



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
"Using NYC Libraries to Help Overcome BIPOC Youth Learning Losses Due to  
COVID-19"  
April 27, 2022**

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I am joined by Gesille Dixon, Vice President for Branch Programs and Services. I would like to thank City Council Speaker Adams, Chair Ossé and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify this morning on Using New York City libraries to help overcome BIPOC youth learning losses due to COVID-19.

We know that children and teens have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, which widened learning gaps that already existed between high and low needs communities. These learning gaps are more pronounced in BIPOC youth. This unfortunate outcome has informed NYPL's current focus on youth and education, especially as it relates to our goal to foster equity and access to learning and development opportunities and resources.

**NYPL After School**

In the fall of 2021, we launched our new drop-in after school program, with free homework help, tutoring, and career exploration services. NYPL After School is currently in 20 of our branches, and aims to help students in historically marginalized communities keep pace with their more affluent peers; a dire need after losing a year of in-person learning.

The Library has recruited a diverse group of tutors to its after school program that includes both mission-driven education students as well as retirees with extensive experience. Lead Tutors reflect multiple dimensions of diversity within age, race, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and nationality, with 17 languages represented. The tutors and children's librarians also create and execute Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEAM) and literacy-based activities to inspire a love of reading and learning. Healthy snacks are provided to each participant to ensure that hunger does not prevent them from completing their homework. At each site, additional tutoring support for younger students is provided by Teen Reading Ambassadors—paid high school interns trained in literacy fundamentals and educational best practices as part of a workforce readiness effort. Those hired have undergone training on the basics of working with kids, helping with homework, and supporting reading skills. The Teen Reading Ambassadors and Tutors serve as mentors and role models for participating students.

This new approach to after school programming has already proven impactful. In its first six months, NYPL After School offered over 1,200 programs to a total of nearly 8,700 attendees. Over 86% of our daily attendees to date have come from New York City public, public charter, and community schools. The remaining 14% come from homeschooling environments or local independent and parochial schools. Nearly all of the independent and parochial schools whose students this program reaches enroll high numbers of students with vouchers and/or provide financial aid to students of low socioeconomic status.

Students, caregivers, and members of the school community have reported that the program has made a huge impact on participating students. Students at nearly every participating branch have brought their report cards to their library to show the tutoring staff their achievements. Caregivers have described the program as a “lifeline” in this year of learning recovery, and a

critical bridge between school and home. We look forward to expanding the program in the coming months, with at least ten additional branches in the Bronx slated to become after school locations in Fiscal Year 22.

### **Teen Centers**

NYPL has also made a firm commitment to expand services for teens, including the establishment of new teen centers across our system. Teen centers provide access to free, up-to-date technologies, spaces to gather and socialize, as well as both academic and socio-emotional support. These critical spaces allow teens to build digital literacy through the use of new technology and digital tools and by collaborating on projects that help them develop the digital and media fluency they need for post-secondary success. Our flagship teen center is at our newly-renovated central circulating library, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (SNFL). On any given weekday you can easily find teens from across the city there utilizing books, computers, programs, staff expertise, or a state-of-the-art recording studio. This coming summer, the Library will open seven additional teen centers in underserved neighborhoods at Wakefield, Woodstock, Van Cortlandt, and Grand Concourse in the Bronx; Countee Cullen and Bloomingdale in Manhattan; and West New Brighton in Staten Island.

