



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

Testimony of Ana Maria Archila

New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs

Before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Oversight Hearing on The Status of the NYC Junior Ambassadors Program and Potential for Expansion

April 27, 2026

Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Williams and members of the Committee.

My name is Ana Maria Archila, and I serve as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for International Affairs. I am joined today by Carly Avezzano, Director of Strategic Relationships and NYC Junior Ambassadors in our office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and to share more about the NYC Junior Ambassadors program.

NYC Junior Ambassadors is a citywide initiative based in our office that connects New York City youth in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades with the United Nations, the diplomatic community, and global learning opportunities. The program reflects New York City's unique role as a global capital and home to the United Nations, and brings that access directly into our classrooms.

Since its launch, NYC Junior Ambassadors has grown steadily in both reach and impact. The program has been active for 11 years and serves approximately 600 students each year across about 20 classrooms. The majority of participating schools are Title I, which ensures that students from historically underserved communities have access to learning experiences that might otherwise be out of reach. This program aims to expose NYC kids to the world of global diplomacy and invite them to see themselves as agents in it. In total, the program has partnered with 114 different schools, 250 educators, and reached more than 6,000 youth since inception.

Demand continues to grow, with more schools applying each year than we are currently able to accommodate. This year, we received 55 applications for just 20 classroom slots. Alumni applied at a rate of 59%. This shows the program's success, the hunger for this kind of educational experience, and the need to expand access.

A defining feature of NYC Junior Ambassadors is its direct engagement with the diplomatic community and the United Nations. All classrooms participate in a guided UN visit, giving students the opportunity to engage with a site of global importance in their own city. In addition, each classroom receives a visit from a diplomat. Through these experiences, students gain firsthand exposure to diplomacy, international perspectives, the global challenges we're all confronting together, and potential global career pathways.

This year, we have classes from City Council districts 2 and 9 in **Manhattan**; districts 11, 13, 15, 16 in the **Bronx**; districts 19, 21, 22, 24 in **Queens**; districts 37, 42, 43, 45, 48 in **Brooklyn**; and districts 49, and 51 in **Staten Island**.

Last year, we had classes from City Council districts 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 22, 24, 26, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 42, 45, and 51.

This year, we are partnering with over 20 Permanent Missions representing countries from every region, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and Australia. These interactions make global issues tangible and relevant in a way that enhances traditional classroom instruction alone.

In addition to these engagements, classrooms receive stipends of up to \$500 to support student-led action projects aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a global framework of 17 goals adopted by all UN Member States to address urgent challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and peace by 2030. These projects focus on themes such as climate action, human rights, and sustainable development, and encourage students to think critically about how global challenges manifest at the city and community level.

For example, last year, students at P.S./I.S 78Q connected their learning on SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) to conditions in Newtown Creek and developed a project that focused on water quality and environmental awareness including cleaning up local waterways and removing trash. At Icahn Charter School #4, students created sustainable fashion pieces from recycled materials to raise awareness about marine conservation and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) within their school community. These experiences help students see themselves as changemakers and connect global learning to tangible local impact.

Educators consistently report that students who participate in NYC Junior Ambassadors demonstrate increased confidence, stronger communication skills, and a deeper sense of civic

responsibility. We hear from students and educators that this program is transformative. Students begin to see themselves as global citizens. They make connections between their lives and the broader world, and they gain the confidence to participate in conversations about the issues shaping their future.

The program invests in educators as key partners. Teachers receive ongoing professional development and support throughout the program year, equipping them with the tools to guide students through complex global topics and translate learning into meaningful action. Tomorrow we will host our mid-year educator meeting at Tweed Courthouse, providing a day full of reflection, planning and resource sharing. This model ensures that the impact of NYC Junior Ambassadors extends beyond a single moment and becomes embedded in classroom practice.

Looking ahead, we see continued demand for NYC Junior Ambassadors and strong interest from schools, educators, and international partners. We are focused on expanding access, strengthening partnerships with the diplomatic community and the United Nations, and building on the program's success to reach even more young New Yorkers.

NYC Junior Ambassadors reflects the best of New York City — its diversity, its global leadership, and its commitment to preparing young people for an interconnected world. It ensures that our students are not only learning about global issues but are prepared to engage with them and take action.

The program embodies the city's commitment to not only host the United Nations, but also to plant the seeds of a future in which we recognize how interconnected our world is and recommit to peace and sustainable development for people and the planet.

We want to take a moment to thank NYC Public Schools for their partnership. This idea comes to life every year thanks to their efforts. The miracle that is NYC Public Schools cannot be understated. We are so proud to be able to partner with the incredible educators that walk into our schools every day. We are eager to continue this partnership and grow it even more.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions.



Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations regarding Intro 0496-2026: A Local Law in Relation to a Study and Report on the Installation of Potential Structures to Acknowledge the Draft Riots of 1863

April 27, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair and Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams and members of the committee. I'm Brad Hoylman-Sigal, and I have the honor of serving as Manhattan Borough President—eight score and three years since the New York City draft riots nearly tore this borough from its foundations and brought the deadly horrors of racial discrimination to our front doors.

I'm really grateful for the opportunity to testify here today – not only because I share the commitment to finding appropriate public ways to remember this historically important, and horrifically violent outbreak, but because doing so has been a priority of mine since my days as a State Senator representing Chelsea and part of the West Side – where some of the mayhem of July 1863 broke out with deadly consequences.

Several terrific New York historians have written about the Draft Riots, I might note, including independent scholar Barnet Schechter and our own Harold Holzer, whom I named a few months ago as the new Manhattan Borough Historian—with explicit instructions to find a way, or ways, to memorialize the 1863 draft riots.

Harold wrote about the outbreak in his 2014, Lincoln Prize-winning book, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*—because the 1863 riots were not only directed against the military draft, and against random free people of color, and against opponents of slavery, supporters of the Union, uniformed fire-fighters, and police; but also against newspapers that supported Abraham Lincoln, emancipation, and the end of the Confederate rebellion.

