment and applications for 3K and pre-K last
25 year, and I would say a system that's been badly

mismanaged is seeing modest improvement. So that's me giving a compliment. We continue to see that in more than a quarter of school districts, applications, demand are outpacing the number of seats. And in an additional quarter of school districts, so 18 out of the 32 school districts, we either have more demand than more applications than seats or over 90-plus percent applications than seats. It's very challenging to manage an early childhood system and actually connect a family to a 3K seat in their neighborhood when you're at 95, 96, 97 percent capacity. So, I'm not sure if this is a Chancellor or Dan or who's the right question on this one. What's the ideal operating capacity for the 3K system? Is it 90 percent, 85 percent?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So, it's a great question. It's a right question, Council Member. Good to see you. One thing I want to...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Dan's a constituent by the way, so we got to take care of Dan.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah, yes, yes, I am. I'm a taxpayer.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: There you go.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: As well, as well. One of the things we are looking at closely, because I can't give you a precise number, but let me tell you why. 3K more so than kindergarten, more so than high school, middle school, other places where we have an application process, we see a big drop off between application and enrollment, and it varies as you might expect.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you know that's because we're offering people seats that are two miles from their home, right? In my Council District, in District 13, 14, 15, you offer a family in Greenpoint a seat in South Williamsburg and it's useless. You can't take a three-year-old two and a half miles each way every day. That doesn't work, but that's exactly what we're doing, and that's when the DOE says we're offering a seat to every student. It's totally disingenuous, right? So how can we get to a place where we're offering a convenient seat for every student?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: The vast majority, 90-plus percent are getting an offer from a place they have designated as a place they

want to go. But we can't just look at application rates is my point. That's not the only metric.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (CROSS-TALK)
looking within sub-districts and making sure that we're meeting demand in those much more targeted areas.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: There's no question about it. We agree with you 100 percent, Council Member, that there are some...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But I'm disappointed you're not given some data this morning to say our goal is to operate at 85 or 90 percent capacity within every sub-district of every school district across the city to make sure that there's a convenient 3K seat for every family. There should be a clear metric goal that we're trying to accomplish because we're failing today, right? We are failing when in 18 out of 32 school districts, we are at 90-something percent capacity or over 100 percent capacity.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: 95 is our benchmark. That's where we would like to be.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you think you can offer a convenient seat for every student at 95?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Sure, sure. At 95 percent enrollment, sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, for the nine school districts where we have more applications than we did seats this year, are you actively working to move seats around in those districts, to those districts to make sure that we're meeting demand?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Within the constraints we have, that is absolutely the process that we're undergoing. Absolutely to move seats around. We'd like to move age ranges as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Getting real-time updates during the school year for how we're planning for next year would be very helpful. You know, we're still failing to fill the extended day, extended year seats, right? So in 3K, you cut almost 10 percent of the 3K extended day, extended year seats, 8.5 percent. And still we're only filling 50 percent of those seats. Why? And in pre-K, we're filling just about, let me get my, make sure I get the right number, we're filling, similarly, 50 percent of those seats for pre-K, for extended day, extended year seats. You added 2,000 pre-K extended day, extended year seats. These are the best seats, right? You have

a working family. That's it, right? That's a full day. You're able to take your child there. (TIMER CHIME) It's year-round. Why are we failing to fill these seats?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: You want to take it?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Yeah. So, we recognize that there's oversaturation in some communities, in EDY seats in particular.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Oh, come on.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: But communities are changing, and those are means-tested seats so those are eligibility-required, low-income seats. And as communities around them change, we're finding that less folks are eligible, right, to avail themselves of those seats so that's one of the reasons why we have oversaturation.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate that there are communities that gentrify and that it's harder to reach families at certain income levels in certain neighborhoods. I represent one of those districts. I get it. But at the same time, when you're filling 50 percent of the seats system-wide, we are failing at outreach. We are failing to reach

the families who desperately need these seats. And the trouble that I've seen over these now year four of the Adams Administration is there's been no improvement. That it's been a failure from the beginning, and it's a failure today. So that's the thing that I'm struggling with. And then we cut 5 million dollars in outreach from the early childhood education budget. We know there is a critical demand for these seats. Families desperately need full-day, year-round seats to be able to work. A working family can't go to work if they don't have a place to take their kids.

So, I do want to follow up on Council Member Brewer and Council Member Joseph's questions. So, in the notes that you shared with us, you shared that there are 38 programs for early childhood programs that have been moved to the inactive status since FY23, but that doesn't include the site in Council Member Brewer's District on the Upper West Side or the site in Council Member Joseph's District in Flatbush or 274 Atlantic Avenue. These are mothballed early childhood education sites. How many of those sites exist? And District 15 has a seat

demand. Can we get a timeline for when this site is going to open?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, Council Member, I believe you're speaking about vacant sites that were part of the 3K expansion under de Blasio. I believe there's about 21 of those sitting vacant. And so what we're doing, just as I mentioned to Council Member Brewer, is working cross-functionally with DOHMH and DOB to ensure that these can be still viable because if time has passed and they're sitting vacant, they need to be up to all appropriate codes. And then we're trying to repurpose them where possible as well. And where possible, if we can't do those things, we're trying to also get out of those leases. So, we're working on different ways to really make our portfolio cost-effective for the City of New York and be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Certainly, we want to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. We have a need for seats in our community and we look at a mothballed site in a private building that we put a bunch of money into the capital repairs and then we're paying rent. That is infuriating. And so we really, I mean, I had a positive meeting with Deputy

Chancellor Vadehra, which I appreciate her time, but then the followup we get is being stonewalled so I'm really looking for actual solutions. We have a meeting with Deputy Chancellor Hawkins later this month. I really am looking to activate this site to provide the early childhood seats that our community desperately needs.

 Last thing is, if I can, Chair Joseph, one quick question. I know there are many schools like this around the city, but I'm going to cite PS8 as an example where around the corner from Deputy Chancellor Weisberg. We added 172 seats in a 2011 expansion. We're at 594 seats today, I think. We're way over capacity again, even after building the expansion. And every kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade seat is over this class size capacity. It's a great school. And I go to Deputy Chancellor Vadehra and I say we want to work together, figure out a way to expand the site. She says, go to SCA. So, I go to SCA, I say, we want to figure it out. Can we make it work? They say, go to DOE, we can't help you. So, I'm getting the run around and I don't want to see the catchment area for this school change. It's a great school that serves

the neighborhood. How are we going to make this work?
Who can I work with to actually identify real
solutions? You can both talk.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'll
take the PSA question since it's my alma mater, my
kid's alma mater, my dad's alma mater from the 1930s.
No joke, way before that 2011.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's why we
take care of our constituents.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So,
this is an example of high demand schools we have all
over the city. We don't want to give you the run
around so we should have a real conversation. I will
be part of that conversation...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Council
Member, with SCA, but it points out one of the
challenges we have with the class size law, which is
the available space in PS8, which was in the
schoolyard was used to build an annex. There's not
really space in that footprint. And as you can
imagine, buying a parcel close to that area is...

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It's impossible.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Impossible. So, we face real challenges. What we don't want to do, we're with you 100 percent, is shrink the catchment area, exclude parents who want to send their kids there, or tell parents you can't enroll in kindergarten, you have to go somewhere else. So, these are real challenges and trade-offs. There's not going to be an easy answer for a PS8 or other high demand schools, but there might be some creative solutions so that's why I would love to sit down with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I want to work with you on those creative solutions. Do you want to add something too?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: No, I was going to say, really sorry I feel like you got the run around because we really tried to work on that. I do think just to put what Dan is saying even more bluntly, there's two things to do in cases like that. There's finding additional space that's close enough to the school. I know we've talked about this in other contexts as well. If the space is too far away, it's not really expanding the school's capacity.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Totally.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: There's finding additional space that's close to the school, which ain't easy around there. And there's changing or capping enrollment. There's three things. There's changing or capping enrollment, or there's eventually exemptions down the road. And those are the paths that are available for schools like PS8. Of course, space is the ideal one, and that's what we will work with you and SCA to make sure nothing's being missed in the neighborhood and nothing else can be done. But to the extent we don't want to be changing enrollment, those are the next few steps that are in.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Look, I think in certain areas, this is really, really hard. In one like this, Council Members have to be key partners because we approve the rezonings so we have opportunities to say in a ULURP we need early childhood space in this rezoning to free up capacity at PS8 or we're not going to be there, and we can collaborate to actually identify real solutions so I just want to say, Chancellor and team, you all have been responsive and you've been engaging in constructive ways, and I really appreciate it. You do not have easy jobs, and I'm grateful for your team

and your collaboration. And I give you all a hard time because I care and I think we can do better, but not because I don't appreciate the work that you do.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We appreciate your rapid-fire questions, Council Member. We're here for it.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Lincoln.

We've noticed that some variance when comparing the ECE enrollment capacity and vacancy across the PMMR and the MMR and the Council's term and conditions. For example, the term and condition number, which were as of the end of January, show the total combined 3K and pre-K enrollment for non-special education seats at the district level as 91,355, whereas the PMMR reflected at the end of October showed a combined total number of these seats at 94,855. Did enrollment decrease from October to January, and could you explain why these numbers may fluctuate across the report?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We'll have to look into that. Apologize, Chair. We'll look very specifically at the timeline for those, what window they're looking at. I don't believe that that's capturing actual trends. I think it's just a

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2 timing window, but we'll get you an answer by the end
3 of the day.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. You'll look at
5 the timeline to see where was an increase and where
6 was the decrease, and you'll share that with the
7 Council?

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes,
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. 3K, what
11 is the current capacity of the 3K system?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Current
13 capacity is about 48,000.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 48,000.

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: For 3K.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much would that
17 number decrease if 112 million to 92 million of the
18 former stimulus funding and 20 million to ensure that
19 all families that apply receive an offer that was
20 not?

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:
22 (INAUDIBLE)

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're going to go
24 back and?

25

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2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We'd
3 have to do that analysis, Chair, to figure out what
4 the average dollar amount per seat is, and then we'll
5 do that math and get back to you.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, in Fiscal 2024,
7 the New York City Public Schools spent about 1.78
8 billion on 3K and pre-K programs. What level is DOE
9 on track to spend on fiscal 2025?

10 CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Again, I think our
11 team will have to get back to you on those answers,
12 Chair.

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: I can jump
14 in. The budget for 2025 is over 2 billion.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Over 2 billion. So,
16 what is New York City Public Schools' capacity to
17 provide the same level of ECE service now compared to
18 last year?

19 CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, you want moment
20 in time data to compare right now to last year? I
21 have data as of the 24th of February, but I would
22 have to pull the exact moment in time for last year
23 to give you a comparison.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how soon can I
25 get that?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Very soon. I think we can do that today, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That would be great. Because my next question was, how has that affected providers? So, it's going to impact providers, right? And what is the current capacity of the pre-K system?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, the total capacity of pre-K, including EDY, SDY, and Head Start, right as of the 24th of February, 71,349 capacity, but there are, as of that date, 56,846 enrolled.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Enrolled, okay. Will more funding needed to be added for the current year for Fiscal 2026, the outyears, for instance, UA408, which has the OTPS costs such as contract, costs for ECE providers, has actual spending of 967 million in 2024, but is currently budgeted at 826 in 2025, and only 689 million in 2026. We're noticing decreases.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: So as everyone has pointed out, including Council Member Restler, there's funding that we need and baselined, right, in our budget after '26 so we're having ongoing conversations to ensure that that is in there. And I can get back to you on the specifics of

what you just named. But just want to point out that in order for us to sustain those programs, we need to have the funding baselined in the budget.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Baselined and not have to be doing the two-step every two years.

Early childhood special education. I noticed the budget included 55 million to open new preschool special education in New York City Public School. However, there are still children waiting for seats. Preschool special education classes they need. At our January 30th hearing on special education, you testified there was 450 preschool students were waiting for class. How many students are currently waiting for seats in preschool special education classes?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, as of our most recent poll, Chair, we have 651 students awaiting a placement.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 651?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And meanwhile they're waiting for seats, are they receiving their mandated services.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, in terms of receipt of related services, students that are receiving partial services are 319 students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many? Can you repeat that?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: 319 of, so of the students waiting for service, waiting for placement, 319 of them are receiving partial service.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the others?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Are not receiving...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No services at all.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And why has the number been increasing so much in the past few months?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Well, so, a few reasons. First of all, there's been a 20 percent increase of students requiring preschool special education services from FY22. We're up to 32,153 students this school year. In terms of kids coming in this school year, we've been able to place, thanks to the 55 million dollars, 92.3 percent of them. So, they were all placed, and Chair, when we opened the

school year, we opened on time with every student in a preschool placement for special education. So, that 55 million was a critical investment, and we thank you and Council Member Gutiérrez for being there present... every two weeks you are there advocating and helping us strategize on this so we thank you for that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Of those students waiting for, how many are waiting for self-contained seats, and how many are waiting for integrated seats?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yeah, so, 528 of the students waiting for placement are waiting for special classes. 123 are waiting for SKIS, integrated seats. I do want to point out, though, Chair, that we are opening up an additional 145 special class seats and an additional 24 this school year so that is going to also be helpful via that 55 million dollars.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that'll be in September?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: No. We're opening those classrooms now because we, as you know, pre-K enrollment rolls, and we want to be able to place kids.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. That's great.

3 That's great to hear. How many new seats in preschool
4 special education are self-contained classes have you
5 opened with 55 million?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: 464 to date, but
7 in addition, we are opening up those additional 145.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many seats as
9 integrated classes have you opened?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: 100 to date.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many
12 additional seats do you anticipate opening in
13 preschool special education self-contained class this
14 year and when will those classes open?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yes. So, we're
16 looking to do another 145 seats, that's 18 classes
17 opening in the coming weeks. 24 integrated classes,
18 integrated seats, three classes also in the upcoming
19 weeks.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can we also get a
21 breakdown? Can you send a breakdown to the Council
22 for Council District and school district broken down
23 by self-contained and integrated classes?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yes. I brought a
25 version of that today, and I will send it to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Has the State process to approve seats delayed these seats being opened in a timely manner?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: This school year has been incredibly collaborative and has gone very smoothly with the State, and so they've been wonderful partners in that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much of roadblock is finding, hiring special education teachers and getting these seats online and ready to fill them up?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: It is our primary roadblock. However, we are delighted that there will be a cohort of approximately another 1,000 teaching fellows coming in the fall, which is exciting. We're going to prioritize preschool special education as well as bilingual special education and special education generally with that cohort so that there's hope coming.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there also a pipeline to create related services, a pipeline to create, that we know that was a shortage area as well?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yes. So, our tuition reimbursement and all of those incentives are

still in place. There is still a national shortage, but what we are doing is currently we just closed an RFP that was out there to provide contract enhancements for our related service providers. We do expect a significant increase in service via those contracts.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And would you be able to fill these seats if you had the funding to find and hire all the necessary staff and teachers?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, all of the gains that we've made thus far, Chair, are due to those investments, right? So, this Administration put 55 million dollars. We were able to open up those preschool classes. 16 million in CPSC administrators. That is helping us enormously. The 40-million-dollar contract enhancement. Remember how we got here, right? We got here because two Administrations ago, we did not plan for special education, right, to be an integral part of the pre-K for all. I know I need to say that every time. We've been making up for it via this Administration, and that's why you and Council Member Gutiérrez meet with us every two weeks on this. We've been inch by inch making up for an infrastructure that did not plan for special

education. With a 20 percent increase, right, that keeps growing so that's what we're adding. And, as you know, when you talk to families and kids that are in the seats, they are over the moon with the services they are providing, and so that is our goal.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. So, we have to keep doing that and also including the pay parity. Most folks don't know about the 4410 and how much that was a game changer for our preschool special education educators in the private sector.

So, I'm going to now pass it over to Council Member Hanif.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You had something?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Just while you were on that really good point, Chair, the other investment that Deputy Chancellor Foti is referring to is around our alternative certification program. So, the additional funding, the 10 million dollars in funding for teacher recruitment, that's what allows us to have a class of 1,000-plus to fill these, and we certainly have the capacity to go even

larger. We have gone larger in the past. But there's, you know, that costs money.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, it does. And it's a great way for folks to come over to the fields and incentivize them. We have to be creative, right, so thank you for that.

Council Member Hanif.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Chancellor and DOE team.

I recently had the great privilege of taste testing arugula pesto pasta at PS295, and I have to be honest, I actually liked it, I liked it, and what I got to witness is the Wellness in the Schools Program, which I love, and I just want to see it have more capacity and to see students taking a cup of pasta and deciding on whether they like it or not and giving feedback, that was great. I saw all of that just standing there for the half hour I was there.

Okay. So, I'll ask about the 3K waitlist. How are we making sure that while families are waiting, they're not depositing thousands of dollars to private childcare centers?

CHIEF KELLY: Thank you for your question. Well, one, we moved up all of the application dates we have moved up so that families can plan.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How many days was that moved up?

CHIEF KELLY: I'm talking about previous years. So, we have heard this feedback. So, the last couple of years, we have adjusted our admission dates to make sure that we can account for families who have to make those decisions. So, as far as now in this particular, yeah, and going back to your question about the waitlist, there's constant reminders that we're providing to families that, and excuse me, reminders to programs more or less so that they can continue to move the waitlist so that families can get offers much quicker because what happens with the waitlist is that if you're on a waitlist and you want a specific program, if the seat becomes available, the program needs to make an offer to the next student and so, therefore, the quicker we can get through those waitlists, the much quicker families will get an actual offer and response and can register.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What's the timeline of getting through the waitlist? How quickly?

CHIEF KELLY: It varies because every program has their own waitlist and every program has their own demand so some waitlists go a lot quicker than others just because, as we said in this conversation, just because the fact that they get an offer to a program doesn't always mean that they want that program. They may want another program. And so, if those become available in specific programs, that can mean a quicker turn than other programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And have you had families raise this concern that they had to put in thousands of dollars in deposits, and how are you responding to them?

CHIEF KELLY: I mean, we hear from families, you know, we take their feedback into consideration. I'm not saying that I have a whole lot of complaints about that, but, you know, families want what they want, and we want to make sure that the system works so that they can get what they want in a timely fashion.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We do hear that, Council Member. It's a real issue. It's

one of the reasons why Trevonda and the Enrollment Office moved up the timeline for high school as well because we hear it at that level as well so we do the best we can to address it, even though we don't control the deposit rules and so forth that private schools have.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Sure. And I want to make sure that our public school infrastructure is as best as it could be.

Last month, I had the honor of being with some parents as part of New Yorkers United for Childcare. We were petitioning for two-care in Park Slope in my District, and the conversations I was having, we were at J.J. Byrne Playground. It's one of the popular playgrounds in my District, asking about two-care, three-care, and the responses were outlandish. To know that parents have to make drastic measures, either leaving the workforce or entirely leaving the city, and, you know, I don't have a kid yet because I'm not trying to leave the city and I'm not trying to stop working so what are your thoughts on the two-care proposal for free publicly funded free childcare for two-year-olds? And this is about

60,000 two-year-olds that United Neighborhood Houses and New Yorkers United for Childcare have put forth.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So, Council Member, we obviously would love to make sure that every single family has everything they need and that they don't have to negotiate between work and responsibilities and their child. Obviously, that's something very personal to me. I was very lucky, and I had a support structure in my mom and my sister, but I recognize that that privilege doesn't exist for everyone.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So, of course, these are things that we would love to see happen. Right now, what we're trying to do is make sure that we're listening to everyone's ideas and opinions and figuring (TIMER CHIME) out what the implications are for our own planning and implementation.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, about two-care, what are your thoughts?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We would love to see it happen.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And what's the possibility? Are there conversations that are happening?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Conversations are happening internally, but at this point, we are not able to give you an update because, again, they're just internal conversations.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: We're going to continue to fight for universal two-care.

I have a question about our immigrant families. The partial rollback to the 60-day shelter cap is a relief for the kids who are in grades K through six. Could you provide an update on how this policy change has impacted immigrant families and the costs in particular for our schools and then managing the immigrant families within shelters?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, absolutely agree that the partial rollback was real progress and appreciate the advocacy from many of you as we look to try and make sure as many of our immigrant families and students could stay where they are and stay through the school year. Obviously puts a strain, of course, on the kids and families as well as on our system. The honest answer to your question

is that there are so many different external factors impacting our immigrant students and families in our shelter system right now that it's very challenging to attribute... we have many fewer immigrant students and families in our shelters than we used to. I know we used to look at that closely tied to the 60-day rule and try and figure out what the impact of that was. We obviously looked at it from our side. Given the far broader context around how our immigrant students and families are feeling in our country, it's really hard to attribute particular changes to that particular shift in policy as well as the shutting down of shelters. That being said, it's obviously a good thing if we are removing one of the reasons that kids and families have to move.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I mean, this is a disappointing response because the shelter evictions, I mean, these are evictions, made it impossible for these new families to ever be stable, ever get a job that was permanent to be able to get out of the shelter system, and I fear that right now with, of course, Trump's mass deportation agenda, I have constituents who share that they're afraid to send their kids to school, and I know our school community

is one of the safest communities for families. Could you share any trends in school attendance for immigrant students since Trump was inaugurated, and if there are any costs associated with support?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you, Council Member. And we are going to bring Flavia Puello to sort of walk you through some of the data trends that we've seen in terms of attendance. And I know that you know this and that our policies haven't changed, but also for us, what's important is good communication, not only with the principals and superintendents on these policies, which we've been consistently doing, but also thinking about what are the ways that we can do better with direct communication to family, which is why we're hosting more Know-Your-Rights trainings, which is why we're partnering with local elected officials, because we want families to understand the resources available to them so that way, whatever attendance trends we're seeing, we're triaging them by district and by school.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Thank you, Chancellor. So I want to address that, but I also want to build upon our Deputy Chancellor's response

regarding the shelter and what we've seen in terms of the movement because part of the work that I do is also supporting that population. I think that what our Deputy Chancellor was speaking to, that with the changes with the 60-day and the limitation, yeah, there was absolutely hope and more stability in terms of keeping those families in the same location, or if there was any movement looking at the district where the youngest child was enrolled. However, at this time, with the closures of our HERRCs, which are the humanitarian shelters that were open through Health and Hospital to support our migrant students, that's also impacting and creating additional movement. So, then that has a direct implications with things like attendance, right? Attendance is really, and chronic absenteeism are a symptom of what we see within a community and what may happen, which ranges from access to support services to whatever it is that is going on. So, the good thing is that when we look at citywide data, we don't see massive shift in terms of the data so our percentage for attendance and where we are in terms of chronic absenteeism are on par at a citywide level. However, we know that certain subgroups and vulnerable population like students in

temporary housing or students in foster cares or students with disability have had lower attendance rates and we have to work with them more closely and be a lot more thoughtful about the interventions there. So, for example, immediately after some of our changes in shelters, for instance, I was looking at districts like District 22 where we saw that some of our students in temporary housing then experienced decline on their attendance as a result of some of our changes in shelter. That didn't impact citywide data. So, what are we doing about it to make sure that we keep our fingers on the pulse of what every school community, whatever district is experiencing? Working closely with our superintendents, working with our principal, making sure that they have all the data that they need consistently so that they can monitor what's happening in their community, working with our CBO partners, right, so that we are helping families to understand what are their rights.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And is all of that a separate kind of program? And I'm about to wrap up, so I just want to close before you respond.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Absolutely, it is an innovation. So, I am privileged that because I get

the opportunity in New York City Public Schools to lead work like community schools and to lead work like students in temporary housing and to lead work like attendance that I look at that as like the ecosystem of support that we have for all. And when we work with our superintendents and when we work with our schools, the experience of children's is holistically so we have to make sure that all of these pieces of our agency are working together, are meeting consistently, are emphasizing to families that you belong here, there's hope for here. And just like many of you, we were there at one point as immigrants, and you're welcome and we want you to stay in our schools.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I appreciate DOE's commitment to keeping families whole and not evicting them from our communities. It doesn't help that we have a Mayor who is hell-bent on not saying anything in response to Trump's mass deportation agenda. And our schools can do as much as they want, but if the top leadership is confused as to what to say or not saying anything at all, it really harms our entire city. And I'm also just concerned, I'd love the data, I'll follow up with you.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I'd be happy to do so.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Seventh grade through 12th grade, those families are still shuffling every 60 days. I can't imagine. I just can't imagine these families are stable, that the students are healing from trauma or able to make long-lasting friendships and so much more. Thank you.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Stevens.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, hello. How's everybody doing?

Well, I'm going to start with my favorite topic, Summer Rising. I know everyone has a lot of stuff to talk about, but I'm going to talk about Summer Rising because we know how much I don't like this program. But I wanted to start with, and some of the reasons I don't like it, because I feel like there needs to be a distinguish between young people who need the services and young people who don't, and I get so many complaints, and then I come to these hearings, and I talk to DYCD, and I talk to you guys, and it's always like, no, everyone loves it, and that

is not the experience that I am getting from my parents because they have given me so much pushback, and I don't know how it's such a disconnect from what I'm hearing and what everyone else is hearing. So I don't know, maybe I'm crazy, maybe, I don't know. But one of the things we do want to talk about too right now is around promotion-in-doubt students that are requiring for Summer Rising in order to participate in CBO-led enrichment. How many mandated students applied for Summer Rising in 2024? And the mandated students who did not apply, were they accepted to Summer Rising?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thank you for the question. It's a pleasure to talk to you about Summer Rising again. So, as you know, we've tried to move the Summer Rising enrollment process up for the same reasons actually we talked earlier for early childhood to make sure families have a good sense of whether they're getting into the program.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And in order to plan the summer camp, you need to start in January, but you know.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And we have continually moved that up, and we start our planning

in October and, as you know, enrollment is open now for this summer. We have over 100,000 applications already, actually, for this summer. So, in response to the question, the reason that relates to your question is, it means we don't actually know at this point yet who's going to be mandated for summer school.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Oh, I know that.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We know who...

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: (CROSS-TALK) Part of the problem that I have with Summer Rising so thank you for highlighting my point of that's part of the problem.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: In doubt, so we do prioritize those students as a part of the process. Last year, 98 percent of the promotion-in-doubt students who applied did receive a placement because we do prioritize those students. All families across the system can apply, and so we are holding our Summer Rising seats, including the afternoon CBO seats, for the families who do choose to apply through the process because we don't have enough seats for everybody who applies, and we want to make

sure we can place as many of those families as we can.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So just in terms of family, and as you said, the applications are already available currently for families. What has the outreach look like and how's the enrollment going currently? And I just want to be clear, so DOE is still in charge of enrollment at this time? Because that has also been one of my biggest issues because you guys struggle on recruitment for everything and CBOs actually do that better, and so I still do not understand why this is the responsibility of DOE when we know that this is something you struggle with so I'm still confused on why you guys are taking the lead. It does not make sense when you have a partner who does this well and does this regularly. Why wouldn't they just take the lead and you do the things that you do well and they do the things that they do well? Because it's something you're struggling with in 3K, in school, like all areas you're struggling in recruitment. But again, we're giving this to you when you have a partner who actually does this well so I need just a better understanding of why we're still doing this.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yeah, so this is actually a program where we do a lot of outreach and we get far more applications than we're able to place so we're not struggling.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But no, you do. No, no, no, no, no, no, you do. Because you get the applications and then when it's time for enrollment, it's always a disconnect, and so this is what I'm saying. I know these are the answers that they're telling you to get, but I want us to really get to a place where we're being honest about how to move forward because you do get a lot of applications, and then what happens is the CBO during the summer has to clean a lot of that up because, again, the school doesn't do their enrollment the way it needs to be done. Students are not in the places they want to go, and it's a mess, and then in the summer we're still trying to clean that up. Has it gotten better? Yes, but we're still struggling.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So let me see where to start. As you know, first of all, I would just say, and I know you know this well, but for everyone's benefit, we work very closely with DYCD. They work very closely with their CBOs and we have

1 tried every year based on their feedback, your
2 feedback, and the Chair's feedback to continue to
3 improve this process (INAUDIBLE)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: (CROSS-TALK) but
5 why would we improve it if we have shown before that
6 DYCD, or not DYCD because I'm going to give it to the
7 providers, the providers do this better so then why
8 are we still saying we're still trying to improve
9 when to me, it makes the most sense to just go to the
10 providers and say you lead on this while we are doing
11 these other things.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So we continue
13 to believe with DYCD as our partners, that this is a
14 strong way to run the process to ensure it's fair and
15 equitable for all families who come in, to ensure we
16 can prioritize centrally our most vulnerable
17 students, no matter which programs they are going
18 (TIMER CHIME) to, even if they're moving, and our
19 process allows us to do that in a simple way for all
20 families. I will just say you asked earlier about how
21 enrollment's going as compared to last year. You
22 should know that enrollment is up so far compared to
23 last year. I don't have the data as of today. As a
24 couple of days ago, we were up 25 percent compared to
25

last year. We saw more applicants on day one of this program than we've seen for anything else across the system ever, including a substantial increase over last year.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: (CROSS-TALK)

Again, parents are going to apply, but again, we know that when summer comes, those numbers look different. And so I just, the game that I feel like we always play, it's just, it doesn't make sense for us to just like say, we know that DOE doesn't do this well. Like if that's the case, we wouldn't be having these conversations. And this is not a slight. It's like y'all have other things to do. Like to me, it's like, take the things off the plate that you don't need on the plate. Stop adding them. Because even when we're saying the partnership with DYCD is there, it doesn't feel that way, and so I'm just being clear, like how do we take things off your plate that doesn't make sense and give it to other people because you have so many other things to do. I mean, and y'all know, I don't like the program so I'm like, that's, I'm not going to lie about that. So that's the other piece that I'm pushing. But the other question is, how are we detailing impact around academics? Because that's

another thing, right? This whole program is the model around like, oh, it's so great, the kids are getting all this learning, but how are we tracking that?

Because that's another problem I have with it.

Because one, it does not take that they have to be in class for them to be getting academic so I need to know, how are we seeing the results for what we're putting in for Summer Rising?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yeah. Thank you for that. And at a similar hearing we had a couple months ago, I think we shared early results from last year. So actually, the Chancellor mentioned in her testimony that we just completed the results of our analysis from last summer, which is the analysis our own team did, which is a pretty rigorous analysis comparing our Summer Rising students. We saw a statistically significant positive overall impact for all students in math. We saw statistically..

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: How was that done?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, it was done using our screeners that all of our students across our system take, and so we know we're getting valid comparison data. Our team looks at the students

who participated in Summer Rising compared to like students who did not participate in Summer Rising and looks at the academic growth on that screener data. As I was saying, positive impact overall for math, positive impact in K2 for reading, more positive impact in both cases when students showed up for more...

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: (CROSS-TALK)

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Can I just finish this last sentence? When students showed up for more days. So that's one of the other things we know is when students are showing up more, the academic impact is greater and a more positive impact as well for our students in temporary housing, our English language learners and our students with disabilities so that's the overall academic impact.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So was this done through like testing or something like that because even with positive impact, let's also be clear, if you go to camp, you actually have positive impact too, which is why when you're thinking about summer reading loss, which is why parents were enrolling them in camp. So like, I want to know what is the growth because if we're investing all this money to

say that this is the way and this is the way we're going, for me, the same way with everything else, how do we really prove that other than saying it's an impact because even if they went to camp and if you look at folks who just go to camp and not in Summer Rising, they're going to have a positive impact too, so is there any data to show that it's not just a positive impact?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yeah, so I would say... totally appreciate that question and actually really proud that our team was able to do this by... also totally agree on the value of camp, by the way, but our team was able to do this by comparing these students to other similar students in our system, whether they went to camp or not, we are comparing their progress to those students' progress and taking a look at the Summer Rising students.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I would love to see that data.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We can share it today.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: What support is given to providers with students with disabilities? Because I will say that that's the one thing that I

have appreciated about Summer Rising, but also have been really a bit upset about it because we should have been serving these students all along and the City has said that they couldn't afford it, that they couldn't do it and all these things and now that Summer Rising is here, we're doing this and so I hope that when this program is no longer in existence, that we still are serving the students who need these services. And so this is the one thing I will say that you guys have made great effort to include students with disability in this program that has never been done before, which to me was a disgrace to the students that we were not serving.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Appreciate that, and we are including them, we're actually prioritizing them in this program as well. We've been working closely with D.C. Foti's team on how we continue to support providers who have asked for additional support here. So Christina, you want to come up?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Council Member, I don't want to share with you things that you already know, but you've been such an advocate on this. You pointed out years ago when we first started the need

to train the CBOs, we responded to that and made sure the second year of Summer Rising that that was a full partnership with the CBOs and we've continued to do that, and so a lot of that has been just with existing resources, but we're just grateful that it's landing in a way that works. We've also really upped the number of paraprofessionals supporting our students in Summer Rising, which has been a beneficial impact for students. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: What is the additional training? Because I know like last year, I know that there was additional training, but a lot of it was through like video and things like that. Are there like more hands-on training this year for providers in preparation for this?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yeah. So, we've done more in-person work. We've done the online work. We've also done resources like tangible resources and, whenever CBOs reach out for additional support, I know that our team's been very responsive to those requests.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I'm sorry, Chair, I have a couple, you gave me a lot.

And just the transportation piece around Summer Rising. Year over year, it has gotten better, but how are we preparing for this so to be even better this year because how do we make sure that young people who want to participate in the CBO portion is doing it? Because that is the piece that most of them like and want to do anyway. And with the buses, that has been a huge hindrance so what are we doing to try to rectify this this year?

Yes. So, DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: we do think it's improved and there is always room for improvement on the transportation front. So as with last year, we will be providing rideshare to students mandated for transportation, including our students with disabilities who are staying later. We've heard from families, that's great, but I didn't know that when I was applying, and so we've made sure that's clear before applications open and we are sharing that information out with families. We know thousands of families took us up on it last year. The larger challenge, of course, here is our bus contracts, which don't allow us to do 6 p.m. busing over the summer for everyone. We are in the process of dealing with those contracts now, but the long-term solution

would be to have more flexible contracts in that way.
In the meantime, we're stepping up the rideshare
again this summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: What's the plan
for plans/process for students enrolled in Summer
Rising who are in temporary housing and are required
to move?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. We are
working very closely with Flavia and team on this to
make sure we're getting the feedback in from our STH
coordinators, sharing that centrally with ourselves
and figuring out what the student wants, whether the
student wants to stay where they are, whether the
student wants to move to a different spot, and how we
can support them individually at that time.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Not a huge amount
to build upon there, but also making sure that their
concern about potentially moving don't keep them from
applying. So, it's really like apply, get a seat, and
then we will work with you to ensure that we're
providing the communication or that you get the
transportation that you are entitled to get as a
student in temporary housing to get to your location.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: How are you guys letting families know that? Because I think sometimes that, especially in temporary housing, it's a breakdown, so are you guys like working with the temporary housing placement shelters to let them know this? How are you getting them that information?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: All of the above. So, for example, something that was mentioned earlier when we had the early childhood application, my team, including those who work centrally, including myself, are out in the communities, in the shelters, making direct contact with the families. We also held meetings with DHS, with Health and Hospital, their leadership, so that the people that have direct contact with families are empowered and know that information. We held trainings between the enrollment team, the student in temporary housing team, and to me, it's like all-hands-on deck, including me being out in the shelters and making direct contact with families so that we can ease any confusion, provide clarity, work with them to create accounts if they don't have accounts, really understand what are the things keeping them from applying.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah. I definitely wanted to make sure that we are making this available to those young people.

I want to shift gears really quickly to Learn to Work. 31 million was added to the Preliminary Plan in Fiscal 2026 for Learn to Work, bringing the total to 45 million, which is in line with recent years. We understand that DOE plans to issue RFP for Fiscal 2026. What is the timeline of this RFP and did DOE talk with OMB about baselining in this program? Because I just want to record, this is a program that I believe that we should be expanding and continue to grow, and I've worked in LTW programs and just saw the benefits of it and I know that this is one of the things that was cut before, and they were really fighting hard, and so I think that this is definitely something we should baseline and continue to think about growing and developing and putting in more schools.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah. We agree, Council Member. We certainly are hopeful that funding for LTW is baselined, and we are working on RFP now. We don't have a timeline yet for when it'll be issued, but we expect it to be soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So you have no idea, maybe a couple months, September? What do you need from us to help push it? Like, how can I be supportive? Like, what do you need?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Well, baselining the funding would certainly help.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Certainly help.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So you need us to help you push them to baseline this funding? You didn't say it, but I said it. So that's what you need from us? Got it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair Stevens. Just a couple of followups on that. We know that Summer Rising is usually the program most popular. We get a lot of applications. How do you sustain the students? Because last year's hearing, if you recall, the attendance rates were very low, and I was not very happy with that so how do we, one, get all these applications, yay. Now we get them through the front door. How do we get them to keep coming back to the program?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thanks for the question, for the feedback from both of you at the previous hearings. So, a couple of quick things. I think, I just want to say, I do think we don't expect Summer Rising attendance to be what school year attendance is. It's a voluntary program. It's a free program. There are no attendance requirements. That's intentional. We're excited we're able to offer this very flexible program to families. We could change that, as we discussed, but we don't have an attendance requirement. And given that, we do know that families sign up, potentially knowing they're going away for a few weeks over the summer, and that's fine, and it fits into their schedule. We also do know we have some students who only show up for very few days, and that skews what the data looks like a bit as well. We know that in the last weeks of the summer, both for the Summer Rising portion and the CBO portion, attendance is down, we think, because families are more likely to be away or doing something else in August, right, so I would say I do think the attendance data, there's a lot of context behind that, that we think is partly about providing

families with flexible options that we're excited to give.

In terms of what we are doing, I'd say a few things. One is we do think consistently trying to improve the transportation piece is a piece of this. We do think moving up the admissions and application cycle is a piece of this that allows the families who really want this to plan. Earlier decisions back to families is a piece of this. This year we're hopeful we'll be able to make more offers and move down the waitlist faster so we get families earlier in and who really want to do this.

On the programming side, I would say there's a series of changes we're making ourselves and with DYCD. We are looking at some special initiatives around, for example, sustainability programming and the equivalent of our Climate Action Days to make sure we have more enrichment-like programming interwoven with our CBOs throughout the day. We're also looking to continue to improve our field trip take-up. We had twice as many field trips we were able to provide last year as a couple years before, and it looks like we'll be able to do that again this year.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's the fun part the kids look forward to.

So, in your testimony, you stated again now in response to Council Member Stevens, Summer Rising has a significant impact on students who participate. Can you please release the data analysis done by New York City Public Schools? If the program has a positive impact, why hasn't it been baselined? Our favorite word.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We actually are just releasing that analysis today. I believe it just went up on our website this morning. We will share that with you, and we're happy to arrange a briefing to talk you through what the impact looks like. I know we talked earlier about the early impact from last year. This is stronger, including for our most vulnerable students, so we're really glad to see it and we can do a briefing on that if you'd like.

In terms of the baselining question, as with many other programs, we would support baselining this very popular program, and we'll continue to advocate.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, at the January special education hearing, New York City

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2 Public Schools testify that 5,657 preschool students,
3 which is about 22.2 percent, were receiving no
4 services at all. I know we spoke about this earlier.
5 How many special education students are currently not
6 receiving special education services?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, there are
8 4,570 students not receiving any services. Chair,
9 that's the first part.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many preschoolers
11 with IEP-mandating related services are currently
12 waiting to start one or more related services?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: 7,914.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many and what
15 percentage of preschoolers with IEP-mandating special
16 education teacher services are currently waiting to
17 begin the service?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: For the special
19 education itinerant teacher services, which are
20 called SEIT, it's 4,087, that's 58 percent.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This percentage is
22 much higher than 1 percent of all students with IEPs
23 that were not receiving services in January. What
24 accounts for the difference in wait time for
25 preschool and school-age students?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yeah. So, as I testified earlier, the number of students has dramatically increased. And Chair, I must correct, I gave you the 32,000-plus number. I just want to note that was FY24, and I can get you the number for this year.

So, in terms of the itinerant teachers, we are doing a number of things to increase teacher capacity, looking at hard-to-staff differentials, talked to you about our recruitment efforts, but this is clearly an area where we need additional itinerant teachers for our preschoolers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many preschoolers were referred for an initial evaluation are currently waiting for evaluation, and what percentage does this represent of the total referrals made during the current school year?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yeah. So, about half of the kids who were referred this year are still waiting. It's about 9,200 students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the timeline to get through those cases?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, thanks to the great efforts of our CPSC administrators, the wait

time between initial referral and appointment with the CSE is 30 days.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For those currently waiting for evaluation, what have they been waiting for, 60 days or less, or over 60 days?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, for the evaluation piece, it's 42 percent 60 days or less, 57 percent for over 60 days.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's a lot.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Chair, can I just add that we've, you know...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please, add.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Thank you, Chair. We've developed in-house preschool assessment teams. We have 21 of them now. They did about 2,100 evaluations themselves. We prioritize hiring for bilingual staff in those preschool assessment teams. That's also where we see inclusive recommendations happening, and so we are delighted that we have more and more students attending 3K and pre-K of students with disabilities. Those in-house assessment teams, they cut down on delays because parents don't have to seek out an evaluator, right? When we have availability, we just offer the family. So that cuts

down delays significantly, and it's something that I'll continue to advocate for more NYCPS evaluators to provide those services in families' home languages.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long did it take to evaluate the 2,100 students that you evaluated in-house?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, I don't have the exact number on that, Chair, but what I can say is that given that we arranged those services, it's one that we can do very quickly for families, and that's where we see a reduced wait time. It's also where we just see those inclusive recommendations that we want to see so kids then are able to go to district schools with their siblings. You mentioned 958 earlier. When you and I went and visited, we saw kids who were there, kids with disabilities attending with their siblings, and that's the ideal, that a parent can say, my child is in preschool special education in pre-K here, and my other child is in first grade general education, and we walk to school together.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. The goal is to keep our young people, our young students, our

youngest learners in community with families without having to get on the school bus and travel for hours and hours to get to a great program.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: That's right, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I want to talk about early childhood site leases, my favorite topic, one of many. So how many ECE sites have 95 percent or greater enrollment, and how many sites are not at 95 percent and may be in the same situation as the five sites that were almost closed last month?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Sure. Just one moment, Chair.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Chair, while Jeff is getting the data up so we can respond to your question specifically, just want to clarify and reassure. It's not that if you're at less than 95 percent, if you're 92 percent enrollment, you're somehow in risk of having your contract pulled. That's not the case at all. These five sites that were an issue had specific conditions around their leases. In some cases, lease was ending. In some cases, the landlord was asking for a lot. So, enrollment certainly was a part of it, and we do, as

we said earlier, have a 95 percent standard in terms of that's what we consider to be fully enrolled, but we don't want to send the impression. I want to make sure our communication is clear on that. Doesn't mean that you're at risk of some negative action being taken just because you're below 95 percent. Whether you are in a lease site, and most of our CBOs, as you know, are not in sites that we lease. They're in their own properties that they lease or otherwise have access to so I just want to give that a high level before Jeff dove into the specifics.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Yeah, that's right. An important point about those particular five sites was they were in communities that could absorb impacted children so that was something that was looked at for those as well. But those discussions were largely driven by upcoming lease expirations.