### **College and Career Pathways**

Our focus on equity and access within our youth and education priorities includes our College and Career Pathways initiative, which coordinates more than a dozen virtual programs offered every month that are designed to support students navigating the postsecondary education and planning process and address college application protocols altered by Covid-19. Specific offerings include one-on-one counseling, information sessions on updates to the application and enrollment process, and panel presentations by current university students on “College Life during Covid.” We also assist teens with resumes and cover letters and hold info sessions on

Covid-related changes to standardized testing and financial aid. We have coordinated these activities with the help of external partners such as the Princeton Review, Collegewise, and City agencies like DOE, and DYCD. Perhaps our most noteworthy offering is our annual, enrollment-based Intensive College and Career Access Network – or ICCAN – program. This initiative helps teens navigate their postsecondary options and prepare for their lives after high school with monthly workshops on ACT and SAT test prep, financial aid and scholarships, college and career fairs, and essay-writing skills, among others. ICCAN also provides one-on-one guidance to students on how to craft a strong college application, fill out financial aid/FAFSA forms, and apply for scholarship and internship opportunities. This program has been designed with equity and access in mind, with hub branches in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island targeting underserved communities. Ninety-three percent of the 2021 ICCAN group identify as racial/ethnic minorities, 71% of participants qualify for a free or subsidized lunch at school, and another 71% indicated that they would be first-generation college students. The ICCAN program provided over \$240,000 in Magic Grants to participants who completed all attendance, participation, and documentation requirements. The purpose of the Magic Grants is to offer teens a sum of money to aid them in preparing for their postsecondary lives. A total of 600 College and Career Pathways programs have been offered thus far in FY 22 (through March) with two-thirds of them being one-on-one career counseling sessions.

### **Summer Learning**

We continue to make adjustments to our Summer Learning program in the interest of reaching those students who need it most. NYPL's Summer Learning program is comprised of a series of free events, take-home activities, and resources that aim to encourage young New Yorkers to invest in their own intellectual development and creative exploration, and become confident and curious self-directed learners. An expansion of the Library's long-standing Summer Reading program, the Summer Learning program unites traditional summer reading elements with new

educational initiatives and materials to frame reading and learning as active and enjoyable activities for children grades Kindergarten through six. Activities include a six week STEAM 'Summer Cruise' in participating branches and special events featuring BIPOC authors and illustrators that represent our kids and show them a future of possibilities through reading. As with our traditional summer reading initiatives, Summer Learning includes book giveaways targeting high needs communities where "Summer Learning Kits," which include high quality, diverse new books and reading activities, are distributed to children in a branch's catchment area. Nearly 70% of kits distributed in 2021 were in areas considered high needs.

Teens additionally make up an indispensable piece of our summer programming. In keeping with this year's theme of "Oceans of Possibilities," the Library invites teens to "Make Waves" through community engagement and activism. At all of our neighborhood branches, as well as through social media, teens across NYC can engage in fun weekly, creative challenges and have the opportunity for their work to be published in a system-wide NYPL Teen Magazine. The magazine will feature creative work (i.e. narrative essays, photography, poetry, etc.) that reflects the theme of civic activism and how teens can "Make Waves" in their communities. Additionally, teens can participate in social media calls to action, volunteer for and attend special events and author programs, and explore library resources.

### **Center for Educators and Schools**

NYPL's recently-launched Center for Educators and Schools (CES), which makes library materials and services accessible to educators and easy-to-employ in classrooms (curricula using primary sources, educational projects tied to our Polonsky Exhibition of The New York Public Library's Treasures, etc), has already proven to be a powerful tool in breaking down learning and development barriers for youth in underserved communities. Currently the CES is supporting the completion of the long-awaited Schomburg Curriculum Project, which includes

lesson plans that help middle-and high-school students use unique primary sources to deepen their understanding of Black history. The three unit themes are: Slavery and Abolition, Black Power, and Black Women's Stories. Our pipeline of other curriculum projects will help students use primary sources to learn more about our city's indigenous roots, as well as explore the history of its playgrounds, with a special emphasis on their development in Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The CES also hosts workshops on topics such as BIPOC-authored children's and young adult books, Abolition as a Black-Led Movement, and Afro-Latinidad in New York City history, among others.