South of City Hall Park, not far from where we are sitting today, rioters attacked the offices of the anti-slavery *New York Tribune*, even setting fire to the first floor before police drove the vandals outside. A few doors away, the owner of the *New York Times*, Henry J.

Raymond, stood on the roof with his publishing partner, Leonard Jerome, manning gatling guns to ward off an attack on their new headquarters. (Jerome, by the way, was the grandfather of someone who would make his name in another war: Winston Churchill!) Both newspapers survived the violence of 1863, but for a while it was touch and go.

The riots started in the brutally hot week after the Union's big victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, when the nation's first-ever conscription law went into effect. On Second Avenue and 46th Street, army officers were preparing to pull the initial draftees' names out of a large wooden wheel when an angry mob outside began throwing bricks through the window.

Soon, all hell broke loose. The drafting process stopped in its tracks, mob marched north along the East Side, gaining in strength and fury as they headed uptown, then crossed over at the southern border of Central Park, and began heading down the West Side. Along the way, the rioters pried loose cobblestones from the streets to use as weapons, picked up clubs and pokers, and began wreaking havoc at every dwelling and retail establishment suspected of supporting the Union and, worse—in their minds—sympathizing with people of color.

There is no way to rationalize mob violence, but it's worth noting that the rioters did have one actual justification for their opposition to the draft. The way that first law was written, anyone called up for conscription could pay \$300 to "buy a substitute" and thereby evade the draft altogether. Theodore Roosevelt's father availed himself of the opt-out. Even Lincoln did it!

But most of the poverty-stricken Irish in Manhattan didn't earn \$300 in an entire year! They convinced themselves, with the encouragement of racist newspapers and politicians, that the fight against secession and slavery was a "rich man's war but a poor man's fight"—and that disparity, that dramatic economic inequality, incited them to unspeakable violence.

Over the next couple of days, the outbreak grew into unspeakable proportions. Commercial establishment as small as corner drug stores and as large as Brooks Brothers were vandalized and looted. People's apartments were broken into, furnishings destroyed. Police were attacked on the street.

But worst of all, as I have noted, was the violence directed at Black people. Men were dragged from their homes in Lower Manhattan, beaten, sexually mutilated, lynched, set on fire, or driven off the docks into the river to their deaths. The grotesque killing spree claimed some 119 victims—we don't really know the total; it could have been larger.

And it uprooted families, especially mixed-race families, and drove black women from the safety of their homes and onto the streets.

There is ample reason that Harold Holzer and other historians refer to the Draft Riots as the worst civil disturbance in American history save for the Civil War itself.

But the worst was yet to come. On July 14, a mob of white people attacked a new, modern orphanage for black children that stood on the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street—the site of a super-tall skyscraper now rising next to the city’s famous Century Club.

The 1863 building, known as the “Colored Orphans Asylum,” stood just a block from the source of Manhattan’s water supply — the reservoir standing where the New York Public Library now stands — and its occupants included the children of black soldiers who had recently volunteered to fight for their own freedom in the Union Army.

The rioters did not care. They ransacked the building and set fire to the mattresses in the upstairs dormitory, sending the entire structure up in flames. Only when the headmaster of the orphanage held a bible over his head and begged the petrified children to follow the good book outside — as they had followed it all their lives — did the children escape with their lives. Once safely on the street, a young Irish boy led them down to the nearest police station, from which they were transported across the East River to what is now Roosevelt Island, for their own safety. We don’t even know this hero’s name.

But for that one miracle, the death toll of the Draft Riots might have risen by 250 — all children burned alive.

There is no question but that there were heroes in New York that week: the exhausted troops sent north from Gettysburg to finally put the riots down; the white New York progressives who hid blacks and fellow Republicans in their homes; the newspapers that continued to condemn the violence and defend both black freedom and press freedom ... and, on the other side, the villains who so savagely injured, maimed, and killed the innocent and wreaked havoc on the streets — deluded into believing that free black people would undermine their job security and take away their own freedom.

They had succumbed to the same divisive rhetoric that plagues us today — from those who believe immigrants will hurt, rather than enhance our economy; that widening the pool of opportunity for some will narrow it for others. As usual, Lincoln said it best a few months later at Gettysburg: government must be of, by, and for the people... all the people. And “a new birth of freedom” for those long denied freedom can only make us more faithful to the “all men are created equal” promise of the document whose 250th birthday is now just two months away: the Declaration of Independence.

Fortunately, we do have a few ways we can already remember the New York City Draft Riots. The New York Historical collection, for example, includes the very bible the 43rd Street orphans followed through smoke and flames to escape their burning building in 1863.

But the site of the orphanage itself – shrouded in construction scaffolding these days (like too much of Manhattan) bears no marker to convey its history. It never has. In fact, when the excavation pit was first dug a decade ago, veteran *New York Times* reporter, now its official historian, David Dunlap, pleaded for the chance to do just a little archaeological exploration on the site. He hoped to unearth just a few artifacts that could testify to the lives of the forgotten children who once found peace on the site – and then ended their time there in terror. David was denied access.

Well, it's not too late to make amends for the invisibility of the draft riot victims. I would certainly support a study as envisioned by your legislation and I hope we can have our experts assist you.

I will share with you some thoughts for locations of the markers that you envision:

- Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street, of course – where the atrocity against the Orphan Asylum took place. And maybe at the headquarters the orphanage later built in Harlem, up at 143rd Street between Broadway and Amsterdam;
- The site of the first outbreak of anti-draft violence: Third Avenue, between 46th and 47th Streets;
- The site of the federal armory on Second Avenue and 23rd Street, burned down by the rioters – and the nearby Union Steam factory, where workers were clubbed to death or pushed to their deaths from the upper windows;
- The site of the old New York Tribune building south of City Hall, where freedom of the press almost came to an end here;
- And perhaps even the basilica of the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral around Prince and Mulberry Streets, where Archbishop John Hughes made a hugely important speech imploring Irish Americans to put down their weapons and end the violence that was staining the streets – and reputation – of New York City.

We should not be afraid to mark these spots. We proudly celebrate our great accomplishments here, but we seem to have far more difficulty admitting our failures.