But as to your question about how many are at the 95 percent enrollment threshold, 773 sites out of our 2,017, that's 38 percent. And Dan mentioned that our standard for full is 95 percent citywide, but just note that that is less than the federal standard of 97 percent that's held by the Office of Head Start.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So to clarify, if I'm at 90 percent, I'm a provider, you're not going to come and shut me down?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: No, ma'am. No, we will not. And we also don't want to characterize a program at 90 percent as low enrollment. It's under the standard of full, but we wouldn't characterize that as low.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, I think maybe the language has to change in that messaging, right, so the general public doesn't see it or hear it that way unless you come here and we ask you for that, right?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: We've definitely seen the need to communicate enrollment and enrollment levels better with that situation with the five leases, for sure.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you for that. How many sites have not been renewed due to low enrollment numbers?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, we haven't only driven decisions about lease renewals by enrollment numbers as I mentioned. There are several factors that will go into whether we should decide to renew these City assets. In many cases, they were asking

for 10, 15, or 20-year leases, which far outlast our contracts for service provisions and what we have secured funding for, right, so we have to make those decisions in accordance with community need, what we have secured funding for, and we are not merely looking to not renew a lease because of enrollment. So that has not historically been done. I think in the five cases that we've been talking about, we've mentioned their enrollment levels mainly because we wanted to demonstrate that the children at those sites could be placed elsewhere in the community, right, that we had community capacity to absorb those children and that for the past three fiscal years, some of those sites were significantly under-enrolled.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The community was saying that that wasn't the case, that the Members were right and you guys were wrong so that's what led to that, and it was a miscommunication so I hope that this communication is working.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Yeah. So, we rely on a system of record that really determines how we can reimburse programs and, in one particular case, we saw that there were only four children in that

system of record. It is the program's responsibility to maintain these accurate records because we have 1,500 contracts with CBOs, and our site support staff are there to coach pedagogy. They're not there to audit enrollment records. So, we really rely on programs to partner with us in making sure these figures are accurate, and really, in the end, they need those figures to be accurate so they can be properly reimbursed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that was one of the questions I asked, do you provide technical support, do you provide customer service, which a lot of providers I've always heard from is they can email you days in and days out and no one responds, no one pick up their calls. So, again, and I think we agreed in the last hearing that communication will be much, much better to providers so we're providing a service to our communities and they have to in turn have information as well.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: And I'll add, Chair, that we have, since dealing with these five sites, set up monthly meetings with our enrollment team, our eligibility team, our finance team, our policy team, and we're meeting with them ahead of

that to ensure that the agenda meets the moment, that we're discussing things that are truly pertinent to them, and we're really trying to improve that kind of engagement across the board. I will say, since D.C. Hawkins assumed her role, we have really made an effort to be responsive. We don't let requests that come in for technical assistance go unresponded to. But if there are any cases that you know of, we'd love to hear about it because we have taken really, really immense efforts to ensure that that does not happen.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, you don't have to tell me twice. Somebody's always on speed dial. For example, one of the things, the reasons they gave for renewing the lease was the sites were oversaturation in school districts and zip codes. But when we met, when we had that hearing, all five sites had extended day seats, which is limited in our system, and we know those are needed for parents to go to work, which were limited. And one site was said only had four toddlers in site. Can you define oversaturation, and what does it mean for New York City Public Schools to determine if a school district is oversaturated? What does that look like?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Sure. So, just to clarify, this goes to the point I was making to Council Member Restler, right. EDY seats are income-restricted seats, and so as the community, right, around that particular site with the four children changed, right, less children in that community were eligible for those seats so that is part of why they were under enrolled.

Oversaturation is where there are too many of a particular seat type in a neighborhood, which children in that neighborhood are not eligible for, and it leads to unhealthy competition, us having to subsidize programs for their vacant seats, and so all around, right, it's not good for the program. They can't maximize enrollment and therefore maximize their revenue. They're in unhealthy competition with their neighbors because nobody can fill their seats, and the City has to subsidize these programs, putting us in a financially unsustainable state.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But do you know that across the city, a lot of our neighborhoods are facing gentrification, so how are you also planning for that, that takes away those income restricted seats?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: For sure. I think you brought up a really important point about the upcoming resolicitation. As we know, the current Birth to Five contracts are ending and we are in discussions about how to make, you know, future solicitations more responsive to community need and the changing community need as the landscape..

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct. The landscape and the communities are changing very rapid and that's scary.

How many leases have been terminated in the last five years due to landlord noncompliance?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: We asked our SCA partners, and they told us four leases were terminated at sites. Of course, SCA could have more detail as they manage our City assets, and I know they're coming soon, but we know of four, and I am happy to give the detail about what those four were if you'd like.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The sites were extended for one year in my school. Were parents whose children are currently enrolled at these sites notified that they could mark these sites as priority for next year. What has New York City Public Schools

done to ensure that these sites will not be at a disadvantage for enrollment for next year, considering they were added to my school in the middle of the application period?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Thank you for that question. And I'm actually really proud that our team was able to contact all the families. We've been working closely with the program to make sure that during that application period, that last couple of weeks before February 28th, that families knew that they could amend their application. And like I mentioned earlier, we've set up monthly meetings with these programs. For those that we've identified enrollment issues, we've asked them to submit a recruitment plan, and our policy team is working closely with them to ensure that it is on track with SMART goals that are time-bound as we reach the end of the year to make sure that they're meeting their goals.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Fair enough. The Council invested 35 million into additional extended day programs known internally as School Day Plus Pilot. However, 25 million of this funding has not been baselined. How many sites are signed into the

SDY Plus in the Fiscal 2025 and how many of these sites are operating?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, Chair, actually the correct amount is 40 million for the SDY Plus, not 35 million. 15 million was baselined, and we are waiting the 25 million to be baselined. And as of March 7th, there are 70 programs that have signed onto SDY Plus and 61 programs are currently operating.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, that's good. See, we give money.

What is the process for a site to take on SDY Plus seats and how long does it take for these seats to become operational?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Yes. Thank you. So, programs in areas with a high economic need index, that's between 70 and 100 percent that have very few to no Head Start or extended day and year seats that are contracted to provide SDY seats are eligible to expand their services for those seats. That's an additional three hours and 40 minutes per day. So, programs can begin extending their day as soon as they sign on. But, of course, in order for us to reimburse them for those extra hours, they need to

amend their contract so their contract value allows for us to pay that out.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you're working on amending the contracts and how long does that take?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: That would be a question I can get back to you on for getting an average understanding of how long it takes to amend these specific contracts.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the seats being funded by the Council, how many are filled currently?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So, with the 40 million investment, there's a potential to serve over 5,000 seats if a program begins at the beginning of the school year. So, to date, we have over 2,000 seats filled and the potential for another 685 seats still to be filled this school year. For programs that began operating last year and were able to market more, they're enrolling around 73 percent of their seats and newly enrolled programs are seeing a 60 percent enrollment.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the goal is 100 percent, right?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I don't like those low numbers.

How do families learn about SDY seats at their site? Do sites choose which families to convert their school day seats into an extended day seat?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So I know we do outreach to programs based on which zip codes become eligible or are part of our current outreach and, as I mentioned earlier, when a program is eligible, they can immediately offer the services. They just attest to how many children, but then we have to amend their contract in order to pay them out.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How do families know they're eligible for these seats? Is it through My City identified or are families who did not fill out an eligibility may be eligible and you direct them to My City? How does that work?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So we rely, and this reminds me of Council Member Stevens' point about how the CBOs are really the best at recruitment because we rely on programs to share their available options with their community, SDY Plus being an example. Since it's only available in certain zip codes, as I said, we open up those zip codes to do

the outreach, and then it's denoted on the program's My School profile so families can be informed there, but really the main goal is the program because they have relationships with their families that are already enrolled. They know which seats they can convert. They're embedded in the community. They know the community's need. So, we rely on them and then as those seats open up, they are put on My Schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So the magic is the CBOs as partnerships to make sure recruitment is being done in these seats. So Council Member Stevens, see.

Delayed payments. How many ECE contracts have been registered for Fiscal 2025?

CHIEF-OF-STAFF KLEIN: So I will turn over payment questions to my colleague who's Chief of Finance for our division.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Sure. Thank you.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Hello, again, Chair and Council Members. Thank you for your question. So, we have several different contract types. So, there are contracts that are currently on a four-year and five-year term. So, in total, we have 1,340 contracts that are currently registered. We

have another 66 that are in the process of being registered for FY25. Then we... let me back up. So, we have 1,340 contracts that are currently registered. That's on our four-year and five-year contract term. We have approximately 100 contracts that have to be registered or extended every year. So out of that 100, we have 66 contracts that are in the process of being registered and 34 have already been registered for Fiscal 25.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many have been approved? How many ECE budgets have been approved for Fiscal 2025?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So for Fiscal 2025, we've approved 1,141 budgets out of the 1,175 submitted budgets.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And how much is that in dollars? You'll get back to me.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'll have to get back to you on that one.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you please tell me the details on New York City Public School effort in recruiting and hiring more analysis to work on processing these contracts, and what are the barriers

to hiring for this position? Because I know last time there's a headcount.

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, we are currently, for the division, currently hiring or looking to hire analysts. As Deputy Chancellor said in our previous hearing, currently there's civil service laws that we have to abide by, but we are actively looking and trying to recruit for the appropriate positions.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, do you get accurate up-to-date enrollment numbers for ECE providers before the providers are approved to submit invoice or submit current attendance and enrollment? How does that?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, it's important to note that the providers are the ones that have to submit the enrollment information, and they do that through our vendor portal. So, for us to have accurate and up-to-date information, they're the ones that submitted into vendor portal. So, once they submit the information, then they are able to, once they have an approved budget, they're able to certify attendance and then they can submit an invoice.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take if they submit the information for you to start working on that case?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, regarding submitting the enrollment, there's nothing that has to happen, they just have to submit it. They have to submit the enrollment, again, they also have to certify attendance. So, it all depends, it starts with them, but once they certify attendance, they have an approved budget and they submit their invoice, then we will work and begin to process the invoice.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take to process an invoice?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Our average time is about two weeks to process an invoice. That's our average time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I know we meet on marketing and outreach a lot, and that was one of the things that Council negotiated in last year's budget, so we added 5 million dollars to the fiscal budget for early childhood marketing outreach. How did you utilize the funding to conduct outreach

for ECE and how did it work? Was it successful? How do you measure success?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, for the outreach, again, that is a joint thing that's happening with the Deputy Mayor Almanzar, and it's supported by New York City Public Schools. So, we've had, as I've mentioned earlier in the testimony, that we've had six events. We've touched all boroughs. I can't say right now how it has measured up, but I know that they're actively out there and going out to different communities to conduct outreach and marketing.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Any ads?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Yes, there's digital and print media that's out there. Social media, yes, absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just want to make sure you have your footprint everywhere that you need.

How many in-person events? You said you had six in-person events, right? How many families attended these events?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, there were between 150 to 250 families attending.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In each borough?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, I believe that's across the city.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Across the city. And can you tell me per borough how many folks attended the event?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, one in each borough with approximately 70 to 80 families attending across all five events, the additional five.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And do you use bus and subway for your 3K and pre-K programs to advertise about them?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: We have digital, print media, radio ads, so yes, we're using everything.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is language access also one of the tools you're using?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What languages?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: There are several different languages. I can get the list for you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I appreciate that. How many staffs were hired to work

on the ECE outreach with this funding and what staff titles did this include?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, ECE did not hire any staff. We're invested in the outreach communications and plan to build a team with internal funding. We've contracted with a vendor and had an outreach team of five people engaging in community outreach as well as providing application support to our families. We've also provided supports to students in temporary housing, and we contacted approximately 25 shelters in areas where there were CBOs and provided technical assistance as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Were you also supporting students in foster care?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'm sure we were, but I'll definitely get back to you on that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Do you use any consultants with this funding, and why did New York City Public Schools choose to use consultants and how did they utilize the funding?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, ECE did not utilize consultants. As I said, this is a joint venture with the City Hall. But for us, we had the

marketing campaign, we've done these events, we've done the different media ads for this outreach.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How was your multi-language effort tracked and analyzed? Did you realize there was a pattern in what languages were used the most in your outreach?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I don't have that specific information on how it was tracked, but I can definitely get that back to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: A portion of the 5 million investment was transferred to HRA, DOHMH, to contribute to this effort. 2.15 million was transferred to HRA to conduct this outreach. How did HRA use the funding?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: So, HRA was awarded the funding, and they provided 175,000 to 10 New York City benefits grantees along with additional support and training and reporting.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I noticed that 1.72 million was DOHMH to conduct outreach. What did they use that funding for?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that, Chair?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The funding you provided to DOHMH. How was that funding used?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: DOHMH, they awarded funding to 12 grantees at 75,000 each through a task order. Their funds were being transferred in the Citizens New York City Managing Vendor Payments and invoicing through DOHMH. Now again, so I'm giving you information on some of the things that they did, but they would be better able to explain to you their process.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did City Hall hire any consultants for this project?

SENIOR DIRECTOR SCALES: I am not aware that City Hall hired any consultants.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm going to allow Council Member Brewer for the second round.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My question has to do with the Division of School Facilities. Can you provide details, if they are relevant, on changes to the payment system implemented by DSF last May? Because New York Sun Works has 90 projects in the pipeline, and I believe they were supposed to be built last summer, but they

1 didn't get built, apparently, because of the changes
2 that DSF made last May regarding a payment system.
3 And I guess I'm just trying to find out the status of
4 this situation. What will the projects move, etc.?

5
6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So on the
7 specific vendor you mentioned and the specific
8 projects, I will check and we will get back to you
9 today.

10 More broadly, there are a series of
11 changes DSF has been doing in conjunction with our
12 finance team and with SCA to make sure, quite
13 honestly, to make sure we can clean up our processes
14 and to make sure we're using capital funding for as
15 much of our projects as we can and maximize that
16 spend. So, there's a series of changes we've made to
17 finance and to contracts through this that we'd be
18 happy to do a fuller briefing on, if helpful, and
19 I'll check on New York Sun Works in the meantime.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I appreciate that.
21 I don't know if the changes are making slow process
22 or if they're improving the process. That would also
23 be something to find out because it sounds to me that
24 it might be slowing down the process.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I think in the long run, these things will dramatically improve the process and make sure we're maximizing capital funding, which means more money for school projects. I do think in the meantime, some of the transitions are taking time and we're working through that, but I'll check on the specifics.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to know how does DOE prioritize which schools receive funding for necessary repairs and upgrade, and how can we, Council Member, ensure that our District's taken care of? Can we participate and help?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Thank you, and I think this is related to Council Member Brewer's question as well. So, schools have their own budgets and custodians have their own budgets to do some of those repairs and upgrades. When they are not able to, we work closely and we try and be as responsive as we can to school needs, understanding we do also

have a limited budget centrally. Where projects are large enough that they take capital funding, we do try and spend capital funds on that as well. One of the changes we are actually making is, frankly, to push more of these funding decisions closer to the school level.

In terms of your, look, we are very grateful for the funds that you all, as Council Members, put into our school projects as well. I'm sure we'll talk about that more this afternoon, and appreciate more of that as well for the schools in your own Districts. And if there's specifics you want me to check on, happy to.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. Now, we're talking about the very fast summer will come, right? We have a new state law, effective September 2025. The temperature will be set at 88 degrees Fahrenheit, the maximum allowed temperature for the student-occupied spaces. It will further emphasize the need for effective control in the schools. So how are you planning to address that? Because I know we have a lot of ACs that are not working. That's the reason for my question.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. So, as you know, and all of you know, we had central funding for ACs, and we continue to work through that. A lot of our AC funding is now moving on to school budgets, and our central facility team is also working as hard as we can to address any AC issues that come up. I will say, I know this sounds small, but one of the things we did this year is getting an early start on this process for Summer Rising in particular, reaching out to principals and custodial staff already, and saying, this is coming, what do you need, where you know you have issues, so we can try and work through as much of that as possible prior to the summer. We do always have resource constraints, but whether in central or school budgets, we will continue to prioritize that going forward, not just because of the state law, but because we want to make sure our kids are as comfortable as possible in our buildings.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. Now, coming back to the AC again. For the installation, do you have a timeline how long it takes to get the process going? Let's say AC is now working in some schools, like in the cafeteria, which I have seen

kids sweating in there, so what is the timeline to get them fixed? I mean, to install a new one?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: If there's a kids sweating, make sure you let us know so we can make sure we have that one on our list, but it depends entirely on what the project is, whether it's a small replacement, a larger replacement, or sort of a larger capital project which of course takes longer so I don't think I can give you a typical time, but we could come back with a range, if that would be helpful, based on the type of project.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So, thank you, Chair, because I'm very much interested, especially in the classroom, in the cafeterias, to see our kids sweating, so they're not learning.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: And Council Member, just to double down on that, wherever you know of specific cases, if you can reach out to us, just so that way we can work directly and make sure that we're prioritizing those spaces.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: This is a side one. I'm talking about the farming too now. So can we talk about the farming? So how we see the one in

Bergen Beach? I'm leaving you with that. The Bergen Beach farm that we have in 312.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We got it.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I hope you're looking, because I'm excited for this opportunity, especially now to show our kids how to eat well, organic food, so thank you for the support. I'm looking forward to open it. Thanks. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I have a quick question around ACs. Is there yearly assessments that's taken? Do you do an inventory check and see what's working, what's not working, and how do you troubleshoot that? Because I went to a Summer Rising last year in Brooklyn, and as the Council Member said, them kids were sweating bullets, and they had to move them to one area. They had to create... if I'm going to Summer Rising and I have to be sitting in an auditorium because the classroom is hot, I will stay home, and so I think there should be a yearly inventory that's taken on ACs and then figure out what's not working, what's working, and troubleshoot them. I know that's going to be a long conversation I'm having with SCA, but I just wanted

to put it out there just on your radar so we're being proactive.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Totally agree with that. Again, make sure you're bringing issues to us. And that is partly what we were trying to do by getting in touch with schools earlier this year and saying, remember, summer's coming. Remember, it takes us some time to work through this process and support these projects. So, as we get to spring and summer, we're more prepared, well ahead of time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm going to be flagging a school for you.

One of my favorite topics, art education. The City supplemented the funding for art education with stimulus dollars and then covered them with City funding in 2025. Even with these additional fundings, not all schools have art instruction. Maintaining and baselining this funding is a goal for the Council. How many schools currently lack a certified art teacher?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: Good morning, Chair Joseph.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good afternoon.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: Sorry. Good afternoon. We've been here a little while.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and Council Members. Thank you, thank you, thank you for the question, and also thank you for the dedication and advocacy that you regularly have for the arts, especially in the support of the City Council's Support for Arts Instructional Grant so thank you very much.

As reported in the 2023-24 Arts in Schools Report, of the 1,585 schools, 290 did not have a certified arts teacher. Of the 290, 176 were elementary schools K through six. And so one of the things to understand about the complexity of this is that New York State does not require there be a certified arts teacher in classrooms K through six, only six through 12. So, while there may not be a certified arts teacher teaching class in an elementary school, the report also reported that 99 percent of all students received instruction in at least one arts program.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I got to be talking to my State Colleagues. I think Senator Liu's going to be here later. I'm going to take that up with him.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: I'm here for it. Let's get it.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So am I.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: Let's get it on.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We're just going to ask you to make sure that you talk about it as a funded mandate with him, too.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Funded mandate, correct. We're going to yell at the State, too. He's just visiting me now. I don't want to scare him.

Per student allocation in the SAMS, increased art funding to cover over 5 million. How does School spend this funding and what's the additional programs or services that this funding provide for?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: So in this SAM... well, in this initiative for spring 2000 arts funding, what we did is about six million was added to the FY25 SAM number 36. 4.7 million went to increasing the individual teacher studio arts

allocation from a little over 600 to 2,000. So, every arts teacher certified in New York City received that funding. It just went into school's budgets. We also increased the partnership grants by 1.3 million. We also funded 6.6 million to go into the principal fellows program, and that is funding 170 principal's schools. These are principals who are part of the Arts Office Principal Fellow Program. We're going to be outfitting them with three classrooms with new paint and furniture specifically for the arts. And these are principals that we have worked very closely with to ensure that the arts are at the core of their school's instructional mission. 2.5 million will go to extending the Adobe licenses citywide. And we have 135,000 that is going to a new arts office initiative, which is the Childhood Springs Program Expansion, and so we piloted a program this year in three schools, one in the Bronx, one up in Harlem, and one out in Staten Island, where we outfitted 3K and pre-K programs with little baby violins, and then we helped to support and work with art partners and ensuring that those students had at least four days a week of string instruction in class at a very critical age where getting students up and running on

the string instruments is very important if they want to be competitive at all, in terms of audition programs or even programs outside of New York City Public Schools, like the Juilliard program, various programs that are sought after in the city.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We want well-rounded students. And again, those are well-kept secrets.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THOMPSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Deputy Chancellor, we talked about that.

How many schools rely on this 41 million to provide arts education?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Chair, are you talking about the SAM, the school allocation?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, the 41 million. How many?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Before we give you the specifics, I just want to highlight that that money is to support programmatic pieces and not headcount, and so what this Administration has done is recognizing the complexity behind arts programming, we have centralized through Paul's work a number of supports on the programmatic side so even schools that don't necessarily have the ability to

put in place an actual arts teacher, students are still getting access to arts programming, but we will get you more specifics.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. And the students were texting me along for this next topic because it's very near and dear to their heart, restorative justice, and it's near and dear to my heart as well. How many schools currently have restorative justice programming?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and thank you for your advocacy, of course, for restorative justice programs. We currently have 972 restorative justice that we support across New York City Public Schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students have received these services in the current year and in the last school year?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: So, this current year, FY25, I don't have the number of students, but every student it's touched through the 972 schools we support citywide. But if you want the numbers, I can get you those numbers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a plan to expand as we see suspension rates are up? How do we address that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Well, I hope we can expand, but I would defer to...

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So, one of the things, Chair Joseph, that I'm doing right now is actually meeting with Dr. Davson and her team to really talk about the work that Restorative Justice Team does across New York City and what that looks like in the specific districts. In the coming weeks, we are going to announce some changes, some initiatives in how we're furthering and deepening this work, but also defining what restorative practices look like. What do I mean by that? Re-entry plans for our young people when they come back into buildings after suspension. So, we know that there are consequences and we know that the restorative practices have to work in collaboration. It's not necessarily one or the other. And so we are doing a needs assessment as to what this work currently looks like, where it needs to deepen across districts and schools. Particularly, and I'm sure you would attest to this, just because a district has really low

suspension rates and really high attendance, that doesn't mean that when you disaggregate that you don't see certain schools that have practices that need to be supported so what we're doing, Chair, just to put a finer point on it, is making sure that through this needs assessment, our restorative practices team is actually working with the right schools in the right ways and that we're centralizing what some of those good practices look like.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because we do get a lot of calls around bullying still happening in schools, and that's part of the restorative justice, right? Sometimes you may cause harm and don't know it. How are we using restorative justice practices to address those situations, and are we also including students with special needs? And we talked about that in my last hearing through MDRs, when students are suspended with special needs and then their services are not being met if I'm at home or at a suspension center, how are we addressing that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Sure. So, we continue to provide training citywide for our schools on bullying. We continue to lift and share with our communities about the multiple ways in which bullying

can be reported. We actually, this year, have targeted specific schools that have high incident rates in bullying and/or incidents to provide individualized case-by-case professional learning and training for those school communities in partnership with our vendors.

And in terms of special education and students with disabilities, we work really closely with Christina Foti and John Hammer and our advocates in remedying a lot of those issues that come up case-by-case. For example, specifically with our team, in collaboration, we have made some changes to some documentation that we've sent to families to let families know they have access to an advocate at hearings and at MDR processes. Also, we have extended professional learning and training not only to our internal teams but for schools on how to use progressive discipline and how to decide on appropriate disciplinary actions for each and every student, especially our most vulnerable students. And I'll let Christina talk a little bit more about our work with MDR.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Thank you, Chair. We read your op-ed this morning, beautifully written.

Just to address some of what you spoke about in the op-ed. Oftentimes our students with disabilities are given an unfair shot, right? The reasons why they are acting out are sometimes, oftentimes, most times part of their disability and/or linked to their feeling of not being successful in the classroom. And so we did engage a group of advocates, administrators, teachers, to make adjustments to the MDR process, and we've been out in the field training. So far, we've done CSE staff, Districts 8, 17, 18, 20, and we plan to train all district special education teams on these modifications and changes to the process. Namely, we're talking to them about examining the impact of suspensions, deeper dive into positive behavior supports and getting in front of these issues, best practices for building trust with families. Parents should not have to rely on an advocate in an MDR process. The school should be the advocate, right, on behalf of every child. And at the end of the day, if a child's not succeeding, that's on the adults that are supporting them, and so this training is really intended to be a call to action for people to support students with disabilities before taking on

disciplinary processes that are not necessarily going to be helpful.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are parents notified or made aware of MDRs? Or do they know what it is? Is there training provided for parents?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR FOTI: Yeah. So, we updated the family letter to be much more family-friendly but also to give access on the discipline process. We're hoping that this more family-friendly notification is going to land as supportive to families.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: And, Chair, we are going to share with you in the coming weeks an additional layer of support for families. So that way, beyond the written communication and social media communication, we are really training on myriad topics that are going to allow for parent leaders to share shoulder-to-shoulder information with other parents in the communities, including topics such as these.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Can you provide a list of which schools have restorative justice programming for the 2024 and 2025 school year?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Yes, we provided that list to Council.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. In looking at the terms and condition on restorative justice spending and programming in Fiscal 2024, can you explain why the utilization rate on spending for OTPS costs was lower than personnel costs?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Sure. So, last year, that was due primarily due to late allocations going out, but I can say for this year, we've gotten it together. And at year-to-date, we've expensed about 80 percent of the budget and on track to spend it down.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How can we make all deans restorative justice practitioners with deep knowledge of mediation and conflict resolution?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: We can certainly provide those trainings to deans. We currently provide trainings to all school staff citywide who are interested in restorative practices, and we can certainly provide those training for deans. Actually, through our suspension and hearing offices, we do train school staff who issue

disciplinary consequences to students, and that does include deans, but we can certainly do it wide scale.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Again, doing the needs assessment to see when principals, again, just having done this work, Chair, when I was a small school principal and someone told me, you have to send 12 of your staff members to be trained on restorative justice circles. Not that I wasn't bought into it, because I absolutely understand the power of restorative practices, specifically restorative circles. That being said, if you have a staff of 25 people and 12 people need to be out at the same time, it is unmanageable. And so what we're doing in our needs assessment is really thinking about how do we get the job done while taking into account a specific school's context so principals can actually send the people who need the training to the training. Because if I'm being blunt, Chair, and I have my dean out of the building for a training for five weeks, that's debilitating, right, and so this needs assessment is really thinking about not lessening it, but actually expanding in a way that makes sense for schools to be able to take advantage of these trainings.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And those who have been trained already getting refresher courses as time changed, the needs have changed, the needs of students have changed also, and what we're seeing as our students are coming back post-pandemic so I hope we stay on top of our...

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Well, Chair, if I can add, we also need to marry that with trauma-informed care and caring for the caregiver. Because compassion fatigue is real, and we need to make sure that the people who are trained on these restorative practices are also being given the grace to have them practice with them as well because we want, this is a part of retaining good teachers, right, and good staff, we want to make sure that they're taken care of as well, and so have to commend the UFT for doing amazing work with us, and our partnership with MindUp and Mindful Breathing. They were instrumental in making sure that the mindful practices were happening not only in schools, but with quality. And so, you know, I made my six-month anniversary this week, I'm almost a toddler as Chancellor, but we're getting to the work, but what we do want to do, Chair, is we want to make sure that it's in a purposeful and

intentional way. It's not just to do the thing. We have to make sure that we're looking at school programs, we're talking to school leaders, we're talking to teachers, and getting things done in the way that suits the school's context.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One other partner I want to bring in, Restorative Justice, I visited the Outward Bound School, and one of the things they've done is include parents in restorative justice. We can train students, right, and remember, they live at home so we want to make sure they're applying those same techniques with parents and with students. How are you engaging parents in Restorative Justice?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Thank you for mentioning that, Chair Jules, because last time, the last testimony, that's what you and Council Member Stevens pushed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Restorative communities.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: That's my partner.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Restorative communities, and as such, we have prioritized doing

professional learning for parents. First, we're starting up this spring with our district-facing staff, our FLCs, our FCLs, also our district training parent coordinators, and this spring, we're trickling it down to parent coordinators and families, and we're also proud to share that we're going to have our first Family Restorative Justice Summit in May.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I would love to see it. We're attending.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: You're already on the list.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, Chair Stevens and I, we're attending.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAVSON: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Chair Stevens had a question. Go.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Really quick question, and this is pertaining into the immigrant population and the gang database. When we had the hearing a couple weeks ago, one of the indicators is a trusted source, and I know DOE has been doing a lot of work around protecting our young people, especially when they're in the school building, but one of the things that, to me, is alarming, and I

want to just hear how you guys are processing this and working through this is around, school safety is one of the trusted sources, and NYPD said that they are one of the people who are often referring people to the gang database, and especially with the immigrant population and understanding how this is so sensitive at this moment, how are we going to protect young people from being on this database and now being criminalized and them not knowing and all the issues that can arise around this? And so this is a huge concern for me, and I know that this can also, where, and this is what I'm (INAUDIBLE) with NYPD about, is like, this is how we destroy relationships with communities, and I know that you guys are working to protect them, and this can also potentially destroy your relationship with communities and families, because this has real implications, although we are constantly hearing that it does not, and this is one of the things I would love to hear, how are you solving to remedy this?

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: Yeah, so thank you very much, Chair, oh, I'm sorry, I promoted you to Chair, I called you that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, she is a Chair, Chair Children and Youth, we share Chairs.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: There you go, Chair Children and Youth. First of all, this is the first time that we're actually hearing that that was the statement made by the NYPD. We work aggressively to remind our principals and as well, all of our educators, that FERPA does not allow us to share student information. So if there's an intention, and this includes school safety, right, so if school safety is administering a summons, they're provided just enough information to execute their summons by law, right? But in terms of the sharing information for the purposes of the database, that is something that we will definitely take back and talk with Inspector Millett about, right, because we're intentional about protecting students' information in schools. As a matter of fact, that's one of the push-pulls that we have in schools today, that schools refuse to give student information when asked by a school safety agent and/or an officer, right, and we are intentional about reminding officers and other external partners that we are required to protect student information, and that's our job by federal

law, and that's the work that we're going to continue to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, school safety is down as a trusted source that they get information from, so clearly there's a disconnect, and I'm happy that I brought it up because that's one of the huge concerns that I have around them being a trusted source in this fight moving forward. And again, I know all of the work that DOE is doing to try to protect young people, especially in this climate, and I think that that's one of the things that we just have to make sure that we're all on the same table with.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: 100 percent.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: All right. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair Stevens.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PALMA: Good afternoon, Chair. Good afternoon...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good afternoon.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PALMA: Council Members. First of all, I just want to point out that I'm here from the Office of Language Access, which is

part of the new division the Chancellor highlighted earlier today, and I want to start with echoing the gratitude from the Council for the investment made on the language access piece, engaging, communicating with families. We've done a lot of exciting work with that investment. We've amplified the work that we currently have been doing for the last several years, and we've seen a lot of net results, positive results in added engagements, increased demand overall, and just general awareness, and we continue to do that work. But that amplification is based on the work that we lead here at the Office of Language Access. It's approximately a 12-million-dollar yearly investment. In addition to that, we have oversight of about 7 million dollars that are dispersed to schools every single year to help with the local needs and the local languages that perhaps here at Central we're not the lifeline directly so we're being very creative to ensure that we support all of our families. This is a system with over 180 different languages with over 40 percent of the household speaking a language other than English so we have to be creative with what we can do. And as you heard today, a lot of the new programs that we've spoken

about today, every one of those programs initiatives has a language access component to it so we're kept busy by all means so I'm happy to answer any other questions you have.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. That was going to be one of my questions. How is language access used across the board? Making sure families are engaged, especially in households we know that English is not their first language and helping them navigate those spaces. I know parents also, for the high school piece, I know a lot of parents also are looking for language access to understand the system better. Is there a plan in place to better engage parents as they transition from middle school to high school, even from elementary to middle school to high school?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Absolutely. It's one of the reasons why we wanted to go from engagement to empowerment because after meeting with our Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council, these are some of the topics that they brought up and they said, you have to do better. So, one of the things that I have personally committed to is actually visiting SLTs. I asked the CPAC to work with Dr.

Melendez to do sort of a heat map across the district, and where are the SLTs and PTAs/PAs that I need to visit, so that way we can talk about what are the specific trainings that need to happen in those districts, right? So, this is something that I'm sure that you've heard. We need more support in transition from middle and high school. Are we going to offer some of those trainings centrally? 100 percent. But we also know that on top of that, the relationships happen between superintendents, principals, and their families, so how can we create those resources so that way principals and their staff can administer those, sort of like a train-the-trainer model, but again, what's better than having trained parent leaders who can do that work themselves and who are willing to do that work? They want to work shoulder-to-shoulder with their peers, and so that's something that we're working on.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. I love the idea. It would be great.

Parent and family engagement, 1 million dollars. How much is that total funding that New York City Public Schools allocate to parents and family engagements more broadly?

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: So, we're going to bring up Dr. Melendez to talk about the specific division that does things from a central perspective. What I do want to note, Chair, is that there are specific pots of money within a school budget as well, right, so we're talking about from a central perspective, but we also know that there are other funding streams within a school budget. Quite simply, just head down for a parent coordinator, right, who also supports some of that work so I just always want to make mention that there's the things that we do from a central place, and then there are things that happen in a separate budget.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In school communities, and it's extended beyond (INAUDIBLE)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MELENDEZ: Yeah. So, we invest centrally and locally about 8 million dollars plus, depending on when there's a CEC election every other year, which we get another additional 4 million dollars to fund that election, which is where we are right now. So currently FACE and their 1-million-dollar allocation really expanded the New York City Ambassadors Program, where we really spent a lot of time speaking to some of the

things that the Chancellor shared around what does it look like for the parents' perspective to really support New York City Reads, what does it look like at home, and what can you do, and how do we teach and support our families in understanding brain science, right, and all of the stuff that the teachers were talking about, so we did that last year, and we were able to expand on that and build on that. It's been a very popular program. I think we're at 4,500 parents now that are trained and have gone through some of these cohorts. We have also expanded our literacy hubs, which are community spaces that host books and opportunities and events, but then I want to pass it over to some of the work that my colleague, D.C. Rux does at the local level, right, so how do we support our FLCs and FSCs and PCs to really expand locally on what family engagement looks like and how do we make those things actionable?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR RUX: Good afternoon, everyone.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good afternoon.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR RUX: So, I'm excited to share that in partnership with D.C. Melendez that

we've been bringing our FLCs and our FSCs together for monthly training. As a former superintendent, one of the things that I had heard from many of the FSCs and the FLCs who are on superintendent teams is the need for real professional development. And so we've been providing that, and I'm very excited about that. In addition to that, superintendents have said that they want an opportunity to bring all of the folks together and provide a menu of professional development for them who are supporting our families, and also have families be a part of that. And so in the spring, last year we did this, and it was highly sought after, and we had hundreds of parents and FSCs, FLCs, parent leaders across the district join us, and so this year we're doing it again, and we're doing it even bigger, and so we are thrilled that we're able to provide that support to them. We're going to have a menu of different options and opportunities for parents. We've even asked parents to facilitate some of those trainings, so it's by parents, for parents, and that is coming in the spring. You all will get an invitation to join us for that opportunity as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And as you're training, you trained 4,500 parents, are they turning key to other parents, or how does that training spread?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR RUX: That is the work that D.C. Melendez is doing and that our Chancellor spoke about.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MELENDEZ: Yeah. So, now we're embarking in that second phase of the work, which is exactly what you're saying. It's really important for us that communities... we're really confident that communities know how to take care of each other, and we want to respect and trust them to do that, and that requires that we now not only expose them to the work, but now teach them how to facilitate the work towards others. So, we're embarking in the Ambassadors 2.0 program, where parents are being taught how to train the trainer. What does it mean to facilitate this knowledge to a peer? And the hope is that they're not only just being able to train around New York City Reads, but they're able to train and build those skills for everything, and that's the goal as we keep expanding and leaning into our families to be those trusted

messengers in their communities that they know to be. And invested partners, right? Because their children are in our schools, they really want to be part of the conversations. A lot of the listening to our feedback was we want to be involved more, we want to be in the conversation more, and our ultimate goal is really to be real partners in this work, and so these are some of the ways that we're doing that, and we're building that base so that they're able to confidently do that at their school communities on a regular basis.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the parents you're engaging, is it you meet them where they are, this is on the weekends, this is Monday through Friday, wherever it is in the community you're out and about making sure you're engaging them.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MELENDEZ: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: School food workers. Our favorite topic, school food. How many of the additional 1,000 school food workers have been hired with the 20 million that was added in adoption?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. Thank you. We've hired 153 full-time, and we are up to 105

subs who will hope to transition to full-time, so we should outdo the 250 that were.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the goal is to keep hiring until?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We keep hiring all year for school food workers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How difficult is it to hire for these positions when the funding is not baselined or guaranteed in the outyears?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: It's definitely always a preference to have funding baselined and guaranteed in the outyears. I will say for positions like these, it's just hard to hire generally, and we have high turnover, and so that's one of the things we're continuing to work to ensure that we're supporting our food workers and retaining them as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And hiring is on a rolling basis all throughout the year?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: All year, yep.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mental Health Continuum. We need to baseline that. Would centers that would have been open using Mental Health

Continuum funding be able to continue in Fiscal 2026 if the funding is not renewed?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Good afternoon, again. So Mental Health Continuum is an effort between New York City Public Schools, Health and Hospitals, and DOHMH. It will be incredibly challenging to sustain the supports without the funding because the funding is utilized by Health and Hospitals to hire clinicians that are servicing in both satellite clinics as well as the five clinical hubs that are leveraged for the Mental Health Continuum.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What services have these centers provided since the opening?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: If you give me a quick second, I can tell you some very specific details. For context, these schools are primarily located in Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx, and we specifically focused on working with schools where we saw need, both from the principal end, from the community, and from advocates. So, to your question, what are some of the things that we have done in the time of doing the work? So, as of March 2025, 16 school-based satellite clinics have been open. We

have been able to provide 231 universal interventions in terms of training and consultant meetings for support. There have been 262 referrals that have been made as of December of last year in terms of schools referring students to clinical services. These include 144 unique patients that have been receiving support. This also includes more than 1,618 appointments that have been able to be completed for students that are part of the Mental Health Continuum. And this is specifically for those 50 schools that are serviced.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are serviced through these programs?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, we have to find a way to baseline this program. It's critical to the mental health and support of our students.

Community schools. Don't go nowhere.
Community schools.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I won't go anywhere. I'm here, right here. Not moving.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Don't move.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: I won't.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many community schools received funding from the 14 million that is currently set to expire at the end of the year?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: It's actually 17. So, about three million support our contract that we do with United Community Schools. A portion of that also support 10 schools that we did during the COVID expansion. And then the rest of that were utilized to do amendment for at one point when there was a change in the community school formula that impacted some schools and we'll have a reduction. So, the 17 million will be needed to be able to maintain those three buckets of supports that I share.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I know community schools also have reached out and delayed in payments to providers. Is that being worked on or all that is taken care of?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: That is absolutely being worked on. I won't say it's all taken care of, but it's definitely a lot of work in progress. So, it's a combination of getting contracts renewed and accelerating the payment, and I know our Chancellor has been incredibly supported in that space. So, there are 269 contracts that we're working to renew.

Out of those ones, already 198 have been renewed, 18 of them are with the Comptroller, which leaves a small bucket. Just to give you an example, the Chancellor and her leadership worked with us to put a meeting together with the Coalition of Community Schools at the end of November. And since then, in combination with the work that we've done around contracts, we have been able to get from November 25th until now over 62 million dollars in the hands of CBOs, both by expediting advances of 40 percent for the contracts immediately once they're registered, so those 198, but also by working on any backup payments or invoices that they share. So definitely more work to go, and I feel incredibly supported by our Chancellor and the work that we're working there. But if any CBO provider that you are aware or you want to put me in contact with, if Terrence hasn't already done it, I'm sure that you will absolutely let me know as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, absolutely.

Across the city, how many community schools?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: 421 community schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I would love to expand. Every school should be a community school, but we have to perfect what we have before we do expansions.

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Absolutely agree with you, ma'am.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, would these programs have enough funding to continue community school programming without this funding?

CHIEF PUELLO-PERDOMO: Not for the specific ones that we mentioned, not for the amendments, not for the 10 COVID ones, and not for the ones that we have the partnership with the United Federation of Teaching.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Teacher recruitment. The 10 million, I know First Deputy Chancellor, we spoke about that. 10 million for teacher recruitment is being utilized this year. What type of recruitment efforts has this funded?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah. It's been critical Chair for the recruitment of 5,000 or so pedagogues that we hired, teachers and other pedagogues, so about half of it went for our New York City Teaching Fellows, which as you know is a major

source of talent particularly for shortage areas and for our harder to staff schools, but we also use that funding for peer recruiters, which we find to be a really effective, innovative method of doing recruiting, again particularly for our harder-to-staff schools. Having a teacher in the school who is getting paid to help recruit has been really effective so we use the funding to hire about 300 of those. And then there's been a couple of other activities. But the main thing is, as you know, Chair, the most effective recruiting tool that we have, again for shortage areas, harder-to-staff schools, is fellows where we are subsidizing their tuition for their master's degree so that's a very, very effective incentive, and a lion's share of the 10 million dollars went for that type of investment, which we know we can show has a yield. We can show for sure. We know how many, the numbers in our All-Cert programs, how they go up when we are able to fund them at higher levels.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Given the need to hire additional teachers to comply with the State's class size law, do you believe you can afford to lose this funding?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Absolutely not.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely not.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Absolutely not. I mean, in fact, we have a need for greater funding in order to have a chance to meet the requirements of the law.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for not being shy about that.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for not being shy. School cleaning, I know we support school cleaning at 154 million. There's approximately 154-million funding gap in the 2026 for school cleaning that reflects that this funding was added in Fiscal 2025 and, again, not baselined. Does New York City Public School plan to add funding in Fiscal 2026 for cleaning services?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: So, I can confirm that the, in comparing Fiscal Year 2026 to 2025, we see that level of a gap, and it's a part of our conversation SO I know we've been talking a lot about, you know, the expiring federal dollars and what needs to be backfilled and one-time funding that

needs to be baselined, but that we also have our core, you know, operations and our school support services being one of them and also a part of our conversations.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Would you be able to meet the contractual obligation with the level of funding currently budgeted in the 2026?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: And this is the reason why we would need the funding to be increased. And the funding does get increased. It's just one year at a time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The last ARPA stimulus funding was rolled into FY 2025 to cover this area. Will this funding be fully spent in 2025?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Or can any of it be rolled into 2026?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: I believe that the last date is the end of the Calendar Year so it has to be spent.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So we can't roll over anything? We need new money.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm saying it for you.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: New money. Gotcha, gotcha. New money. Our Colleagues in the State level with the Foundation Aid and resulting of 350 million less. OMB mentioned in the Finance hearing last week that they have identified Foundation Aid proposals that we're pursuing in the State advocacy. Can you give us those proposals and their estimated impact?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. Thank you, and thank you, Chair Joseph, for your advocacy at the State level as well. As I noted right at the beginning, the State is our largest funder besides the City, and the fact that at this moment in time, given all the other threats, given the class size mandate, they're looking at changes that would reduce our allocation from what we'd otherwise expect is very disappointing so, as you know, we put together a set of recommendations last summer that were shared by many in the advocacy community and labor partners, and that's what OMB is talking about. We still think that those are some of the critical changes that if

the State were to make them, they would ensure New York City got more of the funding we need to support our students and families. How they chose to choose to make them, you know, there's a million different ways of doing these things, but I would say one of the things we think is most critical is updating the regional cost index. There are different ways, and that's basically, it costs more to do things in New York City, and the measure that the State is using is decades old and not taking into account how much more expensive it is to do things here so there's various different ways you could look at that. Rockefeller put out a proposal that would be a few hundred million dollars, the increase to New York City. The Regents had actually put out a proposal that would be substantially more than that. What we saw earlier this week is that both the Assembly and the Senate did a version of that. They acknowledged that they should be updating regional costs just as they're updating poverty, and those changes move in the right direction. They still don't fully take into account, we think, the full cost here. We'd also say another critical change would be the additional funding for students in temporary housing. We were very glad,

with your partnership and the partnership of others, to include that weight in our local funding formula. We're now putting out close to 80 million dollars through that weight alone, and over 100 million through the different changes we made through the Fair Student Funding Working Group. Again, there's different ways the State could look at doing that, but we think if they just modeled on what we're doing, it would be well over 100 million dollars for our schools and communities.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I told the State that. I was like y'all need to copy the City, what's wrong with y'all?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I feel that way all the time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Exactly. Last year, the city baselined 243 million in State funding for programs that were, at a time, being funded by expiring federal dollars. This was done using funding from increased Foundation Aid. Has DOE had a conversation with OMB about using State funding to cover the many programs that do not have funding beyond the Fiscal 2025? If so, what programs?