### **Collections**

We have mirrored this prioritization of equitable and accessible learning and development opportunities for youth and teens within our collections. Since the start of the pandemic, the Library has made significant investments in collections for kids and teens in our branches. Between March 2020 and March 2022, NYPL invested \$3.3M in books, \$345,000 in read-a-longs, \$365,000 in World Language materials, and \$1.9M in eBooks and audiobooks targeting kids and teens. Supplementing our investment in these collections are a multitude of subscriptions to electronic resources that allow youth of all ages to learn and do research both in the Library and remotely. Many of these resources are specific to BIPOC communities such as our African American, American Indian, and Latino American Experience databases. NYPL also recently launched a series of BIPOC-related collections initiatives. One such initiative was led by our Aguilar and Harlem branches which used city funding to create local community collections that included nearly 500 books.

In the coming months we will refresh our collections in high needs neighborhoods, with a goal of providing an additional 1,000 diverse books for youth in 35 branches. We will also purchase entirely new collections for five of our Carnegie libraries in high needs communities currently

undergoing total renovation: Hunt's Point, Melrose, Port Richmond, 125th Street, and Fort Washington. We are also making a significant investment to ensure that young people not only have access to library books but books they can own: this summer we will distribute 500,000 diverse books for youth and families, allowing young people to choose and keep books based on their interests, as part of our overall “Summer at the Library” plans.

In the fall of 2021, the Library eliminated late fines on books and other circulating materials. This removed a significant barrier to access for our most vulnerable neighbors and had an outsized impact on kids and teens. In October 2021, almost 113,000 library cards belonging to kids and teens would have been blocked because of fine accruals, meaning that children and teens essentially could not access ideas, knowledge, and information. As we evaluate the results of fine elimination, we have already seen increases in visits and circulation immediately following this policy shift, and expect those numbers to continue to grow. This work eliminates any obstacle between our children and access to the tools they need to learn outside the classroom, solidifying a strong ecosystem of learning in New York City, and supporting the City’s educational efforts.

Since its inception and throughout the various crises that have challenged our City, the Library has never wavered in its commitment to equal access to books, knowledge, and education for all. This is why we are so attuned to the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on BIPOC youth, and are committed to addressing learning loss on all fronts. Whether in the home, the classroom, or one of our branches, after school, during summer break, or in a one-on-one counseling session, we are expertly equipped to ensure that our city’s disadvantaged youth receive unfettered access to the tools, resources, and development opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to take any questions.

## **BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY**

### **COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS OVERSIGHT HEARING: USING NYC LIBRARIES TO HELP OVERCOME BIPOC YOUTH LEARNING LOSSES DUE TO COVID-19**

**VIRTUAL HEARING ROOM 2, APRIL 27, 2022**

Thank you, Chair Ossé and members of the committee, I am Linda Johnson, President & CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. I appreciate the opportunity to share how the Library worked to minimize the pandemic's disruption on the lives of BIPOC youth over the past two years. Even as we were forced to close our doors for the first time in our 125-year history, Brooklyn Public Library staff swiftly pivoted to offer as much support as possible to youth and their families, including those grappling with remote schooling. While I am confident that our efforts helped blunt the impact of the pandemic for many families, there is more work to be done.

We believe that our work to keep BIPOC youth connected to the library and engaged in our programs is addressing learning loss. The rapid disruption of the school routine had a damaging impact on the city's children, particularly those with the least resources, and our staff made it their priority to minimize interruption in services for all patrons, learners and especially youth and families. Overnight, we transitioned to virtual programming. We leveraged our means to ensure a robust digital platform, hosted six New York City Learning Labs in our branches, created at-home kits to maintain connections with our patrons, and provided books and resources to support their growth and enrich their learning outside of the classroom.

As the largest provider of free Wi-Fi in Brooklyn, we are keenly aware of the 800,000 Brooklynites who lack digital access and have worked over the years to help bridge the digital divide. While our branches offer free internet access, technology and classes, the **pandemic amplified disparities in underserved communities**. As the world went virtual, those who needed us most became even further removed. So, we placed signal boosters on the rooftops of our buildings to extend our internet signal 300 feet in all directions, even into nearby homes and businesses. Our internet is now available to patrons 24 hours a day, whether they are in the library or outside of it. Additionally, we published a guide to



understanding the new FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit, and our librarians have been helping families sign up for the subsidy to receive low-cost broadband services.