History happened in Manhattan – history as glorious as the tearing down of the Statue of King George to start the American Revolution here in July 1776; and as inglorious as the rioting that almost tore down the fabric of the city in July 1863.

We should identify all such sites – either in celebration or in solemn acknowledgment.

History is complicated – but unless we fully confront and understand the past, we can't and won't find what Lincoln once called "a vast future." The idea is to learn from our mistakes, not ignore them.

By making sure we don't erase what happened in Manhattan – as well as other cities, by the way – in July 1863, we will make sure nothing as ugly and devastating ever happens again. It's a part of our history we have closed our eyes to for far too long. But it's not too late to open them and shine a light on the truth.

Thank you.



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NYCITYCENTER.ORG

Testimony of New York City Center

In Support of Res. No. 429 and Res. No. 402

Recognizing the Life and Legacy of Alvin Ailey and Declaring March 6 as Carmen de Lavallade Day

New York City Center is honored to submit testimony in strong support of Res. No. 429, recognizing the life and legacy of Alvin Ailey and honoring his contributions to American dance and the founding of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and Res. No. 402, declaring March 6 as Carmen de Lavallade Day in the City of New York.

Mr. Ailey and Ms. de Lavallade were singular artists whose friendship, creative partnership, and shared artistic courage helped transform American dance and theater. Their relationship began when they were young artists in Los Angeles, where Ms. de Lavallade brought Mr. Ailey to observe classes with her teacher Lester Horton. That introduction helped open the door to a lifelong artistic journey that would change modern dance.

Mr. Ailey went on to found Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York City in 1958, creating a company that honored the African American experience while speaking powerfully to the shared humanity of all people. His masterpiece *Revelations*, born from childhood memories of Southern churches, spirituals, struggle, faith, and communal survival, remains one of the most enduring works in modern dance. Through his choreography and the institution he built, Mr. Ailey expanded what the American stage could hold and affirmed the dignity, beauty, and resilience of Black life.

Ms. de Lavallade's legacy is equally profound. A dancer, actor, choreographer, teacher, and artistic force for more than six decades, she helped shape the artistic world from which Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater emerged. She appeared with Mr. Ailey on Broadway in *House of Flowers*, succeeded her cousin Janet Collins as principal dancer with the Metropolitan Opera, performed as a guest artist with American Ballet Theatre, choreographed for major companies, and inspired generations through the grace, intelligence, and humanity of her artistry.

For City Center, these legacies live not only in history, but in the continuing presence of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on our stage. The company began appearing at City Center in 1971, and for more than five decades, New Yorkers have gathered here to experience the power of Mr. Ailey's vision and the lineage of artists, including Ms. de Lavallade, who helped shape it. As our principal dance company, AAADT returns to City Center as a living expression of the artistry, access, and excellence that Mr. Ailey championed. City Center's VP and Artistic Director of Dance Programming Stanford Makishi remarks:

"The dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey was a revolutionary artist who used dance to uplift the Black experience in America. He created one of the world's greatest

repertory companies, a true national treasure, and consistently nurtured the careers of some of the brightest stars of the dance world. One such individual was the legendary Carmen de Lavallade, Mr. Ailey's longtime friend and frequent collaborator, whose powerful elegance propelled a career of enduring relevance that lasted over sixty years. We at City Center could not be prouder to call Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater our principal dance company and to have had Carmen de Lavallade grace our stage on many magical occasions."

That pride is rooted in gratitude for the artists and the tradition they created. Since 2012, City Center has commissioned 13 works from Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, supporting the continued growth of the repertory Mr. Ailey began. The company has also appeared in Fall for Dance 13 times, extending his belief that dance should be accessible to all.

Together, Alvin Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade helped expand the possibilities of the American stage. They challenged narrow ideas about who belonged in dance and theater, opened doors for generations of Black artists, and helped shape New York City's identity as a theater for the world's best art.

New York City Center respectfully urges the Council to adopt Res. No. 429 and Res. No. 402. In honoring Alvin Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade, the Council honors two artists whose legacies continue to illuminate our city, our stages, and our shared cultural life.



Queens Museum
New York City Building
Flushing Meadows Corona Park
Queens, NY 11368

**Committee on Contracts:
Testimony Submitted by:
Debra Wimpfheimer, Deputy Director, Queens Museum
April 29, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Williams, Chair Abreu, Chair Restler, and members of the Committees on Cultural Affairs, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Contracts. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Debra Wimpfheimer, and I serve as Deputy Director of the Queens Museum.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Deputy Speaker Nantasha Williams and Committee Chairs Lincoln Restler and Majority Leader Shaun Abreu for convening this important hearing, and for your continued leadership on strengthening the City's capital process. We are deeply grateful for the Council's longstanding partnership and support of the Queens Museum.

The Queens Museum has direct, long-term experience with the challenges and delays that plague the City's capital procurement system—and the significant cost escalation that results.

Phase I of our current capital project was completed in 2013. Originally envisioned as a single, unified project, it was ultimately divided into two phases. As a result, the Museum has operated in a partially completed building for more than 13 years. Today, portions of our galleries remain unfinished, our HVAC system requires full replacement, staff work in constrained office space, and the building is not fully accessible to the public we serve. We also have over 15,000 square feet of unused shell space.

Compounding these issues, the roof was improperly installed, leading to more than 45 documented leaks across galleries, collection storage areas, the auditorium, and back-of-house spaces. Nearly half of the roof has experienced recurring failures despite repeated repairs and coordination with the New York City Department of Design and Construction, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, manufacturers, and contractors. These conditions have placed our collections, staff, and visitors at ongoing risk.

We began efforts to advance Phase II approximately eight years ago. During that time, repeated delays in the City's capital process have required us to return year after year to secure additional funding simply to keep pace with escalating construction costs. We are now facing further delays related to DDC processes, which may push our anticipated groundbreaking beyond early 2027.