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER SCOTT: So, I don't have a list of specific programs that that would fall under. In OMB's sort of assessment of our needs of our budget, I think they basically utilize all funding sources to meet the needs of our budget, but I don't have the specifics on that.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: If I can also share one more thing. As you know, the State requires we use a proportion of the funds, C for E funds, for a set of things, including class size. I mentioned earlier that we are in the process of reviewing applications with our labor partners at UFT and CSA from around 800 schools that applied for additional funding to mostly support the hiring of additional teachers. As I said earlier, there's some other stuff too, but it's basically teachers, and we do expect that to be hundreds of millions of dollars alone. And so, our expectation, although we'll continue to work with OMB, is that is where a good portion of the state increase will go as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have a number of how many teachers you're going to need to meet the mandate?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, it's a very good question. What I will tell you is schools have applied for well over 4,000 teachers. We are looking, and that's obviously on top of the 4,000-ish we hire each year so basically doubling the number we think we will need next year. We are reviewing all of those applications case by case. We would expect that if we can hire all of those teachers, it gets us above compliance, but not by a lot, and so we do think the number is up in that direction.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 40,000.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: 4,000.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 4,000. So, earlier this week, as you mentioned earlier, the State and Assembly released a one-house budget which includes recommendation for the Foundation Aid formula. Both State and Assembly included funding to adjust the regional cost index and to increase funding for pre-K programming, raising overall amount of new Foundation Aid funding. Do you have an estimated of how the proposed adjustments to the regional cost index would affect the Foundation Aid funding?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, we are still very carefully running all of the numbers. So,

I'll give you the general answer and then we can obviously come back to you specifically. So, as we discussed earlier, the Governor's proposed changes result in a reduction of 350 million to New York City Public Schools. The Senate made a change to the regional cost index that is quite substantial. We think it is getting up towards 300 million dollars, not quite there, and so that would make up a good chunk of the difference. Again, that's just the difference for status quo funding. The Assembly included a different version of the regional cost change that is closer to 200 million, we think. However, the Assembly also included an increased weight for English learners. As you know, one of the things we and you advocated for was an increased weight for English learners and special education students to get closer to how we look at those things here in New York City. And so, that increased weight, of course, will also help New York City. We think over 100 million dollars there, too. So, both are getting closer in different ways and we can get you the specific numbers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. That'd be great. And the Assembly also proposed 327 million for

pre-K programming across State and Senate proposed.

Does the DOE have an estimate of how much of this funding would flow into New York City?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. So, approximately 90 million from the Assembly and approximately 190 million from the Senate.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The Senate proposed also 500 million dollars for childcare workforce stabilization fund for more childcare workers, which we all know need. Does the DOE have an estimate of how much this would impact the current staffing level at ECE centers in New York City?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We don't have an estimate right now, but we can get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a difference between the Assembly, the Senate, one house budget, differ from the Governor's executive budget?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: In terms of the same one? I'll get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because everybody's giving me their estimates. You testified earlier, there were 297 SAPIS workers citywide. We've been told by the Vice President of Local 372, the number

is actually 236. Would you confirm which number is correct on the record?

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: Sorry about that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The numbers were not correct. We need the correct numbers on the record.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: The numbers that I testified to are the numbers. Hang on one second. Hang on one second. I'm sorry. Yes, that's correct. The number that I gave you includes the vacancies as well so what is the number that you're quoting?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You told us 297, but it's actually 236.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: 294 is what I said.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, but the union is emailing and saying the numbers are wrong, that the correct number for SAPIS workers is 236 citywide.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: 294 SAPIS positions to date. 271 positions are active. 10 are on leave. 13 vacancies. Three candidates have been identified. We have 10 that we don't have candidates for right now. 389 schools being serviced, receiving services. This includes 35 schools that supported by 20 of the SAPIS workers that we've been able to bring on as a result of funding from Council.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Chair, we can get in touch with Local 372 and figure out what the discrepancy is and we can report back.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. That's fine. Thank you. Okay. Quick question around, we had a hearing earlier on Tuesday with NYPD around assistant school safety agents. Does that fall under you?

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: No, it does not.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, it does not, okay. Because I know... it does not fall under you so we will follow up with them around those questions that we had. And I know there's a crisis care in the school safety. Oh, I forgot off the top of my head, it was called a crisis care in schools, in public schools.

CHIEF RAMPERSANT: New York City Public Schools has crisis teams?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No, I know you have a crisis team. I call them all the time. I'll follow up with Officer Millett on that because I want to see what it looks like in real life in action, because she said in other than that's how they're doing it.

But I have a couple of questions around Carter cases, due process claims, however we're calling it now.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, and I hope you had an opportunity to listen to all the amazing partnerships we have with New York City Public Schools.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you heard all of the great programming we do so this is not a combative relationship. This is actually a working relationship.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Without a doubt.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, spending on due process cases such as Carter cases, Connor cases, and direct service need is continue to grow with funding added for these costs in each plan. Fiscal 2025 budget now include 1.08 billion for Carter cases and only 100 million less than Fiscal 2024, actual spending of 1.19 billion. So, does the DOE budget for Fiscal 2025 spending Carter cases exceed Fiscal 2024 in actual spending levels?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: I don't know the actual numbers. What I can tell you is what we are observing with the increasing costs. One of the key elements of the answer here is that we are continuing to pay claims, cases that apply to prior service years. We have really made a lot of progress in catching up and closing the gap. But the point is just that we will continue to see the impact of costs from last year's cases, the year before's cases, certainly over the next couple of years at least. I'm very pleased that we've been able to reduce the number of filings of due process claims, so that covers both the Carter's and the IESP cases. We've been able to reduce that number by about 20 percent so far this year, year-over-year. It's the first year that... obviously, the year is not over, anything could happen, but it's the first year in I think 10 years that we're not seeing a dramatic increase in the number of cases filed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How far back are some of your cases going? Some of your caseloads, how far back are you going?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes. I looked at this recently, and I think we're under a couple dozen

cases that are still open, unresolved, that go back more than three years. However, that still doesn't answer our question fully about payments made. You know, families have a two-year statute of limitations. They can file a case now for a claim they have from a few years ago. Cases that we have open now might apply to a few years ago. So, in terms of cases that are closed, our speed at getting these cases closed has dramatically improved, and so we're closing that gap of having sort of an older backlog there.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: At our January 30th hearing, New York City Public School was able to provide a preliminary number of students who are receiving tuition payment through due process for schools in 2024. Can you provide updated numbers of students receiving tuition payment through due process for the school year 2023, 2024? And can you provide this preliminary number for the current school year?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes. Chair, I have to apologize because we didn't prepare the number for school year '23. I can tell you that for school year '24, so school year '23-'24, we have so

far made tuition payments for 6,113 students. For the current school year, we have currently made tuition payments for 2,393 students. And to my earlier point, I just want to make sure... I'm being repetitive to just say those numbers will continue to go up.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, can you give us numbers of students receiving, oh, you did, in current school year, can we break it down by race, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and school district and Council Districts?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes, Chair. We're doing our best on that, and we have some very detailed tables that we should be able to send you today. We have not been able to this point to identify specifically school district and Council District. However, the top lines here are pretty clear. Somewhere between a half to two-thirds of all tuition cases are filed by families who identify as white, non-Latino. The number of tuition students we have who do not identify in any racial category is pretty significant, so about 25 percent. The takeaway point is that families of color are very underrepresented in due process and especially tuition filings, especially when you put those

numbers up against our student population in the public schools where they're almost flipped.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That is what we're seeing so that's why we wanted this so you'll get that to me..

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This afternoon broken down into these areas.

In our special education hearing in January, New York City Public Schools testified students who need a program for autism and dyslexia make up the majority of due process claims?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes. I just want to correct that point. So, when we talk about the majority of due process claims, we are still talking about these IESP cases. But with that point clarified, let me share the following. I'm going to offer numbers that break down autism and dyslexia claims in the IEP case and then in the IESP case. So first, I just do want to note that, and I believe this is a matter of State law, colleagues can correct me if I've got that wrong, but dyslexia is actually not a disability classification that we're able to enter into an IEP or IESP. And so instead, when a

student has dyslexia, that will show up in their IEP or IESP as a learning disability. And so in school year '22, we had 1,827 students who filed due process claims with an autism diagnosis. We had 1,286 students who filed with a learning disability so that includes but probably is not exclusive to dyslexia. In school year '23, it was 2,090 students filing DPCs with an autism diagnosis for an IEP and 1,271 with a learning disability in the IEP case. And then in last school year, we had 2,067 students file a due process claim where they had an autism diagnosis on an IEP and 1,450 with a learning disability diagnosis on their IEP. I do just want to make this note that when we are strictly talking about this diagnosis, these due process cases for IEPs do include some public school cases. These are not only cases where we've got a tuition issue.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask. You'll share all of that information with us.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you very much. Chancellor Weisberg, this is for you. Last year in our DOE, you testified you'd be able to separate the

spending between Carter and Connor cases. Were you successful at that? Tell me.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: No. I was not successful.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh no.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Certainly, my intention was if we had that information was to get it to you. The distinction gets lost in the data and I can do my best to explain why, and our great GC Liz Vladeck will back me up if I get something wrong. But the distinction with Connor is supposed to be direct payments, right, so lower income families can access the system through getting direct payments. It hasn't worked out that way for a variety of reasons, but it turns out we give direct... so my thought was we can separate the direct payment cases from the reimbursement cases. Higher income families obviously being more represented in the reimbursement scenario. The issue is we do direct payments for pendency all over the place for the full range. It's not Connor. It's Carter cases where the year one, the first year they're in, they win the due process hearing and then every year after that, we're directly paying so we

don't have that distinction. It's not really... direct payment doesn't tell us what's Connor, what's Carter. So Liz can follow up. If there was a way to cut that for you, we would do it. We just don't have the data organized that way.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Thanks, Dan. I do just want to add that for practitioners when the Connor case was first decided that created this model, I think the hope was that the model was going to help level the playing field in terms of access to due process and, unfortunately, as both our demographic data that I've summarized as well as our litigation experience tells us, it has not succeeded at doing that. To Dan's exact point, once you've won your case, pendency is flowing and should be flowing without interruption. But filing that first case, finding an attorney to represent you, figuring out with a school that you want to attend whether the school's willing to wait for payment or not, signing a contract, this is a pretty big burden. It's a lot to ask for families that don't have a big cash reserve to take risks with so in our view, that's where that inequity... you know, that's the source in terms of the process. Now we, of course, think the

solution is more of Deputy Chancellor Foti's programs, especially the more we talk about autism. But those are the facts that we think are telling the story of where the inequities begin.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And Deputy Chancellor Foti and First Deputy Chancellor know we feel the same way. If we have great programming, have the services, we can reduce these costs and the students can stay here and stay in communities, and I've been a champion of AIMS from day one.

So last week when our great OMB was here, they mentioned that they changed the name of Carter cases in the budget code, renaming due process claim or something else that's more accurately described what's included in 2127 budget code. What kind of tuition payment, legal fee, direct services and transportation are included in this budget code? Are all the vouchers related to the direct service needs in this budget code?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: I know that our CFO can explain this better, but my understanding is that the due process budget code, and that just covers IEPs, which are Carter cases mostly, and then these IESPs where the family's not seeking FAPE, and

so the services encompassed under these budget codes, yes, as you mentioned, it's tuition, it's transportation, it's legal fees, it's ABA and BCBA services, counseling, feeding therapy, hearing services, interpreter services, life training and social skills, music therapy, neuroendocrinologists, occupational, physical and speech therapies, nursing, SEIT, SETS, transition services, psychological and psychotherapy services, selective mutism training, vision and vocational training.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And some of these tuition also require, if you can't find a program here, the students can go somewhere else, right? In Westchester, dormitory.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes, yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is that a separate cost or that's also added to that tuition cost?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: That would be included as well. If it's coming via a due process claim, then it's included in this budget code.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, what is the average cost for each voucher by mandated services in the categories that you listed? For example, assessment provider, counselor provider, health aid,

paraprofessional, hearing educator provider, all of the list. What are the costs of each of those mandated services?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: So, here are the costs for Fiscal Year '24. An assessment provider, the average cost is 3,294 dollars. A counseling provider, 1,044 dollars. A health aid and/or a paraprofessional provider, 7,591 dollars. Hearing education providers, 1,487 dollars. Occupational therapy providers, 1,186 dollars. Physical therapy providers, 2,039 dollars. Registered nurse providers, 30,676 dollars. Special education teacher support services or SETS provider, 2,648 dollars. And I just want to tag that one because we did increase the voucher rate this year. And we think that anecdotally our evidence is that voucher rate usage is significantly up, which is good news because it means that the number of enhanced rates cases that we have to pay is down relatedly. Speech providers, 2,648 dollars. And vision education providers, 1,244 dollars.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many families are not able to find providers and why do they have issues finding adequate providers? What is the most

common service acquired with a DOE voucher? Is the voucher sufficient for families to find adequate services?

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Just to make sure I understand, Chair, are you speaking within the context of due process cases particularly or more general?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes.

GENERAL COUNSEL VLADECK: Yes, okay. So, one of the key challenges here has been the explosion in these IESP cases. So, we went from having a few thousand of them eight or nine years ago to 19,000 of them last year, and so the number of students requesting services, SETS most of all, really just has skyrocketed. And so we have taken a number of steps to address provider availability. First of all, that increased demand just does put a strain on the existing pool of providers. Others can talk much more intelligently than I about the efforts we're making to increase the number of providers. Deputy Chancellor Foti mentioned the RFP that we've put out, but I really want to credit Deputy Chancellor Foti's CSEs, the Committees on Special Education this year, because what they've done is they've made sure to

reach out to every single family that we have an IESP for, especially with the June 1st notice. We can talk about that if you like. And so we've been able to facilitate arranging the services directly with one of our contracted providers, or providing a voucher. That seems to have worked for most families. We've also hired 19 itinerant teachers on our own payroll to send them to schools. And we've done something we never did before, which is that we've made our afternoon and weekend programs available to students with IESPs, not just public school students. And as far as we can tell, as far as our data shows us, we have been able to at least partially offer services to every family who's entitled to them.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. I was on a meeting for the weekend providers. It went really well.

Chancellor Ramos, I have something. David Brody, they have a prayer room for students who are Muslim. That room was taken away from our students, and you know this is Ramadan so I don't know if we could talk offline, if you want to talk offline about that.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: We will definitely look into it. Love to talk offline, but we will definitely look into it.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Chancellor Foti, I have one more follow-up question for you. At the January special education hearing, New York City Public Schools testified that you would need additional 246 related service providers in preschool special classes in an integrated setting, and even more providers to serve children in general education. 3K and pre-K classes, you did not give a specific number of providers needed for children in 3K, pre-K, general education classes, in addition to the 246 service providers needed in preschool special education in integrated settings. How many more providers do you need to serve preschoolers with disabilities in 3K, pre-K, general education classes?

CHANCELLOR FOTI: So, Chair, one of the things that we... the number of providers that we still need are broken into categories. So for our preschool assessment teams, we're looking to bring on another 83 additional staff. You pointed out related service providers, that's correct, 246. Our related service itinerant team, we would be in need of 73 of those.

Those are to provide services in our CBOs and our NYSEGs. And we're also looking to add additional CPSC staff so that when, you know, I testified that it's a 30-day wait time. We would like to obviously make that much shorter for families, and we also would like to reduce our CPSC administrator workload so we're looking for 25 additional admins as well as community coordinators for outreach to families.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you all. I'll send up follow-up questions and the ones you didn't get to answer.

Thank you so much, and happy anniversary, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR AVILÉS-RAMOS: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We will be taking a 10-minute break.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Keep it down. Everyone, please take a seat. Have a seat, please, have your seat.

Thank you. We'll be starting momentarily. Also, please do not approach the dais.

There'll be no food or drinks allowed in the Chambers and, when the hearing starts, please silent all electronic devices.

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Education Committee hearing on School Construction Authority Fiscal 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan and the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Capital Budget and Commitment Plan for the Department of Education.

At today's hearing, we will primarily focus on the 20.5 billion proposed in February's amendment to the Fiscal 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan. SCA's Capital Plan is an important element of the City's education programming as it provides the infrastructure for learning, extracurricular activities, enrichment that our students crave, every new playground, classroom, cafeteria, and environmentally friendly educational space is a step towards a better learning environment for our city students. SCA's proposed plan includes important increases in funding to a number of key areas compared to where the plan was last year at this time. Most notably, 2 billion was added for new

capacity funding that will fund roughly 10,000 new seats to help reach the goals set forth in the State's class size reduction law. This funding is necessary to get closer to compliance with the class size law, although it will not get us all the way there without additional investments. We were also happy to see that the additional funding provided for swimming pools, athletic fields, and capital improvement work, which are all essential projects to update our educational facilities. In all, the plan is 3.5 billion larger than the one that SCA presented at the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget hearing.

Still other areas have not seen new funding. Accessibility sits at 800 million, an investment that will bring much needed projects to school but it's not sufficient to bring all schools to 100 percent accessibility, meaning we are still many years away from reaching full accessibility. Too many of our schools are still not accessible to all, and this plan does not change that.

We look forward to getting updates on important capital projects, like internet speed upgrades, facility enhancement, the status of removal of temporary class units, and status of new

construction projects on many new schools across the city. We will cover these issues and others and hope to get some additional transparency and guidance on how to best support SCA in their work.

I would like to recognize my Colleagues, none of them are here. I would like to thank the Administration for coming to testify before the Committee today. We will hear their testimony after Committee Counsel swears them in.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you, Chair. We will now hear testimony from the administration. Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation.

Panelists, please raise your right hand, and this includes anybody here for Q and A. I will read the affirmation once and then call on each of you individually to respond. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions? Nina Kubota.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Cora Liu.

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I do.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION 265

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Dan

3 Weisberg.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Tom

6 Taratko.

7 CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Kevin

9 Moran.

10 CHIEF MORAN: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Shakil

12 Intekhab.

13 CHIEF SHAKIL: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Jay

15 Findling.

16 DIRECTOR FINDLING: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank

18 you. You may begin your testimony.

19 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Thank you. Good

20 afternoon, Chair Joseph and Members of the City

21 Council Education Committee. My name is Nina Kubota,

22 and I am President and CEO of the New York City

23 School Construction Authority. I'm joined by First

24 Deputy Chancellor Daniel Weisberg and by Cora Liu,

25 Vice President of Capital Plan Management of the SCA.

We are pleased to be here today to discuss the updates to the New York City Public Schools SCA's Fiscal Year 2025 to 2029 five-year capital plan as laid out in the February 2025 proposed amendment.

Coming off of one of our biggest years in our history, we were proud to stand with New York City Public Schools and many of you as we opened 24 new buildings this past September, adding over 11,000 seats to the public school portfolio. But we didn't celebrate for long. This September, we are opening an additional 6,363 seats across 13 buildings, including the largest project we have ever built, a 3,066-seat high school on Northern Boulevard in Woodside, Queens. I would like to take a moment to share a preview of what some of our other beautiful new buildings opening this fall will look like. Going clockwise from the top right, an addition at PS105 in the Bronx, an addition at PS26, Queens, an addition at PS160 in Queens, an addition at PS5 on Staten Island, and a new school building located at 24 Shelly Avenue on Staten Island.

Since the adoption of our Fiscal Year 2025 to 2029 five-year capital plan, the total funding has increased by 1.5 billion to 20.5 billion,

which was largely due to funding rollover and new Reso A projects. We thank the City Council for their continuous support of our public schools.

I will now briefly discuss each of the categories in the proposed amendment and the changes since the adoption of our eighth plan. The FY25 to '29 capital plan has 6.13 billion for new capacity to create over 33,400 new seats citywide. New capacity is the funding category that will be used for continued compliance with the class size law. 10,596 seats have already been cited in this new plan, so we're already a third of the way there. In our recently published February amendment, the SCA is proposing to allocate nearly 7,100 seats for 15 new projects to specific districts and sub-districts, roughly 31 percent of the remaining unsighted seats. While these projects do not actually have sites identified yet, they demonstrate where we think funds are the most needed under the class size law. In short, these districts and sub-districts represent areas where, after careful data analysis, we believe capital construction is needed to achieve class size compliance. The balance will remain citywide in the plan for other projects to be identified. This gives

us, in partnership with New York City Public Schools, the ability to respond effectively to address class size and allows us to provide targeted support to individual schools that are not located in areas receiving allocation but must rely on capital investment to achieve compliance.

The change to the new capacity program I just outlined was done as a response to the public feedback we received after publishing the original eighth plan. As you can see from these maps, there are 12 districts and sub-districts where we have allocated seats on a PS/IS level, as well as on a borough level for the high school seats. We used the latest enrollment projections, housing development, as well as class size data to develop our proposed framework to allocate seats.

Building new capacity is, and will continue to be, done in a phased approach and will include a variety of different types of projects, from new buildings to leased spaces and interior conversions in our existing buildings. In fact, three room conversion projects are underway now, at Elmhurst Educational Campus and Far Rockaway High School in Queens, and at IS 101 in the Bronx. These

projects represent 229 of the 6,363 seats that we are opening in September. These room conversion projects allow us to add capacity to existing school buildings and provide support in both a time and cost-efficient manner. Overall, the capacity category totals 6.98 billion, and its funding level remains unchanged from the adopted plan. This category also includes 400 million in replacement funding, which provides for the development of seats for schools that must be relocated. These seats are provided through new construction or alternative leasing opportunities, similar to new capacity. In this proposed amendment, we have cited our first replacement project for PS106 in Far Rockaway, Queens.

Additionally, there's 250 million associated with our program to end our reliance on temporary structures. Out of the roughly 350 transportable classroom units we started with, we have only 23 remaining at just five sites. In addition, there are 54 sites that have other temporary structures, and 16 of them already have an identified removal plan. With the Council's support, we have made huge strides in this area. We were happy to join Speaker Adams a few weeks ago as we

celebrated the new addition at PS96 in South Ozone Park that did three things for the school. It added additional capacity, provides amenities such as a gymnasium, art room, music room, that the school was previously lacking, and it will allow us to remove the TCU from the school's yard and turn it into a brand new playground.

We are already seeing the difference that the Healthy Schools category is making across the New York City public school portfolio. A majority of this funding, 1.4 billion, will go towards our efforts to electrify our existing buildings. Additionally, there's 350 million allocated to upgrade our heating plants. Both efforts will make huge strides in eliminating our reliance on polluting fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to our planned funding, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services is anticipated to fund roughly 200 million for electrification projects in FY25, with similar funding expected in '26. With DCAS's partnership and additional funding, we anticipate being able to initiate over 40 electrification projects. In the last plan, we awarded 13 electrification projects,

and we're hoping to more than triple that in this plan.

349 million is allocated to projects that will upgrade physical education facilities, including athletic fields, pools, and playgrounds. We heard from the Council loud and clear that swim education is a top priority, and we couldn't agree more. We were proud to celebrate the opening of the restored pool at Beach Channel Educational Campus recently, and we've worked with our partners at New York City Public Schools, as well as non-profit partners such as Asphalt Green, to ensure that kids across the city are able to have access to life-saving swimming instruction. We are currently advancing seven pool projects to restore all non-operational pools so that they can be used in this vital effort.

The last program in this category provides 180 million for health and nutrition projects. 150 of this funding will continue the successful implementation of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience Initiative started in the prior plan that transforms cafeterias into comfortable and attractive dining environments. 30 million is set aside for the creation of unique

educational spaces with an emphasis on agriculture and nutrition. At our last hearing, I spoke about the exciting project in Bergen Beach, Brooklyn, where we built a two-acre learning farm with support from Council Member Narcisse, but that's not the only farm project we've been growing. We will be providing a new building for the roughly 3.8-acre farm at John Bowne High School in Queens, and I want to thank Council Member Gennaro for his generous support to this project. John Bowne has the largest high school agricultural program in the state, and it's only fitting that they have a facility that meets the caliber of their programming. The farm building, which has been designed in consultation with the Queen Zoo and under the guidance of national standards, will include an aviary to house various species of birds as well as a space for the school's reptile collection. In the end, the animals will be housed in a building more appropriate for their needs, and students will have a facility that's more conducive to John Bowne's programming.

At the intersection of capacity and healthy schools' programs are the innovations we've championed in sustainable design. The former St. John

Villa campus on Staten Island has given us tremendous opportunity for exploring and implementing a multitude of sustainable design elements. We have taken advantage of as much of the campus as possible for solar panels, green roofs, and hybrid systems. Two parking lots on the campus will receive canopy solar systems, generating additional electricity and providing shade. Based on preliminary design estimates, these systems are expected to generate about 500 kilowatts of electricity and save over 200 metric tons of carbon emissions annually. The solar panels will provide onsite energy generation, which is especially important in an all-electric building, to reduce energy costs and strain on the electric grid. This campus is one of the biggest and most complex we have built in our history, and we thank Council Member Carr for his steadfast support of this project. We're also excited to use geothermal system and all-electric heat pumps for a majority of this campus. Geothermal systems take advantage of the near constant temperature of the ground beneath the Earth's surface and can act as a heat source in the winter and a heat sink in the summer, providing a highly efficient means of heating and cooling. Huge

strides have been made in geothermal systems, and we're beginning to pilot them where we can. We are also looking to include geothermal at the Forest Hills High School Annex, which will provide class-size relief. We thank Council Member Schulman for her partnership on this important project.

While we all love new buildings, most of our buildings, roughly 86 percent, are over 30 years, and the average age is 75 years old. As such, our existing buildings and our existing building portfolio still represents a significant area of investment for us. The capital investment portion of the plan includes two main categories, the Capital Improvement Program, or CIP, which totals 3.3 billion, and school enhancement projects totaling 2.88 billion. CIP includes exterior and interior building upgrades and other necessary capital repairs. These include life safety and security systems as well as critical components of a building's infrastructure, such as roof, parapets, and windows. One of our main priorities is to keep our buildings watertight to ensure the longevity of our building infrastructure. This work is so vital that we maintain the highest standards of safety at

our school facilities for all students and staff. In the first year of this plan, we are on track to award approximately 50 exterior modernization projects, totaling over 500 million.

School enhancement projects strengthen educational opportunities for our students. This category funds technology enhancements, which includes continued data network improvements and bandwidth capacity, realignment of existing facilities to better suit instructional needs, bathroom upgrades, science labs, accessibility, the Career Connected Learning Program, and other necessary improvements. In this plan, there is an increased funding level for accessibility, demonstrating the Administration's continued commitment to expanding the accessibility of our school facilities. This plan allocates 800 million towards making our buildings accessible. For the FY25 to '29 Capital Plan, we will build on the success of previous plans, continuing our focus on citywide equity. In collaboration with our advocacy partners and other stakeholders, we have established new citywide goals. We will prioritize projects that increase the accessibility of all primary school

buildings across every district, raising the accessibility threshold from 33 percent to 40 percent. Additionally, New York City Public Schools will focus on improving accessibility in D75 schools across the entire city, aiming to ensure that 75 percent of those buildings are at least partially accessible, with 50 percent fully accessible.

In the plan, 3.4 billion has been allocated for a number of items in our mandated category, for remediation, code compliance, and other projects required by law. It also includes funding for our wrap-up insurance for contractors on our projects as well as for prior plan completion costs.

The SCA is incredibly proud of the work we are able to accomplish for New York City Public School students. I would like to take the opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank the hardworking staff at the SCA that worked tirelessly to provide high-quality educational facilities across the city. We've already accomplished so much in the first year of this capital plan, and have so much more that we are working towards. I thank you again for allowing me to testify before you and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your testimony. I want to talk around class size. I know SCA's most recent estimate for number of new seats needed for class size compliance is about 70,000. There are about 33,417 seats funded in the plan, and 14,174 seats funded under the 2020-2024 capital plan that will open by September of 2028. Can you confirm that 70,000 seats is the current estimate?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: It is.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How did you come about that number?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: It is really based on the number of schools that we work with New York City Public School to identify that will be in need of space to comply, and we use the number of classroom to roughly estimate the number of seats that's needed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So that's an estimate, right?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So how many of the 33,417 seats funded in the plan would realistically be open by 2027 to 2028 school year when the class size law will fully be in effect?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, we're very happy to report that since the adoption of the plan, we've been able to cite eight additional projects totaling 2,700 seats. However, as you know, typical capital projects can take an extended period of time, finding the site, the site acquisition process, the design, the bid and award, and then construction, which is typically three years so we're talking multiple years so we are exploring other delivery methods as we talked about a little bit earlier, but of the 33,417 funded seats, as I mentioned, we have identified sites for 10,596 sites, but for there are five projects that will open by the 2027-28 school year for about 1,116 seats. But we're hopeful that we'll be able to open more with the room conversion projects. And I do want to mention that we have 27,000 seats coming online from the 2020 to 2024 capital plan.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Add something.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I would love to. Thank you. I just wanted to say, appreciate the question and appreciate Nina's response. And the one other thing to remember about the law is that it does actually assume that bringing space online will take

some time, and so it has a particular exemption in the law for space where SCA has identified and we know where we're going to build to give the extra time needed to build that additional space and so there's some constraints on that exemption, but to the extent SCA has a site and it's in process, that is envisioned under the law as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So there's some cushion room until you meet the compliance. Okay.

So, you have 13,478 seats scheduled to be opened by 2027 from the 2020-24 capital plan. What percentage of class size compliance would that get us to? Where would that bring us in the class size law?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We don't quite know. It really depends on where the schools are and, as you know, the school enrollment is very dynamic. They've changed from year to year. You could be in compliance one year, not in compliance next year, but we do work with our partners at district planning and space planning very closely so then they are fully aware of the seats that are in the pipeline that will come online in the next few years. So, we're planning how to create a catchment area, for example, or how to pair them up with schools that will be surrounding

area in need of space so we have maximized the effects or the impact of those upcoming seats.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you're constantly working back and forth with the numbers to adjust as the seats become available. Is there possibilities to shift seats as well on a need basis? Oh, that's not possible. Just asking. Because you may see more seats in one area and you don't have enough students, but you have more seats and less seats in another area. Is there flexibility to move seats or... that's what I'm asking.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah. I mean, there are some possibilities to do that. You know, it depends on a number of factors, but you know, yes, we'll adjust as we go. As you say, demographics are fluid, immigration patterns, housing patterns, etc.

One thing just on compliance, Chair, we will be able to make quite a bit of progress towards compliance based on the non-capital efforts that we have that Deputy Chancellor Vadehra talked about in the expense hearing. That is, we have lots of schools that have space. They could open up additional classes. They need teachers and funding to do that.

And so that's the process that Emma and her team have led with our union partners. We've got about 800 applications from schools seeking to reduce class size, not based on building additional space using the space that they have. Now that won't get us to 100 percent by any stretch, but when you talk about how far towards compliance will we get with these additional seats, we have kind of two tracks to get to compliance. One is about opening new classes with an existing space and one is about adding space.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And building more schools.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:
Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, does SCA have a target range for how many total seats you want to open in the 2027 and 2028 school year? Is there a number you have in mind, and what does that look like?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: In addition to what we already have in the pipeline in terms of our seats opening, and we have that figure here, we have about a dozen or so room conversion projects that we're looking at right now that would help increase those

numbers, and we work with our counterparts at Space Planning to come up with those room conversion projects.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: One of the things, Chair, if I could just jump in and President Kubota will elbow me if I'm getting this wrong, because this is really in SCA's orbit. But one of the reasons you're hearing our friends at SCA talk about how many jobs are cited so far, it involves finding sites to build on. And so one of the reasons that, and SCA, I can tell you, is moving as aggressively as it possibly can to find these sites to then get the projects in the pipeline, get the funding there, do the design. This is New York City. There's not a lot of extra space, and so one of the real hindering factors that exist in terms of when we will be able to bring these new seats online is just the availability of space, and we were talking about it in the earlier hearing with Council Member Restler, talking about a school that's a high-demand school where these guys already built an annex in the schoolyard 10 years ago or something, and it's already full up so space is a big factor in that. If, I'm sure you would say, President Kubota, if a bunch

of properties open up and you're able to acquire them more quickly, then they'll be able to move more quickly by '27, '28. If we don't find these properties, then it's going to take a longer period of time.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what metrics do you use to figure out, hey, I'm going to build this amount of schools in the next 10 years. Is this the census? You build out an annex in that other school, and here you are, they're already at capacity. I went to visit that school with Council Member Restler, too, and it's a high-demand school. AP classes are full, the kids are amazing, and more people want their kids to go there. So how do we, what's the metric to expand schools that are in demand in terms of space?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Well, when we do our projections, we do it at a sort of district and subdistrict area, and to that we add housing. So, we were really, prior to this plan, planning at that level. Since class size compliance law came into effect, we've been really analyzing it at a per-school basis, and actually, I'll turn to my partners

here at New York City Public Schools to help us with that answer.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yeah. So, as Nina said, and this is one of the reasons, and she highlighted this, that SCA has had to think differently about how they allocate their new capacity funding going forward, because we used to look at overcrowded communities based on the projections of who was going to live in the community, and that's not what we need at PS8, right? The challenge at PS8 isn't whether more people are moving into the community. Opening up a school down the street from PS8 doesn't actually solve the PS8 problem, unless we want to limit enrollment, which we don't, and so it creates a new way of planning for SCA that's actually far more constraining, right? Because you actually need to find a way to expand the capacity of PS8 itself. As we work with SCA on that, what we are looking at is our class size compliance data, so we're looking, as you know, we have data for every class in the system at this point in time. We are looking at the space already available in that building to see, as we discussed earlier, if any of that space can be converted into instructional space

without any trade-offs, and we also did a survey of all our principals to get their feedback on this particular challenge. What space do you have? What space do you need? What space could you convert? Coming out of that survey is how we've gotten to some of these smaller room conversion projects that Tom and team are doing to actually say we can move further towards compliance without building more buildings, just by churning over some of that space, but the basic data we're looking at is our current enrollment and class size compliance data to figure out what's needed at each school, and when we say 500 schools need more space, that's what we're looking at, current state.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, because we also want to make sure, as we're planning with class size, it's also equitable. Equity will always be at the center of this work for our New York City students, so I just want to make sure that's centered as well.

I'm going to get into delayed projects. Boy, do I have a list, and I'm sure if I call a couple of Council Members, they will feel the same. So, over the past few years, the rate at which

Council Member projects are delayed, pushed, or have costs for re-estimate has sharply risen, and I don't usually say it's a re-estimate. I say SCA likes to guesstimate. We guesstimate and come back to the members and say, you're short. I always keep it real with you guys. So, we want to change that. This put Members in a difficult position of having their funding tied with projects that aren't moving or have to be changed after the project had been announced to the community, and that happened to a couple of projects I funded myself, a middle school in my District, when I funded it at 800,000. You guys came back and said, hey, Council Member, you're short 200,000 dollars. Made sure that additional funding was there, and that library and computer lab in FY23, I funded this, is still not up and running. That's not acceptable to our New York City students who wait on these projects. They leave schools and they have never used these spaces. PS217 in my District, I'm having a nightmare with that. I want to be able to do, we can do better. That project was funded at 400,000. You guys came back and said, no, you're short. Came back, put in my 550,000. This was in FY23. Nothing has started with this playground yet,

and it's supposed to be an ADA playground. These kids, I promised them and I delivered, and SCA has not delivered so I'm going to put that on you so New York City kids know, PS217, SCA did not deliver for them, and not even have a conversation with them. Yes, Emma, I'm disappointed, I'm unhappy, because we promised these kids these things, and we're adults, and when you promise children, you have to deliver. So, I would love to know where I am on PS217. Parents call me, kids call me, and all of the other, PS217, a playground, ADA compliant for our students with mobility issues. That's the one thing they ask me.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And so before President Kubota and Chief Moran are going to respond, Chair, let me just say that I totally agree, and it's the worst thing in the world when you promise kids something, and then they're asking you again and again so we have to do better collectively. You're going to hear from my colleagues like what the process is and how we're trying to expedite it, but I'm going to just short-circuit it a little bit and suggest that, because you're also 100 percent right that you are not the only Council Member who has had issues with delays and Reso A projects. So we would

love to engage with you and colleagues to really go through with a fine-tooth comb, this is what's happening now, here's what we're doing to clear the backlog, here's what we're having, frankly, our own obstacles, and see if we can collectively figure out how to solve it, because, when you fund a project, we want you to have a very clear timeline, we want you to be able to look people in the eye and say this is when it's going to get done, this is when it's going to get started, etc., and we hear you that we are not there now, and so we want to fix it, but we'd ask for your help in coming up with the right range of solutions.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that's what we talked about in terms of communication, and that's one thing I expressed to SCA, I was not happy in the way we were communicated. I promised New York City kids one thing, that I would be their champion, and I would never want to let them down, if I say I'm going to deliver, they have to get what they want. So, talk to me, this is an opportunity, talk to New York City kids, because they watch, and they're here today, because they want to be involved in government, they're here today, shout out to them for being here

today, and for advocating for themselves always.

They're here also to testify, the things they want to see in the budget, First Deputy Chancellor, restorative justice, community schools, those are the things they're here to tell me.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, I mean, I think we met with your office pretty recently on some of the Reso A funded projects, and we actually started with a quarterly update for select Council Member Districts so we can start that communication better. I think one of the things that we, I think Council Member Stevens brought it up last time, one of the things that we wanted to do, and we started to do, is reach out to the Council Members to sort of engage at an earlier stage, because as you know, some of the things, what ends up happening I think a lot of times is that money is allocated to a school, the school then says, oh great, I want all of these things, then we come back to you and say, oh, we're short X number, and in the case of PS217, that was part of it, but also I think what wants to be added right now is the side yard. I think we looked at the larger yard for 217, now we're adding, and we have the exterior modernization project that's completing that

will allow us to start that project. But I think it's earlier communication, I think it's communication with the school, most importantly, because, and we encourage the schools to reach out to us, even prior to the allocations being given, because then we can actually say to them, okay, you're going to advocate for an auditorium project. We know that an AV system is going to cost 200,000 dollars, curtains will cost 200,000 dollars, your floor will cost, I don't know, whatever, 500,000. I think what ends up happening is they say, oh, I want an auditorium upgrade, and Council Members generously fund a half a million dollars, but then when it gets to the project level, then all of a sudden, we see the 500,000 isn't enough because it's not enough to do all the things that they want on the list. So I think, Cora, do you want to add?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 217, just to be clear, that was not the case for 217. I came in, there was 400,000 dollars there, and you guys said there was a gap for 550,000, which I funded so this school yard is going to cost 950,000 dollars, and we're still two years later. So, this is a different scenario than what you're talking about. You're

asking me for funding, I funded it on time, and still, this was FY23, we're in FY25. These kids are going to leave the school that came to me, ADA-compliant playground, and we're not there yet. Not even a communication, not even a note until it was brought to my attention. PTA parent called me, and the kids called, and they said, Council Member, remember that playground you promised us at the legislative breakfast, which I delivered in October of 2023? It is March of 2025. Not one word has been said. And I think, what I say again is, adults have to do better by the kids, right? We're adults, we're leading this. They come to us, and we say, hey, we're going to do it, and here we are. It delays projects. And I'm just going to stop with 217, but if I were to start listing all the projects that I've funded from FY22 that has not been completed, the list would be very long today. So, and I already told, and I spoke to Kevin Moran, and I spoke to First Deputy Chancellor, and I told him I was very, very unhappy, and that's across the city. If I were to do a survey right now, across the city, schools with scaffoldings, students never get to see the school building until they graduate, and they're driving by,

and they're like, what building is that? Oh, I attended that school. So, I'm putting out my frustration, because I want us to do better as Deputy Chancellor, moving forward, do better, communicate better. Let us know early on, your funding is short. We have to do this. It's going to be delayed. That would help a lot of this frustration. PS217, I hope by the time I leave today, and by tomorrow, we start working, and looking how do we address the kids, and making this better for them, right? Okay, there was a delay, and that was your fault. Thank you for owning it. And then, how do we move forward?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We are meeting with the principal on Wednesday so now we can start brainstorming how to move forward. I do want to go back to the point Nina was making. We agree with you wholeheartedly, communication is the key. We took a very deep look at our process, when Nina was mentioning to move that communication directly with the principal to define the scope of work, so that principal has the right expectation for what they are getting as part of the project. We're moving that out of the project design schedule to the very beginning before projects are adopted, or money are added. We

think it will help tremendously, and we're willing to invest time and resources to work with principals directly. And we encourage Council Members to direct their principals to come reach out to us. We will work with them, come up with a reasonable expectation on scope as well as cost.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, back to your Reso A, I wanted to find out your internal process for Member Reso A projects, because my Colleagues wouldn't want me to answer that. And when projects are submitted to their completion, what's the internal process for SCA for Reso A projects? From the time we submit it to the time of completion. I submitted a project in 2022. It has yet to be done. I'm not going to name the schools, we're going to talk this offline, but I have a list. FY22, I just came in as a Council Member. I funded a computer lab in my District. Those kids still have no computer lab until today. What's the process when you submit from the beginning to end? What's the timeline?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Oh, I'm happy to talk about the general process. So, we typically work with Council Member offices very early in the fiscal year. We call that pre-adoption. That's when we talk to the

offices, talk to the principals to get understanding of what kind of projects might be coming. This is the phase where we're doing a lot of fact-finding on trying to help the principals. A lot of information are put together. Once the Council Members finalize their list of projects and funding we need to give, we receive that and then we work with OMB to make sure those projects are kept eligible, to make sure we have all the right information for OMB to approve those funding transfers. So, once we have those approval from OMB on the projects, then we put more information together. We submit the CP request to OMB. There is a process where OMB has to review and they typically have a lot of questions about the scope of those projects. But generally, by this year, January, for example, of 2025, is when we got CP approval for all the Reso A projects. At that point, we'll kind of divide projects up to three implementers. Some projects have been done by SCA, some projects are being implemented by DSF and then DIT. I'll talk a little bit about the projects being managed by us. We will then assign them to a design consultant who will now reach out to the school to have a scope kickoff. I think, again, that's where a

lot of questions raised. Principals might have a different ideal perspective or expectation of what they are getting from the projects so there's a lot of back and forth between us with the school, sometimes with Council Members' office and staff to try to finalize what can be done with those projects. But we're very clear, settle on the scope, then we go through design process, then project is being awarded.