### ***Summer Reading***

Libraries are no strangers to learning loss. Every summer, we launch **summer reading**, intended to minimize learning loss while school is out for summer vacation – also known as *summer slide*. Our approach is to meet children and families where they are. Librarians emphasize finding the joy in reading and develop fun activities, games, specialized booklists and crafty projects to keep kids connected to literacy. The impact of remote schooling over the pandemic surely intensified the summer slide. While the library had to offer summer reading virtually, we supplemented with thousands of grab and go kits, take home STEM based arts and crafts, creative games, and book giveaways. At home kits were particularly successful, as many kids did not have books or materials at home, and caregivers were starving for children's activities.

This year, summer reading at Brooklyn Public Library kicks off on June 4, welcoming people back to the library with exciting events and activities at all our branches, as we jointly celebrate Summer Reading and our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

### ***Online resources + Homework Help***

An early solution to help struggling students was **boosting our online resources**. *Brainfuse*, for example, offers free personalized help in math, reading, writing and science, a 24/7 Writing Lab, and practice tests, including SAT preparation. We continue to offer an extensive list of free interactive learning tools meant to support students and educators.

In addition, Brooklyn Public Library has run its own Homework Help program for years with the assistance of trained volunteers. Homework Helpers tutor elementary and middle school children individually or in small groups, while also teaching them to use the library's directories, indexes, web-based tech, and reference materials. And with the East New York Reads Initiative, a collaboration of 11 organizations in East New York, East Harlem, and South Jamaica, we are partnering with educators to offer homework help sessions for all students from kindergarten through 5th grade at Arlington, Cypress Hills and New Lots Libraries.

## ***Collections***

One of the most impactful ways we increased access and equity for our patrons was the **permanent elimination of late fines** last fall, along with Queens and New York Public Libraries. In Brooklyn, that amounted to clearing late fines and related fees for over 50,000 children and teens. Removing this barrier—which impacts lower resourced communities that need us most—means no one will be prevented from using their library because of unpaid late fines. If their books are returned, patrons will always be able to check out more. Additionally, we took steps to further increase the diversity of books in our collection, created specific anti-racist book lists and programs, prioritizing books and displays that are more reflective of our children, and revamped our Storytime collection to better reflect the diversity of our patrons and ensure that BIPOC youth see themselves represented in our materials.

## ***Young Children***

For children under age 5, we continued to **focus on school readiness** with our Ready, Set, Kindergarten program in English and Spanish. Families enjoy stories and activities designed to encourage the development of early learning practices and the social-emotional skills that help young kids adjust to their first classroom environment.

Playing, singing and having reading materials at home is critical to helping families of young children with early literacy. Thanks to the Council's funding of the City's First Readers Initiative, in the first half of FY22 alone, Brooklyn Public Library engaged young children and their families in 166 virtual Storytime sessions with more than 7,600 views. We held over one hundred in person outdoor literacy programs with an attendance of 4,000, in addition to distributing learn at home kits and play recipe cards, and hosting educator and parent & caregiver workshops on a host of early literacy topics. Since the onset of the pandemic, our children's librarians have held thousands of virtual Storytimes, in more than a dozen languages, often attracting more participants than in-person story time could ever fit in a branch.

## ***Teens***

Brooklyn's youngest patrons were not alone in experiencing hardship and learning loss. Young adults, particularly BIPOC youth, suffered the impact of being isolated from their friends and school

community, missing milestones, processing trauma and grief, and of course the senseless murder of George Floyd.

Over the pandemic through a host of internship and volunteer opportunities, **teens stayed connected with their library**. *Today's Teens, Tomorrow's Techies* students, 85% of whom are BIPOC, signed up to learn new computer skills through a 2-week technology institute, after which they put those new skills to work helping patrons use library technology. This beloved program is now in its 17th year.