This project—now totaling approximately \$42 million—is critical to the future of the Queens Museum and the communities we serve. It will allow us to expand and modernize our facilities to better serve children, families, and seniors across Queens, while ensuring long-overdue accessibility and sustainability improvements.

Specifically, Phase II will:

- Address long-standing accessibility barriers throughout the building;
- Establish the Suna Children’s Museum at Queens Museum—the borough’s first dedicated children’s museum for arts and culture;
- Create a World’s Fair Archive, exhibition galleries, and study center honoring Queens’ global history; and
- Introduce a new outdoor playscape designed for broad public use.

While we are not requesting additional funding for the broader capital project this year, we are seeking \$4 million to replace the failing roof. Addressing this issue now is essential to protecting the City’s \$42 million investment. Without full replacement, new construction, finishes, and building systems will remain vulnerable to water damage—creating the risk of further delays, costly change orders, and avoidable future capital expenditures.

Our experience underscores a broader systemic issue: delays in capital procurement do not simply slow projects—they significantly increase costs, reduce efficiency, and diminish the impact of public investment. Streamlining the City’s capital process is essential to ensuring that cultural institutions can deliver projects on time, on budget, and in service to New Yorkers.

A Capital Plan for Culture could help ensure that our capital assets are maintained in a state of good repair, support modernization, and fund strategic expansion projects. This plan would aggregate both necessary and visionary projects across our institutions so that all institutions can equitable access the capital funding they need on an appropriate timeline.

We thank the staff at DDC and DCLA for their tireless work in advancing these projects and we thank the Council for its continued partnership and urge you to pursue reforms that will create a more efficient, predictable, and accountable capital process.

Thank you for your time and leadership.



Joy. Power. Possibility.
101 Avenue D • New York, NY 10009
212-982-1633 • www.girlsclub.org

**Testimony from the Lower Eastside Girls Club
City Council FY 27 Budget Hearing
Committee on Cultural Affairs 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Nantasha Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs. My name is Jenny Dembrow, and I am the Executive Director of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. I've been with the organization since its founding in 1996—nearly 30 years of watching young women, gender-expansive youth, and their families grow through free programming and the transformative power of the Arts. Our members tap into their creative passions, explore a variety of mediums, and connect with the thriving Arts scene in New York City. In 2022, we launched the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness, extending our mission to reach all genders and generations, enabling us to reach 5,000 New Yorkers annually.

Creative expression fuels empowerment at Girls Club. Our Art and Sound Studios are the spaces where creativity becomes confidence, voice, and agency. From painting to podcasting, welding to songwriting—we share the tools to bring bold ideas to life. In **Visual and Material Arts**, members experiment with clay, acrylics, watercolors, charcoal, murals, mosaics, and screenprinting. Through **Performative Arts and Movement**, our members express themselves through dance, poetry, and song. Best of all, our creative expression courses span generations—from fifth graders to elders—at the Center for Wellbeing. Our **Design Studio** offers hands-on exploration in woodworking and crafting, where students transform concepts into tangible creations. In our **Digital Media and Sound Studios**, members sharpen technical skills and master storytelling through photography and podcasting for **WGRL** (Where Girl Radio Lives) and Liberation Lab. **Music Production** classes in DJing and composition give members access to cutting-edge equipment to record, mix, and produce their own beats and melodies. And for young adults ages 18-23, our partner, **Building Beats**, leads the **Frequency Society** Program, which provides **workforce training** and mentoring in **radio production**.

Our **Center for Wellbeing & Happiness** has become a cornerstone of intergenerational care on the Lower East Side. Since opening in 2022, CWBH has enrolled 1,731 members, including 260+ seniors ages 62+, and offers 100+ free arts and wellness courses annually. **Our Center for Wellbeing & Happiness lobby is a living gallery**, a space where art, storytelling, and community converge. From textiles to photography, our exhibitions celebrate creativity as a force for connection, reflection, and change. In 2025, we hosted 30 Art events, and thousands of New Yorkers benefit from our free public Arts programming each year.

As one CWBH member, Sabura Rashid, recently testified,

“For older adults on the Lower East Side, this place is a lifeline for long-time residents who have watched our neighborhood change around us. Through the arts and movement programs at CWBH, I found a place where I could strengthen my physical wellbeing, prevent social isolation, and connect with other mature adults in a safe space, surrounded by people who truly acknowledge, honor, and respect one another. I’ve had the privilege of teaching a writing class here — sitting with neighbors, helping them find their words and tell their stories. Through movement classes like yoga and Tai Chi, I’ve also been able to maintain my mobility and positivity through these uncertain times.”

The need for our work has never been greater — nor have the challenges been more daunting. City government contract delays have put our organization, like so many nonprofits in NYC, in a precarious cash-flow position. Attacks on DEI initiatives, alongside financial and political upheaval, have dampened philanthropic giving from corporate entities and private foundations. Through disciplined budgeting and careful stewardship, LESGC is projected to end FY26 with a balanced budget — a testament to our organizational resilience. But sustaining that momentum and meeting growing community needs requires sustained government partnership.

We are requesting **\$1,090,000** in total City Council support in FY27 to sustain the full scope of our work—including Arts education programs, community gallery programming, and the continued growth of the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness.

LESGC’s mission to provide Joy, Power, and Possibility is more urgent than ever. Community-based organizations like ours are not a supplement to the city's social safety net. We are providing integrated, culturally responsive services across generations. The return on this investment is measurable, proven, and urgently needed.

Thank you.

A Statement to the members of the New York City Council, from Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc.:

The entire AILEY team, led by Daria L. and Eric J. Wallach Artistic Director Alicia Graf Mack, joins the New York City Council and Deputy Speaker Williams in recognizing the legacy and significance of our founder, Alvin Ailey.

As a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and artistic visionary, Mr. Ailey was an unparalleled change-maker. His company, which was founded in New York City at the 92nd Street Y in 1958, has celebrated the African American cultural heritage for nearly 70 years, and has shared that heritage with people across the globe as a “vital American cultural ambassador to the world,” as named by a US Congressional resolution. Mr. Ailey’s dedication to his craft, his visionary approach to dance education, and his belief that dance belongs to the people are all ideals we uphold today and which are reflected in the life of our great city.