I think the other thing I want to mention that would be the early communication is really helpful. I know a few projects, we started working on them, the principal playground, for example. They didn't know we have an exterior project that's in design about going out to bid. So, if we have talked to them, we would have said, maybe you should ask the funding to fund an interior project because we cannot have two projects happening at the same time, they end up have to wait for the exterior project to be completed. So again, this is why the early communication is really critical, but that's our process in terms of a project to move forward.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So that's like how long? You still didn't give me the...

2 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Sorry, it's from the...

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: From the time you get
4 the approval from OMB and then moving forward, how
5 long does that take?

6 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: The scope and design
7 to go takes up to a year and then bid award is three
8 months. The construction duration really depends on
9 the scope and the type of the projects.

10 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: It could range a year
11 or two, depending on the scope of the work itself,
12 but typically in that range.

13 I also just did want to, before I pass it
14 to Kevin to talk about the DSF managed projects, and
15 this is actually one of them, PS2 is, I think...

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: MS2? You mean MS2?

17 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: MS2. Sorry.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Computer lab?

19 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Computer lab. Actually
20 was previously managed by Division of School
21 Facilities, but we actually recently took it back,
22 and it will be completed by September of this year.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many member
24 projects that were funded in prior years have not
25

been started or passed the scoping or design phase?

And that's all the Members. I need all the numbers.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, I mean, we can speak to SCA managed.

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Yeah. We have about probably 10 percent of projects in the past five years that have not been completed. We're happy to get you the more exact number.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the oldest project you have in your portfolio that has not been completed?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Reso A projects?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Reso A or Capital? Any projects that's old? Or all of them are done up until this Fiscal... I know 2022 hasn't been done, so I'm not even...

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I think we will have to look at the different buckets.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please.

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Yeah, we'll get back to you with more details.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please do, please do. Kevin, you wanted to add on something?

CHIEF MORAN: Yes, thank you, Chair Joseph. I'd like to start to thank you and the Council for your support of schools. The Reso A program, the use of discretionary funding, is a huge win for our students all gathered here, for our families, our school communities, our staff so it is our goal to improve the process, to be transparent and accountable and efficient and so I do definitely want to apologize because we can do better. We started looking at the way the Division of School Facilities operated on the business side of the house last year as an outgrowth of the last hearing. Very clear direction from our leadership team. We weren't doing a great job on how we were financing, how we were procuring, how we were budgeting ultimately, and actually running our capital program. And our health and safety. And there were many, many things. We took a good, long look at it, how to fix things going forward. So with some of the reorganization and a focus on capital, we took some steps. We identified the previous problem. You know, in operations, often today's problem was yesterday's solution. So we looked at it and said, did it work then and, at times, it did. But then we went back and said, how

can we make this better? And then we got into what was known, as we've been talking about, is like our backlog of cases. But I'd say fundamentally on process, we decided to move from a expense payout quickly through once we work with the School Construction authority on an LLW number, a low level work number, and a scope and a budget, that's the good hard work. Getting the scope and budget right. Proceeding then to get a CP. Previously, we would wait to the end of the year to try to true up, and we were disallowed and it didn't work well. Now, we've worked hand in glove with the School Construction Authority on how we do our capital work, and so we advanced through that sequence. We get our LLW number, we get our scope, our budget, refine it, make sure it's tight, get it to CP, you know, the certificate proceed, (INAUDIBLE) to move ahead, and then start the work. Because the vendor was also complaining that they weren't getting reimbursed in time when they finished the jobs so the new process has yielded some early results. I'll start off with what was our backlog, and our backlog represented essentially less than one project per school building. We had about 709 projects that were not

attended to prior to FY24. And so from 2024, we actually have 112 ready to go out the door any day now. But as far back, your question was how far back we had a job or a few that go back from '23 to '18, and that was a very large number. That is not 112, that's 597 jobs. That over time, the scope changed, the priorities changed, and that presents an opportunity for us to work with each Council Member specific and school community and say, for whatever the reason the job didn't proceed at that time, it is still here and let's talk about that. So that's going to be our work this spring.

And then it brings us to the here and now, the '24 jobs. In our pipeline right now, we have 441 jobs pending. We're aggressively working on that. And then we have the new commitments of FY25 in partnership with the SCA, we have 263 jobs in the pipeline.

But I talked about the early wins. Over that same time period, we did complete 2,034 jobs. The bad news was it was actually 944 of them were not necessarily paid for. So, we had to do a fair amount of work to pay back every vendor through the process. So as of August, we started, we've pushed already 201

jobs through payment for 59 million. Additionally, we have 361 jobs referred for encumbrance now, which is representative of 53 million. And the final piece of our backlog is representing 322 jobs at roughly 28 million. So there's a fair amount of work, but we reorganized ourselves. We weren't doing a great job categorizing our work and following our work and then making sure our vendors were made whole. So, some of the complaints I heard in the earlier testimony was vendors weren't, or subcontractors even, I heard some subcontractors saying they weren't being paid. We had to make sure that our GCs were managing well, our contracts were doing the work, we were getting the required information back and making sure we could actually pay them through the appropriate process. So, we believe there's a time and effort here that helped, and we look forward to working with Members on solutions and figure out each project, but also committed to posting the jobs that we receive from the School Construction Authority on the school's homepage. So, we're going to be fully transparent, and along with Nina and the SCA, we would do quarterly meetings for jobs assigned to us. This way, there's no slippage here with the expectation of

student, the expectation of Member and school community on to make sure our contractors know never to work at risk, make sure they're doing it following the book, and then we'll make sure they get paid.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for that update. I'm sure my Colleagues and I and the school community will be happy to hear that you realized there was a mistake, you fixed it, and you go back, your backlog goes as far as 2018. These kids are in college, working with families, and they never got the playground.

Okay, guys, SCA has previously stated that you are bound by capital eligibility rules like Directive 10, but there might be a way to get additional scoping funding early in the process. What's the conversation has SCA had with the Comptroller's Office, OMB, trying to gain more flexibility on the timing of scoping funds to speed up the process?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: So we have had several conversations with OMB Counsel to ask them to help us understand their interpretation of Directive 10. The Directive 10 document itself didn't change. The implementation of how they interpret them seemed

to have changed when they review our projects. In some cases, they help us understand. Unfortunately, some project scope needs to grow a little bit so that we meet certain criteria. Unfortunately, there are certain type of projects. I know water fountain was a very big disappointment for everyone. Unfortunately, they clarify again, those projects on its own is not capital eligible. We continue to talk to them to clarify. We also invite them to come to any hearing or training so that everyone can be more aligned on how to understand Directive 10 requirement.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So where should we be funding those water fountains that's been at the center of this conversation? If it's not capital, where does it fall?

CHIEF MORAN: Well, what I would add through your advocacy and feedback we've received, we've looked at the program a bit differently, and we're probably going back to OMB with a new application of sorts, if you will. We believe that these touch on many of the trades, carpentry work around tiling, plumbing work around the fixture itself, electricity, these units use electric. There's also testing and abatement in some instances.

So, we're going to take another bite at the apple on eligibility and how we do this. These are very popular, but we're also, Emma and I have been in discussion about alternatives to that if we don't meet a capital threshold.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Has SCA identified ways to scope the projects more accurately from the onset to avoid revision delays later in the project timeline?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think Cora mentioned a few minutes ago about really encouraging our principals to reach out to us before adoption so that we can give them the correct sort of estimates. Of course, it's not going to be foolproof and I understand that, but just again to set expectations a little bit. I mentioned earlier about like curtains or flooring or seating like we do have estimates for each of these components of a project. And I think that direct communication with us would really help move some of these projects. And again, if we have that communication earlier, we can get almost straight into design rather than having the consultant reach out and again get the scoping of the project. That'll be done ahead of time. So, we are

changing our process to hopefully engage our principals earlier. And please, if any of your principals are interested, we're always here to walk them through anything.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What are some of the barriers do you face in the process which delays project completion? Other than funding, what are some of the barriers you face?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: There are always new law coming by. There are all new regulations that we have to comply with. Very recently, there is a storm water requirement that's coming from DEP which we have experienced some impact on our design schedule. We're working with DEP to try to understand the requirement a little better, but those are some examples of major hurdles we face.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. In the Fiscal 2025 PMMR, the metric regarding the percentage of projects constructed on time or early was revised from 15 days after the scheduled date to 30. Why was the metric revised to give SCA more time to complete a project to be considered on time?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Actually, we just aligned that with other City agencies use that same

metric. We were not sure why it was 15 days initially. All the capital agencies used that 30 days, so we just aligned it with that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So everyone could be on the same page and aligned. Despite the change in metric, SCA Fiscal 2024 on-time completion rate was only 43 percent. Whereas the Fiscal 2026, there was a high of 86 on-time completion rate with the old metric. What has contributed to the decrease in on-time projects and what has SCA identified as the barrier to completing capital improvement projects on time? What happened in the decrease? You did better in 2016 than you've done in 2024. What changed?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think some of the, certainly the added requirements that Cora just mentioned, but besides that, we definitely had some COVID supply chain issues. I think that we're still sort of experiencing, who knows what the tariffs are going to do, but also site conditions of our older buildings. I think we're seeing a lot of sort of, we get into the building and we're like, even though we test for different areas of the building during design, we can't test 100 percent obviously. And so again, we get into the buildings and we're like, oh

wow, we have to replace all of this brick that wasn't anticipated so it is an unanticipated sort of site conditions.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, I appreciate the new measure identifying designated seats by district and sub-districts before the project has been cited in the plan. The more than 7,000 new seats that are newly designated by district and sub-district in the plan allow more transparency into SCA planning. However, there's still more than 15,000 seats designated citywide as of this plan. Can you walk us through how 7,000-plus seats were designated in this plan?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: So, we certainly have heard the comments and the feedback from the public about, I think prior to this February amendment, our seats were all citywide. We took a look at the latest enrollment projection as well as housing development data. We also look at the class size data. So, on one hand, if the district and sub-district, the total projected enrollment is over the projected seats, we definitely see a seat need there. So that's when we identify some of the sub-district in need of seats. We also look at class size data. If the sub-district

as a whole is in need of classroom space, they must rely on capital strategy in order to achieve compliance. That's another kind of a perspective. So based on those two perspectives, we have identified 12 sub-district for PS/IS level seats and Brooklyn and Queens for high school level seats.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And I'd say, Chair Joseph, as you sort of asked earlier, like how do we keep some flexibility to address needs? And as Nina and I shared earlier, the new law means we need to plan a little differently. We need even more flexibility than we had because maybe we will find a site for PS8 or maybe we will not. And so by keeping some of that money at the citywide level for now, it allows us to find those like, not us, I don't do any of this, thank you SCA, it allows them to really see where they can actually find sites that address specific school needs, even if they don't fit in one of these sub-districts. I would say in these sub-districts, we know we're going to have need and we're going to need to find space, but there's many other schools as well and they maintain some flexibility. So if they do find a site by PS8, they have funding to go put towards that or maybe somewhere else.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: And even our room...
sorry.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No, go ahead.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Even our room
conversion projects that we mentioned before, you
mentioned equity. So, I think Far Rockaway and
Elmhurst Educational Campus are in the third and
fourth E and I quartile. So having that almost 16,000
to allow for room conversions at certain schools does
give us a lot of flexibility.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you've said these
seats in the districts have been identified as not
being able to reach compliance with class size
mandate without adding new capacity. Has SCA
identified other districts that will not be able to
reach compliance without new capacity?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Every district has
some schools that are probably not currently in
compliance. Again, just to refer back to Deputy
Chancellor Emma's point, we keep those seats citywide
so that if there are schools not located in one of
those 12 sub-districts, we still have the resources
and capital funding to assist those schools if an
opportunity comes up.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What timeline do you have for increasing number of seats that are designated by sub-district and district in this plan?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We don't have a target, but as we have mentioned before, we do refresh our analysis on an annual basis. So next year, we'll be conducting the same level analysis to reflect the latest data, to reflect the dynamic enrollment trend at local schools. And as the trend of the data tells us, we'll make sure we make the adjustment to reflect the latest information.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Would SCA commit to having all additional seats that are currently designated as citywide to be identified at least at the district level by 2025 in the November plan?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think as Cora mentioned, we do want to maintain some flexibility. So, we will definitely review the latest data that Cora just mentioned, and I think identify more districts, but I think we do want to retain some of them citywide to allow for flexibility.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But you will be able to share that by district level by November with us?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Of course.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If citywide seats are necessary to retain the flexibility you mentioned earlier, please explain why and how many needs to remain designated as citywide. How many do you think you need that has to remain citywide?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I think it's going to be really driven by the data analysis once we have the latest data sets.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a target for the number of new seats the SCA try to have sited in each new plan? If not, why not?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: To have sited? I think First Deputy Chancellor discussed this a little bit before. We are a built city and finding sites is very tough. We do have four brokers that are continuously on the street looking. We have a sites at nycsca.org for anybody to submit sites to us, but really the availability, as I went through my presentation earlier today, you'll notice a lot of them are additions because we really cannot find sites. So we try, but site availability is the biggest hurdle here.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And this morning in the news report, I noticed that they said a lot of people have moved to New York. Do you think four brokers is enough to do that large scope of work?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yeah. Actually, they've been doing okay. They've been submitting sites and again, it's a pretty built environment, which is why I don't think it's the broker's fault at all. I think it's really the unavailability of sites.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In the past, the active participation of parent leaders, community advocates, and elected leaders have proven critical in siting projects. Does SCA have any plans to involve those groups or reconvene the school siting task force created by Local Law 168 of 2018 to help identifying potential locations?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So Local Law 168, we actually continue with that. We continue to look at those sites that we got. If you remember, I think for the publicly owned sites, there were one John Dewey annex that came out of that, and then the next one was what about the privately owned sites, so I think there were, just trying to check my notes here, there were 2,500 sites or lots, and we have reviewed all of

1 them. I think a lot of them were air rights only.
2
3 There were a couple of churches, irregular shapes.
4 And like 20 by 300 or something like that. And so
5 we've narrowed it down to about 200, and we're
6 actually reviewing a bunch of them right now.

7 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: And that's the kind
8 of the first layer of more desk type of review. For
9 the 200 that are more promising, we're looking at
10 each one of them, and there are about a dozen that are
11 being sent to the next level of review so we want to
12 confirm they are available, and then we want to make
13 sure we do the thorough feasibility study in that it
14 is a proper site for the school. So that's something
15 we will continue. I just want to also add, when we
16 have public meetings, whether it's CEC meetings, or
17 we went to any of the New York City build, any of the
18 opportunities were out there, we're always asking
19 people to submit sites to us through sites at NYC.
20 And we look at every single site, because we know it
21 is very difficult to identify any property here.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many ECE leases
23 have been terminated in the last five years due to
24 unfavorable lease conditions, such as landlord non-
25 compliance or rent hikes?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think there were four sites that were terminated. I'm happy to give you those sites offline.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: But they were mostly due to poor condition of the facility. There was only one that we didn't arrive at favorable terms for the lease, but there were four. I'm happy to give you those addresses.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And when you have to move schools like that, what is the process for that? How long does that take?

VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Normally before we terminate, we would notify the Early Childhood Division. In some cases, my understanding is one program actually decided not to run the program, so it worked out. It is really an ongoing process. In some cases, they will consolidate it with another site in the neighborhood. So we don't always find a replacement site, but we work with Early Childhood to make sure we have a solution for the program before we terminate the lease.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. At the February 20th hearing, New York City Public Schools

testified that six sites had leases that would expire in the next two years. Will you be able to provide us with a list of those sites..

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Offline.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Sure, absolutely. And we actually found, because I think the question was two years, and I think we only looked at through 2026, but there's one that expires October 31st of 2026, so it's seven, and we're happy to send you that list.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. That would be wonderful. Thank you.

Accessibility. At last year's budget hearing on preliminary plan, we asked for a list of your priorities for additional funding if the State raised the debt limit. SCA testified that one of three priority areas would be accessibility. However, although the debt limit was raised, New York City Public Schools and SCA has not included any additional funding for school accessibility in July, November, or February amended capital plans. Is there room within that raised debt limit to increase funding for accessibilities?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, when that additional funding was received in July of last year, the debt limit was raised, and that 2 billion dollars was specific to new capacity to help comply with class size compliance. We were not able to redirect any of that funding to any other category.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And to be clear, Chair, I mean, no one would be happier than us, the Chancellor, Emma, Tom Taratko, if we had additional funding for accessibility to expand that program. Certainly, I can't comment based on all of the City capital needs what room there might be within the debt limit. But if room does exist, and we don't get it earmarked for other things for an expansion, we would be able to make very good use, very productive use of additional funds. We're proud of the program that we have with the 800 million, but we certainly could do more if we got additional capital funding.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you may not have this with you. Is it possible we can get a list of all your accessible schools and the ones that are partially accessible? Because I know some of them are partially accessible.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: We have over 900
3 building accessibility plans online on our website.
4 So that will tell you a rating from 1 to 10 from no
5 accessibility, partially accessible, and then fully
6 accessible being the 9s and 10s on that scale.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We'll
8 make sure your staff has that list broken down.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. SCA has
10 previously stated 1 billion dollars per capital plan
11 would allow SCA to reach your term maximum practical
12 accessibility in the next 20 years. Given that 800
13 million dollars is allocated in this plan, is the
14 City further than 20 years away to the maximum
15 practical accessibility? There was a goal. That's why
16 I'm asking that question.

17 CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: If we had a
18 billion in every capital plan, you would make it in
19 15, I think you would make it.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It would be 15 versus
21 20 years. I know, okay.

22 How much funding would it take to get
23 District 75 schools to be fully accessible? What does
24 that look like?

25

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: One of the main things that we've shifted this year with, and I have to give all credit to our advocate partners who really taught us about our clients and our special needs students and parents with disabilities, that we shifted our whole focus to District 75 now, and that's one of our main goals. We'll be at 75 percent accessible options at the end of this plan. Then to go to fully accessible, I would think one more plan, five years.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Five years.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: You'll be to the top where if we go into a historically protected building or something like that, something we'll have to do, but you'll be at the practical ceiling after that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how much would that cost us?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: I think you would do it within that billion dollars.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Within that billion.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: That's going to remain the focus of accessibility to work with District 75.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: To make sure we bring it to a billion dollars so we're accessible. If we bring it to a billion, does that take us to 15 years? Or would that stay still 20?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: That would ensure the 15. This is back of the envelope planning, but yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. I always appreciate that. Thank you. Thank you for that.

In regards to the maximum practical accessibility, the SCA has indicated that between 10 to 15 percent of school buildings cannot be ADA compliant, and we talked about that, because of age, configuration, location, historic designation, and other variables. Would these schools all require new capacity building to be ADA compliant? If so, does SCA consider the locations of schools that cannot be ADA compliant in their new capacity planning?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: The SCA in an internal meeting said that Tom said that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's on the record. Tom said it.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: Put the blame where it belongs. We have about 300 secondary sites and a few sites we have not surveyed yet, but we're committing right now, first time, two years.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: On the record, in front of everyone. I love it.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: Well, we'll have them all done in two years.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: So, we'll have a much better answer for you on specifically what we don't think after we visit the buildings that can't be done for whatever reasons.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because some of them are too old, as we mentioned.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: Right, right. Or landlocked in Manhattan with no room to do anything or not enough capacity inside. But there's various reasons for that. But we will have those listed out in two years with the building accessibility profiles on those buildings.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it possible to just bring new buildings onto those sites completely, since they are too old?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think SHPO would have something to say about that so I'm afraid to say probably not.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course, of course. So that's what I was asking. Has SCA determined how much it would cost to rebuild and replace these schools in an ADA-compliant manner?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: No. I think what Tom was referring to is how many cannot be made.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: He's going to share that number. But if we were to, how many can we do?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I'm sorry, how many can we do?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many can we rebuild and replace? In the stock you have that says, you said, there's nothing we can do because these buildings are too old. Is there a possibility to rebuild? So I'm asking.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: I think that would be a case by case.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Case by case. Thank you.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: Depending where it's located.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Trust me. My
3 questions, they're going somewhere.

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I know, I know.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Trust me. They're
6 going somewhere, and I know what I'm asking for. Are
7 there accessibility projects funded under the Fiscal
8 2020-24 plan that will be completed in the next few
9 years?

10 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yes.

11 CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: Absolutely. And
12 I just want to tell you, in an average of over the
13 last 10 years, since we've all been working together
14 on this, we've averaged nine completed projects per
15 year, a total of 90 projects so I'm real proud of
16 that.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: (INAUDIBLE)

18 CHIEF EXECUTIVE TARATKO: From where we
19 were 12 years ago.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. So see, we're
21 getting to a good place. Can SCA provide a list of
22 accessibility projects that have either been
23 identified with funding from this plan or progressed
24 with funding from the prior plan?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Absolutely. We can provide you with the list. I think we have provided the list recently of the FY25-29 identified projects. Happy to provide you with the 2020-2024 funded projects. And I think most of them are actually in construction right now. I think 47 active construction projects from that plan.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Cafeteria enhancements. One of our food advocates, if they're here, that's one of their favorite topics. Cafeteria enhancements. In the 2020-2024 capital plan, are you continuing this popular program in the current plan?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Absolutely. 150 million dollars set aside for this program.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many total cafeterias have been upgraded to date and how many remains to be upgraded?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Kevin.

CHIEF MORAN: Yeah. Again, thank you for the funding for this program. This is widely successful amongst our students and staff so we're very much appreciative of the Council's advocacy and our extended advocate community. The 150 million will get us 160 new cafeterias, and that may vary over

time, the number, because if you do a Kennedy that we just wrapped up last year, there's three cafeterias versus a smaller school. But prior to 2020, in 2016, we started out with a very small cohort. It was 45 cafeterias that were constructed in the CEE model. To date, we've completed 254. That leaves us with a balance about 208 middle school and high school sites that are targeted for this. And in addition, we have 76 sites that we would likely need an expense solution for, and so we hope to advance the elementary schools in this current plan with that 160.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's my vision.

CHIEF MORAN: We do have one pilot, K230 in Brooklyn. If you want to visit, it's really cool. The kids love it and we're excited about it.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: District 22?

CHIEF MORAN: 15, 15K230.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, yes.

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: But I will just say, after Kevin ended on the positive note, the current funding in the capital plan, this is our entire dynamic, the current funding in the capital plan will not complete all of our middle and high

schools yet. It'll get us almost all the way there, but not quite all the way there. And I think Cora mentioned this earlier, but this is something else that's been impacted by the OMB directive reinterpretation so we had thought we'd get there. Now we'll get another 160, but we'll have a few left at the end.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. So, additional funding, that's been our conversation today, would get us to the number that we need to be. And then how much would you need to go down to elementary schools?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We don't have a full estimate of that yet, but as Kevin said, the pilot we're going to do is going to help us get a sense of, A, what that looks like, and then we can start to think about cost.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And then we'll be able to look what the design look like across the city and elementary school. I think it would be a game changer. I went to see an elementary school the other day. The cafeteria was atrocious. It could use that help. And it'll encourage our students to eat more lunch, right? So that's the purpose of it.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We're with you, Chair, on that 100 percent. One thing to say, it's not that we're doing no work in elementary cafeterias, because we do have some that we're doing on a one-off basis in addition to the pilot Kevin's talking about. But I noticed this hearing's mostly about dollars and cents. This is one of the highest return on investment programs we have. We are just as enthusiastic as the students who are here, and as you are, Chair, about this. For something, I'll probably get the number somewhat wrong, but I think the average cost of the cafeteria enhancement is somewhere around, it's under a million dollars per site. And all you have to do is look on the faces of the kids when they see, come into the cafeteria and see what it looks like after the renovation to know that it's worth it. And you're 100 percent right, Chair. It improves and increases the amount of food that kids eat, healthy food that they eat. Some of the grab-and-go programs that we see in some of the high schools are outstanding. As good, if not better than the experience you get going to a high-end, fast, casual restaurant so we're with you. Again, this is one of these areas that, if we had the

funding, we would go as aggressively as we possibly could, because we can see, and we hear from the students, and we hear from staff and parents as well, that this is one of the really effective things we can do to improve the learning environment for kids.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I always like the fact that you also include student voice, right? That's very important. I always say that. As you're planning, are you planning with students or just for them?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:
Correct.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So I know this process, students get a voice to plan this. So that's really good.

TCU, this one is going to be for Council Member Oswald Feliz. The TCU updates. Can you please update us in the TCU recent years, the last updates were 24 TCUs were left with having 16, a removal plan, and with all the 24 TCUs removed, what does that look like for us?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So recently, we have identified one additional site. So, we're down to 23 not having a removal plan yet. That one I mentioned

in my testimony at PS106 in Queens, it will allow us to remove that TCU once we build the replacement site so we are down to five sites with 23 TCUs. And also, I think I mentioned that of the other temporary structures, so typically the bigger TCU type, there are 54, and 16 have been identified for removal already so we're making pretty good strides there.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a plan, as we talk about building, at any of the sites we look at to see if we can build an annex from that school from those removing of the TCUs? First Deputy Chancellor agrees, good.

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Absolutely. I think PS96 is a good example of where we were able to build an annex, get them a gym which they didn't have, music room, art room, and now we can remove the TCU so we are always looking... we also want to maintain some level of play space, outdoor play space for children, so it's kind of a balance.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Especially in communities where we lack green space so having those playgrounds, and that's why Council Member Brewer talked about the School to Playground Program a lot

in communities where there's a lack of access to green space so those play an important role in that.

If additional funding needed to be added for SCA, does SCA have an estimate?

PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So right now we have 250 million. And so far, again, we have the 23 TCUs and then we have the 54 other transportables. I don't think it's a question of money at this point. It's really what do we do with the children. We don't want to disrupt operation. We don't want to shove them into a building so it's really just working with the school and the school community to make sure that that happens. So, I don't think it's funding at this point. It's really school's operations.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: School operation, where do we put them and provide the spaces that they don't need? Some of these gyms are dilapidated as well so this would be an opportunity to build when we take off that TCU, Tom. See, I remember.

Technology. We know the exams are moving online. Are we doing inventory to see what's working in every single school? Because the exams are, what, in April? And they move from pencil paper to online?

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Correct. April and May, Chair, that's right.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: April and May. How are you?

CHIEF SHAKIL: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, sure do. Are you taking inventory of the technologies in the schools? Are we increasing the bandwidths for when all the students get online at the same time? I'm not on New York One, Emma.

CHIEF SHAKIL: Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good afternoon.

CHIEF SHAKIL: Yes. As we speak, the test is going on and glad to pass on the message that it's going great. We have no problem whatsoever regarding bandwidth with online testing. With regards to upgrading our bandwidth, we are constantly upgrading our schools every month. As of this month, we have completed about 1,250 upgrades out of 1,350 sites. It's a constant process. We are constantly, every month, we have about 20 schools that we upgrade. The only schools that we could not upgrade are 100 lease locations, about 96 lease locations, which have lease less than five years. Those are the ones we could not

upgrade yet because it's not capital eligible. Apart from that, we have upgraded all the sites in the last capital plan, and now we are starting to upgrade the ones that we did five years ago. It's like painting the bridge all over again. It's a constant progress. Every location that we have is eligible for 1GB internet bandwidth. The schools that have large enrollment and large bandwidth are prioritized first. And as of right now, we do not have any school which is pending a request for bandwidth upgrade.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And all schools have technology. If we were to do a test run tomorrow, every single student have a device in the school building that works, and they can test run the system?

CHIEF SHAKIL: With regards to bandwidth, yes. With respect to devices, we have handed over all our devices to the schools. Schools is responsible for distributing those devices to the students, and we are there to support the school.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, the school is responsible for the inventory. They will know how many are working, how many are not. They know to take it off the inventory to make sure it's working?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. So can I just do a couple things to circle back on the testing one, and then devices. So, I would just say on testing, it is something we have been keeping a very close eye on. It's obviously critical. We're mid-cycle this year, but we did have grades five and eight in SAT and PSAT transition last year. And it wasn't on New York One, and everything went very smoothly in that process.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You noticed I wasn't, right?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I did, did notice that very much. And so I would say this, so that was grades five and eight. And that was about 250,000 tests. This year, four and six are shifting, and then next year we're finishing that off. So that is going smoothly to date, and of course PSAT and SAT have as well. Going into that process, and more broadly, we have various ways that DIIT and DSL work with our schools together to make sure we are prepared. We do have a central inventory of data, but schools are doing the school-by-school inventory of what's working and what isn't, and ensuring they're ready both for testing days and for the possibility

of remote transition days. When Shakil was saying we handed this over, we're still tracking, we still have data, but one of the challenges is we no longer have central funding for devices anymore. So while we had COVID relief money that was put towards devices, that money has expired. There is not money, or it's spent, it's not expired. There's not money in the capital plan. So in terms of as schools need to get more devices, that's something that's now happening through the school budget process. We ensure they have contracts available. We support them, there are good contracts, but schools are the ones doing that side of it now.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Who's providing the funding for that to happen? Is that already in SAMs or in their galaxy? How's that happening?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: That funding is generally coming from school budgets and will continue to going forward. We're setting up a new process this year, actually, as a part of the school budget process itself to say to schools, what does your inventory look like, what do you think you need for next year, do you have it, is that something you can support, and I think that school-by-school

process will help us see how much greater that needs to be.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And if they can't support, it's a smaller school, the school budget is smaller. Is that where you come in and support?

DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: It is certainly something we will be looking at as we get this data coming in this year, as we transition this over, yes, and whether it's appeals or something else like that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And have you been doing test runs for a potential remote day, a potential, have you been testing the system?

CHIEF SHAKIL: Yes. Every quarter, we are testing our system to ensure that it's scalable and able to manage remote education if needed. We just recently conducted a test a few weeks ago, and we are very satisfied with the results, with the scaling, and the work that has gone in the last six months to ensure if there's a remote day, every student is able to log in successfully with no issues.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you all for your testimony. First Deputy Chancellor, thank

you for hanging out with me today. And Emma, thank you.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Always a pleasure, truly.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Always a pleasure.

FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Truly, thank you, Chair. Thanks very much, and thank you, staff.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Senator Liu is in the building with his class from Columbia University, MPS. Are you still here? All right, where you at? Oh, they're up there? Hi, Senator Liu. Hi, Chair.

I'd like to shout out Mel's from Queens, Bay School from the Bronx. Are you here? And International Studies, Harvest Collegiate High School, and MS246.

I remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding, and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio

or video recording as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's preliminary budget hearing. If you are a student testifying today, please make a note of this on your appearance card in order to prioritize student panels. If you have written testimony, or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email testimony at testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

Mr. Kelly, you may start.

DALE KELLY: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and Members of the City Council. I am Dale Kelly, Executive Vice President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, speaking on behalf of President Henry Rubio and representing over 17,000

in-service and retired school leaders. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

School safety is our top concern. Principals, APs, and administrators across the city are raising the alarm. Our schools are less safe than they've been in decades. The number of school safety agents has steadily decreased, leaving many schools without the coverage they need. Recruitment has stalled, and without a citywide plan to address the shortage, our concerns grow. Pre-pandemic, safety agents numbered approximately 5,000-plus. As of today, they hover around 3,000. We must develop a systematic framework to ensure more agents are placed where they are needed most. We must continue investing in school safety infrastructure, particularly cameras and buzzer systems. We must repair and replace metal detectors and scanners and provide this technology to any school that asks for it. We need to invest in restorative practice and mental health support. Every teacher and administrator should be trained in restorative practice, restorative justice, and we need funding for counselors to engage students directly in their classrooms. Bullying, harassment, and gang violence

are real issues, and early interventions can prevent conflicts from escalating.

Beyond safety, we must talk about funding, because every priority in education depends on it. We commend the City for their continued funding for Summer Rising and career readiness programs, but we cannot afford to lose investments in early childhood education, community schools, and arts programs. We understand the fiscal challenges, but cutting direct services in schools harms New York City families, particularly when there is uncertainty regarding the future of the federal Department of Education. I was happy this afternoon when I heard Chancellor Ramos speak about the Summer Rising impact analysis. I think part of that success was attributed to the fact that the Chancellor and the Department engaged school leaders and engaged the principal advisory group to speak about what went well during summer, what didn't go well, what needed to be retweaked, and I think that bear fruit. So I commend the Chancellor and Department on those efforts.

One of the biggest concerns is the class size mandate. Every educator knows that smaller classes benefit students, but the City must provide

schools with the funding to make it work. Schools need more teachers, more space, and more supervisors to handle the additional workload. The fair student funding formula must be updated to align with the new class size limits. Without an adjustment, we risk leaving our most vulnerable students, students with disabilities, those in temporary housing, and English language learners without the resources they need.

Professional development for school leaders remains a top priority, and we hope you will continue to support the Executive Leadership Institute, ELI, which provides our members with peer-driven workshops, mentoring, and other critical supports that has a tremendous impact on New York City families. There is no entity that has done more to recruit, train, and retain our principals than ELI and its flagship Principal Preparation Program.

Earlier, Council Member Brewer spoke about an issue that I didn't anticipate speaking about, but I want to address. She spoke about the investigator headcount at SCI. Please note, Chair Joseph, that apart from the SCI headcount issue, Department of Education also has two investigative arms, OSI and OEO. Both of those agencies, too, face

headcount issues with the investigator. The number of 11,000 cases that were cited by Council Member Brewer earlier for SCI is actually a smaller number than the number of cases that are referred to OSI, and the unfortunate reality is that approximately half of those cases that are referred to OCI get kicked back to schools to handle school-based investigations. Simply put, our principals, our assistant principals are not investigators. They're educators (TIMER CHIME) and shouldn't be pulled away from their duties to do these investigations so we ask that that be looked at.

And I also want to take an opportunity, Chair Joseph, because you hit the nail on the head when you asked that question about the technology infrastructure in our schools, specifically the devices that are going to be needed for online testing. The Department shared the burden has now been shifted to schools to repair laptops and other devices. As we know, since pandemic, those machines sometimes go home, and unfortunately, they sometimes come back, and they're in disrepair. And it's not right that schools are now being expected to foot the bill to repair machines that our children desperately

need. The Department needs to hold the onus of repair, upkeep, maintenance of those machines, which was always part of their fiscal responsibility. That cannot be put onto schools because, as you fairly put, many schools don't have the fiscal resources to keep all of those laptops and other devices in good repair.

Lastly...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Lastly.

DALE KELLY: I apologize, Chair Joseph. I just want to take the opportunity because you said something earlier also that really struck a chord. We, too, believe that there needs to be proactive measures put in place to address the potential shortcoming of the 2 billion dollars that are brought from federal funding. To that end, we've already begun addressing State Legislators during our Lobby Day visit in Albany to really stress the importance of some of the unintended and/or intended consequences of any shortcoming in Title I funding from the federal government. Our children deserve safe schools, smaller classes, and fully-funded programs. We look forward to working with you to

ensure that this budget meets the needs of all of our school communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Does the DOE recently design a process which only principals can apply for this class-size funding? The information New York City Public School put out said the announcement would be made so as to which school would be awarded class-size reduction funding. Have you heard from principals about this process and what's their thought on this approach?

DALE KELLY: We thought it was a very good approach. This sort of coalition of the willing approach that we took. Unfortunately, this Fiscal Year, many schools that did not have the wherewithal to reduce class sizes were given class-size reduction money. So we really want to take a targeted approach for Fiscal Year '26 that those schools who had the space to actually help move the needle toward meeting the 60 percent threshold were given the funds to do so. To that end, every principal, in conjunction with their school leadership teams and constituents, had an opportunity to apply for additional class-size funding. The Chancellor shared that over 800 of our school principals and their teams took the

opportunity to do so. The DOE, in conjunction with CSA and UFT, are in the process of now looking through all of those applications. We are hoping to make a decision and determination on funding the vast majority of those schools, and we're hoping that that can happen, hopefully, by the close of this month.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.

GLENYS RIVERA: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and City Council Members. I am Glenys Rivera, Second Vice President of Local 372, under the leadership of President Sean D. Francois, I. I am here to speak on behalf of our 24,000 members, including 8,000 school lunch workers, regarding the Mayor's proposed education budget.

School lunch workers play a vital role in ensuring nearly a million students in public schools receiving nutritious meals, which are especially crucial for children from underserved communities. Last year, the City restored 25 million dollars to school foods, bringing back popular menu items. However, additional staffing is necessary to fully support these initiatives. We respectfully request 10 million dollars to hire 1,000 more school lunch workers, alleviating the burden on the current

workforce and ensuring high-quality meals preparation.

Beyond staffing, inaccurate ventilation and air conditioning in schools' kitchens remain a serious health and safety concern. Many kitchens in older buildings reach an extreme temperature of 120 degrees, affecting workers' well-being. We urge the DOE and the School Construction Authority to access ventilation issues across the schools and to allocate funding for necessary upgrades.

In closing, we want to thank the City Council for its ongoing support and request further investment in school lunch staffing and kitchen conditions. These improvements are essential to maintaining a safe and efficient food program for all New York City students. Thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. The 20 million was added for school staffing for Fiscal 2025. How has this funding helped in recruiting and retaining?

GLENYS RIVERA: I can submit that information to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because earlier in the hearing, New York City Public Schools said they only hired 150 out of the 1,000 kitchen workers that were supposed to be hired. How many have you guys hired? Oh, you want to get back to me on that.

GLENYS RIVERA: I want to get back to you on that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you so much.

GLENYS RIVERA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: President Mulgrew.

MICHAEL MULGREW: Good afternoon and thank you, Chair. And I do appreciate you having these hearings in such an important time. Two days this week, we've spent in Albany just lobbying on behalf of the City of New York and on behalf for our school system, and I will reiterate some of the messaging I used up there.

We have prepared and have coordinated all sorts of contingencies now about any sort of federal action that will do anything to our schools. That includes Medicaid cuts that would all automatically become education cuts, and people need to be aware of that, and we were happy to see that both the Assembly

and the Senate started realizing and started moving in a better direction in terms of the actual funding for our school system because of a change in the weighting on the formula for Foundation Aid.

But I also want to talk about a couple of other things quickly. Our programs, as always, thank you for your partnership and everybody in City Council is always welcome to come and see their dollars at work actually with children and teachers because that's where it should be.

Class size, we are working with the Department of Education. There are always challenges, but I am happy to report that those challenges seem to be getting worked out, but there are going to be more coming into the future. But more importantly right now, it's the biggest problem we're having, which is our special needs, our inability to even staff the needs of the students of New York City. I want to thank people in City Council working on our paraprofessional equity bill because we cannot fix this through collective bargaining. And right now, even though we were able to get, because of our political pressure and actions of parents and elected officials and five different hiring halls for

paraprofessionals, we were able to hire over 1,500 parents, but we're still over 1,500 short. And I want to put that in perspective for everybody. That means every day in New York City Public Schools are over 1,500 students who do not have a paraprofessional. That means we're out of compliance, but compliance is the least of the problem. The problem is that child is in distress and has even greater challenges in the process of their education on that day. And it's not fair to the students and it's not fair to their parents. And the issue has become very clear. The pay is just not enough for people to live in New York City. It's not enough and the wages are too low and I know people have responded to us, well, that's a union collective bargaining issue. Well, it's not when the City continues to adhere to a practice known as patent bargaining and will only give raises based on percentages and our paraprofessionals for over 20 years, those percentages have created a pay and equity gap because they have less buying power now than they did 25 years ago as compared to the other titles in our school system. So, we are looking to create a program, a program outside of collective bargaining that will allow us to start to work with

the City to say number one, we have to solve the problem of the paras and, number two, we (TIMER CHIME) need to change the practices of collective bargaining because this should never be happening to any low wage workers no matter what union they are in in the City of New York. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, President Mulgrew. How would UFT characterize the progress on compliance with the class size? Earlier you said it was going well.

MICHAEL MULGREW: Well, it's right now, the target for this year for September will be 60 percent of the classes. We're not completely there yet, but we are definitely getting to the point where we are confident we will meet our 60 percent target. The next phase though becomes more challenging because we have to start to coordinate with the School Construction Authority about actually where the creation of seats and schools are going to be needed in the city. This is a break from any way the City has sited schools or annexes before. This is actually going to be based off the needs of the community, I don't have time to mince words, not off the political needs of individuals because what this

law actually said besides the children of New York City deserve this equitable treatment is that when you're siting schools, it has to be based off of the need of the community. For years, we have been siting schools not just on the needs of the community. We all know it's a political process and who's in power and who has sway and it should never be done that way. First thing we have to do is meet the needs of the community, and that's the next phase which is where we're going to have to have a coordination that the City agencies have never had before.

MICHAEL MULGREW: Did you get a chance to analyze the proposed change for Foundation Aid in the Assembly and the Senate budget that was just released?

MICHAEL MULGREW: Yes. The weight about the local cost is very good, but it's not enough. We have different, New York City, as you all know, is the largest school system with the greatest number of challenges. The L weights are not right, okay? So we need to have the English language learner weights have to be adjusted. We have to adjust the rates. We have to include such things as homelessness as part of an actually weighted formula. There are things

that need to be done, and we've never been against this. We've been actually advocating for years to change the Foundation Aid formula but in a holistic way, not in pick one category way and that's what's happened at this point in time. The State picked one category. Well, what happens with that one category is it did a disservice to New York City. So, I will say that in our conversations in Albany that there is a recognition that this has to be adjusted and fixed and we will continue to lobby on behalf of our City school system to make sure to do everything in our power, working with you as always to get this done.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the greatest obstacle in hiring paraprofessionals?

MICHAEL MULGREW: The salary. Very simple. It's their salary. And I want to be clear in what has been proposed, people are like, well, it's 10,000 dollars. They don't understand that's a specific number that means that a paraprofessional from 20 years ago would now with that 10,000 dollars would just be where they were in terms of buying power, where they were 20 years ago when compared to the other titles in the Department of Education so it literally is just trying to get them back to the same

place they were 20 years ago. And we have a further plan to say we need to change these so-called rules that the City wants to follow on patent bargaining because patent bargaining did not start in the public sector, it started in the private sector, and in our historical research of it, it had a specific provision for this issue where if a title, because it was a low wage title, over time if it became a problem to hire those workers, that would be taken outside of patent bargaining. And I think every union in the city has become quite frustrated by that stance of the City and their only solution is to tell all the other workers that if you want to give this title a raise, you all have to pay for it, but then you still got to get us to agree how much we'll allow you to do so I don't know anywhere else in the world where the other workers are supposed to pay for people we can't hire because the wages aren't high enough.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.

MICHAEL MULGREW: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

MICHAEL MULGREW: Have a good evening,
everyone.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You do the same,
thank you.

Marty Gloster, Generation Citizens panel.
Djeneba Toure, if I'm butchering your name, please
forgive me. Alix Torres, Lorens Rodriguez, Lauren
Manca, Soleidy Marta, and Christina Karah... forgive
me. Is everyone here?

You may begin.

CHRISTINA KARAHISARLIDIS: Good afternoon,
Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on
Education. Thank you for the opportunity to submit
testimony on behalf of Generation Citizen. My name is
Christina Karahisarlidis, and I am a Program Manager
at GC.