Collaboration is strong between this cohort and the young adults in *Librarians of Tomorrow*, a hands-on internship program for high school students with an interest in library careers.

StoryTeen, an internship made possible through the City's First Readers Initiative, engages high school students with an interest in literacy and early childhood education. Participants learn to assist in a variety of children's programs, including offering Storytime. Young adults in the current cohort speak a variety of languages including Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Russian, Urdu, and Yoruba, adding a beautiful diversity to our Storytime offerings.

Internships and volunteer programs like these afforded teens an opportunity to gather virtually and connect during the pandemic, outside of school. From learning the basics like "zoom etiquette" to Anime Club and popular gaming programs like Dungeons and Dragons, Among Us and Kahoot!, youth were coming to their virtual library to have fun, be social and talk about their lives. Of course, this connection to the library also kept them involved and learning. Our staff were contacted consistently over the pandemic to share their expertise on successfully keeping youth engaged. Since the pandemic began, nearly 90,000 teen patrons have attended more than 3,600 programs.

Our teens also produced inspiring content in quarantine. They wrote and created video public service announcements to promote a Complete Count during Census2020 and organized programs for their peers on LGBTQ self-care, Black Lives Matter and Stopping Asian Hate. They authored essays and blog posts and encouraged their peers to join in. And while many of them are passionate about coming back to the library in person, others are staying connected digitally, so our capable team will be offering hybrid programming moving forward.

In addition to virtual programming, we are equally committed to better serving young adults in our physical spaces. We proudly host a **Best Buy Teen Tech Center** at the Kings Highway Library. It is an

interactive learning space featuring workstations, tech equipment, collaboration areas, and a recording studio. Teens are encouraged to use the space to produce music, animations, robotic constructions, and more.

A growing number of our branch libraries are outfitted with teen friendly spaces including comfortable furniture, flexible layouts, and charging stations. Over the next few years, a third of our branches will undergo complete renovations, with new teen spaces separate and apart from the children's area. During the community engagement sessions held for these renovations, we asked teens directly what they want in their new library, and their comments will inform the design of these new spaces.

### **Conclusion**

The last few years have not been easy, particularly for BIPOC youth. While it is impossible to know how deeply the pandemic will impact our children over the long term, we know that our library staff worked tirelessly to offer support and meaningful opportunities to stay connected to literacy and learning. Libraries are as important now as they have ever been. It is only with your support that we can remain strong for the millions of people who depend on us every day. Thank you for your partnership and for taking the time to explore this important issue.



**Statement by Nick Buron, Chief Librarian & SVP, Queens Public Library**

**New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations - Using NYC Libraries to Help Overcome BIPOC Youth Learning Losses Due to COVID-19**

**April 27, 2022**

Good morning. I am Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at Queens Public Library (QPL, Library). On behalf of the Library and our President & CEO Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here.

Thank you, Chair Ossé and the members of this esteemed committee for the opportunity to speak with you today on this important subject. The COVID-19 pandemic uprooted normal life for all New Yorkers and it is clear the City's most vulnerable populations experienced the worst of the impact. Queens, the most diverse borough in the country, was the epicenter of the nation's outbreak. Communities were devastated, leaving many people confronting the heartbreaking loss of family members, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Throughout this entire ordeal, QPL remained committed to serving the communities of Queens and helping the city recover and rebuild. This includes remaining a reliable resource and community center for our younger library users so they can overcome the obstacles the pandemic has caused in their lives.

Twenty percent of the population of Queens is 18 years old and younger, with 76.3 percent identifying as non-white. When we examine the age range of all QPL cardholders, we find that approximately 275,000 customers, or 19 percent of all cardholders, are under 18 years old. It was essential for the Library to move quickly when the New York City Department of Education (DOE) announced schools were moving to remote classes to slow the spread of COVID-19 in March of 2020. Despite the unprecedented disruption to our daily lives, QPL swiftly transitioned from providing in-person services to providing virtual programming and services, expanded our digital collections, and secured additional education and personal enrichment resources for our customers. In addition, our specialized programs and services geared towards our younger audiences also transitioned into the digital world.