We are also honored to acknowledge the artistry of Carmen de Lavallade, a friend and creative partner of Mr. Ailey’s and an incomparable artist in her own right. Ms. de Lavallade and Mr. Ailey moved to New York City together and forged their careers side by side, uplifting the work of Black dancers and choreographers and championing diversity in the arts.

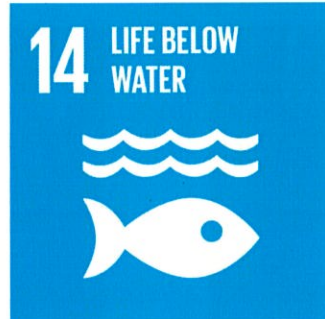
AILEY is proud to continue the tradition established by these two pioneering artists today. From our home at The Joan Weill Center for Dance on 55th Street, AILEY touches millions of lives both locally and globally, offering inspiring performances by our two internationally recognized companies, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II; world-class dance training at The Ailey School; empowering public dance and fitness classes with Ailey Extension; and innovative educational initiatives with Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs.

It is with deepest gratitude that we accept the City Council’s recognition of these two artists and join with them in honoring their work and legacy—today, tomorrow, and into the future.

Sincerely,

The entire AILEY team.

Icahn Charter School 4



SDG 14: Life Below Water, Advocating for a Cleaner, More Sustainable Future

This year, our seventh graders from Icahn Charter School 4 in the Bronx proudly participated in the NYC Junior Ambassadors Program, aligning our mission with Sustainable Development Goal #14: Life Below Water. Our NYC Junior Ambassadors have become passionate advocates for marine conservation and environmental justice, learning that the choices we make on land have a direct impact on our oceans, rivers, and aquatic life.

Through a deep dive into sustainability, our students explored the urgent threats facing marine ecosystems, from plastic pollution to overconsumption, and responded with powerful, hands-on solutions. In a bold act of advocacy and creativity, they designed a collection of sustainable fashion pieces using entirely upcycled and recycled materials. These wearable statements were crafted from reused yarn, collected plastic bottles, bottle caps, and other discarded items, transforming trash into tools for awareness. In addition to creating these impactful pieces, our NYC Junior Ambassadors have made it their mission to educate and inspire the wider school community. Through presentations, displays, and peer-to-peer engagement, they are raising awareness about sustainability, personal responsibility, and the urgent need to protect life below water.

By reimagining waste as wearable art, our students send a clear message: sustainability isn't just an idea, it's a movement. Their work challenges our community to rethink consumption, reduce waste, and protect the fragile ecosystems beneath the waves. As NYC Junior Ambassadors, they are not just students, they are changemakers, standing up for the planet and the life it holds below the surface.

P.S. 095

The Sheila Mencher School



We, the NYC Junior Ambassadors students, have come up with many ideas. Originally, we looked at our school and saw the malnourished students who couldn't focus in class and decided to focus on Zero Hunger, and Good Health and Well-being. We have been researching and discovering the astonishing disparity between small and industrial farms and inquiring into several programs that we hope will support us in bringing more fresh, local produce into our school and communities.

Learning how substantial and immense this idea is, we realized that we couldn't get this done this year, so we decided to just get ourselves ready for the idea, "planting the seeds" for the future, both literally and figuratively through supporting our school garden still in its infancy, while continuing to seek connections to local, sustainable food systems.

Meanwhile, recognizing that small changes can impact the larger good, we shifted our focus to something we could get going right now, coming up with another idea that deals with climate change. Ultimately, we want to create a more sustainable school environment, and this requires acting on many levels.

We have seen how much plastic is used and just gets thrown away, and we learned that plastic takes a long time to decompose, negatively impacting our environment (including our food systems) and our health. From plastic utensils, bags that are unnecessary, and particularly bottled beverages, we have started a campaign of reusing, recycling, and reducing the use of plastics. We have been creating posters and encouraging students to become more aware of their impact on the earth by reusing and reducing their reliance on plastics. Secondly, we are researching, working with the school administration, and investing in bins and compostable bags to collect recyclables/returnables in our school. We are planning on using any funds gained to donate to organizations that support our ideals, such as local food pantries and/or connecting with local farms to bring more fresh produce into our community and school.

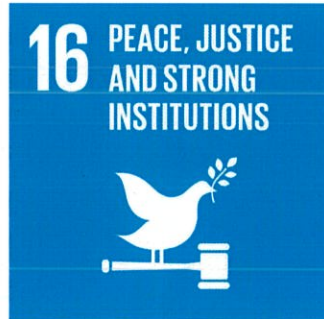
PS/IS 78Q



PS/IS 78Q is addressing the need for Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG #6) in 6 teams: digital design, website design, art, engineering, accounting, and environmental protection. Each team is developing a unique component to the larger community project that raises awareness about clean water and sanitation.

Digital design is developing card stock and posters on Canva. The website design team is presenting the experiences and artifacts on a public domain. The art team has created a mosaic that represents a freshwater ecosystem. Engineering has created fresh water filters. Our money team is allocating and monitoring the funding of all teams. The environmental protection team has been testing local waterways and removing trash.

Long Island City High School



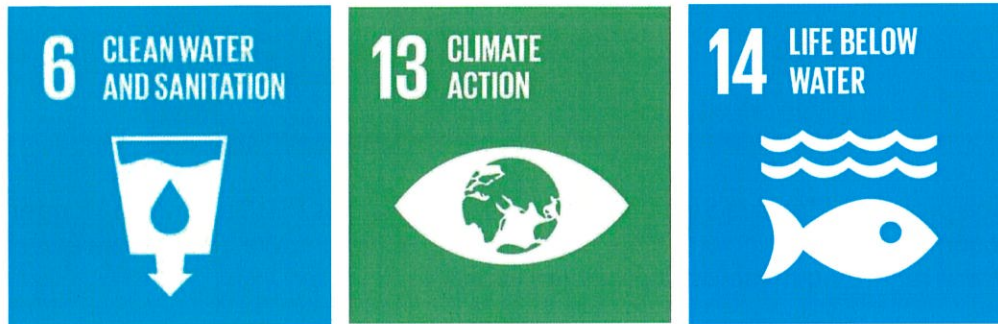
Our focus is on **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16**, which emphasizes promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions. In particular, we aim to raise awareness and foster dialogue on issues related to the protection of immigrant-origin students and their families, especially in light of recent policy changes under the current administration.