Through our community-based civics
curriculum, middle and high school students apply
social studies learning to the real world by studying
and advocating on an issue of importance in their
communities. Before joining GC, I was a teacher in
the NYC DOE for nearly a decade, and it is an honor
to be here today alongside dedicated educators,
hardworking changemakers, and our inspiring students.
Thank you for fighting for a stronger budget for New
York City DOE schools. Increasing the current level

of education funding is crucial to preserving critical services to our pre-K to 12th grade students, especially as we combat learning loss, work to improve mental health of our young people, and ensure that our students are properly prepared for the world they are going to enter when they leave secondary education.

In my previous role as a high school English teacher at various Title I schools, I saw firsthand the detrimental effects that decreasing school budget has on our students. My students' emotional and learning needs were not met because there was not always enough staff at hand. If we see more budget cuts, that could mean that even more students may not be able to meet with a school counselor, students with disabilities and English language acquisition needs may not receive the services that they need, and our immigrant population may not receive a school placement in a proper timeframe. At a time when federal funding support is quite uncertain, we need New York City to continue to lead and to ensure that our schools, where our youth spend much of their time, are properly funded and supported. While we are glad to see that the

Administration has allocated some resources for financial literacy and professional development skills, civic education is an area that has long been underfunded in fiscal support and understated as a learning priority. How can we expect our young people to affect positive change in society if they don't know how to advocate for their needs of their community? We at GC believe that public service and civic engagement should be prioritized as cornerstones of the educational curriculum. We believe that more can be done to ensure our youth are as prepared as possible for their adult lives.

Today, we are thrilled to present the work of one of our partners, Global Learning Collaborative, in Council Member Brewer's District. Social studies teacher Martin Gloster and high school students Djeneba Toure, Alix Torres, Lorens Rodriguez, Lauren Manca, and Soleidy Marte will share issues and concerns that emerged from their implementation of GC's curriculum this year in relation to the proposed budget cuts. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support. I will now pass it over to Martin Gloster.

MARTIN GLOSTER: Good afternoon, Council Members. And thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Martin Gloster. I teach a variety of social studies classes at the Global Learning Collaborative. It's a small public high school on the Brandeis campus on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

So, I'm here in partnership with the fantastic Generation Citizen community-based civics program and as a very proud teacher to support these five incredible students to my right who are going to testify before you. So, I'm also here as a deeply concerned educator to implore this Council not to cut funding for mental health services in our City's budget. The mental health crisis among our youth, it's real, it is growing, and it is much more urgent than I think that has been reported. And I think we know that this crisis largely stems from the COVID pandemic, which has, in my opinion, crushed a generation of kids and the subsequent effects of their addictive cell phone and social media use. So presently, our schools, they're at a breaking point because the past several years have really left an indelible mark on the mental wellbeing of all young

people. I'm seeing anxiety, depression, rates that are at all-time highs. I see these effects every day in the classroom, quite frankly, I'm overwhelmed as a teacher, and I often struggle to do my job on a daily basis, which is to teach content, to teach social studies and skills, because I'm primarily playing the role of a therapist for the majority of my teaching periods. And as a result, I feel like I'm teaching largely in a triage-like situation, and the effects of that, they're not sustainable for anyone. Thus, I'm asking for the City Council to not cut funding for mental health services, but rather increase them.

In closing, our City cannot afford to abandon its children. If we claim to care about education and the future of New York, then we must act accordingly. Maintaining and expanding mental health services for youth must be a priority in this budget so I'm urging the Council to protect mental health funding, protect our children, protect our future. Thank you for the time.

DJENEBA TOURE: Good morning, esteemed Members of City Council. My name is Djeneba Toure, and I'm a 12th grader at the Global Learning Collaborative. As a student growing up in the Bronx,

I've had to navigate multiple identities. Code switching from being an African to being a Black to be a little less ethnic, and even adjusting my speech and mannerism to fit into different spaces. But one thing that has remained constant was the lack of representation of my history in my education today. Thus, I am advocating for the inclusion of critical race theory and a mandatory African American history course in all NYC public schools.

New York City is one of the most diverse places in the world, yet our curriculum seems to be incomplete when it comes to the version of American history. African American history is often reduced to slavery and the civil rights movement, failing to recognize the full scope of Black contribution, struggle, and achievement. Without this knowledge, students are left unprepared and don't seem to be able to understand the racial inequalities that still shape our society. We cannot let our education fall at the hands of people who do not understand us. Having to be the one to mention the Sao Joao Baptista ship that carried human cargo from Angola to being the only one who understood the history of the nation of Liberia, I remember sitting in history class

learning about the founding fathers and the Constitution, yet hearing only brief mentions of slavery, only being able to see Black history begin and end with oppression. That's not our story.

So, no one has talked about the countless Black inventors, scholars, and activists beyond the common names of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. The gap in the knowledge leaves students like me searching for our own history outside of the classroom. Critical race theory is not about division. It's about education. It equips students with critical thinking skills to examine history, law, and social structures, helping them understand how race has shaped their institutions. To make this possible, I believe we need to be funding for teacher training, updating curriculum materials, and community partnerships. This is not about funding education. It's about funding the truth. We cannot call ourselves an educated society if we are not willing to teach the full truth. We cannot fall in line with states like Florida who believe that this is something that should be hidden. Representation in history is not a privilege. It is a right. If we truly want to prepare our students to be leaders,

decision makers, and change makers, we need to equip them with knowledge that reflects the realities of the world they live in. The fight for racial justice starts in the classroom. Let's make it happen. Thank you.

ALIX TORRES: Good afternoon. My name is Alix, and I appreciate this chance to testify at the hearing today. I'm an 11th grader at the Global Learning Collaborative, and thanks to the Generation Citizen Program, I have had the opportunity to testify before you today.

An issue that greatly speaks to me is the effects of classes on the learning ability of the students. My class examined issues that affect us in our community and came to a consensus on one item to address together. After much deliberation, we decided to focus on the consequences of budget cuts on merging classes, notably large class sizes, and established a goal of advocating for more resources to ensure a quality education for all children and sufficient accommodation for all teachers.

Maintaining the school budget is essential to reaching our goal because cramped classrooms hinder learning and make it hard for teachers to give each

student individualized attention. Attention directed to our students is extremely beneficial since it makes us feel seen. It helps the students connect with our teachers and feel secure enough to ask the proper questions without leaving us embarrassed. Teacher attention has a huge impact on our learning, helping us understand the concept or motivation, behavior, and our overall well-being. Individualized attention promotes academic performance, increases engagement, encourages our positive conduct, and builds our self-esteem. The fact is, large class sizes are harmful for education. As a student who has attended classes that could easily be broken into two, this has had a significant impact on my ability to concentrate and feel at ease in the classroom. A big student body forces the teacher's attention to shift away from aiding the students who need it and towards the students who are creating a distraction. In a smaller class, this problem could have been much easier to resolve.

Finally, I ask you to prioritize funding for our schools so that every student has access to a decent education. Budget cuts have resulted in overcrowded classrooms, fewer resources, and

insufficient support, all of which have had negative influence on learning. Students deserve to thrive in an atmosphere with teachers who have availability to support them and the resources it requires to achieve. I ask that you protect and enhance your school funding in order to lower class sizes, restore critical resources, and invest in our education's future. Our success is dependent on your actions, and we hope you will join with students in making education a priority. Thank you for your time and attention.

LORENS RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lorens Rodriguez, and I am a junior at the Global Learning Collaborative. As part of the Generation Citizen Civics program that we partner with, I am here today to share my concern on the budget cuts to NYC DOE schools' special education programs.

As the eldest sibling in my family with one younger sister and a brother, I have seen how crucial these programs are, not just for education, but for working families as well. My mother, like many parents, depends on schools and afterschool

programs where kids are able to do their homework and participate in fun activities while being provided with a safe, structured, and fun environment as she works as a home attendant and takes care of daily responsibilities. Cutting funding to such programs will result in countless families like mine struggling with fewer options for childcare, education, and support services. This would be devastating to my family.

Additionally, these cuts will harm students' learning and development as many children rely on early education to build foundational skills. Personally, I experienced most of my elementary school journey in the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico, but I can say that although I didn't get to experience the early education programs in this city, the afterschool programs I was able to be a part of did play a role in my academic journey where I was given support for my homework assignments but was also able to develop new hobbies and a love for the arts, which is why I applied to the school that I now attend. Without these programs, kids will be joining school unprepared, making the transition harder and widening their achievement gap. Programs

like this, I believe, have played an immense role in helping me become the honorable student I am now to have the courage as a 16-year-old to testify in front of the City Council.

Moreover, I believe the clubs and afterschool programs that I've attended, such as Model UN, Mock Trial, and Student Government have also helped me academically and socially, providing me with an opportunity to come outside of my comfort zone and really put myself out there, while also gaining knowledge and an experience that will help me shape my future.

If the goal is to invest in our city's future, then I believe cutting funding from education is the wrong move. I urge the City to prioritize our schools, support working families, and ensure every child has access to the resources they need to succeed. Thank you.

LAUREN MANCA: Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Lauren Manka, and I'm a 15-year-old sophomore at the Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

This semester, I have been participating in a community-based civics project through Generation Citizen. For this project, my class discussed issues that impact us within our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After much debate, we decided to focus on access to mental health services and set a goal to keep them available in schools. COVID-19 has had a major effect on the school systems, which has put extra stress on students. At-home workloads were increased, and kids were expected to keep up with these new changes easily. Challenges like this can take a toll on students' mental health. Having a mental health counselor or a program that students can rely on gives them a space to talk about difficult matters. Going back to school after COVID-19 was a stressful experience for myself and many other students. After being so used to fully digital school, it was very hard to return to an in-person classroom. When my school implemented a mental health program where we receive weekly lessons, I felt like I could handle more of my schoolwork on a day-to-day basis. Having a counselor who understood our challenges made me feel better since I knew that I

was not the only person struggling. Evidently, COVID had a large effect on the mental health of many students, and we are still dealing with it today.

Having mental health facilities available in schools allows children to feel like they have a place to go that is free of judgment, since many of them may not have a family member that they can speak to about their struggles. All of this is why I'm asking the New York City City Council to not cut the funding for mental health programs in schools. It is extremely important and helpful for the growth of students, especially after events that have occurred in the last five years. Thank you.

SOLEIDY MARTE: Testing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Soleidy Marte, and I'm a 14-year-old freshman at the Global Learning Collaborative on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This semester, I've been participating in a community-based civics project through Generation Citizen. For this project, my class discussed various issues impacting our community and built consensus around one topic to address collectively. After thoughtful discussion and debate, we decided to focus on improving access to mental

health providers and set a goal to increase the availability of school-based mental health services so that students can receive the support they may need.

As a teenager, I've experienced how challenging it can be to balance school, family, and personal struggles. When I feel alone in these matters, I feel more distanced from my goals, those inspirations that inspire me each day and instill hope for a brighter future. It's isolation and pressure to maintain social relationships, excel academically, and handle responsibilities. During my fourth-grade year, when COVID-19 struck, the impact on my mental health and educational development was profound. The sudden transition from daily in-person interactions with classmates and teachers felt isolating. The routine of school life disappeared, leading to a repetitive cycle that reduced my motivation. The effects of the period are still present, emphasizing the need for schools to prioritize more accessible mental health resources at school. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense disruption on my education, arguably unlike anything that has ever been seen before in world history. Now

we're facing a growing mental health crisis among young people because issues stemming from the pandemic have yet to be truly dealt with in our schools. For example, many students do not have someone in their lives of whom they can turn to, leaving many to feel hopeless and alone. As a result, they gravitate to isolating themselves on their cell phones. Something that can first show help with this is more mental health providers in our schools. Therefore, I'm asking the NYC City Council to not cut mental health services at school from the budget to ensure that students like me have a safe space to talk, seek help, and learn how to cope with life's challenges. Thank you so much for allowing me to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you for being here. I have some good news for you. We launched a Black Studies curriculum, and it made the New York Times from K to 12. Despite what's coming out of federal government, we will continue to carry it, and it doesn't only support slavery, we talk about all of the great things that Black Americans have done in this country, from music to economics to science, we cover all of that.

DJENEBA TOURE: Perfect.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you see, you will be seen in the curriculum and this Council launched a Latin-A curriculum as well.

UNIDENTIFIED: That would be amazing, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We see you. What is the largest class size this year? Anyone can answer, anyone on the panel. What was the largest class size?

ALIX TORRES: Okay. We have AP Psychology, so we're dealing with like 30, like around.

DJENEBA TOURE: Yeah, there were 34 kids and one teacher.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One teacher.

DJENEBA TOURE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is your smallest class this year?

DJENEBA TOURE: Three students in the Biliteracy course.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The Biliteracy course. Council Member Dinowitz would be not happy. How many counselors are in your schools? How many students?

DJENEBA TOURE: There are two counselors. One counselor for 10th and 9th grade and another for 12th and 11th. And in each grade, there's about 100 kids.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Your teacher mentioned mental health in connection with cell phone use. What do you think about the proposed statewide phone ban during school day? On the record.

MARTIN GLOSTER: Thank you for that question. I'm very much in favor of that. Needs to have teeth, can't be left to the teacher, can't be left to the schools. There have to be consequences. It just has to be enforceable. I feel like what I've been reading recently, it seems like they're going to start chipping away at that. There needs to be funding for the program. There needs to be manpower. I'm in a building that has five schools so how do you actually have a "cell phone ban?" What does that look like? There has to be funding for that. And if there isn't, it just kind of falls by the wayside. It's very hard to do on a day-in and day-out basis. Like how do you prevent a student from not being on their phone?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. So the State has to step up. I can't mandate you to tell you what to do, but the State can so let them figure it out. Thank you so much for your panel.

MARTIN GLOSTER: Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

I'm going to call the next panel. Logan Vanhoutte, are you here, Logan? She's coming. I can't read this. Chaplain.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Chaplain Sondra Mitchell.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Chaplain Sondra Mitchell, Hadia Ali, Orla Flynn, Noura Ayoub, Mololuwa Fasola, am I saying it right, and Ihel Nunez, and Janice Chong.

Is Chaplain Sondra Mitchell here? Hadia Ali. If I butcher your name, forgive me. Orla Flynn, Noura Ayoub, am I saying it right? Thank you. Mololuwa Fasola, Ihel Nunez, and Janice Chong. Did I get everybody? Everybody here?

Hi, welcome back. Happy to see you.

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What grade are you in now?

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Third.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Third grader? All right. Good. Getting ready for your first city exams.

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Huh?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Getting ready for your first city exams. Oh my goodness. Congratulations.

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You ready to start?

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, go ahead. Tell me your full name.

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Hi. I'm Logan Vanhoutte, a third grader at the Brooklyn Brownstone School in Bed-Stuy. First, I want to say thank you to the City Council and especially Councilwoman Joseph. I was here last year, and you made me feel respected and like I did good work. You saved important parts of my school, like our social workers, so thank you.

I'm here today because our presidential people are taking away 50 percent of the US Department of Education, and it might get worse. Me and fellow kids will be your future doctors, teachers, artists, actors, and lawyers and we need

education, so we would like New York City to invest in our future. Education is not just about math, science, and reading, even though those things are super important. It's also about our community, our arts, our 3K and pre-K, our mental health, our teachers, and our people. When you're deciding how to spend our taxes, please try to put our education first. We need it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And I listened to you last year, and I put all of that first, especially your social worker, right?

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Go ahead.

IHEL NUNEZ: Good afternoon, Chairperson and Members of the Committee. Thank you for having me here. I am Ihel Nunez, an 11th grader at the Young Women Leadership School of the Bronx in District 7. I am here with the YA-YA Network and Dignity in Schools to advocate for more funding for restorative justice practices in schools.

As a student who's involved in the peer mediation program started by my restorative justice team, I have seen firsthand how students are being helped and how arguments have been avoided by just

talking and understanding each other. Think of how many more fights and suspensions can be avoided if we have stable and reliable funding for these programs. Early this year, I witnessed one of the worst fights of my life. It took 40 minutes for a safety agent to come to the classroom. And by the time they got there, teachers, educators already had de-escalated situation and even some got hurt. Since I was there and officially trained as a peer mediator, I was asked to help mediate the discussion between the students while we waited for parents to come. Because of the severity of the fight, we had external help who met once a week for an hour to talk with the students separately and together while they were suspended. This wasn't enough, not enough time, not enough dedication, which led to another fight that happened right after the students came back to school. Apart from that, there was little to no reintegration of the students into school life, which caused a lot of tension between groups leading to more fights. That's why we need this funding to be baselined. We need to know for certain that schools have the resources to avoid these situations. We need 16 million dollars directly to schools to have

teachers, deans, and community volunteers to be properly trained in restorative justice practices so they can handle these situations more effectively. 80 million to 500 schools to have RJ coordinators which can relieve the workload from counselors who take up multiple roles leading them to be overworked. We have seen how these practices work, and not have only they improved schools socially, but suspension rates have been lower, racial disparities have been reduced, and improvement in mental health within communities have been increased. But in order for this to happen, you Committee Members have to make sure that this funding is baselined and that the resources are here for everyone. It's up to you to prove that you care about the students of New York City.

MOLOLUWA FASOLA: Good afternoon, and thank you for having me. My name is Mololuwa Fasola, and I'm currently a junior at Forest Hills High School. I'm a youth leader with the Circle Keepers and the Dignity in Schools Campaign, which aim to bring restorative justice into schools and communities and help dismantle the school to prison pipeline. I'm here to advocate for the City to fully fund 80 million dollars for the continuation of RJ

coordinators in 500 schools as well as 5 million for the mental health continuum. These funds will not only keep students safe and protected in their schools, but also provide them with the mental health services and education they deserve.

During my time in this program, it has educated me on the importance and effectiveness restorative justice has done to our youth. For example, last Saturday, I got the opportunity to co-facilitate a discussion at Columbia University about restorative justice to a group of adults. Restorative justice uses the elimination of punitive methods and fights to create and build a community derived off of trust and inclusion. These approaches have been proven to decrease fighting and bullying in schools, improve students' behaviors, and reduce the rate at which students get suspended and expelled. My school, on the other hand, consistently uses punitive approaches such as suspensions and detentions as their way to discipline students. As you can imagine, this doesn't solve the root of the problem and keeps kids in the cycle of fighting, being disruptive in class and simply being pushed out of school in general. In relation to this, it can cause many

students to see a downward spike in their mental health, leaving them left with anxiety and depression. No student will feel happy and safe knowing they go to a hostile school and the administration does not solve the root of the issue. I know these funds will go towards making school a safer and more engaging environment for students to fully express themselves and live up to their capabilities. We are demanding that the City should fund 800 million dollars in RJ coordinators as well as 5 million in the mental health continuum. With this shift, us students will stop living in fear and as criminals but for the talented and creative people we should be nurtured for. Thank you.

NOURA AYOUBA: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, students, and members of the community. My name is Noura Ayoub. I'm a student at George Westinghouse High School and a youth leader with the Circle Keepers and a member of Dignity in Schools Campaign New York, a coalition of over 20 New York-based organizations consisting of students, parents, educators and advocates who work to create a system of school discipline and safety that is based on

mutual respect and problem solving and to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

I am here to call on the City to expand restorative justice and mental health services, including investing 80 million in hiring school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. I want our elected leaders to support the expansion of restorative justice programs to help eradicate the school-to-prison pipeline and also to baseline funds needed to support other critical programs that are at risk of being cut, including the mental health continuum. Having been in a public school system for half of my life, I have witnessed firsthand how things can escalate from small issues to large fights that do more harm than good. Students spend most of their lives in schools, so it should be a welcoming and inviting environment where they don't have to feel like criminals. I have experienced firsthand how things such as TSA security checks in the morning not only take away time used to learn or just get the school day started, but also make students feel a sense of criminalization. When students are met with these kinds of punitive and policing factors, it shows how this can create or add trauma to students'

everyday lives. I still remember vividly one day I was rushed to pick up my bags during the daily security check. I asked for a bit more time to pick up my things, but I was only met with a harsh response. Being blamed for advocating for myself against the school security. This is something that has personally traumatized me and I'll never forget as I broke down in tears. On the other hand, by instead of implementing relationship building and meditations and staffing schools with adults who can support kids when there is conflict can help us feel safer. NYC could be the one to lead in the fight and movement of changing schools for the better and ensuring that all public students thrive. We're here today because we want the City to put an effort to fund restorative justice programs for promoting non-punitive ways of resolving issues in schools. New York City could be the change for the best for all public school students, but that won't happen if our demands aren't met. Thank you.

ORLA FLYNN: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Orla Flynn. I am a high school senior from Queens and a youth leader of the Circle Keepers

Restorative Justice non-profit and the Dignity in Schools campaign.

I have come here today to ask the City to expand restorative justice by 80 million dollars in the FY26 budget to go directly to 500 schools to hire restorative justice coordinators. Schools should be sanctuaries of learning and community, and we should strive to ensure that we live up to that standard. When your school is equipped with restorative justice practices and social emotional supports, only then can we create a healthy and thriving community. Throughout my time with the Circle Keepers, I've seen firsthand the power that restorative practices can have, bringing people together through peer mediations and mental health support. I come from a school that is without cops and metal detectors and I can assure you as a student, we do not need heavy policing to keep us safe. In fact, punitive measures only ostracize and isolate kids from getting support. Throughout high school, I have skipped entire days of learning just to avoid the hours of detentions I would get for being late, and those detentions never helped me solve my behavior. These types of punitive measures, including suspensions and expulsions, only

make kids fall behind in their learning and, when it comes to school policing, it directly disrupts the dignity and safety of students who are Black and Brown. Let us divest from school policing and invest in students' well-being and safety. Redirect our City funding from surveillance to critical programs that are currently dependent on expiring city dollars and to expand restorative justice and create opportunities for youth to learn how to mediate challenges, take accountability, and build community. Thank you for your time.

HADIA ALI: Good afternoon, Chairwoman and members of the committee. My name is Hadia Ali and from PSU17 to Midwood High School, my whole life, I've spent my whole life living and going to school in District 45. I'm a junior in one of the many overcrowded high schools in this city, and I'm here today with the YA-YA Network and DSC to stress why funding for restorative justice is not just necessary but long overdue. When I first learned about restorative justice, it was introduced to me as a way of addressing conflict and, at first, I didn't completely understand the scope of it but the more I learned, the more I couldn't unsee the ways that my

school and many others consistently fail students because the conflict that RJ aims to repair goes far beyond fights or school disruptions. It addresses the culture of disconnect, distrust, and neglect that exists in our schools, the very culture that students are forced to navigate every single day. I've experienced this failure firsthand through how my school administration handles conflict, whether it's by calling the cops on students demonstrating a walkout or by handing out unwarranted suspensions during Regents Week or the way that it disproportionately suspends Black students and students with IEPs. Every single time conflict arises, no matter how minor, students brace themselves for punishment. In nearly every single circumstance, students are met with hostility and deprived of their right to advocate for themselves. And that's because conflict, regardless of the context, is always treated as something to be shut down, not something to be understood, addressed or resolved. And that dynamic, that culture of fear, fundamentally damages any real sense of community that exists within our schools. It's the reason that students feel disconnected and unheard and the reason

that teachers feel unsupported because when schools prioritize punishment over resolution, it prevents growth and understanding from everyone involved.

But it doesn't have to be like that. RJ is the exact intervention that could break that cycle, but only if it's properly and effectively funded. And that means 12 million dollars in baseline funding, 16 million dollars to transform deans into RJ coordinators, 75 million dollars to fund community-based initiatives, and 80 dollars million directly to 500 schools to hire RJ coordinators. This is about more than just reducing suspensions. It's about shifting the very culture of our school so that conflict does not immediately lead to punishment, but instead to understanding, repair, and growth. It's about ensuring that when students make mistakes, they're not criminalized, but supported. And it's about making sure that teachers aren't left to rely on punitive systems, simply because they have no resources to do otherwise. And most importantly, it's about recognizing that students in communities like mine don't struggle because they're inherently destructive. They struggle because they've been systematically denied the resources, care, and

investment that they are entitled to. You have the power to change that. So I'm asking you today, meet these demands, fully fund restorative justice in our schools, and prove to students like me that we are worth investing in. Thank you.

JANICE CHONG: Good afternoon, Chairwoman Joseph and Council Members at large. My name is Janice Chong, and I'm a youth organizer with the YA-YA Network and the Dignity in Schools campaign. As a student of the largest high school in America, I know firsthand how important having a supportive school environment is to students like me. However, my school recently experienced a hold where everyone was kept in their classrooms for over an hour and a half because there was a hunt for a student who pulled a weapon on another student during a fight. The amount of police officers, questions, and anxiety that filled the school that day was overwhelming. In those 100 minutes I sat in my AP stats class, I thought about how dangerous this hold was towards the supportive school environment that I know and love and how dangerous this hold was on the well-being of the student who was clearly going through a crisis. This is why I am here today to implore you Council

Members to grant 80 million dollars directly to schools to hire more community members in supportive roles rather than rely on the police. In the case of this hold, a community member trained in restorative justice would have been able to de-escalate the fighting situation between the two students, calm the student who pulled the weapon, and prevent the hold entirely. I know you might ask, why not fund more police officers in schools for more protection? Well, the NYPD isn't equipped with the necessary skills to help students in crisis. They're trained to catch criminals, not counsel students. Instead of using a method that predominantly hurts students of color, if you grant 80 million dollars towards restorative justice counselors, you will create a more nurturing school environment, which I know you guys all want. Without this money, you will irreparably perpetuate a system that ensures students are treated like prisoners and not people. Thank you for your time.

CHAPLAIN SANDRA MITCHELL: Good afternoon, everyone. I am so honored to be in your presence once again. The heart of the City, that's who you are.

Good afternoon. My name is Chaplain Sandra Mitchell, and I'm a parent leader with the New

Settlement Parent Action Committee. By profession, I am a mental health, behavioral health, and substance misuse counselor. The Parent Action Committee, PAC, is a member organization with the New York Dignity in Schools Coalition, where you see some of them are right here, and the Healing Centered Schools Working Group, and the Coalition for Equitable Education and Funding. We are a large conglomerate of people who will appeal to you and are really, really knowing that you could be our champion. You are our champion.

As a Bronx parent living in the Bronx for 55 years, a mental health advocate and counselor, it is clear that the City of New York needs to reinvest in our schools and our families and reinvest in social, emotional support for students and families, not increasing funding for policing. A student in crisis doesn't need policing, they need counseling and support. Our students and family need trauma-responsive care and culturally responsive healing-centered practices, not surveillance and cops. Our school staff needs to be provided with the support and guidance to develop trauma-responsive and healing-centered schools for all schools. It is time for New York City to reinvest in the highest quality

education that respects the dignity of all students and pursues restorative approaches to conflict and harm, reinvestment in supportive staff positions and continuous professional development. We're calling for funding to hire Black and Brown New Yorkers for jobs that support young people's social, emotional, and mental health. We need to hire necessary personnel such as restorative justice coordinators, paraprofessionals, community outreach staff, nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors. Reinvesting in our public schools is the right thing to do. We must protect, empower, inspire, and nurture the genius in our New York City students. This is how we should be reinvesting in our children and city's future. And the City, the Mayor, and City Council should no longer be invested in metal detectors and the policing of our youth. Our youth are not criminals. We should be investing in our future and not furthering the cradle to prison pipeline. It is our demand that the City Council invest 5 million in the mental health continuum, 80 million to fully fund restorative justice programming, and enough funding for supports for students in temporary housing, our most recent immigrants, community schools, 3K and

pre-K, immigrant family communication outreach, preschool, and students with special needs. I'm a student with a special need. I'm going back to school. We demand full (TIMER CHIME) equity and sustained funding for top-notch education. A City budget is a moral document. It reflects our City's and our leaders' priorities. We demand that New York City invest in the future of our children who are the future of New York City and the strength of the United States of America. Thank you for your listening ear. You've already done some of that work already. Amen.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Chaplain.
How many counselors are in your schools?

LOGAN VANHOUTTE: Two.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Two. How many?

IHEL NUNEZ: I have, in the school of 500 kids, like three.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Three. Okay.

MOLOLUWA FASOLA: In my school, there's about like 3,500 kids, and there's only around eight or nine counselors.

NOURA AYOUBA: In my school, we have roughly 500 kids because it's two schools, but specifically mine, we have like five counselors.

ORLA FLYNN: In my school, we have about 800 or so kids and about three or four counselors.

HADIA ALI: In my school, we have almost 4,000 kids and we have about 12 to 15 counselors, but two college counselors for 1,000 kids.

JANICE CHONG: In my school, we have over 6,000 kids and, yeah, it's a lot, we have about 10 to 12 student counselors and four college counselors.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are you aware of the support services in your school? Has anyone talked to you about mental health service, guidance counselors, and other services to support you?

JANICE CHONG: For my school, mental health is very pushed. Luckily, I'm privileged enough that my school has these opportunities, but it's not as expansive as I would like and it's not as expansive as students would be able to use to really benefit their education.

HADIA ALI: For my school, we have very limited mental health resources and, while I have a social worker, after my freshman year, she made me

aware that it was kind of a privilege for me to see her because after my freshman year, if you didn't have an IEP, you were not allowed to have access to a social worker, which is the only mental health support that is really in my school.

ORLA FLYNN: In my school, I'd say we do have some mental health supports, but it is difficult to make appointments with counselors, especially college counselors, so although those services are there, you can't exactly access those in a timely manner.

NOURA AYOUBA: In my school, we do have resources, but they're not as promoted as they should be and also, it's really hard to get a hold of our counselor because the work we do, it's a CTE school, so we have extra work that we have to do, so even if you want to meet with your counselor, she might not be there or he might not be there at the time that you need them, so yeah.

MOLOLUWA FASOLA: In my school, there's, I think, one social worker and they formally introduced themselves to us now, which I believe is ridiculous because I'm a junior and I went through three years of school without knowing that we have a social

worker and regardless, with 3,500 kids, one is not enough and they don't even come every day. They come, I think, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, which is not enough help and resources that our school needs.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So that means they're split between another school. Right.

What have you seen as the positive impacts of restorative justice programs in your school?

NOURA AYOUBA: I can start. So, we have our restorative justice counselor. She promotes events for students to come, and we also have our program organizer. They try to get students involved with the school but also to get students involved with each other. We have some programs that are between grades, so we get to meet with other students and also we have, oh, I forgot, yeah, that's all.

IHEL NUNEZ: My school has implemented a peer mediation program that I have started with my dean. At the beginning of this year, a lot of the freshmen were having fights for apparent no reason, according to the SSA agents and some teachers, so we just decided to, like, during lunch or maybe when they had, like, an advisory class, we would, like,

ask them if they could talk to us. That started up in mid-November, I think. So far, we haven't had a single fight after the one that happened in December and students are comfortable coming up to us. Suspension rates have lowered. I have, like, three, four freshmen that whenever they feel like they need to, like, push their anger out on something, they would come up to me and just talk and, like, just come ask, like, a friend to me. So, like, in my opinion, it has worked. I see the change in many of the students who have been suspended in the past and it's just, like, a better environment so far, so yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you for that. And those who have no type of restorative justice in your buildings, how are issues, if you have a problem, how are they resolved?

JANICE CHONG: Well, in my school, as I asserted in my testimony, it's a lot of police and because my school doesn't have restorative justice, when I join programs like the YA-YA Network or the Circle Keepers or the Dignity in Schools Coalition, it really shows the absence of how, like, the absence of restorative justice in schools is so detrimental.

When I came to these programs, I was astonished about how nurturing, how caring restorative justice is towards students and that's why we are all here, me and my peers are here to talk to you, who we know is, like, a champion for restorative justice and to really advocate for this funding because we all know that it's needed and I know personally that it's needed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you all for your testimony. Oh, go ahead, go ahead.

HADIA ALI: In my school, the school administration primarily deals with conflict through suspensions. Like I said in my testimony, they handed out a lot of suspensions during Regents Week for things that weren't, like, serious conflict. It was more just to, like, intimidate students. And in other cases where it was mainly conflict between administration and the students themselves and not violent. There was an instance where it was a peaceful walkout in June and my administration called, like, actual police, like, cop cars on us and it was just, it wasn't even SSAs because they were just standing there, they don't do much but, like, they called actual police cars on us.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Sorry you had to go through that. Thank you so much.

JANICE CHONG: Thank you. Before we leave, can I just ask for your commitment or verbal commitment to restorative justice funding?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This is just in the beginning stages, and so I'm mapping it out as we continue to negotiate. That's why I take feedbacks from young people. I always say, as I build out the budget, it's your voice that really matters and last year's budget was really, if you look at it, it was really your voices that was in that budget, not mine. So, I'm here to listen, take back, and fight when I get in those rooms.

JANICE CHONG: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're so welcome. Thank you.

Kira Healy, Becky Yang (phonetic), Nicolas Lipscomb, Amina Jallow, Emily Duenas, Sirahi Drame, Amber Colon, and Mamouna Doumbia.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: You may begin. We can start on this side.

SIRAHİ DRAME: Good afternoon. My name is Sirahi Drame, and I'm a junior at the Young Women's

Leadership School at the Bronx at District 9, working with YA-YA Network and (INAUDIBLE). Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you guys. We're often told how important education is, but I haven't seen that importance reflected in our schools, in our policies, in our funding. As someone who goes to school predominantly of people of color, I can't help but wonder how much of a priority our education truly is to those with the power to control it. You see, you know how many counselors I have in my school? Two to three for almost 500 students. Two to three compared to the several police officers. I mean, I see the police officers more than I see the counselors. When I get to school, I don't have access to my counselors when I need them most because they're too busy. This lack of support has had a large effect on my ability to learn when I'm struggling. Sometimes my school will have like random metal detectors that scan us. During those times, my school feels more like a prison than a place of learning. A lot of issues that happen at schools happen because of the lack of preventative measures such as mental health support. Police officers are trained to enforce laws, but keeping schools safe

also involves social issues like bullying, etc. It's hard for our school to feel like a nurturing environment with the presence of traditional law enforcement. The human brain is designed to protect us so, when kids don't feel safe, they fight, freeze, shut down. The internalization of harm grows stronger through suppression and isolation so, when kids get in trouble, we shouldn't meet that with aggression and harsh suspensions. We need to provide healing and compassion. More counselors, mental health professionals, and restorative justice in schools will provide that. When kids feel safe, they not only can but will learn. When I meet with my counselor, I get close to solving my issues, whereas police officers are reactive measures that leave me feeling on edge. I learn better, feel better, and leave better. When schools become locations for healing, they also become locations for learning.

Unfortunately, this lack of funding has stretched even more. My school didn't even have a chemistry teacher last year, and many of my classrooms don't even have enough chairs. These are the bare necessities. We shouldn't have to ask and fight for this. We need an educational experience that help us,

heal us, and set us up for success. We deserve so much more than just the lowest acceptable standards. That's why we're here today, demanding 80 million dollars to 500 schools, 75 million dollars to committee members, 12 million dollars for our baseline, and 16 million dollars to transform deans. It's not just time for more funding, but for funding to be used the most effective way when it comes to school safety and helping students. No more can we tolerate our asks to fall on deaf ears. Thank you.

AMBER COLON: All right. Good afternoon, good evening. My name is Amber Colon, and I was born and raised and went to school right here in Lower Manhattan. I'm a youth leader for a non-profit organization called The Circle Keepers, and I would like to first say, thank you for hearing me today.

We are here demanding that the City invest in 80 million dollars to hire school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. I'm here to help advocate with The Circle Keepers and the Dignity in School campaign that organizes with students, parents, and educators and advocates to create a system of school discipline and safety that is based on mutual respect and problem-solving and to

end the school-to-prison pipeline. I'm here to support these youth and this important work because we need the City to fund restorative justice programs and redirect funding from school police and policing the DOE. Our youth, me, we, are not criminals, so stop treating us as such. I'm doing this work for five years now. Since I was a freshman in high school, I've had witness how restorative justice is useful and what it's like when a school staff and students have a lack of restorative justice.

Restorative justice made me feel that my voice matters. Growing up, I was going to charter schools where there was always a toxic power dynamic and my voice was crushed by my staff and teachers, especially during COVID-19 where everyone felt hopeless. Circle Keepers and restorative justice gave me that hope. I started organizing because I realized that change can happen if you put the work into it and the youth are as important as anyone in this room today. I was able to create a safe space with youth power and youth voices. I've seen both worlds, a school with punitive measures. I knew at least two or more peers that had detention. I myself would skip school and stay home because I didn't feel safe or

heard by my teachers. On the other hand, going to a fully restorative school where issues were discussed and not only students but teachers took accountability for their actions, change was made and student voices were heard. All in all, a trust, a safe space, and a community was created. We're demanding that the City invest in 80 million dollars to hire school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. To make this happen, the City must shift funds away from school policing by ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring, and training of school police, and halting the expansion of surveillance and technology that criminalizes our students. Thank you.

KIRA HEALY: Good afternoon. My name is Kira Healy. I'm a 10th grade student in a downtown Brooklyn school and a leader at the Circle Keepers and a Dignity in Schools coalition.

I'm here to talk to you about a personal issue, something that hits home and has affected me deeply for far too long. Students with individualized education plans, otherwise known as IEPs, are being failed by an educational system that legally mandates their support but consistently falls short in meaningful implementation and over-criminalizes them,

and it's all because we are not given the accommodations needed. I am a kid with said IEP, and I am not getting what I need in my school, and it's been going on for over a year. I'm supposed to get speech, but my speech teacher is currently on maternity leave. And because of that, I haven't really been given speech at all this year because my school couldn't find another speech teacher to fill in. I also haven't been getting the special education teacher support services I am required by my IEP so I am currently struggling in the majority of my classes. I'm also supposed to get physical therapy, but I am not receiving that either. And from what I know, the only accommodation I'm getting out of the four that I need is counseling. So almost the entirety of my IEP is not fulfilled. Despite federal protections and carefully crafted plans, students with learning differences, neurodivergent challenges, and specific educational needs continue to be marginalized, under-resourced, and denied the fundamental right to an equitable, accessible education that recognizes their unique potential. This neglect not only violates legal requirements, but perpetrates long-term academic, social, and

emotional harm for some of our most vulnerable students, limiting our success. And I am here fighting for restorative justice and more supportive programs in schools. We demand the City invest in 800 million to hire school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools because it's an undeniable fact that we don't provide services to students with disabilities, but we funnel them into the school-to-prison pipeline. And we spend a boatload of money, about 400 million, on police and surveillance. But we can't provide mandated special education. How is any of that okay? We need programming that supports students with disabilities, including concrete transitional plans and pathways towards employment in areas of related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech. And we need this investment now because the biggest resource we lack (TIMER CHIME) is time. Thank you.

BECKY YANG: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and Council Members. My name is Becky, and I'm an eighth-grade student at IS30 and a proud member of the Circle Keepers. I'm here to strongly advocate for the investment of 80 million dollars to hire

restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools.

Restorative justice is extremely important for helping students effectively resolve conflicts, take responsibility for their actions, and strengthen our school communities. For instance, when disputes arise between students, they can engage in a restorative circle. This process encourages open dialogue, fosters understanding of each other's perspectives, and allows them to collaboratively find resolutions rather than facing punitive school suspensions.

Rather than increasing school policing and surveillance, which can make students feel criminalized, let's focus on resources that promote understanding and growth. Hiring restorative justice coordinators will create safer and more supportive environments for all students. Please invest in restorative practices that help us heal and succeed. Thank you.

AMINA JALLOW: Good afternoon, Chair. My name is Amina Jallow. I'm a District 13 high school student junior from Flatbush, Brooklyn. I'm here today with the YA-YA Network and the Dignity in Schools Coalition to show you the importance of restorative justice and community building in

schools. Before that, I'd like to thank you for taking the time today to hear our testimonies and understanding how vital youth voice is.

As someone who's seen the value in mentally affirmative school environments, this is a huge priority to the school community. My school currently utilizes aspects of restorative justice, such as peer mediation. But imagine if they had the funding to expand these programs and better connect with the community. Many people find themselves in physical altercations in my school community and around the area, which leads them to month-long suspensions that stunt their academic ability to grow and destroy their enthusiasm surrounding the educational environment. Children thrive off of social interaction, and it's vital to make them feel welcome by their communities rather than imprisoned and shut out due to suspensions that put their social lives on hold. If these children maybe had reformative outlets in contrast with isolative punishments, they'd be less likely to end up under suspension again. Community members who can understand their point of view and serve as a low-stakes parental figure can heal these bonds.

Additionally, reshaping disciplinary actions towards violent behavior can create children that grow into adults that can manage strong emotions like anger. That's why we're asking for 80 million dollars to introduce 500 schools to the wonders of restorative justice, 75 million dollars to employ community members instead of school safety agents that create a prison-like environment, 16 million dollars to transform dean positions and encourage restorative justice programs, and 12 million dollars baselined funding to support restorative justice and add restorative justice coordinators. The reallocation of funding to these causes can promote a better school environment and create adults who don't have hostile trauma memories associated with their schooling experiences. Thank you.

EMILY DUENAS: Good afternoon. My name is Emily Duenas, and I go to school right here in Downtown Manhattan. I'm a youth leader for a non-profit organization called The Circle Keepers. And I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the Members of the Education Committee for convening this hearing.

We are here demanding that the City invest more money into the education of millions of

students in New York City. And I have a question for everyone. Would you imagine a day where every youth is able to understand and really love school and being able to find new paths in their life? Well, I imagine a world where counselors and teachers are more considerate in work areas. By tutoring kids and allow them to have more resources and programs to higher education, we create the best part of them, just like me in seventh grade. I'm a Colombian immigrant, and I couldn't reach out for help to learn more about the topics that I was passionate about. School resources were limited and not available for me. I had a hard time trying to figure out the things that were taught to me. With more resources and orientation, I would probably have gotten a better grade on my algebra regents and got into a specialized high school. But unfortunately, (INAUDIBLE) to explain the process of learning any of that. Without math and English, I felt that I couldn't access to it and it clipped the wings of my future. But I saw how much money was given out to the police instead of students. That makes schools a place where learning was not important. It made me feel like a bird trapped without a way to look

forward in the sky. In partnership with the Circle Keepers and Dignity in Schools Coalition, we're demanding that we have 80 million dollars to place restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. We also call for protection of immigrant students and family baselined 4 million dollars in immigrant family communication. As an immigrant in the public school system, I see how crucial and valuable this will be to all immigrants. We need to speak up for our students and demand the resource for them to receive help. We need to invest in students' education instead of focusing only on the privileged kids. Thank you.

MAMOUNA DOUMBIA: Hello. My name is Mamouna Doumbia, and I'm a junior at an NYC public high school. Today, I come from the YA-YA Network to advocate for restorative justice. Throughout my elementary school years, I've been suspended seven times for constant fighting. One altercation occurred when a student had gotten into my bag and ripped my books and threw my lunch away. It got heated to the point where we were physically fighting and she bashed my head onto the bookshelf. As I bled, my teacher threw me up from the ground, called me a

savage N-word. I was only six years old. I got suspended and teachers continued to handle conflicts inappropriately, often picking on Black and Brown students. Entering middle and high school, I couldn't help but realize the large-scale impact of the influence of teachers' actions on students' self-esteem. Today, I'm demanding 16 million dollars to provide proper Tier 1, 2, and 3 RJ training. Many teachers' reactions to conflict reflect implicit biases that affects the future of Black and Brown students. Restorative justice training and practices between students and teachers makes our school safer by creating an atmosphere of safety and community acceptance. Students are our next leaders and to grow their beautiful garden, all plants must be nurtured. Thank you.