QPL developed the STACKS program, a free enrichment program for children in grades K-5, to enhance a child's learning experiences through age-appropriate activities in a safe and welcoming environment. The program is designed to help build their social, emotional, and academic skills. Prior to the pandemic, STACKS was operating 13 enrichment sites and 11 homework centers in our library network. Our amazing staff was able to modify the program to fit a virtual model allowing any student to attend, no matter their location, and offering STEM workshops, art projects and more. This past year, staff interacted with students on various activities, including writing a "Who Am I?" booklet on important women from history, creating coin spinners and mini volcanoes and a "The Cat in the Hat" STEM challenge on National Dr. Seuss Day. According to voluntarily provided data, our STACKS 2021 Summer session served 1,094 students, of which 82

percent of participants identified as non-white, while our Fall session had a similar percentage of non-white youth.

QPL has long prioritized minimizing learning loss that many students experience during the summer months often referred to as the “summer slide.” Our Summer Reading program not only encourages students to read throughout the summer, but also aims to engage students through special programming. In honor of our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we challenged readers to dedicate 125 minutes per week to reading. We offered virtual programming covering a diverse spectrum of interests, such as our multi-week series on Explorations in Cartooning, teen photography and design, and storytelling. Our staff curated specialized booklists for students in elementary school through high school. Even the pandemic could not stop the enthusiasm of our Queens youth. Inspired by the theme “Reading Takes You Everywhere,” our Summer Reading program remained popular with nearly 15,000 participants in over 2,200 program sessions, and a circulation of over 266,000 this past summer.

When the pandemic began, QPL understood the need of acquiring extra tutoring and e-learning resources for our students. As a result, QPL began to offer Brainfuse, one of the nation's leading online tutoring providers, to provide access to free homework help, including live, online tutoring and test prep in a wide range of subjects for K-12 students and adult learners. In Fiscal Year 2021, QPL users accessed Brainfuse for 3,500 sessions, with more than 3,100 being live help sessions, and nearly 5,800 database visits.

In Fiscal Year 2021, QPL virtually hosted more than 3,800 children programs serving over 37,000 children. Programming specifically for teenagers, yielded more than 8,300 teens participating in over 900 virtual programs. For our high school students who are exploring their options for the next phase of their educational journey, we scheduled 40 programs with an overall attendance of 770 students. College readiness workshops focused on an array of vital topics, such as time management and study skills, understanding the FAFSA application process, financial literacy and helping students to understand which college may be right for them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many inequities, one of the most alarming being the lack of broadband access in households across New York City, particularly in Queens. Many homes in our borough do not have the access they need for schoolchildren to complete their homework assignments or to connect with their cohorts. Working to narrow the digital divide, QPL loaned 475 mobile hotspots to students in 2020 through our ongoing collaboration with the DOE. In October of 2021, QPL announced an initiative funded by Sterling National Bank, National Grid and the Thomas & Jeanne Elmezzi Private Foundation to provide over 250 hotspots and laptops for loan to the public at the Lefrak City, South Jamaica, Astoria and Long Island City libraries. We have continued to prioritize securing hotspots for our customers. Currently, we have over 2,200 hotspots to lend, which are available at 25 locations throughout the borough. However, we know more are needed.