We will share information about the rights and protections available to these communities, ensuring they are informed and empowered in the face of shifting political landscapes. Through this initiative, we hope to inspire our students to become informed advocates for justice and to contribute to creating more inclusive, equitable, and supportive institutions within our society.

Students will have the following to present:

- Justice Through Art Exhibit
- Immigration Journeys Digital Story Archive
- Know Your Rights Youth Toolkit

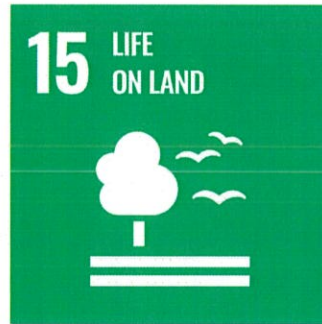
I.S. 171 The Magnet School of Leadership and Innovation



In partnership with The Billion Oyster Project students were able to, through interdisciplinary practices, learn about the positive environmental impacts Oysters have on our waterways, which includes their natural filtration system. After learning about the positive impacts Oysters have on our environment, students created their own Oyster Tanks to house, grow, and maintain Oysters right in our classroom. Students were in charge of feeding the Oysters every other day and ensuring they were actively cleaning the algae from the tank.

Students also learned about the impact of Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) in New York City and how Oysters are working to combat CSOs. In their math class, students began mapping out NYC Rain Gardens in their community and set out to clean the gardens surrounding our school. Students had several Community Clean-up days in which they cleaned these Rain Gardens of trash and other forms of litter and placed a sign with our school logo on it, signifying that our students are helping keep the community and our local waterways clean.

Al-Ihsan Academy



Our capstone project addresses Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 (Zero Hunger) and 15 (Climate Action), focusing on how climate change impacts hunger. We aim to raise awareness and motivate action regarding these interconnected issues.

Climate change has already inflicted significant harm on our planet. Through our project, we seek to encourage others to take steps towards achieving these goals. While we are not currently hosting virtual events, we have launched a website to engage the community in addressing these challenges, with potential events in the future.

Website Features:

- Homepage: Introduces the site's purpose
- Solutions Page: Offers ideas brainstormed by students
- Article Page: Lists our sources
- Action Page: Suggests ways to help solve these SDGs

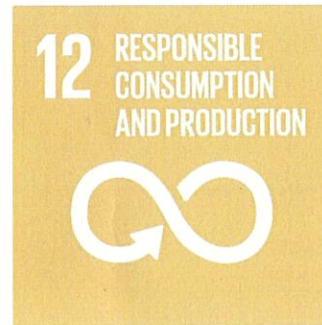
Our website aims to connect students beyond their local community and encourages sharing to inspire action in different regions. Our NYC Junior Ambassadors strive to create lasting awareness through this website, ensuring their efforts have a lasting impact.

In conclusion, our focus on SDGs 2 and 15 highlights the need for awareness, idea generation, and collaboration to combat climate change and its effects on hunger. Our website is designed to continue this mission, serving as a resource long after our project concludes.

We also explored vermiculture systems (worm farms) as a solution to recycle organic waste into fertile soil. This method is particularly beneficial in regions facing desertification, like Sudan. Worms improve soil fertility and natural moisture retention, reducing the need for irrigation and supporting sustainable crop growth. Additionally, worm farms can enhance local food production and mitigate resource conflicts.

The NYCJA has partnered with UNICEF KID POWER to distribute ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) globally, alongside tree planting and providing internet access and meals to local families.

Brooklyn Science and Engineering Academy (BSEA)



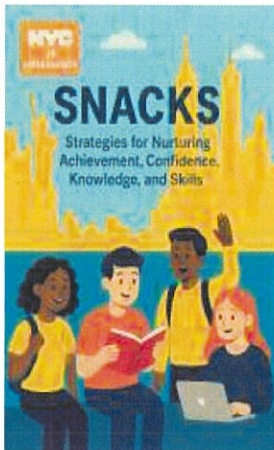
BSEA NYC Junior Ambassadors have focused their interests on SDG 6 Clean Water & Sanitation, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production.

BSEA NYC Junior Ambassadors worked to inform and advocate for communities, cities, and countries that are in the midst of a crisis with water. Their research highlighted the need for Clean Water and Sanitation and its effects on the everyday lives of ordinary people all over the world.

They took a solutions-based approach to SDG 6 by creating a water filtration system to demonstrate how waste and contamination can be removed from water systems in order to provide clean water to households and communities. They have also designed and created a 3D water filtration model to show how innovation and technology can help develop reliable and sustainable solutions for clean water.

Additionally, BSEA NYC Junior Ambassadors have documented their design processes, research and advocacy through social media-style videos to help educate, motivate and inspire others to understand the issues surrounding Clean Water and Sanitation.

Community High School



The SNACKS Toolkit, or Strategies for Nurturing Achievement, Confidence, Knowledge, and Skills, is our student-led initiative rooted in Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education. Designed by young changemakers, SNACKS addresses real challenges students face in accessing equitable and engaging learning. From academic burnout to lack of motivation and limited personalized support, our toolkit offers practical, youth-driven strategies to make education more inclusive, empowering, and relevant.

This presentation highlights the impact of student voice in reimagining education through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals. SNACKS provides bite-sized, actionable solutions that can be used in classrooms, schools, and communities. We prioritize confidence-building affirmations to creative learning activities, and peer mentorship models. SNACKS is our way of helping create a world where every student feels supported, seen, and capable of achieving success.