NICOLAS LIPSCOMB: Hello and good afternoon, Chair Joseph. My name is Nicolas Lipscomb, and I was born in Puerto Rico and raised in downtown Bronx. I'm a part of the youth leadership non-profit organization called the Circle Keepers and Dignity in Schools Coalition. I would first like to say that I appreciate you for hearing me out today as today we are demanding that the City invest 80 million dollars

to hire school-based restorative justice coordinators within as many schools as possible. Today, I am here to help advocate the expansion of the system of school discipline and safety that is based on understanding and communication and to end how schools are ran like prisons. We as a community need for the City to fund restorative justice programs and redirect funding from school policing into restorative justice practices because school is to learn and feel safe. So why does every day feel like a prison being ran under security? I am not here speaking from preference nor persuasion but encounters and personal experience. When I first went to middle school, I had encountered bullying and I personally thought it was something that would have went away if I had told or informed staff but in reality it never changed or helped anything. I felt unsafe and unheard by anyone in general as if I was just another voice in an echoing room full of people, unheard and unimportant. Currently going into my freshman year of high school I quickly realized that the feeling of being unheard and unimportant wasn't something within the school due to my school incorporating a restorative justice program making me

as a person realize that restorative justice should be something incorporated into many other schools. I joined my restorative justice team because I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to be within a safe space where the youth had some sort of voice, some sort of input, and some sort of power. I've been in schools that had extreme punitive measures where being suspended was something that happened quite often. I personally got put into positions where that actually happened, where what actually happened wasn't important but how many people saw and said what they saw. There was never a clear fair investigation where both sides of the story were heard and put into account when punitive measures were taken into account. For all, I often looked like overall just a bad kid for anything and everything I did or didn't do. Now going to a mostly restorative justice school where issues were discussed upon both sides of what happened and are taken into account where teachers first result isn't to call parents or give gift punishment but to sit down with the kid and have the kid explain what's wrong and this is why I'm here fighting for the funding within restorative justice practices within as many schools as possible.

We're demanding that the City invest 80 million to hire school-based restorative justice in 500 schools but, for this to happen, we'll shift the funds away from school policing by ceasing all police hiring and teaching of school policing and stopping the growth of surveillance technology to make our future generation feel like criminals. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. How are you feeling from your experience at six years old? So that stayed with you and you described it vividly.

MAMOUNA DOUMBIA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Love your hat by the way.

MAMOUNA DOUMBIA: Oh, thank you. Honestly when I was six years old, I was clueless. I didn't think that the world could be this cruel and having to experience that and knowing that that wouldn't be the last time I would experience it was something that was so powerful and it has led me to have this little spark of advocacy that I have today. Now I see Black children, particularly Black girls, getting criminalized in their school systems. It's something that drives me to make the world a better place especially in New York City. Primarily in that

instance, for example, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to react in that case. I was just a young girl. I figured that it was something that was normal and I was the person who did something wrong, but growing up and learning more about restorative justice practices, I realized that teachers are the one who should be making our schools a safer community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for sharing. How many counselors do you have in your schools? Go down the line whoever wants to start.

SIRAH DRAME: Like around two, three for like 400 to 500 students.

AMBER COLON: My high school had around 400, 500 kids and as well two, three but you couldn't even... it was so chaotic that you couldn't even get a chance to speak to them.

KIRA HEALY: Since my school is still brand new, we have like 200 students, and we have two counselors currently.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have access to your counselors?

KIRA HEALY: I do, like when I can... like when they have the time because like they have a lot of students to take care of too.

BECKY YANG: I'm not sure how many students we have but one counselor.

AMINA JALLOW: My school has 400 to 500 students, and we have two counselors.

EMILY DUENAS: My school has 136 students, if I'm not wrong, and we have one to two counselors.

MAMOUNA DOUMBIA: My school currently has about 400 to 500 students, and there's two counselors and one college counselor.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What are some of the positive impacts that you've seen with having restorative justice in your schools?

MAMOUNA DOUMBIA: In my school, particularly, I work with Student Educators for Equity, and basically we work to have restorative practices and recently we have been working on a lot of cultural events and we have seen that a lot of students in our school have been more culturally aware. I have hosted a natural hair care panel for Black girls a few weeks ago, and it has been a huge success. A lot of these girls in my school has been

more aware on their culture and they're taking more pride in their cultural identity.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I love that, love that. In schools without restorative justice how do you address conflict?

AMINA JALLOW: So a lot of the time in my schools they usually address like a lot of the more violent or serious conflicts with suspensions or some type of disruption from their learning, and it's definitely like emotionally taxing to see these things go on and I could only imagine how much more taxing it is for the children going through it and I think that punishing them and not exploring their character, what drives them to do some of the things that they do, is dangerous to their mental health and dangerous to their character building.

AMBER COLON: For me, I have seen both the best worlds. I went to a charter school for my middle and elementary school and, for high school, I went to a fully restorative school, and I would say for a charter school, the teachers didn't want to do nothing. It would be simple detention or, you know, sometimes even suspension for something that could have simply had a conversation, and they were so easy

and they even had a point system on students and it would be like if you talk out of turn, you get points taken away from you, and they really just showed like that hierarchy and like that, oh, teacher's pet type of ideology. And when I went to a fully restorative school, you know, know students' voices mattered, and the benefit was the organization I work with now, the Circle Keepers. Now, we get to help and train youth throughout many schools and throughout all the DOE, and I think if we didn't have the support with restorative justice that it could have died simply, but now I get to be here speaking and, you know, with all the youth in this cohort, I feel like restorative schools brought us here today.

SIRAH I DRAME: I want to add on to what she said. I feel like suspensions and expulsions, even detentions, these are all seen as like in many schools like the only way, and those are not the best case because a lot of us, all of us students here today, we all have stories, multiple stories, of how these like aggressive measures have affected us, and I just wish restorative justice, and like I wish there was more emphasis on healing because when schools are places for healing, they become places

for learning, so I wish there was more emphasis on that because that has been a bigger, best effect for us like I've seen how, like just simply talking out your emotions, I've seen how people become aggressive to more responsive so I wish there was more emphasis on that in our schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Well said. I have to use that. Thank you so much. Oh, you have something? Go ahead.

EMILY DUENAS: Yeah. So, when I entered to my new high school, there was no restorative justice, but now that I see they are implementing more. Before there was more restorative justice, students will get suspended even if you film a fight and you even weren't involved in that fight. And a friend of my told me that he got suspended and that caused him to basically fail his marking period, and he told me that he was just filming the fight and it wasn't like on the school buildings or anything like that and he had no right to speak or like to give his point of what happened, and he got suspended due to that. But now, if there's like any issue in our schools, they are trying to implement more like what happened, like both sides perspectives, so we see that now our

community has been growing, and I want that for every single school to being able to implement restorative justice so there is peace in schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you for your voices. Thank you.

The next panel is Aislinn Cao, Blaise Lashima (phonetic), Marilyn Perez, Kai Lin, Edward Sanchez, Amina Begum, Shansi Young (phonetic), Andrea Ortiz.

BLAISE LAMISHA: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, Council Members, everyone. My name is Blaise Lamisha. I'm 16, a junior in high school at Lower Manhattan, and I'm here from the YA-YA Network organizing the Dignity in Schools campaign for restorative justice funding. We are here to advocate for schools that are invested in the mental health and well-being of their students and for educators who show they care by taking accountability for their actions. I'm going to tell you a story. Sophomore year, my teacher engaged in behaviors that specifically targeted me. She would single me out in uncomfortable ways, would inappropriately contact me, and write me personal notes, spoke ill of me to other students, and all around it was a terrible experience

for me to be in her class. Without doubt, her treatment of me was motivated by the fact that I was the only visibly Brown and Muslim student in her class. My own dean had admitted to me that I was treated unjustly and, in their own words, my treatment was racist and emotionally destabilizing. Nothing was done for me after that, and the teacher faced no punitive consequences. She still teaches today at my school and just, last week, I had to cross the street in the middle of running traffic just to avoid seeing her and further confrontation. Because of the way my school failed me, I believe our schools need this restorative justice funding. I propose that the City expand school-based restorative justice and mental health services including investing 80 million in hiring school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. Additionally, I hope that public schools are given 60 million which will go to specialized trainings for deans of schools to resolve conflicts like mine, make ongoing restorative justice trainings available for all school staff and to the broader community of students and families, and create and compensate youth-adult restorative practices and equity teams so

our schools would have restorative justice curriculums. It also incentivizes active participation from the youth. The culture of our schools need to shift away from the needs and the presence of security guards and cops to supporting the well-being of students through restorative justice centered staff. I implore you to take the voices of my peers and mine in account. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

AISLINN CAO: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and Council Members. My name is Aislinn Cao, and I'm a youth with the Circle Keepers and Dignity in Schools coalition. I go to a relatively small school in Bay Ridge called IS30, but there's still not even one restorative justice coordinator. Just last month, there was a fight between my friend and a new student but, rather than guidance and proper measures being taken, they were both threatened with suspension. Of course, this might not seem like an issue, just kids fighting over some nonsense, but they were friends before this, and the way this situation was handled drove a deep wedge in their relationship. Now, some might think more police or surveillance would help

prevent this from happening at all but, instead of keeping us safe, it makes us feel like criminals in a place where community and security should be fostered. Even now, I'm still facing the repercussions of the fight and I wasn't even involved in it. If even I, a mere bystander, can see what these punitive measures do to the school environment, then shouldn't you? This is why I'm here today. We need you to grant 80 million dollars to schools citywide to not only hire but train more restorative justice coordinators in schools. Instead of continuously funding the police, fund us as the future of this city. Thank you.

KAI LIN: Good afternoon, Chairwoman Joseph. My name is Kai Lin. I'm a participant in the YA-YA Network and Dignity in Schools and a senior at Fort Hamilton High School. In all of my four years at Fort, I've only been subjected to metal detection upon entering the building a handful of times and only when my school was under direct threat. There is little police presence in my school. Instead, we have social workers, countless guidance counselors, and a restorative justice team. Even without a strong police presence, most students feel safe at Fort.

When students are not meeting class standards, most teachers offer them comfort or refer them to a school guidance counselor or a social worker. Detention is not a method of discipline in my school. When I was struggling in freshman year, I met with a social worker weekly to talk about my feelings and come up with ways I can improve my school work. These resources have helped for achieve an average daily attendance above the citywide average and a graduation rate of 89 percent. I've come to learn that I am extremely privileged when it comes to mental health resources in my school. It is this environment that inspires me to pursue a career in secondary education and potentially school administration. It is no surprise that my school, one situated in an upper middle class neighborhood and has significantly less Black and Brown students than the City average, receives resources like this. Schools with predominantly Black and Brown students are more likely to be subjected to higher policing. These schools receive a lack of mental health and restorative justice resources. This discourages students' performances academically and also promotes the school to prison pipeline. It is for this reason

that I believe 80 million dollars should be funded directly to 500 schools to hire community members to take on supportive positions in our schools based on the needs of students, positions like youth advocates, parent coordinators, paraprofessionals, community outreach coordinators, counselors, and social workers. These individuals should be hired instead of new police officers. If my school can receive proper resources, so can others. Schools with predominantly Black and Brown students should not be redlined. Thank you for your time.

MARILYN PEREZ: Good afternoon hi my name is Marilyn Perez. I go to an all-girls school in Astoria, Queens, and I am a youth leader for CAE PAC activists and a member of Dignity in Schools campaign New York, a coalition of over 20 New York City organizations of students, parents, and educators who work to create positive school culture and safety that is based on mutual respect and problem solving. As a student, I am here to support my peers in important work because we want the City to fully fund meaningful restorative justice programs and diverge from school police and surveillance. I want to have public schools that recognize all the students that

can offer them things that help them expand their knowledge and help them reach goals that they want to achieve. Unfortunately, we're currently spending too much money on school police, close to 400 million, and that could be better spent on support and services and, in my school, I'm uncertain of who I can reach out to and who I can trust because there hasn't been enough sense of community. Restorative justice focus on community building because, realistically, there cannot be justice without community and without the community coming together. We need to fully fund restorative justice and mental health resources in our schools now. (INAUDIBLE) fear that something can happen in our schools with a student which can be avoided or prevented if there were more programs, restorative justice practices, and mental health resources in school. The money we spend on policing in schools could be used to fund programs and academics. If something were to happen, many people will be left with a memory and pain that could cause trauma and people to struggle mentally or emotionally so we have to get to the root of the problem. Additionally, my school has three counselors but, as of right now, one of them is on maternity

leave. Knowing how much the school counselors have on their plate, adding more counselors will not only be a benefit for other students but also take pressure off the counselors. We are calling on the City Council to expand school-based restorative justice and social emotional support including investing 80 million in hiring school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools. We can fund this expansion of mental health and academic resources in schools if we redirect money currently going to policing. Thank you.

EDWARD SANCHEZ: Thank you for your time. My name is Edward Sanchez. I am a CUNY political science student at Baruch College, a recent graduate of New York City Public Schools, and a youth leader as Citizens Committee for Children of New York and the Coalition of Equitable Education Funding. I'm testifying today on behalf of Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, a group of more than 120 organizations advocating for the resources needed to ensure every student receives a high-quality education with the focus on those who need the most support. While we appreciate that the Administration and the City Council made significant investments in

the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs that had been at risk of ending due to expiring funds, we are concerned that a number of these programs are currently funded for one year only, meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless City leaders extend the funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. Unless the City acts, here are some of the important education programs and services at risk of funding cuts: 3k slots for thousands of young children, 112 million; preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities, 55 million; extended day 3k and pre-k seats, 25 million, outreach efforts to help ensure families are aware of early childhood programs, 5 million; more than 50 community schools to provide wraparound support to students, 14 million; restorative justice programs to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended, 12 million; the mental health continuum to provide mental healthcare to students at 50 high-need schools, 5 million; immigrant family outreach to help ensure families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access, 4 million; Student

Success Centers to help students at more than 30 high school prepare for college, 3.3 million; arts programming for students, 41 million; high impact tutoring to help students get support in reading and math, 4 million; and lastly, teacher recruitment, 10 million. We call on the City to provide long-term funding for these programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget so that students, families, educators, and providers will know that they can continue relying on these programs in future years and to make additional investments that are needed to support students, especially those who have the greatest needs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

ANDREA ORTIZ: Hello. My name is Andrea Ortiz. I represent the Dignity in Schools New York, a coalition working to foster mutual respect, care, and problem solving in our public schools. DSC calls on New York City to expand restorative justice by 80 million, create protections for immigrant students and families, and baseline mental health continuum at 5 million, restorative justice at 12 million, immigrant family communications and outreach at 4 million, and other critical education programs

currently under threat of being cut. This is all possible by redirecting money currently used for surveillance and policing towards the healing center responses and staff our community desperately needs. Sadly, Mayor Adams hyper-austerity, brutal policing, and anti-immigrant policies have been just some of the ways that this Administration is failing BIPOC communities and especially youth. Adams' proposed cuts are unnecessary as demonstrated by the Council's forecast which includes 3 billion in new revenues and underspending. This allows for the full restoration of all critical education programs and even needed expansions for programs like school-based restorative justice and the mental health continuum, which have already been successfully piloted and now need to be expanded. We join with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to baseline funding for these programs so students, families, educators, and communities can continue relying on them without the fear of them randomly being taken away. These programs are critical to ensure the dignity and safety of Blackm Brown, immigrant, trans, gender non-conforming, queer, low-income, and students with disabilities. We call on New York City

elected officials to expand restorative justice and mental health services including investing 80 million in hiring school-based restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools, protecting critical programs currently funded with expiring City dollars, redirecting money away from school policing. Simply by not hiring any more school police, New York City could save up to 90 million in one fiscal year and use those funds to hire more community-based positions in schools. And additionally, New York City must protect immigrant students and families from the President Trump's mass detention and deportation plan, including strengthening immigration preparedness policies, offering comprehensive training for students, staff, and families, enhancing data privacy and security protections, and passing Intro. 7098 to eliminate the New York police gang database. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is the 80 million for restorative justice in addition to 12 million dollars.

ANDREA ORTIZ: Yes. So, the 12 million dollars that is currently allocated for restorative justice is mostly being utilized through a central-

based program, and the 80 million we're calling for would be a school-based addition to the centrally run program that would allow for each school to get that money directly and be able to hire a school-based restorative justice coordinator.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you for the clarification. How many counselors... I know you talked about how much resources you have in your school while your other classmates or your friends you made along the line lack the resources that you have at your school, so how many counselors do you have at your school.

BLAISE LAMISHA: I have about 600 students in my school, and we have eight counselors, but usually those counselors are also college counselors so that means that resources are limited.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take you to see a counselor, if you were to ask to see one.

BLAISE LAMISHA: I'm privileged enough to have a personal relationship with the counselor I do have as I've known her since freshman year, and so that means that dropping by her office is pretty easy

for me and accessible I guess venture, but for other students this might not be the case.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Are you aware of any support services in your school building? That could go for anyone on the panel. Has anyone talked about mental health services, guidance counselors, and other services to support you?

AISLINN CAO: I wasn't aware of my guidance counselor until around eighth, no, seventh grade, and that was only because she was hired when I was in sixth grade. My school is a conjoined school so it's elementary and middle school, so throughout my elementary years, I did not have a single guidance counselor or mental health resource.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Anyone else? No. What are the impacts of having restorative justice in your buildings?

MARILYN PEREZ: As of right now, there really isn't anything related to restorative justice in my school. That's why I applied for like outside so as of right now I'm with the CAE, the Center of Anti-violence Education, where we meet once a week and we talk about like different things like violence in our city or like ways you could prevent this stuff

so that's why I attend the program I attend today because as of right now my school doesn't have anything related to restorative justice.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Go ahead.

KAI LIN: So even though I said that my school has a restorative justice team, it's not well-known in my school. My school has like 5,000 people, and I'm pretty sure it's only second to Brooklyn Technical High School. However, I would like to mention a conflict that happened between peaceful protesters who walked out of our school and the administration. So, we had several walkouts and, after each walkout, more and more NYPD cars came and at a certain point there were more NYPD officers than there were protesters and only until students who were organizing the walkouts met with the administrators was something achieved. Then, we were able to get our demands and they were able to filter how many walkouts. There has definitely been less ever since we had that meeting so it goes to show that instead of using police to stop our walkouts, having a conversation with us and compromising with us is more effective.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So what did you walk out about?

KAI LIN: For the genocide in Palestine.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

BLAISE LAMISHA: I would like to add on to Kai. My school has a restorative justice curriculum. We have emotions and equity classes that start freshman year where student leaders basically teach the freshmen, basically anything about emotions and equity. The thing about our school is the fact that this is an initiative that was taken on by a principal and this is not funded by New York State so that's why I believe that it hasn't been as successful as it could be, and that's why we're here today to basically ask you for that funding.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you've seen models, just that some of the models are not successful?

BLAISE LAMISHA: Yes. I believe that it's not as sustainable as it could be if it was given enough money. And I'd like to add on that the student leaders who do sign up are being paid by this opportunity, and that's why we have so many student leaders with us.

EDWARD SANCHEZ: Just to quickly add on. I am a former graduate of Fort Hamilton High School. I graduated in June of 2021. Now, the type of resources that they have now is incredible of course over the years. However, even when I was there, the population was around 4,600, and we only had two social workers for 4,400 students and, especially during a time during COVID that they didn't increase, a majority of my friends who requested or would want those type of services never got it. Although I know it's still not enough in Fort because there's 5,000 students and it's the population ratio between social workers and students is immense, and you can see it across every other public high school in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I need to take a five-minute break. I have to. Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All right. If everyone could please find seats, we are going to reconvene this hearing. Once again, please find a seat.

Also, if you have not done so, please take the opportunity to silence your electronic devices. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The next panel, Imani Wilson, Martin Urbach, Jania Witherspoon, Anyinel,

I'm not sure, Santana, Kimberly, not reading the last name, Kimberly Gil, do I have a Kimberly, yes, Abrar Bhuiyan, Andrew Alonso Rodriguez, Andrea, I couldn't read it. I did ask for grace on the names. All right. Ready. You may begin.

ANYINEL SANTANA: Good afternoon. I'm glad and appreciate that you're still here.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

ANYINEL SANTANA: My name is Anyinel, and I am a senior at the academy for excellence and leadership with Make the Road New York and a youth leader at our Student Success Center. As a youth leader, I help seniors apply for college and discover their career options. Our Student Success Center in Bushwick was the first to open in the city in 2007 after Black and Brown students designed it and fought for it since the City was not providing their schools with the resources and support needed to go to college. There are now SSC's at close to 40 high schools across the city helping more than 16,000 students figure out their future. SSC's help support first-generation college students, immigrant students, low-income students, and students of color who for years have not gotten the support they need

and deserve from the City to support them on the path to college. The Student Success Center has been transformative and crucial to my personal and academic growth. I discovered the SSC in 2023 and fell in love with the help they offered to my peers applying to CUNY, SUNY, FAFSA, and more as well as how organized they were with their peers' information. Now, I get to be part of the experience by attending training to educate myself and how to help my peers and myself. It has provided me with a unique opportunity to explore my strengths and interests in ways I never anticipated. Through various workshop, discussions, and one-on-one mentoring sessions, I gained valuable insights in my future and uncovered new dimensions of my potential. Before discovering the center, I often felt uncertain about my path and overwhelmed by my choices. However, the supportive environment created by caring mentors and engaged peers has made all the difference. They invested their time and energy in my success, fostering a sense of belonging that ignited my aspiration. With their encouragement, I began to set meaningful goals and, most importantly, develop the confidence to pursue them. After graduation, I plan

to attend college and study nursing at CUNY. The nurturing atmosphere of the Center allowed me to dig deep into my academic career interest and push beyond my perceived limits. I explore new opportunities that I have never considered myself before and, as I face challenges, I learn to approach them with resilience. The SSC's became an (TIMER CHIME) essential space for me where my aspirations were nurtured, where I cultivated my dreams, and where I was empowered to strive for excellence. This journey has shaped my future and equipped me with the desire to contribute positively to my community, aspiring others to pursue their goals just as I have. If we no longer have fundings for the SSC's, my peers will not have the same support I received with my post-secondary process. We need the City to commit 3.3 million this year to support Student Success Center across the city. By investing in this Center, you are investing in the future of thousands of young people throughout New York City. Our schools and communities deserve the same transformative experience I had as a student and a youth leader for years to come. Thank you.

JANIA WITHERSPOON: Good evening. I know it's been a long day so thank you for still being

here. My name is Jania Witherspoon, and I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and I'm a current master student of social work at the Silverman School. I am the co-founder and director of Youth Voices at the Circle Keepers, a non-profit organization I co-founded as a 10th grade public student alongside my restorative justice coordinator. I'm here alongside the Circle Keepers and the Dignity in Schools Campaign New York to advocate for a school system that prioritizes respect, problem solving, and student support over punishment and criminalization. At Harvest Collegiate, restorative justice wasn't just a program. It transformed our school culture. Students trusted the process because it worked. Instead of punitive discipline, conflicts were met with dialogue, accountability, and repair. That environment shaped me. Leading circles taught me how to hold space, navigate emotions, and support my peers, skills that now drive my work in social work and youth advocacy. When conflicts arose, meaningful dialogues were had. This created a system of trust where students felt safe, valued, and heard. The culture of the school began to shift, students took accountability for their actions and, instead of

feeling alienated, they were given the opportunities to repair harm and strengthen their relationships with peers and educators. I've seen young people thrive with giving the tools to express themselves, resolve conflicts, and build community. This impact is undeniable. Restorative justice fosters a sense of belonging and empowers students to be active participants in shaping their school environments. This approach works, and it is past time for the City to invest in it at scale. Our elected officials have continuously underfunded public schools. This is especially severe for Black and Brown students like me. At Harvest, we had broken bathrooms, no gym, and barely enough laptops to go around. Yet, we were considered well-resourced. Meanwhile, the City continues to fund school policing over student support. We demand 80 million dollars to place restorative justice coordinators in 500 schools, and we also call for baseline funding for critical programs including 12 million dollars for restorative justice and 5 million dollars for the mental health continuum. The City must start investing in healing, not harm. The time for action is now. Thank you.

ABRAR BHUIYAN: Good evening. My name is Abrar Bhuiyan. I'm in 11th grade and a student at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. I'm also a restorative justice youth leader at my school. I'm here to show you how important restorative justice is in school and prove that the City should listen to students when we stand up for full RJ funding and acts to demilitarize schools. In my school, we are immediately met by metal detectors and school safety with mysterious ominous black belts. When we arrive at school, we should be welcomed by our community, by our teachers who are greeting us with positive affirmation. A citywide student-centered commitment to restorative justice means building community safety and responding to harm when it occurs. We are calling on the City to protect the funding for restorative justice in our school and also expand it to make sure all students have access to school-based restorative justice. Funding should also be included for students to lead restorative justice in their schools. By being an RJ youth leader, I have learned that the core of RJ is building healthy relationships. Schools right now are not focused on community, and that is why we have low

attendance rate, lowest test scores, and more conflicts. RJ creates a safer, more respectful environment where people feel heard by encouraging everyone to understand each other's feelings and work together to make sure things right. RJ reduces repeated behaviors because it helps students develop social and emotional skills. I urge you to invest in RJ programs in schools because it creates positive and supportive environments for students instead of a punitive punishment-based environment. Unlike suspensions and school police, RJ focuses on understanding accountability and healing. RJ not only focuses on behaviors but also builds essential skills like empathy, communication, and conflict resolutions. So, by funding RJ programs. we are investing in a healthier, more respectful future for students and our city. Thank you.

KIMBERLY GIL: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Kimberly Gil, and my pronouns are he/her. I'm in the 11th grade, and I go to the Brooklyn School for Social Justice in Bushwick with Make the Road. I am also a restorative justice youth leader at my school. I'm here because I want to let the City know how important restorative justice is in school

and that students want the City to fully fund restorative justice and divest from school police. Discipline and policing creates barriers to learning and violates the safety of well-being of students, particularly Black, Brown, immigrant, and trans young people who are targeted most by school police. I have seen this firsthand when people of my campus community have been judged and assumed to have malicious intent because of racial stereotypes. I have seen administrators segregate and ridicule students because of the language they speak and, in turn, I have seen those students come to school less and less. I have seen school safety challenge and harass students of color who don't speak English more than students who do speak English. If students used RJ with administrators and school safety, we could interrupt the school to prison pipeline. Restorative justice programs teach accountability and empathy. I have seen RJ give students confidence in coming to school and having trust in our community to face unfamiliar situations, eventually building trust in themselves to face the day. The RJ program at my school has allowed me to create community with peers and teachers from self-regulation and meditation

skills and to be part of a new family that I know cares for my education. I feel safer at my school because I am an RJ leader. Please fund and expand funding for a restorative justice in all schools. Please show us that you care about us, the youth of New York, by creating accountable, safe, and caring schools through restorative justice. Thank you.

ANDREA ALONSO RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Andrea Alonso Rodriguez, and my pronouns are she/her. I am in ninth grade and a student at a community school in Bushwick with Make the Road New York. I am also a restorative justice youth leader at my school. I am here because I want to let the City know how important restorative justice is in schools and that students want to want the City to fully fund restorative justice and divest from school police. While being an RJ youth leader, I've learned better ways to communicate, how to be accountable for my actions, and how to de-escalate conflicts within my peers. I have firsthand experience in seeing my community at school grow because RJ has given me more confidence to make new and strengthen my old relationships. I've noticed in myself that I want to come to school more. It is

terrible that the current budget Mayor Adams is proposing would cut funding for restorative justice and important programs like community schools and Student Success Centers while prioritizing school policing and surveillance technologies. This proposal does not feel like it is for us, the students. Restorative justice supports students instead of punishing them. It helps address the root causes of behavior, keeps students engaged, and teaches accountability. RJ has built empathy and, instead of pushing students behind with suspension, RJ has given me more direction, and I can see how RJ gives my peers tools to succeed and build a better future. I believe that New York City has an opportunity to be a leader in the U.S. by investing in practices that support young people and divesting from practices that criminalize them. More funding for school safety officers does not make us safer. Students demand real safety. I have seen that RJ can keep us safe. It keeps students engaged in their education, reduces repeat offenses, and creates a safer, more supportive school environment and by investing in RJ means investing in the future of our youth and community. Protect funding for restorative justice in school,

move money away from hiring and training school police, and stop the funding for surveillance technology. By not hiring any more school police right now, New York City could save up to 100 million in one year, and that money could fund community-based sustainable RJ approaches to safety. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many guidance counselors or college counselors you have at your Student Success Centers?

ANYINEL SANTANA: In the school, we have 350 kids and two college counselors.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And how many counselors do you have at your schools?

KIMBERLY GIL: In our school, we have three, but there's 425 students for...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students?

KIMBERLY GIL: 425.

ABRAR BHUIYAN: And in our school, there's over 400 students and three guidance counselors.

ANYINEL SANTANA: Excuse me. I made a mistake. It was only one college counselor and two counselors in my school.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. And any restorative justice in any of your schools or you getting that outside of your school?

KIMBERLY GIL: It's mostly in our schools. I feel like I haven't seen it as much outside. We're actually a part of a program in which all four schools, but it's only three kids from each school so there's four schools in our campus and it's three from each, and there's only one person that manages the whole group.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

Okay. The next person will be Trinity on Zoom, and the following come to the panel, Sebastian Espinal, Holiday Woodside, Jeylin Frias, Ava Harris, and Darialias Infanten, I butchered it, forgive me.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Trinity, you may begin your testimony.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

TRINITY WILLIAMS: Hi. Good evening. My name is Trinity, and I'm in eighth grade. I'm here today because afterschool programs are not just extra activities. They are necessary. They give students like me a place to feel safe, stay motivated, and

discover what we are capable of. I'll be honest. When the last bell rings to end school, none of us ever want to go home at all. We are very excited that we are able to be with our friends and having the expansion span of just school time, it's not really enough for us, and it's not because we don't love our families. It's just because we do want to be around our friends. We learn new things, and we have experience we wouldn't get anywhere else. Like when we're at home, we're digital with our friends, sometimes friends can't come out to hang out because of parents, but afterschool programs do give us that experience where we can hang with our friends and learn new things from each other. For example, I've been involved in STEM, cosmetology, sports, leadership, art, and step through my afterschool program. Each one has helped me grow up in different ways. STEM showed me how creative science can be, cosmetology taught me about self-care, love, confidence, and sports pushed me to work harder, leadership made me speak up more, and art let me express myself when I couldn't verbally express myself. I can express myself in my artwork because I know I will have a connection with it, and step gave

me a sense of teamwork and rhythm. When I'm in step, it's like I get to learn different cultures, different traditions of how people dance, and it's not just I step just to step. I step because you can actually feel the motivation and you feel really important when you're in step. And it's not just about what we do in a building. We also get to experience things outside of school. We take fun trips that open our eyes to new opportunities, like you can go on a trip and you just see something and then you want to explore it and that's what you could do in afterschool when you're on trips. One of my proudest moments actually was when my afterschool program back in December, I was nominated to play in the girls football league at the MetLife Stadium. That was a very huge moment for me because I felt very underestimated at the time because I am a girl, and I didn't think that I really had the confidence and courage to push myself and I felt like I was just doing it for fun but when I really got the chance to play at the MetLife Stadium and I stepped onto the field, it just (TIMER CHIME) changed everything.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is expired. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Trinity.

Hello. Can you hear us?

TRINITY WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah. Go ahead.

Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your testimony. I hope you had a great time. I'm going to come back for questions. Don't leave.

TRINITY WILLIAMS: Oh, okay.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All right. Go ahead.

Hi.

SEBASTIAN ESPINAL: Hello. My name is Sebastian. I'm a senior at Community High School in Brooklyn. I'm a proud youth leader with Make the Road New York and their Urban Youth Collaborative. Our schools should be places of learning growth and opportunity, not fear and punishment. Mayor Adams continues to fund hundreds and hundreds of vacant school cop positions while the programs and support we care about are facing cuts. The lengths our City is willing to go to criminalize us Black and Brown youth never fails to amaze us. This week, the youth education department cut nearly 50 percent of its workforce. This is a straight-up attack on all young people and their right to education. These cuts will

eliminate protections in place for Black, Brown, immigrant, and trans youth like us. More than ever, we need our City to pass a budget that has our back and make sure we have what we need, that listens to us when we say school cops don't make us safe. Millions of dollars are wasted on school policing, money that could be better spent on the resources we need, like funding for tutoring programs that could give every student a real opportunity to succeed. We need teachers and support staff who can help us more. Our schools also need up-to-date technology and textbooks, and we cannot learn from outdated, falling apart materials, of course. Services and programs that we count on such as community schools, restorative justice, mental health continuum, and Student Success Centers are at risk of being cut from the budget this year. That is not okay. We need New York City to do better and step up. School policing has never made my school feel safer. Instead, it created an environment where students feel watched, controlled, and criminalized. For undocumented students, it's even worse, knowing that school police can collaborate with ICE means that one wrong move could put their entire families at risk. Even for

those of us who are our citizens, police in schools mean being treated as suspects instead of students. I know it's because it's happened to me before. I've been stopped, searched, and delayed from getting to class by school police. I've been held back from AP courses, not because I wasn't capable but because unnecessary policing wastes my time. How are we supposed to focus on our education when we're treated like criminals? How can we grow when we're met with suspicion instead of support? We don't need police in our schools. We need a hiring freeze on school cops, cut funding from the hundreds of vacant school cop positions, and then use that funding from both these divestments to protect and expand to achieve actual investments in our education and our future, investments such as restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive. These are the resources that uplift students instead of criminalizing them. We need proper clubs and training to help advanced students in aspects besides education and prepare them for the real world. We deserve an environment where we feel safe, encouraged, and empowered to

succeed, and we need you and City Hall to help us get there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Go ahead.

HOLIDAY WOODSIDE: Hello. My name is Holiday. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a senior at the Community School in Brooklyn and youth leader with Make the Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative. I'm here today because our Mayor has failed us throughout his entire administration by investing in the wrong things. Mayor Adams and the federal government keep saying they will cooperate with law enforcement to deport immigrants that have committed crimes. This makes us worried about how schools can criminalize students by having school police respond to conflicts happening in schools, using surveillance, or harsh discipline policies instead of using proven alternatives like restorative justice and mental health support. Instead of truly supporting our students and listening to us, the Mayor continues to criminalize us by cutting funding from vital resources. I've been searched multiple times while going through scanning. And for what? I followed every rule and did nothing wrong, but the system was designed to make me feel like I had. One

time I was pulled aside by a school's cop and felt very nervous and embarrassed as I was the center of attention at that moment. School should be a safe environment for all students. The embarrassment I went through is something that no young person should go through. We deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. We don't need metal detectors, random searches, or school cops treating us like criminals. We need more restorative programs, school success centers for college and career planning, and job opportunities in schools to build skills. I've experienced it myself. Counseling and sports have kept me grounded and healthy in high school. When it comes to college, I'm on my own. Being a senior is tough, and applying for college is even harder. The youth leaders and counselors at the Student Success Center help us navigate financial aid, but we will lose that support if funding is cut. FAFSA and TAP are confusing and, without guidance, we are stuck. I feel the pressure daily because failure is not an option when my future depends on getting it right the first time. Without these resources, seniors will be left to fend for themselves and lose essential support. We need these funds to give students a

welcoming place to focus and succeed. This week, the U.S. Education Department laid off nearly 50 percent of its workforce, something that shouldn't come as a surprise. We all know President Trump's appointment of Linda McMahon is part of his plan to dismantle the Education Department. What students like me need right now is for the New York City Council to step up and protect us and our education. School is a place where all young people should feel free to learn, grow from mistakes, explore new interests, and be safe. There is no proof that school police prevent conflict in our schools. In fact, we have seen them mostly escalate any conflict that does happen, making things worse, and reinforcing the school to prison deportation pipeline. Neither police nor ICE have a place in our school buildings. We deserve better. We deserve opportunities, not intimidation. We need support. In conclusion, we demand cuts to police funding in schools, vacant school cop positions, and redirect the money to restorative programs and resources that help us succeed. Thank you.

JEYLIN FRIAS: Good afternoon. My name is Jeylin Frias. My pronouns are she/her, and I am a youth leader with Future of Tomorrow and Urban Youth

Collaborative. Today, I'm here to ask you that you start investing in our schools and communities and stop prioritizing racist police practices. School cops are not helping us stay safe. In my experience, I feel very anxious when I have to go to school every morning. Getting to school and stepping into the building, the first thing I see is metal detectors, police, and scanning wands. One day, I was wearing boots that according to them had metal in the sole so I got pulled to the side in front of all my peers like I was doing something wrong. For me, it was a degrading experience. I felt humiliated and terrified while being searched as I saw this cop go over to me and tell me to stand in front of a wall. The entire day all I could think about was the feeling of being targeted as some criminal who did something terrible. We do not need police in our schools. All we need is guidance and real support. My peers and I need to feel safe in what is supposed to be a sanctuary, and you finally need to understand the real safety to us means resources. We need mental health support, more access to extracurriculars, restorative justice, and more guidance counselors so we don't have to wait weeks before talking to someone about our needs. We

need fully funded programs like community schools and Student Success Centers that provide us with some of the extra help the system is failing to provide.

We're being set up to fail. Today, I'm here to ask you to prioritize our education, to look at us as the brilliant and unique students each one of us are, and invest in our future. I demand you and the Mayor to prioritize our care, not criminalization, by first securing a hiring freeze on school cops that does not allow to fill for alteration, cut funding for the remaining vacant school cop positions, and use funding from both of these divestments to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other staff practices that help students learn and thrive.

You must cease all NYPD recruitment, hiring, and training of school cops. Do not hire any new school police and permanently eliminate any school police academy classes. This should be the first step towards full elimination of all school police positions. By not hiring new cops and cutting the current 675 vacant school cop positions, we could immediately have 100 million dollars to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other programs that we need to have real safety and

support. It is time for the Mayor and the City to start prioritizing our education to invest (TIMER CHIME) in the promising future of the city, to invest in us the youth, the students that will hopefully someday be leading the city and our communities.

DARIALIAS INFANTEN: Hello. Okay. Good afternoon, elected officials, peers, and community members. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak today. My name is Darialias Infanten, and I am raised in the Bronx and I am a junior in high school as well as a youth leader in Sisters and Brothers United and the Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition and the Urban Youth Collaborative. I would like to start by sharing a story about my sister who was a paraprofessional in my school. She was not just a para but a mentor, a listener, and a person who was always there for students who needed her. She helped many students, including me. She would talk to us when things were difficult, help us through school problems, and be there for us emotionally when things at home or in our personal lives were rough but, despite all the wonderful things she did to assist students, she was laid off due to budget cuts. However, the budget cuts did not affect the police

officers in the school. Those positions were retained. I know having her presence made such a huge difference in my life and in the lives of so many other students. We needed her, and we still need her. If we can afford police in schools, we should be able to afford more staff who actually work with students in a way that builds trust, community, and emotional resilience. My sister, like so many other para educators, was a part of a team that made students feel safe, supported, and heard but, instead of more people like her, we got more police. This is not the kind of safety that helps us grow. And speaking of staff, my school only has one counselor per grade in addition to two college counselors and, with over 1,400 students, that creates an unmanageable workload. It is nearly impossible to get an appointment with a counselor and, when we finally do, it is last minute and unfocused. We need to talk about our problems, whether they are academic troubles, home troubles, or mental health crises but how are we supposed to get the help that we need when the demand is this high and the resources are this low. The counselors are supposed to be there for the students, but the reality is we barely get to see

1 them. The scheduling system at our school is always
2 backed up because of the number of students who need
3 the assistance. It is impossible to receive help for
4 the specific problems we're experiencing when there's
5 simply not enough time nor staff to help us. We do
6 not need supervision nor surveillance. We need trust,
7 counseling, and resources that will enable students
8 to become healthy, solid, and well-rounded human
9 beings. If you need money, I know where you can find
10 100 million dollars. City Council has the
11 responsibility to fight for a budget that will
12 support young people like me and my peers. You can
13 help support us by, one, securing a hiring freeze on
14 school cops that does not allow to fill for attrition
15 and, two, cut funding for the remaining vacant school
16 cop positions and, three, utilize the funding from
17 both of these divestments that equates to about 100
18 million to protect and expand restorative justice,
19 mental health, and other staff practices that help
20 students learn and thrive. Thank you so much.

21 AVA HARRIS ESPINAL: Good afternoon,
22 elected officials, peers and community members. My
23 name is Ava. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm a youth
24 leader for Sisters of Brothers United at Northwest
25

Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and the Urban Youth Collaborative. I'm a recent high school graduate, and I'm currently attending Co-op Tech which is a DOE-operated program. During my high school years, I experienced policing in my school as harmful and, despite there already being 12 police there, rarely arrived when there was an incident, leading to a teacher/teachers actually supporting to de-escalate the situation. The minimal times when school police were involved, they had actually escalated situations instead of de-escalating them. One time when an officer was going through my bag, they pulled out a pen and started passing it around to their colleagues making jokes about what the pen said. I felt embarrassed and unwelcomed. Imagine that being the first thing that happened to you as you came into school, being bullied by the people principals across NYC and the Mayor call on to keep us safe. It is clear that more police in school wouldn't lessen violence and oftentimes make students more uncomfortable, suffocated, and criminalized, invading and judging their privacy and private items. Police being there in general makes the line longer. Even now that I go to Co-op Tech, they share a

building with a DOE school that recently had metal detectors for two days in which they usually have none. Despite there being over 10 police there, that security check made me take 20 minutes longer to get into class one day and on the other 23 minutes making me late for my class when it usually takes around three minutes to scan my ID and go up the stairs. It's striking that many DOE principals would share the same message as the Mayor to call for more policing in our communities and schools when they should understand that the safest communities are those with the most resources. Violence often stems from underlying issues in someone's life. If we focus on investing in resources that address those issues such as mental health support, financial assistance like higher wages and more accessible benefits, housing stability, and medical care, people would have the help they need to cope with life's challenges, reducing the likelihood of violent outcomes. Instead of focusing on controlling individuals whose emotions are escalating, we should address the root causes of their struggles by providing support that tackles the issues affecting people's well-being. We could prevent violence and

create healthier, safer communities. It is the Committee's responsibility to ensure that young people have fully funded schools free of police. Don't add to the many uncertainties students already face because of what is happening at the federal level. We call for the City Council to fight for a budget that secures a hiring freeze on school cops, (TIMER CHIME) this hiring freeze would not allow the City to fill for attrition, cut funding for the vacant school cop positions, use the money from both these divestments to baseline funding for school support staff that schools like mine desperately need. It's time that the City Council stand with students and fight for a budget that funds our futures, not our criminalization.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The future looks bright, it looks bright. I'm ready.

Trinity, are you enrolled in a community school?

TRINITY WILLIAMS: I'm in a public school for Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But it's not community, right? Is it a community school with community support?

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2 TRINITY WILLIAMS: It's a public.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many counselors...

4 TRINITY WILLIAMS: Oh, it is. It is a

5 community school. Sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's okay. How many

7 counselors do you have?

8 TRINITY WILLIAMS: In my school, I have

9 one guidance counselor.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One? How many

11 students?

12 TRINITY WILLIAMS: About 160.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. How many

14 counselors are at your schools?

15 SEBASTIAN ESPINAL: I guess I'll start

16 off. There's three guidance counselors in my school

17 with about 350 students that are there.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Oh, they are

19 from the same school.