As we begin re-introducing in-person programming and slowly return to a new kind of normal, we are refocusing on how to best serve our younger customers. In January, our Far Rockaway Teen Library, located where 26 percent of the community is under 18 years old and 65 percent identify as non-white, reopened for the first time since March 2020. The Library provides teens in Far

Rockaway with dedicated space they can call their own, helping them explore their interests and learn outside of the classroom with their peers and trusted adults. It aims to stimulate creative thinking, encourage civic engagement and – with the guidance of youth counselors and teen librarians – help teens explore their school and career options. The center has a dedicated homework space and computer area with free printing (up to 20 pages a day). The Teen Library will continue to provide robust virtual programming, including Youth Justice Court, workshops on subjects ranging from technology, entrepreneurship and financial literacy to creative arts and health and wellness, college readiness and job search resources, as well as a book club. It also offers grab-and-go kits, containing items such as craft supplies, bookmarks, and writing journals to engage teens in projects outside the Library. As the Teen Library welcomes back their customers, they are increasing their unique and creative programming. With support from the Queens District Attorney's office, the teens have started their own podcast, interviewing celebrities, including Funkmaster Flex. The podcast requires them to hone their skills through researching and compiling information and questions, public speaking, editing content and working collaboratively as a team. Since its reopening earlier this year, the Library has had over 6,100 visits.

Our public service staff are at the forefront of helping our children and teens at our 66 locations. The temporary closure of schools affected how students socialize, complete tasks and focus their energies. At the Cambria Heights Library's teen center, staff found the best method to support their teens was by helping them prioritize their goals, whether it is assisting in researching higher education options, or offering consistency and support while completing assignments. Additionally, Cambria Heights has been encouraging teens to read by updating collections with materials that speak to their interests and creating programming based on them.

Throughout the academic year, the Long Island City Library infused trauma-informed principles into their programs for school-aged students, which includes reinforcing the fact that they belong to a safe and trusting environment where they can collaborate with peers and interact with mentors. Long Island City hosted an array of unique programming, such as: Code and Create; Ask Teisha, which is a several week class where young adults work in teams to develop a virtual personal assistant; Grow with Google; and Environmental Explorers. These after-school classes motivated students to collaborate with one another to solve problems relevant to their lives. This is just a snapshot of the amazing work our staff is conducting to get our youth excited to learn.

As we welcomed our customers back into our buildings, we recognized there were some that would still face barriers to returning. For too long, our policy of imposing fines for late library materials have discouraged individuals from accessing our services, especially our youth. We temporarily suspended late fines during the pandemic, and in October 2021, Queens Public Library, along with the Brooklyn and New York public library systems, permanently ended the practice of charging late fines on overdue materials and cleared all existing late fines on customers' accounts. This bold act cleared late fines on 289,000 accounts in Queens, and unblocked 27,900 cards. Since the new policy was enacted on October 5, there has been a ten percent increase in the number of impacted cardholders who borrowed physical materials compared to the month prior, and a 16 percent increase in request activity among impacted cardholders. We hope the new policy continues to encourage more people, especially our younger customers, to return to their libraries or become cardholders, no matter their circumstances.

Queens Public Library is dedicated to being there for our customers, including our youth populations, who depend on us to provide the educational resources and extracurricular programming that sparks their interests and curiosity. New York City's three public library systems must be adequately funded in the new fiscal year in order to continue offering high quality programming and services. For Fiscal Year 2023, we are respectfully requesting reallocation of the Council's Libraries Initiative at a minimum of \$14 million, as well as increased funding from the Administration in the amount of \$15.7 million. This funding will allow us to boost both physical and digital collections, fill vacancies, and address emergency repairs and more. In addition, all three public library systems need consistent and considerable capital investments to ensure our youth are learning and exploring in safe, modern and welcoming facilities that they deserve. In our Ten-Year Capital Plan submitted to the City, we have identified a need of \$270 million over the next ten years, \$98.6 million for Fiscal Year 2023 alone. Funding will cover projected deficits and initiate projects in need of immediate capital attention.

Every day, Queens Public Library transform lives by cultivating intellectual and personal growth. As the center of community life, we build strong neighborhoods through the multitude of free programs and services we provide. In partnership with the City Council and the Adams Administration, we can continue to aid in the reduction of learning loss in our BIPOC youth communities.

Chair Ossé, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.