PS/MS 95

THE SHEILA MENCHER SCHOOL



Last school year we focused on Sustainable Development Goal #2: Zero Hunger. Through reading and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals, we learned that the Zero Hunger goal is at risk. It is projected that over 600 million people worldwide will face hunger by 2030, and that food prices will remain high in many countries. We noticed how food shortage affects students in our school community. As a result, we decided it was important to raise awareness and educate students, families, and community members about ways to address hunger.

To improve food access, we organized canned food drives, hosted food pantries, and launched a community garden to provide healthy food options for our school community.

We also created a pamphlet with information about SDG#2: Zero Hunger. It includes data, resources, suggestions on what and where to eat, the best times to eat, why healthy eating is important, and, through our partnership with WITS, how to prepare nutritious meals. Using our hydroponic tower garden, we planted and harvested a variety of vegetables and herbs. Our garden has successfully sprouted green vegetables. Additionally, we started a windowsill garden that has produced small crops of fruits and vegetables. We plan to transplant these into raised bed planters on our outdoor patio.

We've made meaningful progress since last year and are committed to continuing our efforts to support the 2030 Zero Hunger goal.

Progress High School

The goal of eliminating extreme poverty for everyone around the globe by 2030 is a key aim of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Extreme poverty refers to living on less than \$2.15 per day per person, based on 2017 purchasing power. Significant decreases in extreme poverty have been seen in recent decades.

India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economies globally in recent years. However, despite this significant progress, poverty remains a critical challenge in the country. A small segment of the population has reaped the benefits of economic growth, while the majority continue to struggle to fulfill their basic daily needs. This inequity is further compounded by a longstanding social caste system, which disproportionately impacts women and children.

QUEENS COLLEGIATE



Defining and Measuring Impact:

Students focused on clean drinking water and water pollution.

Awareness:

The NYC Junior Ambassadors will be incorporating how daily human activities are impacting New York State in different ways and then using everyday technology to research specific areas in NYC that are being impacted. These lessons and activities would be directly tied to SDGs 6,13,14. Students will focus on how to reduce pollutants in waterways and design water filtration systems.

The levels of water pollution have been rising over the past decades, with increased water pollution from local sources such as homes and buildings. Personal care products, medicines, and household chemicals are washed into the waterways, where they are severely affecting aquatic wildlife and drinking water supplies. The majority of these chemicals tend to remain in the environment for long periods of time without being naturally broken down. The students will focus on promoting the proper disposal of everyday household and personal care products and educating the public on purchasing products that are environmentally friendly. Students will also test different water filtration designs to effectively remove many of these pollutants from contaminated water sources.

Service Learning:

The lessons for these topics would center on SDG 6 and 14, where students will create solutions to promote sustainable cities and communities. Many of our students are not exposed to this information and do not see the importance of this situation. Students need to understand the importance and that their everyday actions can directly aid to prevent the disruption of water quality in New York State. We would like to incorporate the United Nations into our curriculum by discussing and focusing on the use of innovative technology to solve some of humanity's most pressing needs. Science tech is facilitating the global exchange of ideas and resources!

-We will create a water filtration system to research different designs and efficiency.

-We had a park clean up and a meeting with members of the NYC Water department to discuss microplastics.

-We will create an informative power to share ways to effectively remove many of these pollutants from contaminated water sources.

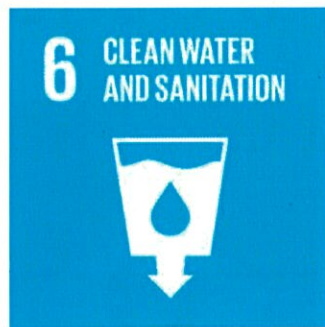
Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School



This year, our MAELS NYC Junior Ambassadors focused on SDG 5, Gender Equality. Due to their heavy use of social media, our students were aware that the young people of their generation were facing issues they had never faced before. For example, they were seeing jokes on TikTok about how women belong in the kitchen, jokes about women only being useful for making a sandwich, and other harmful videos. All of the NYC Junior Ambassadors felt as if the jokes that were being normalized online stereotyped the roles of women in America. From their observations, they then inferred that gender disparities would be similar or worse in other countries.

For their project, MAELS NYC Junior Ambassadors conducted a deep research study on the current achievements of the goals set in SDG 5 of multiple member countries. They researched countries such as Kenya, Lebanon, Jamaica, and Ireland. After they completed their research, they realized that raising awareness was key to changing the conversation about gender inequality around the world. Their first idea was to create a children's book to educate the youth on the reality of gender issues around the world. However, they also found it important that adults and older students had access to the information as well. They decided to create both a website and a children's book raising awareness of gender inequality and the reality of the targets. They have worked diligently under a tight schedule to finish both projects and has shared the projects with multiple campuses in the Staten Island area.

Ditmas JHS 20K062



SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation and **SDG 10:** Reducing Inequalities

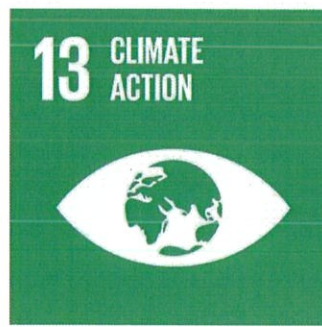
Topic: Water is life, and everyone should have access!

This project engages 7th and 8th-grade students in exploring the global challenge of access to clean water and sanitation and inequality through the lens of Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 10. The NYC Junior Ambassadors created a lesson plan to help Social Studies teachers teach the SDGs. The following activities will be suggested activities on the lesson plan:

1. YouTube videos about the SDGS
2. Two articles to conceptualize the topic
3. Original word search puzzles that will include focus vocabulary phrases,
4. A comic strip exploring the extent of the social problem and possible solutions
5. An interactive activity where students can team up and design a social media campaign, which includes
 - Creating a hashtag
 - Creating a logo to describe the social problem,
 - A three-day challenge highlighting solutions and local and international organizations that are working towards a solution. The winning team can have their designs posted on the school's website!