20 JEYLIN FRIAS: I have two or three

21 counselors in my school.

22 DARIALIAS INFANTEN: I have a total of

23 1,400 students that attend my high school, and I have

24 one counselor per grade with an additional two

25 college counselors.

AVA HARRIS ESPINAL: At my high school, we had one one mental health counselor and one college counselor with 500 students. And at the school that I'm currently going to, I'm unsure of the amount of students that we have, but I know that we have like around four counselors and it depends on which class you're in depending on what counselor you'll get, and there's like three levels to my school and each floor has like 10 to 12 classes with a normal amount of students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's a D79 program, right?

AVA HARRIS ESPINAL: I believe...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's Co-op Tech on 96th?

AVA HARRIS ESPINAL: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you.

Delenium Alban (phonetic), Anderson Guaman, did I say that right, Anderson? Chauncey Young. Is there any students that wish to testify that have not testified?

Go ahead.

ESTHER: Hello. My name is Esther. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm in 10th grade. I'm a youth leader with Make the Road New York and Urban Youth Collaborative. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand up for my community and talk about key problems and solutions. As of right now, there is only one guidance counselor. Even then, my guidance counselor is still busy with the other 500 students in my high school, and I can never find time to speak to her one-on-one. That one guidance counselor is away on parental leave and someone is filling in for her. They are building connections with students and helping them but, as soon as the actual counselor comes back, that connection is gone. If we had more than one guidance counselor, this wouldn't be such an issue because there would be other people ready to fill in for her role. Our Mayor has not prioritized our health. He has threatened to cut money from important resources. Some key resources needed for students that are being threatened is the mental health continuum, Student Success Centers, restorative justice, and community schools. We urgently need police-free schools to protect the immigrant students and their families

from deportation. Just last week, there were confirmed reports of ICE trucks outside of one of the high schools in Port Richmond. Youth were uncomfortable and full of anxiety. This is how impacted young people are at the mere presence of their vehicles. A couple of weeks before that, one of our youth members experienced ICE beating on the door repeatedly. They were not looking for them, but their aggressive presence made the rest of our peers feel fearful. The other day, one of my peers sent a photo of a police officer with the jacket that she said had ICE on it. When he turned around, she realized the design on the coat split the word police in the middle. This is our reality, one that many young people across the country have to navigate through. If New York divested from all forms of policing and disciplinary practices, there wouldn't be such a high risk for immigrants to get deported. We need to redirect those funds into systems that create a safe and supportive environment for the students where they actually belong. A prime example of restorative practice is peer mediation. Peer mediation is a resource we are lucky to have in our school. I happen to be a part of this program and get to facilitate

mediations. Before I became a facilitator, I was once part of a mediation as well. There was a conflict between me and a student about untrue rumors and miscommunication. A dean guided us to the mediation center where we got to hear each other's side of the story. This happened a year ago. I haven't had any problems with this student since. This is an important example to show peer mediation and restorative justice is helpful in schools and helps keep students from getting into fights. It hurts to see not enough schools in New York have this key resource. What the students really need is for elected officials to listen to all voices and remove police from school and invest (TIMER CHIME) and expand the staff and practices that truly keep us safe. We demand that the City and Mayor prioritize the students by, one, stop hiring any new school cops immediately, two, cut funding for the remaining hundreds of vacant school cop positions and, three, use that funding of 100 million dollars to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other practices that help students thrive. More than ever, we need our Mayor to listen to student voices and divest the funding from the policing division

into resources that actually let students succeed in their environment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Good evening.

JOE TITUS: Good evening. Thank you, Committee Chair Joseph and the Members of the Education Committee, for the opportunity to testify today about the state of physical education in the New York City budget. My name is Joe Titus and, in 2022, two co-founders and I launched Hiveclass to make physical education and wellness accessible through remote learning. Our standards-based curriculum support supports both mental and physical health, providing the foundation for a healthy active lifestyle. In 2016, the City launched the PE Works program, which helped principals prioritize physical education. By 2019, the percentage of elementary schools failing to meet State standards dropped from 96 percent to just 21 percent, nearly every school had a PE teacher. However, COVID-19 disrupted this progress, leaving many students unable to move or engage in physical activity. Today, 20 percent of students are not meeting required PE instruction time, with higher rates among Black and Brown

students. At Hiveclass, we believe that physical education is essential for both academic and emotional development. Just as students learn math and reading, they also need to learn how to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and build relationships. Yet, PE is the most skipped class in many schools. We believe this is partly because traditional PE classes struggle to address the complex needs of students, including bodily changes, social pressures, and academic stress. Physical education gaps disproportionately affect lower-income students who often lack access to alternative activities. Club sports and all sports have become expensive and inaccessible for many families, making it harder for all students to stay active. These disparities in physical education, much like disparities in academics, should not be accepted. Hiveclass is committed to closing the gaps, but we need the City's support. We urge the City to fund physical education programs so all New York city students, especially our most vulnerable, can have access to the tools they need for a healthy active and successful life. The PE Works program had funding. We ran into a pandemic. Today, the best part

of the 11 hours I spent here was talking to kids and asking them about physical education. (TIMER CHIME)
Let students tell schools what they want in physical education because a lot of kids are skipping it because we're not giving them what they need. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

DHALIEM ALBAN: Good afternoon. My name is Dhaliem, and I'm a youth leader at Make the Road New York and I am a senior at International High School in Queens. I came here today to testify and urge the City Council and Mayor Adams to take immediate action to support and protect young people like me by investing more money in our schools and education, not school cops. I came to this country about two years ago in search of more opportunity, safety, and better education. It was very scary to be alone with just my grandmother. With all these changes going on, my teachers helped orient me to a new language and a better education. The one thing that I can't just adjust is the amount of school police always present. It makes us feel like we did something wrong. Every afternoon, the school cops go loud and aggressive, urging us to immediately leave the school property. I

used to attend Regents Prep classes on Saturdays, and the school cops will push us to leave the building or stay outside the school, even in the winter days.

School cops truly don't help us in any way. They are not trying to support young people in mental health crisis, and they should not be the people the school depends on to help us because their reaction to situations escalate everything. We need adults that are training in restorative justice and mental health to support us. It's terrifying to be surrounded by school cops because I know any interaction is more likely for us to get pushed into the school deportation pipeline. Racism is the core of the United States system of police and incarceration and immigration. Since arriving, I've seen Mayor Adams increase local and state police presence throughout the city. All of these enforcement system use discrimination and violent tactics to criminalize Black, Brown, Latin, and immigrant people. We are calling for the Mayor and the City to prioritize no criminalization. This can be done by stop hiring the school cops, cut funding for remaining 675 vacant school cops positions, and use the 100 million dollars that will come from both this divestment to

protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help us students learn how to grow. My senior year has felt very stressful as all of these executive orders have come out attacking students at school. It is really scary to know ICE can come into schools. Every student deserves to feel safe in schools regardless of their immigration status. And let me be clear when my friends and I talk about how the school looks like safety, we don't include school cops. We want more mental health support. We want New York City to invest in us, not school cops. City Council Members, we need you to stop and do everything in your power to protect the rights of all young people in schools. I don't want to wonder if it's safe to finish my school year. I want to continue planning for my college dreams and planning for my future career in psychology. Protect me, protect young people, protect all immigrants. Police and ICE are not welcome in our schools. Thank you for listening and your time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

ANDERSON GUAMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Anderson. I am a high school senior at International School, and I am a leader at Make the

Road New York and the Urban Youth Collaborative.

Council Member Moya represents where I live in Corona and Council Member Krishnan represents the area where I go to school. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony today. As a young person who immigrated to New York City a few years ago from Ecuador, my only hope was to have a quality education and go to college. When I first started school, I felt scared to see so many school cops and did not understand what they were doing there. Now, I know that school cops are just there to criminalize Black, immigrants, and students with disabilities. Every time I'm changing classes during the school day, school cops threaten me to keep walking and get to class and, when I go downstairs for lunch, I see school cops in the hallways where the special education classrooms are and I hear the young people yelling in desperation because of how the school cops are treating them. It makes me feel so uncomfortable the way they impose their authority on us. Instead of wasting money on school cops, we need to invest money in real school safety like restorative justice and mental health supports. This isn't just about money but about the direct harm caused by school police.

School police escalate conflicts and disproportionately punish Black and Latin students. There is no proof that school police actually prevent conflict in our schools. Even worse for immigrant students like me, any interaction with school police can be life-changing. With increasing presence of ICE in our communities and the City's cooperation with immigration authorities, school police are driving the school to the deportation pipeline. I don't want to have to worry that any day in school for me could lead to being separated from my family or derailed from my dreams. All young people deserve to feel safe in school regardless of immigration status. I am so tired of coming here every year to fight so that the New York City budget stops funding school police and instead funds my education. New York City has the largest school police force in the country with a budget of about 450 million dollars. Mayor Adams and the City Council, you should stop recruiting, hiring, and training school cops. Also, you should permanently eliminate any school police academy classes. If we stop hiring new school cops and quit recruiting 675 vacant schools cops positions, we could immediately have 100 million dollars. I want to

see that money used to protect and expand restorative justice, mental health, and other programs that we need to have real safety and support. Under the new federal administration, young people and schools are under attack. Just this week, I saw that the United States Education Department is going to fire half (TIMER CHIME) of all its employees. These threats are really scary, and we need the City to pass a budget that protects young people and our education. I just received a scholarship of 2,000 dollars, and I'm excited to go to college and get a degree. I don't want my dream to be uprooted by any school police system or immigration enforcement because then all my hard work will have been for nothing. We need police-free schools now. Thank you.

CHAUNCY YOUNG: Good evening, honorable Chair Joseph and New York City Council Members. My name is Chauncy Young, and I'm a Bronx parent living in the Highbridge neighborhood of the Bronx and the Director of the New Settlement Parent Action Committee. PAC is a member organization with the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, the New York Dignity in Schools Coalition, the Healing Centered Schools Working Group, and the Coalition for

Equitable Education Funding. For nearly 30 years, the parent action committee has been led by Bronx parents who believe that every child deserves access to a quality education. For several years, we partnered with the DOE to develop the Parent Healing Ambassador Program but, since the DOE paused this program, we sought private funding and have worked for 12 schools in District 9 to further develop healing-centered schools as a model for both the city and for across the country, but our members are extremely concerned about the state of New York City Public Schools and have been advocating for equitable funding in schools on both the city and statewide level. The City of New York needs to invest in our schools and our families and invest in social emotional support for students. Our students and families need trauma responsive care and culture responsive healing-centered practices. Our schools need to be provided with support and guidance to develop trauma responsive healing-centered schools. New York city needs to make it clear to all New Yorkers that our students and our city are safe and a sanctuary for our immigrant families and students and to not cooperate with ICE. We need to be investing in our future and not

furthering the cradle to prison pipeline. Yet on so many ways, New York City has continued to undermine this by not moving forward with fully funding restorative justice programs, program that could use this funding to train our young adults to be school-based restorative justice coordinators. Mayor Adams has continued to cut this funding while continuing to increase funding to Project PIVOT now at 20 million dollars though I believe City Council, the Public Advocate's Office, and the Comptroller's Offices continue to ask questions about how this funding is being spent. We would demand that New York City instead invest 80 million dollars to fully fund restorative justice programs in 500 schools. It is also our demand that the City continues to invest 5 million dollars in mental health continuum, fully restore programming to our community schools, 3K, pre-K, to our immigrant families communication outreach, and to preschool special education funding. The City budget is a moral document. It shows our City's and our leaders' priorities, and we ask you to invest in a future for our children and for the future of New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. You mentioned in one of the examples meditation. What other positive aspect of restorative justice have you seen in your school?

ESTHER: I'm afraid to say that the only restorative practice in my school is peer mediation. There are social workers, but it's not advertised enough in our school. I recently got to my school a year ago as a freshman, and I didn't know until this year in like December that there was a social worker and that they're not even there every day. And most of my friends that I've asked and other people that I've asked, they aren't aware that they are social workers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. How is conflict resolved at your school if you do not have any restorative justice? Any of the two students.

DHALIEM ALBAN: I'm sorry. I don't speak a lot of English but...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's okay.

DHALIEM ALBAN: We don't have restorative justice. I know about the restorative justice because we have a subject called advisory, and when I met someone that introduced me to Make the Road and I

went to the sessions and then I know about the restorative justice and that's why I came here to testify, and I really like the content that Make the Road gave us and I would like that kind of subject can be implemented in our schools.

ANDERSON GUAMAN: So basically in our school, we don't have restorative justice but basically when any conflict happens in my school, it doesn't matter what conflict it is, like a minor conflict or a big conflict, there's always the presence of police in every moment. Like if there's any conflict, minor conflict, there's the police also. If there is a bigger conflict, I don't know, the police is there also. So, we don't really have that information or what to do in those cases so the only thing that we have in our school or the only thing that is the solution for everyone is call the police, and that's the only solution that we have so that's why we are fighting for it and raising our voices to have more restorative justice and mental health support for our students in the schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how do we get more PE into our schools?

JOE TITUS: We offer choice, we personalize it, and we give kids access to everything and anything that they want. And so if kids can have a personal experience with it, I think that will get them to want to go to class. And now in the world we live in where most schools in New York City are on a one-to-one basis, the kids who don't feel comfortable maybe changing can do remote work at home, if you give them the instruction. By no means are we replacing teachers. What we're trying to do is support PE teachers. The student/teacher ratio is high in a physical educational classroom.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, that's why I asked. Okay. Thank you so much.

Kyae Sin Linn Lat, Kucsoon Tapal, Brandon Lee, Ayesha Tasnim, I hope I'm saying it right, and Waiza Irshad.

Any other students waiting to testify?
That's it?

Go ahead.

KYAE SIN LINN LAT: Good evening. First, I want to thank Chair Joseph and the rest of the Council for allowing this conversation. My name is Kyae, a student at John Dewey High School. I'm a

youth advocate at the Asian-American Student Advocacy Project Language Access Campaign. The Asian-American Student Advocacy Project is CACF's citywide youth leadership program. Just to let you know that we've been waiting here for six hours which means that we really feel that this needs to be shared. This is a problem that have to be shared and shouldn't be a budget cutting. I'm here today to address the needs of ELL students including AAPI ELL students who are trapped in the closed world of isolation, discouragement, and low confidence, often struggling with language barrier academically and socially. As someone who came to the country two years ago, not only do I feel like my English is my weakness but judgments from peers and teachers also make me feel like I'm not learning fast enough. I'm also simply stressed out about having conversation because I stutter when finding words in my head. I was lucky enough to make friends with my ELL students in my classes but due to how we are separated from the native English speakers, I will still feel nervous to hold conversation with them. To me, it often feel like students do not create appropriate environment where ELL students can receive support when learning

English. Moreover, the English we learned is academic language so it make it hard to hold everyday conversation. I feel like as ELL, we are often being (INAUDIBLE) by the school and fighting alone for ourselves with academic and social pressure. Beyond translation support, our Language Access Team firmly believe that the City and DOE must do more to create a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable school environment for English language learners. We found that many ELL students struggle with social integration because they lack space to practice English. We need schools to actively participate integration of students and make sure the goals of ELL student is not just to pass the necessary tasks, but the goal is to gain confidence in speaking English, make friends, find themselves in the community, and have the resources they need to thrive. We want the school to be able to properly communicate with our families. My parents deserve to have information delivered properly to them. I shouldn't be expected to translate. However, this is often the case because our language is not a top spoken language (TIMER CHIME) in New York City, which make me feel more isolated. We call on the City to

create an equitable and inclusive environment to help ELL students who feel hurt about their struggles by implementing special program that can fill in their language needs and provide engaging materials for an inclusive language learning experience. Thank you.

WAIZA IRSHAD: Good evening. First, I'd like to thank Chair Joseph and the rest of the Council for allowing this conversation. My name is Waiza Irshad, and I'm a junior at Staten Island Technical High School. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Anti-Bullying and Harassment Campaign. For many AAPI students, we face unique challenges that often make us feel disconnected or overlooked. It's not always the blatant bullying but the small repeated moments that go unnoticed, the jokes about how we look, the comments about our food, or the assumptions made about our cultures. In my school, there was an incident that made clear how racism can negatively impact students, especially when it comes to our identities. A group of students decided to create a list ranking East Asian girls in our grade, reducing them to nothing more than objects for comparison. The list was demeaning and hurtful, not just for students

on the list but for our school community. I was very disappointed by the way the incident was handled. The students who were involved were not held accountable, and those who caused harm were not given a real explanation why what they did was wrong. It felt like the system just wanted to move on, but the harm had already been done. This left many students feeling invisible and worthless, including myself. We all deserve an inclusive school environment that centers on empathy and humanity, and it hurts to say that that is not the case for us. As AAPI youth, we're often reduced to assumptions about our culture. our intelligence, or behavior. As a result of the model minority myth, teachers have biases, believing AAPI students are academically gifted, hard-working, and quiet. This completely ignores our individuality. We're constantly being asked whether we're terrorists or viruses by peers, comments that do nothing but cause more harm. All of these ignorances and misunderstandings come from a lack of understanding of each other. Chair Joseph, you mentioned earlier today that the Council has funded Black studies and now Latinx curriculum. We are so grateful for that effort. AAPI students also hope to see themselves in

the classroom, and I hope a City-funded AAPI curriculum can also be piloted in a similar manner. The Anti-Bullying and Harassment Campaign Team believes the solution to addressing bullying and harassment in schools is not punishment but creating an environment of empathy that focuses on healing and repairing harm. We believe every school should have a restorative justice coordinator to help guide students toward better conflict resolution and understanding. Through restorative justice, schools can be proactive, creating a space where students feel safe and included, and the entire school community learns to move forward together stronger and more connected. We need the City to take meaningful steps to prioritize the wellness of students. That is why we believe every school should have a restorative justice coordinator, and the City must have a baseline funding for the program. We know that meaningful change takes time so the funding for such initiatives must be sustainable and protected from cuts. We want to create a community where all students regardless of race, ethnicity or background feel valued safe and understood. Thank you.

BRANDON LEE: Hello. Good evening. First, I want to thank Chair Joseph and the rest of the Council for allowing this conversation. My name is Brandon. I'm a student at Lab High School Manhattan. I'm also a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project's Language Access Campaign. In schools, I've always felt a sense of distance from my friends because of my background. For example, kids in school would always compare skin colors and, as an Asian, I felt secluded as I was only one of color. My experiences as an AAPI student is something other students can relate to. The constant feeling of being different led me to join the Language Access Campaign in ASAP. While I may not be an immigrant myself, I believe that we have shared struggles, and it can be worse for them due to their additional language barriers. English language learners not only need to learn the language, but they also have to adapt to a whole new culture, social life, and also have to support their families who are often in need of language support as well. AAPI ELLs face additional challenges in schools such as social isolation due to stereotypes, different accents, and sometimes even the cultural food that they are

eating. Moreover, oftentimes school resources are not translated into their language, and it puts burden onto the AAPI ELL students to translate for their families. Supporting ELL students must go beyond the academic support. It is a shame that ELLs are not getting the adequate support that they deserve.

Language access isn't just providing a translation.

This is why in ASAP we advocate for the creation of more culturally responsive and integrated spaces for AAPI ELL students in high schools across the city.

Implementing these spaces require understanding their social and academic barriers. We also need schools to actively foster an environment where all students, including ELL students, feel genuinely welcomed and supported to be themselves and thrive. No one should be judged based on their speed at learning English.

We believe that their identities as English language learners should not be ashamed and that their ability to be multilingual must be cherished. All families should be receiving information and school materials regardless of the language that they speak.

Navigating a new education system is challenging for both parents and ELL students, and it is on the school to ease that burden. The City must baseline

the funding support for immigrant students and families, and what this means is that they can also have different outreaches such as using ethnic media and translating material into more languages. We also need data disaggregation to have a full understanding of the language needs of students. We believe that the City can do and must do more to support and protect our immigrant students and families through many different ways. They are part of the community so the City must take action to make that happen. No one should feel excluded, isolated, or judged in our school system. We all deserve to be seen and valued. Thank you.

AYESHA TASNIM: Good evening. First, I want to thank Chair Joseph and the rest of the Council for allowing this conversation. My name is Ayesha, and I am a junior at Bard High School Early College in Manhattan. I'm a youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project Mental Health Campaign. From the first day of freshman year, I knew I'd never fit in. The teachers never understood why I didn't comprehend the math concept sometimes. My classmates always asked me for help when I didn't even understand it. I wondered why it was me that my

classmates came to. As a Pakistani student, it is hard for me to see myself in the school community. I question my belonging and existence. All of these negatively impact my mental health on a daily basis. I know I am not the only one who has faced these stereotypes yet has had no one to talk to about it. Over time, these stereotypes and expectations have reduced our individuality to a simple grade, but we are more than just a number. We have feelings, we have thoughts, we have emotions that deserve to be addressed and supported. I want my school and all schools to prioritize students' mental health because mental health isn't just about diagnosis. It is part of our wellness. Schools seem to have implicit biases. When AAPI students are doing seemingly well or if students don't reach out themselves, then they don't need help. However, as a student, how can I reach out if I feel like no one understands my concerns? How can I recognize my feelings and emotions when we never talk about it in school?

ASAP's Mental Health Campaign aims to identify mental health needs and challenges faced by AAPI youth in New York City public high schools and to advocate for cultural humility and culturally responsive mental

health services in schools. This year, we aim to identify how the model minority myth and a lack of data impact AAPI students' well-being. We want to see systematic changes in school. Addressing and destigmatizing mental health have to be approached from different angles and holistically that address some of the root causes of the issue. For example, a curriculum change that would include the teaching and learning of mental health as mental well-being in classes like health class. This is not a mental health club where only a portion of the students would learn to understand mental health. We would like the City to reduce class size and implement it. Small class size would allow students to build connections more effectively and make it easier for teachers to understand and see students' individuality. We need continuous funding to hire more diverse social workers and ensure that there are enough social workers per school to support all students. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I know they're working on an AAPI curriculum. It was announced about two years ago. Go ahead. You were going to say something.

WAIZA IRSHAD: Thank you for letting me know about that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, absolutely. What kind of support do you want to see in your schools for ELL students? What kind of support? Tell me what that looks like.

UNIDENTIFIED: They already answered that.

KYAE SIN LINN LAT: For the ELL students, I think it will be better if there's more special programs that can support their language needs and, if there's more inclusive materials that can provide inclusive learning experience, it will be better for the school to provide for the ELL students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And you sound great, and that includes social workers, guidance counselors that are also bilingual, right? Is that what we're looking for?

KYAE SIN LINN LAT: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you for your panel. I've taken it in. I'll connect with your coordinator. I'll connect with you, okay? Thank you so much. Keep fighting, y'all.

Sarah Jonas, Nikesha Francis, Randi Levine, Chelsea Baytemur, Molly, Maggie, Michelle

Kraus, and Michaela Schuchman, and Paulette Healy.

Y'all look familiar. You want to start, Paulette?

PAULETTE HEALY: Okay. Thank you, Chair Joseph, for being a constant companion for our children and a true champion for New York City public school families. My name is Paulette Healy, and I'm raising two teenagers in public high school, both with IEPs, one in a D75 inclusion program. I had to laugh when School Construction said that their inability to complete projects was because projects cost more than they anticipated. My son is learning financial literacy in his D75 program in order to know how to create a budget to live independently as an adult. Perhaps School Construction needs a refresher on how to stay within budget or maybe stop greasing palms for contractors who do subpar work in order to curry favor from the Mayor and his cronies, but that's a different hearing. I do want to focus my testimony on Future Ready. The career readiness initiative was funded 53 million dollars aimed to equip students with real life skills and prepare them for careers including paid work-based learning experiences, mentorships, and access to college

credit and industry credentials to 15,000 students in 135 schools. Guess how many of them were D75?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: None.

PAULETTE HEALY: Two.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Two.

PAULETTE HEALY: Not that the students didn't fit the criteria or that there was a lack of willingness from other D75 programs to participate. I actually don't know why there was only two. The historically explicit bias about what our D75 students are capable of has always been a barrier to access to these opportunities. So, as much as I'd love Future Ready to be baselined, I need to know what metrics is being used in the selection process before we do that. What I will ask for today is investment in opportunities for our D75 students, transfer school students, and our alternative pathways students. My head is on a constant swivel watching for yet another transfer school to be on the chopping block for closure or another D75 program being pushed out because a charter school wants to add a grade or another ASE NEST program getting relocated because rich privileged parents want to expand their dual language program. All of these

decisions made by the DOE is a constant reminder that students who cannot learn in a traditional classroom setting are not worth the investment. So our D75 para program, which is a successful program, generates an average of 85 paras yearly that go on to serve students in our public school system. This is a successful program that was piloted in D75 for D75 students who then go on to work with more students with disabilities. I propose a similar model to develop social workers, speech, occupational, and physical therapists, restorative justice and travel training coordinators, and school bus drivers because these are vacancies every year that are positions that are very difficult to fill. And, if we take this direction, this will create a sustainable pathway for opportunities for our students with disabilities and provide them a better chance of independent living outside of the school system. Thank you.

SARAH JONAS: Good evening, and thank you to Education Chair Council Member Rita Joseph, the Education Committee, and the New York City Council for this opportunity to testify. My name is Sarah Jonas, and I'm the Vice President of the Youth Division at Children's Aid. At Children's Aid, we are

committed to ensuring that young people have no boundaries to their aspirations and no limits to their potential. For over 30 years, we've partnered with New York City Public Schools to operate community schools that break down the barriers to success academically, socially, and emotionally. We currently partner with 20 community schools across New York City, providing a comprehensive range of services that span academic support, social emotional development, health and wellness, and family engagement. These services include afterschool programming, targeted academic interventions, health clinics, mental health supports, and family workshops. Together, these efforts address some of the most pressing challenges our youth are facing today, including chronic absenteeism, learning loss, mental health concerns, and food insecurity. In the 2023-24 school year, we saw promising results. 11 out of our 20 schools showed improvement in chronic absenteeism, and 14 out of 15 of our K-8 schools increased math proficiency scores. Nonetheless, there's still much more work to be done. We are so grateful to our City leaders for their commitment to community schools. However, 80 community schools in

New York City are facing a critical 14-million funding gap, which must be addressed to continue providing essential services to the children and families who rely on them. This includes 9.16 million for approximately 70 campus model community schools and 5 million for 10 schools in the zip codes hardest hit by the pandemic. Children's Aid Charles Drew Campus, one of the campus model impacted schools, has provided essential services since 2014, including afterschool Beacon programming, ESL and GED classes for parents, a food pantry, and a school-based health clinic. We stand with the Coalition for Community School Excellence in urging the Administration to restore and baseline this 14 million in funding. We also call on the City to address the delays in contract registration and timely payments to nonprofit providers. We join the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in advocating for baselining funding for essential education programs that are currently at risk due to one-year City dollars. Finally, we urge the City to take urgent action to address the challenges of school transportation for students in foster care. Reliable and timely transportation is essential for these

students. It's a critical source of stability in their lives. Delays of weeks or months in assigning bus routes create unnecessary barriers (TIMER CHIME) to their education, and we call on City leaders to allocate the funding needed to ensure safe and consistent transportation. Thank you so much for your time and for your continued commitment to the children and families of New York City.

NIKESHA FRANCIS: Thank you, Chair Joseph, and all the folks who are rocking out with us, including the officers. We appreciate you. My name is Nikesha Francis, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd Services. I'm also the on the steering committee of the Campaign for Children, the Coalition for Community Schools of Excellence, the Learning to Work Coalition, the Student Success Center Coalition, and the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding. Good Shepherd has 31 education programs that support over 7,500 students across Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. Our programs include learning to work, student success centers, young adult borough centers, and transfer schools and community schools. The Mayor's FY26 preliminary budget extended funding for two of these programs,

Learning to Work and summer programming for another year, but did not include long term funding for these programs, putting them at risk of cuts in 2026. We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling for the City to baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded by one-year City dollars and are therefore at risk of significant funding cuts in July by the executive budget. I would like to focus my verbal testimony on highlighting Learning to Work, community schools, and Student Success Centers. Learning to work. In 2004, New York City conducted a study of students who were falling off track and found that we were losing almost 140,000 students every year. In response, New York City created the Learning to Work model to address the giant need which embedded community-based organizations in transfer schools and young adult borough centers. While the Mayor's FY26 preliminary budget extended funding for Learning to Work for another year, the Learning to Work CBOs are operating under contract extensions that do not consider the changing demographic of students we are supporting and the growing cost of operating programs.

Community schools. In 2021, a change in the Office of Community Schools funding formula led to significant budget cuts in 52 New York City community schools' contracts that account for 70 schools citywide. Over the past three years, the Coalition for Community Schools of Excellence have advocated annually for funding resulting in temporary one-year allocations. This funding must now be baselined in the upcoming budget to ensure long term support. DeWitt Clinton High School, one of the impacted schools, is set to lose over 400,000 in July if no action is taken. Restoring this 9.16 million funding is vital to continue these critical services and support the community.

Student Success Centers. While the adopted budget included one-year funding for Student Success Centers, four Student Success Centers lost funding and had to cease services. (TIMER CHIME) Programs are concerned that they are not able to sustain services with the current funding sources and distribution plan and have been asking New York City Public Schools to RFP Student Success Centers to bring about more sustainable and reliable funding. We urge Mayor Adams to baseline these programs in FY26

executive budget so that students, families, educators, and providers will have the assurance that they can continue relying on these programs in future years and to make additional investments that are needed to support students with a focus on those who have the greatest needs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

RANDI LEVINE: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine. I'm the Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York. We are concerned that a number of important education programs are funded only through the end of this year. If funding is not continued, hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities could lose access to preschool special education programs in violation of their legal rights at a time when more than 600 preschoolers with disabilities are still waiting for seats and the City could lose thousands of 3K seats. The Immigrant Family Outreach Initiative could end at a time when changes to federal policy make it essential for schools to be able to communicate key information to families. Thousands of students at 50

high-need schools could lose access to the mental health continuum while there is an ongoing youth mental health crisis. The majority of restorative justice programming could end despite the importance of students learning to resolve conflicts and repair relationships instead of being excluded from school. We appreciate that you, Chair Joseph and the City Council, fought for each of these programs and more last year. We stand with the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in calling on the City to baseline a number of important education programs this year.

While it is important to ensure that these programs are continued and baselined, the City must also do more to address pressing needs that we see in our work with families. We recommend that the City add at least 70 million dollars for preschool special education evaluations services and staffing at a time when 11,000 preschoolers with disabilities are waiting for at least one of their legally mandated services to begin, and 5,000 are receiving none of their mandated services at all. 17.5 million dollars to expand access to small group support for students who need extra help learning to read. We should not have to take legal action to get private

tutoring because our public schools are not equipped to provide effective reading interventions to students who need them. 3.75 million dollars to provide behavioral support not currently funded through school-based mental health clinics such as training for school staff. And 450 million dollars to the five-year capital plan to make more schools fully accessible so that students with physical disabilities are not turned away from school because they can't get in the building. More information about each of these priorities and others is in our written testimony. We look forward to working with you as the budget process moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and to all of you who are here this late in the evening. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

CHELSEA BAYTEMUR: Good evening, everyone. My name is Chelsea Baytemur, and I am Director of Policy and Advocacy with the YMCA. First and foremost, a huge thank you to you, chair Joseph, for your tireless advocacy and partnership in securing critical investment for our school communities. A huge thank you to our Finance and Committee Staff, the Sergeants, and all of the students that came

straight from school and patiently waited to share their stories with us. I'm going sound like a broken record, but we're going break the record. It's fine. The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is amongst the city's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in our communities. We are a proud member of CIF, CCSE, C4C, and we stand with everything that our colleagues said. So, while the Mayor's preliminary budget continued funding to support programs like Learning to Work and Summer Rising, this was only for one year, and we need the City to baseline these programs. Others such as 3K, community schools, preschool special education classes, restorative justice, and more will expire at the June if our City leaders do not act now. Specifically, the YMCA's early childhood programs serve nearly 1,000 children, and the need continues to increase across the city with the Y having a waitlist at more than half of our program sites.

Early childhood education is a vital part of New York City's social and economic ecosystem as it allows parents and guardians to go to work, supports the development and enrichment of children, and enhances the quality of life for some of our most vulnerable communities. To sustain these ecosystems, CBOs like ours need seamless support from our agency partners, meaning fully staffed divisions, clear and timely communication, designated points of contact, and secure long-term funding.

Secondly, I wanna bring up community schools. So, the YMCA operates 10 community schools across the city, each dedicated to setting students on the path to success by fostering essential life skills, community engagement, and leadership development. Beyond academics, like Sarah mentioned before, community school providers play a crucial role in delivering real time support and solutions to families in the time of crisis. So, during the onset of the pandemic, they were amongst the first responders providing essentials such as food, clothing, translation services, and electronic devices for remote learning. They also mobilized aid for families affected by the Bronx fire tragedy and

continue to support our most vulnerable student populations as we face attacks from Washington. Community schools are more than educational institutions. They are a pillar of stability that extend beyond the classroom walls. Any gap in funding for these programs, no matter the scale, threaten the remarkable progress community schools have made in improving student attendance, supporting social and emotional well-being, and connecting families to critical resources such as food and healthcare. Budgets reflect our priorities. A budget without secure sustainable funding for education sends a clear message (TIMER CHIME) to students, families, and educators, and non-profits that our futures are not a priority so we urge the Administration to baseline these programs in the executive budget. And to quote you, Chair, the word of the day is baseline.

MOLLY SENACH: Good evening, everyone. My name is Molly Senech. I am the Education and Employment Community Organizer for Center for Independence of the Disabled New York. First of all, a huge sincere thank you to Chair Joseph, to the Staff, to everybody. It has been a very long day and you have been engaged the entire time, so thank you.

I would also like to thank you for the significant work you put in last year to ensure that investments were made in continuing many significant and crucial education programs that are, as we all know, in danger of expiring once again this year come June. I'm not going to list out all that they are. I have in my written testimony, but we are all very familiar with them, so instead I am just going to emphasize the fact that these programs were implemented to provide support for the students with the greatest needs. And while the loss will be felt by all students in New York City if funding for these programs is not included in the final budget, students with disabilities will be disproportionately impacted. These students are going to be forced to navigate a school system that is actively reducing support for preschool special education despite hundreds of students still waiting for their legally mandated seats. They're going to be navigating a school system that is actively reducing support for teacher recruitment despite simultaneously acknowledging current massive staffing shortages in special education and bilingual education and projected massive staffing shortages relating to new

class size requirements. They are going to be navigating a school system that is actively reducing outreach capacity despite families consistently reporting being unaware of available resources, and a school system that is actively removing support for community schools, restorative justice, and mental healthcare at a time when, according to a 2024 comprehensive report by the New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene, 48 percent of New York City Teenagers reported experiencing depressive symptoms in 2023, 24 percent reported wanting or needing mental healthcare within the last 12 months and not receiving it, and 9 percent reported attempting suicide. So, all of that said, we call on the City to baseline funding for these programs in the FY '26 budget, and we also ask for the City to make additional investments including but not limited to, again more in my written testimony, we would like to emphasize the need for that 3.75 million dollars to expand school-based mental health clinics. Additionally, we would like to see a greater investment made in improving physical accessibility. I would like to emphasize that it doesn't just impact students. It also impacts family members who might

also have disabilities and cannot participate in their children's education, and it also impacts the people who can staff that school who might not have access to those buildings. Therefore, we also ask for an additional 450 million dollars in the capital plan to fund school accessibility projects. Once again, we thank you for your time very sincerely.

MICHELLE KRAUS: Good evening, Chair Joseph and Members of the City Council Committee on Education. I hope you're all having a good evening. It's been a long day, but a very rewarding day to hear from the students exactly what all of us are advocating for. I think it really validates all our testimonies. My name is Michelle Kraus. I'm the Social Work Manager in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. We are a civil rights legal organization who serves individuals and communities by assisting them in enforcing their legal rights, including children and adults with disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities receive the meaningful and supportive education they deserve.

NYLPI strongly applauds the enactment of recent bills establishing a peer-to-peer support model to promote mental health literacy for students, strengthening the student-led mental health clubs to promote mental health literacy for students, and strengthening student-led mental health clubs with the involvement of clinical candidates. I'm here today to urge, and this evening to urge, the Council to increase and ensure baseline funding for mental health services in New York City Public Schools, particularly for students with disabilities. Right now, too many of these students are struggling in silence. One in five children face a mental health challenge, and the statistics are alarming. In 2023, half of surveyed New York City teenagers reported mild to severe symptoms of depression contributing to school avoidance and chronic absenteeism. In 2021, 16 percent of students reported suicidal ideation with 9 percent attempting suicide. Students identifying as transgender reported high rates of persistent sadness. And nearly 60 percent of District 75 students are chronically absent compared to a 36 percent citywide average, largely due to heightened anxiety, depression, and behavioral challenges. In

2024, NYLPI released a damning report titled A Crisis in Special Education: New York City's Failure to Educate Students Classified with Emotional Disability. This report exposes the consistent failure of the New York City DOE to identify, classify, and adequately serve these students, condemning them to a future of academic struggle, social marginalization, and too often failure to graduate. Critically, our schools lack the resources to address these needs adequately. There's a chronic shortage of special education teachers and related service providers, including mental health professionals. The DOE has admitted that one in five students needing mental health support (TIMER CHIME) do not receive them. The report underscores that the consequences of the DOE failures are clear. Students who do not receive mental health support services and related services are more likely to struggle academically, experience higher rates of disciplinary actions, and face long-term emotional distress. We cannot allow these gaps in care to persist. We are deeply concerned that the Mayor's preliminary budget for 2026 DOE does not include baselined fundings for school-based mental health clinics, previously

supported with a 3.6 million dollars from the mental health continuum, a 5-million-dollar partnership between New York City Health and Hospitals, the DOE, and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. This program was a key component of the Adams Administration mental health agenda. Without this funding, how will the DOE compensate for these lack of services and the students that need these vital services? The FY26 budget must therefore prioritize hiring more school-based mental health professionals, especially psychologists, social workers, counselors trained in disability services, expanding social based therapy programs as students receive help before their struggles become crises, and funding professional development to equip teachers and staff with tools to identify and support mental health needs. Investing in mental health is an investment in academic success, student well-being, and the future of our city. The students of New York City cannot wait any longer. I urge you to take bold action in this budget cycle to ensure that every child, especially those with disabilities, has access to the mental health support they need. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. We have a Mental Health Roadmap led by Council Member Lee, and we passed some bills around student peer-led meditation, around peer mental health, and the Speaker also spoke about that in her City of the State so we are in the same.

Sarah, DOE earlier said they were getting contract payments to community schools on time. Have you seen any improvements in delays in these contract payments?

SARAH JONAS: I know that they've been working hard on it. We have seen some improvements, but we need more and faster. So, I think it's sort of an ongoing issue that needs continued attention, but yes, we do see that there have been some improvements, which we appreciate. More is needed.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And Nikesha spoke about changes you would like to see in the upcoming RFP for the Learning to Work that may address the problems you'd identify.

NIKESHA FRANCIS: Sorry, can you repeat the question, Chair?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you speak to some changes you'd like to see in the upcoming RFP for

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2 Learning to Work that may address some of the
3 problems you identified or you would like to see them
4 put out RFP?

5 NIKESHA FRANCIS: We'd like to see them
6 put out an RFP.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Would it help solve
8 some of the issues you're seeing on the ground as
9 you're working with?

10 NIKESHA FRANCIS: Yes. For sure, it
11 definitely would because it would kind of like
12 streamline the process, so for sure. Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. I
14 saw a hand go up.

15 CHELSEA BAYTEMUR: Yeah, Chair. I was
16 gonna say so because of the City Council and your
17 partnership for ECE, our contract payments have been
18 processed. For community schools, they still owe us
19 money, at least 100,000 dollars for the last school
20 year. Just wanted to put that on the record.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. We will be the
22 debt collectors.

23 Chelsea, DOE testified that 17 schools
24 received the 14 million for community school. Your
25

testimony said 80. What do you think New York City Public School is referring to?

CHELSEA BAYTEMUR: I don't know what 17 schools they're referring to, but the way my colleagues broke it down. So, it's 70 for the 52 campus model schools, and that total is 9.16 million dollars. We keep fighting for it year after year and then it's 10 schools in the neighborhoods most impacted by COVID-19, and that was your schools, the Council, and now it's on the side so 80 schools, and they actually sent us that list which I can share with you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. That'll be great. Thank you so much.

Thank you all for standing with me here today.

Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters, if I messed it up, grace, please, Allison Marino, Tyra Vanriel, Briana Black, Megan Nordgren, Aaron Sanders, Debra Freeman, Gregory Bender.

Is there anyone else waiting to testify I didn't call your name?

You filled out a slip?

You may start, Debra.

DEBRA FREEMAN: Okay. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am really grateful to Chair Joseph and to the Council for all of the hard work that you do supporting education. My name's Debra Freeman, and I'm testifying on behalf of For Freedoms Democratic Club as Chair of its Education Working Group.

At this challenging time with our schools anticipating devastating cuts in federal funding and struggling to address student mental health challenges and the overwhelming needs from record levels of homeless and immigrant students, the budget should prioritize and increase public school funding, including funding for arts education in order to prepare students for success and to stabilize the economy. While we appreciate the investments that have been made to sustain many essential education programs funded with stimulus funding, we are really concerned that many essential programs funded for one year only will be totally cut if the City fails to extend funding in June. Unless the City takes action, programs at risk of cuts include arts programming that research shows expands student access to the arts, supports social emotional well-being, enhances

academic achievement, and provides preparation for creative careers, 3K programs, and we know how many people are waiting for more of those programs. Community schools providing wraparound services. Mental healthcare, and we've heard today how important that is to our students to help them during this mental health crisis. Immigrant communication, restorative justice programs. Again, we've heard how important that is. Tutoring to provide necessary academic support. So, we join the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding in asking the City to baseline funding for essential programs previously funded with federal funding so that students can continue to benefit and rely on these programs. We also ask the City to make additional investments that are needed to support students including expanded access to arts education, ensuring that every school has at least one certified arts teacher. Sadly, though there's so much research showing how important the arts are to supporting social emotional development, school engagement, school attendance, academic achievement, yet there are 379 schools in the city that don't even have one arts teacher, not one. We're talking no teacher, not just visual arts

but we're talking music, theater, dance, things that students will remember for the rest of their lives, that will help them prepare for college, and they don't even have one. We also have the situation that has gone on for years that middle school students, the vast majority of them are not meeting the standards for the arts. (TIMER CHIME) So I want to add that we also support additional funding for literacy support. We've heard how there are students who get to high school who still can't read. Clearly, we're not doing enough in literacy support. We need to do more. And mental health, we need to do more than just what we did last year. We need more school-based mental health clinics. The kids just don't have enough mental health support. And I need to add that we are deeply concerned that the proposed changes to Foundation Aid formula by the Governor would result in New York City Schools getting 350 million dollars less than under the current formula. So, we urge you to work with the Governor and the State Legislature to ensure that any changes to the Foundation Aid formula result in more money for New York City Schools, not less. With drastic changes to federal education funding anticipated and proposed changes to

the Foundation Aid formula threatening State funding, this is not a normal budget season so we ask you to go above and beyond to do everything possible and look at new ways to increase investment in New York City Public Schools meeting this challenging moment and getting past the chaos. Our children are worth the investment. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

AARON SANDERS: Good evening, everyone. My name is Aaron Sanders, and I'm the Deputy Director of Government and Community Relations at Grand Street Settlement. Thank you, Chair Joseph and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening this important preliminary hearing around the education budget.

Grand Street Settlement is 109-year-old multiservice social service agency, and we serve over 18,000 New Yorkers through vital early childhood youth, and older adult programs infused with impactful benefits assistance on the Lower East Side, Manhattan, and The Bronx. We're also a member of United Neighborhood Houses, a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers

across the state. Additionally, we're a member of the Day Care Council of New York, a membership organization dedicated to the expansion of quality childcare and family services.

Today, we're asking the City to strengthen and preserve early education programs for families by reversing 300 million dollars in proposed cuts. Expenditure reductions to the City's early education programs would adversely impact children and families. Specifically, we're advocating for the following: Restoring 197 million to the DOE for 3K programs, continuing towards the path on to universal childcare by codifying and funding 2 Care, and baselining funding for learning to work programs, and finally, restoring 14 million for community schools.

City funding supports our network of center-based early childhood education programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and The Bronx. Grand Street early childhood education programs serve working families and their children, many of whom live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles as it relates to education, health, and economic prosperity. Our network of childcare and educational programs provide families with the opportunities that

they need for long term short-term and long-term development. Budget reductions for the City's early education programs would be catastrophic for working families. According to a recent report from the New York City Comptroller's Office, the childcare sector faces ongoing challenges post pandemic, including a dearth of childcare slots, retention in its workforce, and soaring childcare costs. These disruptions not only impact working families, but they also impact the business sector and commercial corridors. A lack of universal childcare is projected to reduce revenue by 384 million according to the aforementioned report. Investments in this sector will promote economic growth as parents and the labor force will be able to balance family and work. We're also concerned about proposed cuts to youth education programs. A restoration of funding will provide much needed support for our talented and bright students.

In closing, we urge the City Council and the Administration to reverse the proposed cuts. And on a personal note, Chair, I want to thank you for all your support in supporting our youth.

MEGAN NORDGREN: Thank you, and I think we can officially good night instead of good evening.

Thank you for your patience, your passion, and your kindness to the wonderful, wonderful students who showed up here today. What an inspiration. We so appreciate the opportunity to be here tonight.

I'm Megan Nordgren. I'm the Director of Development and Government Relations with New York's Sun Works. We are a non-profit that builds hydroponic farm classrooms in New York City Public Schools. In our farm classrooms, we use hydroponic technology to educate students and teachers about the science of sustainability and bring quality STEM education through the lens of urban farming. We envision a generation of environmental innovators who are empowered to create solutions to our global climate challenges. Since opening our first hydroponic classroom in 2010, we have partnered with over 350 schools, and we are currently reaching more than 140,000 students annually in New York City and the surrounding region. And thanks to Gale Brewer's questions this morning about DSF, we should be in another 90 schools very soon that were funded generously by the City Council Member and Borough Presidents, but those are delayed. But when those do go forward, and we appreciate your support in helping

move those along, we will be in 20 percent of New York City public schools.

And I just want to quickly talk to you about how our program is, really addressing the critical educational priorities that are outlined in the Mayor's Management Report that's on the docket today. But we are educating our children to become productive, engaged adults with our program, helping students understand their connections to the world around them and how their actions impact their communities and the environment. We're promoting civic engagement through hands-on project-based learning, which is exemplified by our program. We are helping to reduce chronic absenteeism, which we know is still a scourge across our school district. And specifically, we are improving academic achievement through our rich curriculum that's aligned with NGSS. We're promoting parental involvement through our Harvest program and our hands-on learning really helps English language learners, helps D75 students. We are also in transfer schools. In addition to all of those amazing benefits, have a workforce development program that gives students opportunities in career pathways. And we are helping to address

food insecurity by sending food home. Despite all of that, we are an extremely cost-effective program at only 10,000 dollars a year per school and, as our schools face budget cuts at the federal level, we request (TIMER CHIME) your support to help our schools fund our program across the city and our 350 schools. And thank you so much.

ALLISON MARINO: Thank you so much, Council Member Joseph, for holding this hearing and for sticking with all of us late into the evening tonight.

I'm Allison Marino, the Director of Public Affairs at Edible Schoolyard NYC, and I also serve on the steering committee of the Food Ed Hub at the Tisch Food Center at Columbia University, and I'm also the Board Chair of Equity Advocates, which convenes the New York City Food Policy Alliance. Edible Schoolyard's mission is to support access to edible education, hands-on cooking and gardening experiences for every child in New York City. We partner with public schools to help students build healthy relationships with themselves, each other, and their environment through food. And last school year, we taught over 2,100 lessons to nearly 4,000

students in 23 schools across the city, including in Council Members Sanchez, Stevens, and Hanif's Districts. The FY25 budget, with your Committee's support and leadership, prioritized food education for schools. 130 new public schools, over twice as many as the year before, are now prioritizing hands-on culturally relevant food education experiences for their students. And last year, over 1,000 New York City public school teachers were trained to incorporate edible education into their classrooms. We are optimistic that with ongoing support and investment from the City, food education providers like Edible Schoolyard can continue to help even more students build healthy relationships with food, school, each other, and the environment next year.

In the FY26 budget, we have an exciting opportunity to amplify the impact of the investments that this Committee has made so far in schools as centers for food education, food access, and social, emotional, and intellectual nourishment. We urge the City Council to continue to prioritize food education in New York City Public Schools and strengthen support for food education and their partner organizations in this year's executive budget. To do

so, we specifically request that your Committee increase funding available to New York City public schools for food education programming to 3 million dollars, this would continue to fund all 190 schools currently receiving funding while allowing for new schools to also begin programming; to establish a Speaker's Initiative to facilitate targeted funding to support the capacity of organizations providing food and nutrition education to New York City public schools at 2.5 million dollars; and our written testimony also outlines additional requests that would strengthen and support food education organizations and their partners to ensure that your investments so far can continue to make an equitable impact. We also urge the City Council to improve nutrition security for New York City Students and their families. Again outlined in my written submission but specifically I'd love to highlight increasing funding for Free Health Bucks which has not seen an increase in funding for CBOs for years. And, finally, we urge the City Council to expand support for summer opportunities for enrichment and food access. (TIMER CHIME) Specifically, we'd love to see the contracting for schools and CBOs done earlier

on the same timeline as for SYEP so that CBOs can specifically contract to support schools that are going to be open for Summer Rising and so that we can specifically work with them to incorporate. We'd love to see a required meal period so that students, especially those who rely on summer meals for a lot of their food access, so that we can make sure that we incorporate with them to support and also get, you know, all the resources we need to do so early enough in advance. Thanks for your time.

TYRA VANRIEL: Good evening, Council Member Joseph and Members of the Committee. Thank you for your dedicated service.

My name is Tyra Vanriel, and I'm a graduate intern at the Tisch Food Center. I'm honored to have the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm a second-year student in the master of science in nutrition education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am on track to become a registered dietitian upon completing my studies this year. My studies have illuminated the disparities in our community, and my fieldwork experience has reinforced the importance of advocating for equity. We urge the Council to strengthen food ed in New York

City by renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub and enhancing food ed programs and partner supports. Increasing funding for food education programs is essential for students' long-term health and academic success. In November and October of 2024, I had the opportunity to co-teach two nutrition lessons about fiber to third grade students at PS75. During the lessons, the students were very engaged and excited to try samples of different fruits, vegetables, and whole grains that we offered. This experience reinforced the need to educate students about nutrition from an early age and continuously reiterate the knowledge they learned. During my Zankel fellowship with the REACH program, I taught two fourth grade classes at PS35 throughout the 2023 and 2024 school year where I taught introductory nutrition. After providing both pre and post surveys to students, I was able to see that their knowledge about nutrition and our food system has improved. Additionally, those 32 students expressed more interest in incorporating healthier foods because they understood the benefits. This leads into my support for the next policy initiative. A 100,000-dollar investment in developing a consistent

evaluation methodology to community-based organizations is crucial. This will provide invaluable data to inform both the community and the Council about the effectiveness of current food education programming, highlighting successes and identifying areas for improvement, ensuring that our investments yield the most significant possible impact. Lastly, to highlight how the work of our partner organizations positively influences our New York City Students, last spring I had the opportunity to visit two elementary schools, PS75 and PS163, to interact with students during their lunch period and motivate them to try new sample recipes from the salad bar. Wellness in the Schools, one of our partner organizations, works with both of these schools and has made efforts to improve creative ways to promote health and wellness in the school. During one visit, there was a third grade teacher that dedicated a period to teach her students about nutrition education utilizing the Green Beat's curriculum, another partner organization that provides lessons to students to learn more about modern and traditional food systems and the impact that food has on their health. It is crucial for

students to be curious about where their food comes from and its impacts from elementary school. At the end of that lesson, the students tried a cultural snack, yucca, which they thoroughly enjoyed. By prioritizing food (TIMER CHIME) education, we empower students with the knowledge and skills to make informed dietary choices. Thank you for your time.

BRIANA BLACK: Hello. Chair Joseph and Members of the City Council Education Committee, thank you for your time today. My name is Briana Black, and I am the Educator and Executive Director of the Leave It Better Foundation. Our non-profit provides food and nutrition education to students across New York City through programs centered around gardening, composting, harvesting, and DIY snacks. I'm here not only as a representative of my non-profit, but also as a voice for the students that we serve across the city. One of the hands-on activities that we do with the students is make parfaits. At the start of this activity, I asked each class at different schools across the Bronx about the food options available around them. Unsurprisingly, most responses include fast food restaurants and maybe a bodega that might sell a fresh salad. The lack of

knowledge about food and food deserts and nutrition education is something that noticed repeatedly at the three schools where I work. Many of the students live in food deserts but don't even know it. When unhealthy options are the norm, it is hard to recognize what is missing. In communities like these where access to affordable healthy food is limited, these disparities only grow. Thanks to your funding and the support of the Tisch Center through the Food Education Hub at Columbia University, we've been able to provide essential food and nutrition programming to over 500 students across New York City. Nutrition is the foundation of education. Without it, students cannot thrive. Academic success starts with proper nutrition. This is why we urge the City Council to renew funding of 250,000 dollars for the Food Education Hub. This will enable vulnerable communities, including students from low-income and housing-insecure households to access to essential food and nutrition education. Allocate 100,000 dollars for intentional framework. This will help grow the coalition, allowing more organizations like ours to serve schools across New York City. Good nutrition is a foundation of a healthy life. By

expanding our reach to more students, we lay the groundwork for healthier communities. As a proper nutrition education empowers individuals to make informed choices that benefit not only themselves but everyone else around them. At Leave It Better, we believe that providing children with access to healthy foods and nutrition education is essential to their well-being. By supporting such programs, we ensure that we do not deprive our children the opportunity to make informed healthy choices, empowering them to lead better lives and in turn leave the world better for others. (TIMER CHIME)

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I appreciate you guys rocking with us for the whole night.

DR. NATALIE GREAVES-PETERS: Good evening.

Thank you, Chair Joseph and the Members of the Education Committee, for your time throughout and thoughtful consideration on food and nutrition education today. Your leadership in shaping policies that impact New York City Students is deeply appreciated. My name is Dr. Natalie Greaves-Peters, and I'm a Researcher at the Laurie M. Tisch Center

for Food Education and Policy at Teachers College
Columbia University.

Throughout today's testimonies, you've
heard how food education transforms schools and
communities, and I see this firsthand in my work at
the Tisch Food Center where we collaborate with
schools and organizations to ensure that every
student regardless of the zip code, all those
students we saw today, has access to high-quality
nutrition education and food security. To truly meet
the needs of New York City Students, we must invest
in both. That's why I urge the Council to renew
funding for the Food Ed Hub with a 250,000-dollar
investment, not just to expand food education but to
strengthen food security in our schools and
communities. This funding would allow us to advance
research on best practices in food education to
ensure that we have the most effective
implementation. It'll also allow us to develop
culturally responsive evidence-based food education
strategies to guide schools and as well as community-
based organizations, and will also compensate
community-based organizations for their expertise in

co creating programs that directly serve students and families.

In addition to renewing funding for the Food Ed Hub, I also urge the Council to support key initiatives that strengthen food education and security across New York City such as those mentioned by my teammates. One critical investment is 499,870 dollars to expand the Food Justice Leadership Fellowship which trains diverse CUNY undergraduates to advance community driven voice and leadership. Right now, too many New York City Students lack access to both quality food education and reliable nutritious meals. Without continued investment, we risk losing momentum and leaving thousands of students without the support they need to thrive. The students who spoke today are proof that this investment changes lives. Investing in the Food Ed Hub ensures that every dollar reaches classrooms, strengthens community partnerships, and creates lasting impact. I urge the Council to fund the Food Ed Hub request and the additional initiatives because food education and food security go hand in hand and no students should be left behind. Thank you again for your time and your leadership.

GREGORY BRENDER: Good evening. I'm Gregory Brender from the Day Care Council of New York. Chair Joseph and all of the people who are making this happen, Staff Members, Sergeants-at-Arms, thank you so much for this and for really making it a full day starting with a press conference that's adding voice for children and youth and teachers. You know the kids who are in 3K and pre-K are a little young for the twelve-hour hearing, but in every corner of New York there are early childhood educators who are working to give young children the confidence, the social skills, the bravery to in a few years be the ones who are here testifying so I'm excited to see maybe the FY 2031 budget process to see that happens.

Unfortunately, this is a budget hearing so we have to talk about the really scary things that are in this budget for early childhood education providers and for the children and families they serve. Mayor Adams' budget makes drastic cuts to early childhood education at a time when families are leaving the city because they cannot afford early childhood education, at a time when programs are struggling because staff are underpaid and they're

losing teachers, staff, directors, providers because of inadequate salaries and benefits, and at a time that also the ACS system is facing a significant deficit in its voucher program which is going to be increasing the need for the services of NYCPS contracted childcare centers and family childcare programs particularly in their extended day, extended year programs. Therefore, we have many recommendations where we will be using your word of the day, baselined, quite a bit starting with keeping the promise of 3K for all. We urge the City to include full funding for the current 3K program in the Mayor's executive budget for FY24-25, maintaining the complete number of seats and programs and at a minimum reinstating the 112 million dollars cut in the Mayor's preliminary budget. We also urge the restoration of the timeline for 3K expansion so the City can move towards true universal access to 3K in every neighborhood. We urge the restoration and baselining of the School Day Plus Program. This is an amazing Council initiative that allows childcare programs to respond to the changing demographic needs of their neighborhoods and provide a longer school day and longer year in programs that only have school

day contracts that are on a six-hour twenty-minute schedule which we know are not working for many working families. We urge the restoration of the Promise NYC program, also a City Council initiative that provides access to children who are otherwise denied due to discriminatory requirements. We urge the (TIMER CHIME) restoration and baselining of preschool special education programs.

Finally, two other key areas where we know work needs to be done. One, we need to continue to invest in the early childhood education workforce. The Day Care Council is proud to have worked with our partners in organized labor to settle collective bargaining agreements. However, the biggest issue still facing early childhood education providers is loss of staff, the difficulty finding staff and that is due to the inadequate salaries. We urge the City to expedite the payment of collectively bargain salary increases to the early childhood education workforce and to identify new resources to increase the pay of the early childhood education workforce, teachers, directors, providers, staff at every level. We also urge the City to improve enrollment procedures, and we have several recommendations in

our written testimony to support making it easier and reducing the red tape that families face when they are trying to enroll their children, particularly in community-based early childhood education programs. Thank you so much for having this hearing and for being such an important advocate for early childhood education, and we look forward to working together and hopefully to see changes in the Mayor's executive budget.

TRENTON PRICE: Thank you, Chair Joseph and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Trenton Price. I'm the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center. I'm a former middle school teacher, school leader, and a district leader for arts education for New York City Public Schools before joining Salvadori. At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services, that's STEM plus the A for arts and architecture, to New York City Public Schools, NYCHA Community Centers across the five boroughs. For context, last year we served over 12,000 students at 145 schools and NYCHA community centers. Our goal is to make STEM and the arts come alive for students and foster the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and problem solving, just like real life architects,

designers, and engineers. We are grateful to have the support of the Council through multiple CASA and digital inclusion and literacy grants as well as the afterschool enrichment and speakers initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the city. I want to thank this Committee and Chair Joseph, and the Council more broadly, for their commitment to ensuring that our schools are adequately funded and equitably funded despite what is in the proposal from the Mayor. All too often we see that schools that serve students with compounding needs without adequate resources to provide a robust and well-rounded education. From our project-based learning work, we know that well-planned lessons that have students creating their own understanding through real world applications require time and resources. For example, our programs require significant materials for students to be able to bring the built environment to life. I and Salvadori underscore the importance of funding for schools, especially for arts and creative education. As we say, it starts with the arts. We thank you for advocating for full and robust funding for our schools and for creative education citywide as we know these are important

levers for student achievement as well as career pathways here in New York City.

One way to increase these opportunities for young people is to increase CASA and digital inclusion and literacy funding, which have remained flat for several years. This investment in our youth will create pathways and vital opportunities for learning outside the school hours. I thank you for facilitating this hearing and for your commitment to supporting the young people of New York City. We are grateful to be able to serve New York's children and we hope to support the work of hands-on project-based STEAM learning for years to come. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And we also have an arts education hearing in April. Just a plug.

Day Care Council, can you speak to some potential changes in the next early childhood RFP that would address some problems that you're seeing now.

GREGORY BRENDER: Sure. So, I think the first one is going to have to be the investment in the workforce, moving toward salary parity. We also want to improve the enrollment procedures, ensuring

that community-based organizations can enroll families directly so if a family comes to the center, they can enroll them instead of having to go through a centralized enrollment process. Using presumptive eligibility so that families can get into extended day programs once they've cleared basic background checks and not gone through the full check that can take several months. And investing in linguistically and culturally appropriate marketing to ensure there's greater uptake in the programs. We also want to ensure that community-based providers have more flexibility to propose and make changes to their programs based on community need. We see a lot of demographic changes in neighborhoods so ensuring that providers, who really see what their communities need, can propose changes like switching from extended day or school day and changing those models. And, of course, on-time payments. Improving the payment procedures. One of the things that we've been talking about for a while is, under the RFP, you're guaranteed 75 percent of the contract value, but the advance is only 25 percent, and so you have a lot of programs who are, you know, and if we've had crises, where programs have missed payroll because of late

payments so ensuring a better system for on-time payments.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Gregory. New York City Public Schools testified earlier they work with the five ECE sites that were extended. Can you speak on how they work with you to ensure parents knew that your site was available next year?

AARON SANDERS: Yes. So currently the DOE is in conversation with the property manager specifically at 319 Stanhope to come to a resolution about the lease, and that's ongoing right now to my knowledge, but I can follow-up with some more details.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What does food education look like in New York City in schools, not just New York City Schools? And in FY25, New York City Public Schools told us there was funding for some nutrition committees in schools. Have you all heard about this? Are you able to collaborate with these committees?

DR. NATALIE GREAVES-PETERS: Yes. So, we've been very fortunate in the last couple of years where the Mayor's Office has given us funding and community-based organizations to have nutrition

education programming within schools, and what that looks like, it's basically experiential learning, predominantly cooking classes, gardening classes, compost and hydroponics so stuff that's connecting not just, you know, educational content but experiential learning activities also.

ALLISON MARINO: And then to answer your question about the... you asked specifically about...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Nutrition committees?

ALLISON MARINO: Yeah. So, nutrition committees, from my understanding, have actually been fairly difficult for schools to sustain. They there is not dedicated funding or there hasn't been in the past dedicated funding for their capacity. And even when there is dedicated funding for their, like, materials or activities, it's been hard for schools... it winds up falling on the principals or the assistant principals. It's been hard for them to identify a point person to cover those pieces. However, with the new food education grants and the different iterations thereof, for the past couple of years, some of that work has shifted. Some schools have elected to shift some of that the weight of that work over to their food education partners, and I

know that it has gone well when they have been able to do that. So, they need the capacity to be able to do it, and some of the capacity can certainly come from food education organizations that are providing the experiential work in the schools currently, and then that is really successful.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you all and good night to this panel.

I have one more. Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Hello, Chair Joseph. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thanks for staying out here for this, what is it, 12 hours? 12 hours. Hope you get home safely. Take a Uber if you can, please. It is dangerous out there.

All right. So, I'm here to show my support to Mahmoud Khalil, free Mahmoud Khalil. I hope that the City Council really put a resolution to free the man. The reason he's in this situation because of freedom of speech. I know this is Education. I know this is not Higher Education, but since, you know, he got arrested in Colombia, might as well add it in here. I'm calling on the City... I mean, look. He didn't have to go through that stuff.

You know, support Israel, don't support Israel, support Palestine, don't support Palestine. Nobody should be arrested by the FBI or any government agency or even NYPD because they say stuff that

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please stay on topic.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I am. I am. I am. They shouldn't be (INAUDIBLE) but that's my thing.

All right. While we're here, the City Council should make sure to keep the schools funded. All schools be funded. The City Council needs to really care about the kids by keeping stuff funded, especially special education and childcare. Shout out to New York for Childcare Campaign. We need childcare for parents that that go to school. They need childcare. Well, let me see what else. Mainly, that's what we need in the city. And I know the City, they oversee the School Construction Authority. I think that the City Council should make charter schools facilities separate from public school facility because what's going on here, my niece go to a charter school but it's inside a public school. The City Council should allocate at least 5 billion dollars into developing charter schools separately

from the public school system. While at the same time when that happens, they should hand out security contracts to private security contractors. I think it's kind of, like, really funny when you put a charter school inside a public school, but then they gotta be protected by school safety, and then it's kinda really complex and funny about that. But like I said, protect the kids, fund the kids. Education is first. Like Mr. Eric Dinowitz said early over there that education matters, like that need to be funded more. I don't know why that the Mayor's Office doesn't prioritize education for the kids. Without education, these kids ain't gonna see the future that they wanna see. So I'm done. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you so much to our in-person panelists. If there's anybody else who wishes to testify in the room, please raise your hand.

We are now going to move on to our virtual panelists.

For virtual panelists, once your name is called, a Member of our Staff will unmute you and the Sergeant-at-Arms will start the timer and give you the go-ahead to begin. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce you may begin before delivering your testimony.

Our first panelist, Angela Alshaar followed by Beth Reisman and Espa Zigouris (phonetic). Angela.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

ANGELINA ALSHAAR: Hello.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes, we can hear you.

ANGELINA ALSHAAR: Okay. It's Angelina Alshaar so I just want to make sure you have the right person.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

ANGELINA ALSHAAR: So, thank you for being so patient in this long meeting. I'm here to testify on preschool special education services. My name is Angelina Alshaar. I live in Queens. I'm the parent of Anais (phonetic). She's my 4-year-old daughter, and she has autism. I'm here today to talk about the need

for the City to provide the preschool special education services that young children need. My daughter, Anais, is a preschool student who is nonverbal and was diagnosed with autism. In 2023, I had Anais evaluated for preschool special education program, and everyone agreed that she needed a small special education classroom where she will also receive speech, occupational, physical therapy, and SEIT services. However, the Department of Education never provided Anais with her mandated-related services for the 2023-2024 school year. I contacted the DOE in the summer of 2024 to request that they provide the compensatory related services, but was informed that would not be possible. They also failed to provide me with any information on when those services will begin. It was very frustrating to see how the lack of supports and services negatively impacted my child. It took a full year before Anais was provided with the compensatory related services she was owed for the last school year. Additionally, I briefly experienced the same challenges with getting Anais mandated-related services for this school year and had to send multiple emails to the DOE before those services were put in place. I'm

still waiting for the DOE to provide additional supports for Anais for this school year. It is upsetting to know that there are many children like my child who spend months or even years waiting for preschool special education services. Children have a legal right to these services, and the City has an obligation to provide them. That is why I'm joining advocates in asking the City to add 70 million dollars to the City budget for the preschool special education services and to continue the 55 million dollars that was added for this year only for preschool special education classes. These funds are necessary to ensure that all preschoolers have the special education classrooms and services they need. Thank you so much for listening to my testimony, and I really admire the children that stood up, you know, throughout the day to testify, and the City Council for really and genuinely listening to what the children had to say and everyone in this in this discussion.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you, Angelina. Beth.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

BETH REISMAN: Hi. Good evening. I'm here today to ask that you prioritize New York Edge's Fiscal Year '26 citywide funding request. We're seeking 1.2 million dollars under the Council's After School Enrichment Initiative and 250,000 dollars under the Council's Social and Emotional Supports for Students Initiative. Our Council citywide funding has remained at 1 million dollars for the past 15 years, despite the fact that we've tripled in size and have significantly increased the number of students served. New York Edge is the largest provider of school-based afterschool and summer programming in New York City, serving 33,000 students in over 100 schools throughout the five boroughs. Our mission is to help bridge the opportunity gap faced by students in underinvested communities. Core components of our programming include STEM education, social emotional learning and leadership, visual and performing arts, sports health and wellness, academics and college and career readiness, and summer programs. Mosaic by ACP has identified us as the largest afterschool provider in the nation offering SEL support. I know we heard so much about that today. We are also one of the city's largest providers of college access programs.

Council citywide funding has enabled us to enrich and expand our school year and summer programs and has allowed us to develop and implement unique and engaging programs such as our award-winning student led podcast Formative, our book publishing program, and our Read Across New York Edge program. Along with our students and families, we are extremely grateful for the Council's 33 years of support. Together, we're guiding students so that they grow up happy, healthy, and empowered. Together, we are creating the next generation of active and productive community members and problem solvers. We were so proud to hear our student, Trinity Williams, speak about this earlier today. The time has come, however, where increased funding is vitally needed. Unlike contracts with DYCD and other agencies, Council discretionary contracts are not and have never been eligible for COLA increases. This is making it increasingly difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality staff and to continue to offer the wide array of programs that we're known for. We are now looking to you to meet the needs of the next generation of young people by supporting our FY26 funding request.

Thank you, and thank you so much for the opportunity to testify this evening.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you. Next Espa Zigouris followed by Michael Rands and Takiyah Tinsley.

Espa.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Espa Zigouris.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: We can't hear you.

We're going to move on to Michael Rands, and we'll come back to Espa. Michael.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

MICHAEL RANDS: Thank you so much, Chair Joseph and entire Members of the Education Committee, for sticking it out and allowing me to testify tonight.

My name is Michael Rands, and I'm a researcher at Class Size Matters. We are deeply concerned about many aspects about (INAUDIBLE) tonight, especially relating to the lack of funding allocations to ensure that schools are going to be

able to comply with the class size caps that we're expecting by 2028. As we've already talked about, 50 percent of classes need to be complying with the caps that September compared to the 40 percent that we have now. Yet we think that the process designed by the DOE to achieve this goal is an entirely voluntary, meaning that the principals are essentially allowed to apply for class size funds with no actual funding allocated or disclosed or appropriated for reducing class sizes, and there's no clear goal in this plan of how many teachers are to be hired in the budget. And while the DOE had originally stated that an announcement would be made to which schools would be awarded class size reduction fundings by the February, as the last time we checked, we couldn't find that information. But perhaps more crucially, there's been little progress so far made to create sufficient space for overcrowded schools to be able to meet the class size caps this year. The percentage of students enrolled in schools over 100 percent utilization rates have actually increased last year rather than decrease. And as we heard earlier, according to the DOE, there's upwards of 495 schools that do not have

enough space to meet the class size caps. And of these 495 schools, they actually enroll nearly half of all K-12 public school students. Unfortunately, there were a lot of really good practical solutions put forward by Class Size Working Group, yet very few of them have been adopted. One of them was to balance enrollment and utilization rates more evenly between nearby schools, which would improve both overcrowded and (INAUDIBLE) schools, yet that has not been implemented. Nor has the DOE acted on the Class Size Working Group's proposal to shift some of the pre-K and 3K classes in overcrowded elementary schools to nearby pre-K programs run by community-based organizations, which have thousands of empty seats and are now threatened with closure by the DOE if they do not have 95 percent of their seats filled. Nor has the capital plan come up with enough new funded seats to really comply with the caps by 2028. According to Nina Cabot, President of SCE (INAUDIBLE) estimated that they would need 85,000 new school seats to comply with the class size caps, yet only about 33,000 seats have been added as new capacity seats. Far, far fewer than what we need and

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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2 approximately only 20,000 are expected to be
3 completed...(TIMER CHIME)

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank
5 you.

6 MICHAEL RANDS: Again, we are deeply...
7 thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank
9 you. Next up, Espa Zigouris.

10 ESPA ZIGOURIS: Hello. Can you hear me?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Yes.
12 Espa.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 ESPA ZIGOURIS: Thank you. Good evening,
15 Chair Joseph. I apologize for that mix up. And good
16 evening to other Members of the City Council. Thank
17 you so much for this opportunity to testify. I'm Espa
18 Zigouris, Senior Vice President of Education at Birch
19 Family Services, which is a not-for-profit agency
20 supporting children, adolescents, and adults with
21 autism and other developmental disabilities since
22 1975. Bridge is a leading provider of special ed
23 preschool services under contract with the New York
24 City DOE, and we operate eight New York State
25 Education Department approved 4410 preschool programs

and provide services to over 1,000 preschool students in the least restrictive settings. Our students are New York City Public School students, and children are referred to us by the Committee on Special Preschool Special Education because the DOE has no suitable placement options. Our tuition rates are determined by the SED and DOE. And for years, Birch and similar providers have struggled to recruit and retain certified teachers, teacher assistants, and related service therapists because of the inadequate tuition reimbursement. The result was our inability to provide competitive salaries to our teachers. The challenge was exacerbated in 2019 when an agreement was reached by the City to raise the salaries of certified early childhood teachers at the DOE-contracted CBOs. This agreement failed to include certified special education teachers of DOE contracted 4410 preschool special ed programs like ours, and this created a huge disparity between teachers that were included in the parity initiative with starting salaries for certified special ed teachers of 68,500 for 10 months. The Mayor and the City Council, in 2022 invested 96 million dollars to support preschool special education students and

their families. The 4410 enhancement provided equity for 4410 vulnerable preschoolers that the New York City DOE could not serve, and they have received a longer school day from 5.5 hours to 6 hours and 20 minutes, the same as their neurotypical 3K and 4K counterparts. This has provided parents with additional childcare opportunities as well. We're asking that Members of the City Council do the right thing for children with special needs and other families. You must ensure that Fiscal Year '26 budget invests in preschool special education, students, teachers, and staff at 4410 CBOs through the continuation of the 4410 contract enhancement as a baseline, that's the word, right, so that preschoolers with disabilities get a fair and appropriate public education to which they're entitled (TIMER CHIME) by law...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time's expired.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you so much. Next up, Takiyah Tinsley followed by Jolene Gunther-Doherty, Fiodhna O'Grady, Janice Wineman (phonetic). Takiyah.

TAKIYAH TINSLEY: Hello. My name is Takiyah Tinsley. I live in Manhattan with my two daughters. I am here today to talk about the need for sit for the City to provide the preschool special education classrooms and services that young children need. Thank you for the chance to speak with you and share my story.

My youngest child is named True Blessing. She is a sweet 3-year-old who has cerebral palsy and a seizure disorder. I knew that because of her disabilities, True Blessing would need a lot of supports to learn, so I worked hard over the summer to make sure she would be ready to have a successful start to preschool. I contacted the Department of Education to have True Blessing evaluated and met with them to create a plan for her education. I was encouraged when the DOE told me they would place True Blessing in a special education classroom with just six students and provide her with speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and vision therapy. Unfortunately, the school the DOE offered me for True in September was not a good fit. I had a hard time communicating with the program and disagreed with their plans to deviate from the

services recommended by her service plan. I felt uncomfortable sending my daughter to that school so I contacted the DOE at the start of the school year to request a new placement. However, the DOE has not provided me with any other options despite all my efforts to set True Blessing up for successful first year of preschool. She has been out of school all year and has barely received any of the therapies she has a legal right to receive. I am fortunate to have been able to get True Blessing some services this year through her health insurance, but the therapies are not enough. It saddens me to know that there are many children like my child who spends months waiting for preschool special education classroom and services. Children have a legal right to these services, and the City has an obligation to provide them. That is why I am joining other parents and advocates in asking the City to add 70 million to the City budget for preschool special education services and evaluations and to continue the 55 million that was added for this year only for preschool special education classes. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your testimony. Jolene Gunther-Doherty.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

JOLENE GUNTHER-DOHERTY: Good evening.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jolene Gunther Doherty, and I am the Director of the Guild for Exceptional Children's 4410 Preschool Special Education Program. I'm here today to talk about the importance of finding funding to continue to support our 4410 preschool special education programs. We appreciate that last year Mayor Adams and the City Council made significant investments in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue essential education programs. While the City baselined many of these programs, the City continued other programs for one year only, meaning the funding will expire at the June unless extended in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. Unless the City acts, programs at risk of significant funding cuts include preschool special education classes for hundreds of young children with autism and other disabilities. We need that 55 million dollars baselined and other support as well. The failure to act to save this preschool special education funding will result in many preschool special education teachers and teacher assistants resigning. There is a potential for hundreds of 4410

classrooms being closed across the city. The impact on preschool students with disabilities and their families would be devastating, causing thousands of children, preschool children with disabilities who have a legal federal right to special education services to sit at home waiting for a seat once again. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I invite you to come see our work. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your testimony. Next up, Fiodhna.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

FIODHNA O'GRADY: Hello there. Fiodhna O'Grady here, Director of Government Relations at Samaritans of New York, the Suicide Prevention Center. New York City's young people are telling us all day long in the starkest terms possible that they need mental health help. In 2023, the CDC's biannual youth risk behavioral survey reported that suicide attempts among New York City high schools have come to an all-time high with 14 percent attempting suicide in 2023. That's an unimaginable 56 percent increase from 2021 and an all-time high since the early 2000s. That means that New York City students are attempting suicide at a rate more than 50 percent

higher than the national average in 2023, and the severity of these attempts is escalating. Between '21 and '23, percentage of students who were seriously injured in a suicide attempt nearly tripled.

UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE)

FIODHNA O'GRADY: I'm sorry. Can you hear me?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: You can continue.

FIODHNA O'GRADY: Oh, I'm so sorry. I heard something.

This crisis is not affecting all students equally. African American students in New York City attempted suicide at a rate of 23 percent. That is one in five, more than double the national average for African American students nationwide. Seventeen percent of our African American students reported a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury serious enough to require medical attention. LGBTQ youth, the numbers have increased too. Among heterosexual students, about half of those who seriously consider suicide go on to attempt it. But LGBTQ students, that drop off does not exist. Nearly 36 percent of our LGBTQ students in New York City seriously considered

suicide last year, and almost 30 percent were followed through with an attempt. We can no longer afford to say that suicide prevention is just a mental health issue. Suicide is a tragic result of a process in which a person's ability to cope breaks down, leading to intense struggle and crisis. These crises don't happen in isolation. They are shaped by identity, by loss, circumstance, housing stability, food security, social environment, systemic inequalities, factors that can push young people to the edge and rob them of hope. We cannot just prevent death. We must create the conditions that allow young people to feel life is worthy, something that DOE does on an annual basis with its myriad mental health programs, and we are here to support you and encourage you to continue investment in mental health. Samaritans appreciate the City Council's continued support of funding for social emotional mental health programs and professionals like SAPIS, students in temporary housing, guidance counselors, social workers... (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time's expired.

Thank you.

FIODHNA O'GRADY: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you so much. Next up, Brett Zaffer followed by Eduardo Antonelli, Jennie Schoen, and Brittany Kaiser. Brett.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

BRETT SAFFER: Good evening. Thank you for having me. My name is Brett Saffer, and I am a parent from the Bronx. My daughter, Samantha, is three years old and attends a preschool special education program in our neighborhood. Sammy has Down syndrome, and her IEP mandates several different support services. We have seen the immense benefits of receiving preschool special education. She is in a wonderful school and has great providers, and we've witnessed her growth since the beginning of the school year. However, like so many other families, we have experienced gaps in Sammy's services due to the persistent shortage of providers in our city. Just recently our school had to hire a new occupational therapist, and it took two full months to find a provider with availability despite the school and the DOE doing everything they can to search for one. That's two months that Sammy missed of her mandated services due to the provider shortage. Unfortunately, this was not the first time

we experienced long gaps in services between preschool special education and early intervention. As a parent, it is a terrible feeling to know that your child needs a service but that the City is unable to provide it. The citywide numbers shared in a recent report from Advocates for Children are extremely upsetting. Thousands of children across the city are not getting the services mandated on their IEP, and in some cases, it's for the entire school year. How can we let this happen? It is unacceptable, and it is illegal. It is illegal. And it should not be this hard to have services in place. So, I echo the call of advocates for the Council and the Mayor to extend the 55 million dollars that was granted this year for preschool special education and to add another 70 million dollars to the City budget for services and evaluations as recommended by Advocates for Children. I'll close by saying next Friday is World Down Syndrome Day. It is a day of inclusion and advocacy, and it is in that spirit that I am here to advocate for all children with disabilities to get the support services they are entitled to, and the Council and Mayor will continue to hear from us until that becomes a reality. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you so much. Eduardo Antonelli.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

EDUARDO ANTONETTI: Good evening. Thank you, Chair Joseph and the Members of the Education Committee, for the opportunity to speak today about our priorities for the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. My name is Dr. Eduardo Antonetti, and I am the Senior Director of Advancement for International's Network. As you review the Council's budget priorities, I would like to highlight the invaluable work that International's Network is doing across New York City. In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever that non-profit organizations like ours are adequately funded and supported. Our work is crucial to ensuring that immigrant and refugee youth in New York City receive the quality education they deserve. International's network is an education non-profit organization with more than 20 years of success in supporting immigrant and refugee students. We achieved this by designing and implementing inclusive high-quality multilingual learning environments for newly arrived youth in collaboration with educators in New York City Public Schools. Students at

International Schools in New York City consistently have graduation rates that exceed the district average for multilingual learners. Through our Project Soaring program, we are also working with new groups of schools in improving their approach to working with this vulnerable population, especially given the current political climate. With that in mind, I want to emphasize the importance of maintaining funding for the affinity organization contracts, a cause I know Chair Joseph has championed in the past and we want to thank her for her leadership. The affinity contract enables International's team of experts to work closely with New York City superintendents, school leaders, teachers, counselors, staff to ensure that immigrant and refugee students continue to receive the necessary resources and opportunities to succeed. In addition to providing coaching, strategic planning, and professional development services, Internationals creates opportunities for educators to collaborate as professional learning communities. We strongly urge the City Council and the Mayor to prioritize and preserve this funding in the upcoming budget as well as any additional discretionary funding to support

education for multilingual learners and migrant youth. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of our public school system and our newest New Yorkers. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your example. Jeanine.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

JEANINE SCHOEN: Chair Joseph and Members of the City Council, thank you for hearing my petition this evening. I'm Janine Schoen, a parent of a second grader of PS323 in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a Chair of our school's Family Arts Night, and a brand marketer who uses both my right and left brain in my job. I'm testifying before you today to protect the arts programs in our public schools. The American Academy of Pediatric emphasizes that a well-rounded education is crucial for children's development and future successes, promoting cognitive, social, and emotional growth and preparing them for college and careers. Additionally, the New York State Education Department guidance from 2018 advocates that when part of a well-rounded education in schools, arts learning contributes to increased academic achievement and student success in college

preparation for college, career, and life. My well-rounded education helped me develop skills in critical thinking, flex my creative muscle, and develop new ideas essential in my pursuits at Cornell University, NYU Business School, and as a marketer, providing creative solutions to complex problems at Unilever, Avon, and Cody. I've been thrilled that my daughter's public school has fostered exceptional programming in the common core as well as arts and music. Unfortunately, much of the arts funding as well as supplemental teacher salaries has been subsidized by the PTA in addition to the DOE budget. Art and music are not only a study of creativity, drawing, painting, sculpting, building, singing, playing, but also history, designing creations in the style of artists like Basquiat, Mondrian, Bisa Butler, and learning about music from composers like Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart. Math, learning geometry in perspective paintings, using mathematics in the color wheel to impact hue, saturation, and brightness, and learning fractions through sheet music. Poetry, writing songs and ballads, science, the physics of sound wave vibrations, and the engineering involved in making musical instruments.

Teamwork, harmonizing music together and working collaboratively on art projects, and executive function, fine motor skills, organizational skills, and mindfulness. I've spoken to second graders who also note that music and art calms you down and helps you to be at your best, are inspired that it can help you to see the results of your work and identify the success at the end of the struggle like some famous musicians have had a rough time, and can help you to achieve your dreams like Nina Simone, who started out playing piano in church. Art helps our children appreciate creativity and cultural differences. It's an outlet for students who may struggle to express themselves and provides a different means to learn life skills necessary in any chosen profession. I urge you for the good of all of our children to continue to (TIMER CHIME) financially...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time's expired.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your testimony. Next up, Brittany.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

BRITTANY KAISER: Good evening, Chair Joseph and Education Council Members. My name is

Kaiser. I am the Community Organizer for the Alliance for Quality Education. AQE organizes parents pushing for quality public education for all children regardless of zip code. Chair Joseph, thank you for your ongoing advocacy and your genuine dedication to improving our schools. You and I are both former teachers, so we know that letting the youth lead is always the way to go so I will begin by echoing some of the calls from young people today.

Many young people spoke about the need for more social workers and counselors. The NASW and the SSWAA recommend a ratio of one social worker for every 250 students or one to 50 for high-need students. As of 2023, the DOE ratio was one to 465. I echo the call for 80 million dollars directly to schools to hire restorative justice coordinators. And we need to hire more service providers and improve the system for maintaining services when providers are on leave. Quality education looks like early education programs, arts programming, community schools, restorative justice, and immigrant support but, as you've heard here today, these same programs are at risk of being cut. We urge the Council to baseline programs at risk of being rolled back or

eliminated. Acknowledging that the federal budget is not within the purview of this hearing, we can't deny that the current Administration is instilling deep fear in our students and their families to the extent that they don't feel safe showing up to school. To counteract this, we call on the Council to further invest in immigrant family communications and outreach, increasing funding for this multifaceted, accessible communication so that we can build trust and empower families. I've personally seen the tears of children who didn't have access to pre-K and struggled throughout their kindergarten years as a result, both in terms of socialization and learning. I've worked at schools where staff didn't have adequate training or resources to implement restorative justice practices, and so the root causes of kids' conflicts were never addressed or resolved. And I've worked with students whose immigrant families were completely disengaged, not because they weren't invested but because DOE's communication, even if it was translated into their language, was just not reaching them. I have also seen how a funded stocked art studio can have a transformative impact on students' sense of self and school engagement.

I've seen students learn through play and fall in love with learning at just three years old. I've seen staff and families at a community school stop a deportation in its tracks. These programs matter, and it does real harm when we destabilize them. We want to emphasize the Speaker's previous sentiment on rejecting the pattern of fighting for restorations in the budget instead of focusing on expanding things that we know work, community schools, restorative justice, smaller class sizes. As one of the young people said earlier, funding for these essential programs needs to be stable and reliable. Baseline these programs. Thank you for your time, your attention, and your compassion.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL JEAN-FRANÇOIS: Thank you for your testimony. If the following panelists are on Zoom, please use the raise hand function to testify. Janice Wineman, Tanesha Grant, Ramone Perguro (phonetic), and Ava Lana (phonetic).

No hands. That concludes our virtual testimony.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 31, 2025