A podcast promoting the program, project, and lesson plan was completed by the NYC Junior Ambassadors and will be posted on a website dedicated to the final project.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Intermediate School



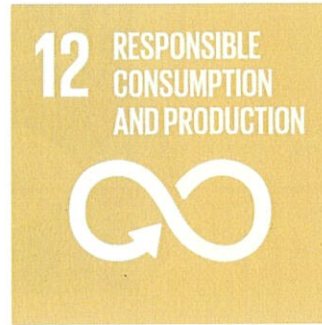
NYC Junior Ambassadors at the Oliver Wendell Holmes Intermediate School designed a virtual representation of a garden and successfully took it from virtual to reality! Together, they explored various gardening techniques that promote healthy plants, efficient resource use, and sustainable practices. Students proudly transformed a bare corner of their building into a beautiful space that fosters a positive and welcoming environment for all.

A sense of community and pride can positively impact student behavior and academic performance; however, their key objective was to support SDG 13 by mitigating the negative impacts of climate change.

Sustainable gardening and landscaping techniques provide many benefits that slow climate warming by reducing carbon emissions and increasing carbon storage in soil and plants.

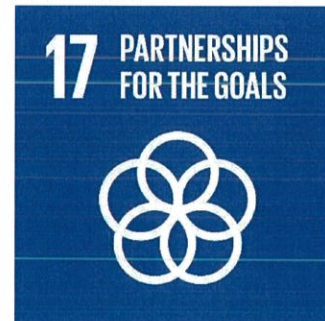
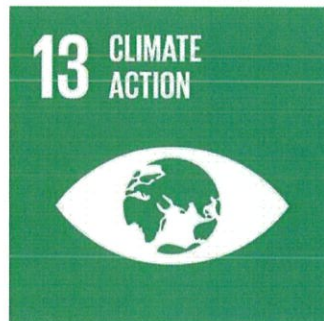
Another component is our focus on SDG 5 Gender Equality. Through an interdisciplinary approach focusing mostly on Latin American, African, and Southeast Asian countries, students conducted comparative research on how climate change can exacerbate gender inequality.

East New York Middle School of Excellence



East New York Middle School of Excellence is located in the East New York section of Brooklyn, NY. Within the community, we have noticed an increase in items that can easily be repurposed into something else, for example, bottles into pots for planting. Even within our school community, we noticed an influx of recyclable items tossed around the school, which removed from its beauty. We came up with a plan of how to beautify the school while making money. Thus, we decided to create a challenge to decrease the amount of garbage spread throughout our school building. Our 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade students engaged in a recycling challenge. There are 4 blue recycling bins and 4 green recycling bins throughout the school building. Each grade understands that they must use the proper receptacle to dispose of items. The plastic, glass bottles, and cans will be brought to the recycling facility for money. That money will then be placed into the school treasury for incentives to be placed back into the school community.

Renaissance School of the Arts



Renaissance School of the Arts is proud to participate in the NYC Junior Ambassador Program, engaging students in meaningful global and local initiatives. Recently, our students had the honor of hosting the Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN and meeting with the Education Minister from the Netherlands, creating inspiring opportunities to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals. Focusing on SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 13 Climate Action, and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals, our students deepened their understanding of these critical issues while building international connections.

Locally, students actively partnered with our community garden by planting vegetables and nurturing green spaces, embodying the spirit of SDG 2 and SDG 13. They took part in climate action days at school, raising awareness and promoting environmental stewardship. To celebrate and amplify their efforts, Renaissance hosted a Zero Hunger Climate Change concert in the garden, bringing together the community to support sustainability and partnership. These experiences empower our students to become leaders in creating a healthier and more equitable planet.

Harlem Village Academy



This project was dedicated to understanding and alleviating the pressing issues of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2) within our local community. Students undertook a multifaceted approach, directly engaging with community members and organizations to pinpoint needs, mobilize resources, and deliver immediate assistance. The initial phase involved a comprehensive community needs assessment, where students conducted surveys to gather firsthand accounts of how poverty and hunger were impacting residents. This collection of qualitative and quantitative data provided critical insights into the specific challenges faced by individuals and families in our area.

Following the needs assessment, students moved into a crucial phase of community engagement and collaboration. Leveraging the insights from their survey, they initiated dialogues with local community boards. These meetings were instrumental in gaining a deeper understanding of existing community support structures and identifying prime opportunities for collaborative action. This groundwork then led to the practical step of resource mobilization: students successfully organized and executed a food drive. Through dedicated community outreach and further collaboration, a significant quantity of non-perishable goods was collected, powerfully demonstrating how collective action can effectively address immediate hunger.

The project culminated in strategic partnerships and direct distribution of aid. Students forged vital alliances with established community programs that provided access to food pantry facilities. This collaboration proved essential for efficiently organizing and distributing the collected food items. The grand finale of the project was a community fair, proudly hosted by the students. At this impactful event, free food was distributed to those in need, and crucial resources and information about available community support services were shared. The fair served as a central hub, connecting individuals with ongoing assistance and actively promoting overall community well-being.

This initiative profoundly empowered students, transforming them into active agents of change and fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable development goals in a practical context. Key outcomes included a heightened awareness of the prevalence of poverty and hunger within our community, alongside the development of invaluable research, communication, and organizational skills. The project successfully mobilized community resources to address immediate food insecurity, established new community partnerships, and strengthened existing ones. Most importantly, it directly provided food and essential information to community members in need, positively impacting their well-being. This entire endeavor stands as a testament to a commitment to building a more resilient and equitable community, powerfully illustrating how student-led action can contribute meaningfully to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bronx Aerospace High School



As part of the 2025 NYC Junior Ambassadors Program, students from Bronx Aerospace High School explored SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, focusing on how access to mental health resources, healthcare equity, and community safety directly impact youth in the Bronx. Recognizing that many of their peers struggle with stress, anxiety, and limited access to quality care, the students launched a project titled *"Healing Starts Here: Youth Voices for Community Wellness."*

Through this initiative, students surveyed classmates, interviewed local advocates, and hosted a wellness day at their school featuring peer-led workshops on mindfulness, nutrition, and navigating mental health stigma. Their project highlighted the systemic barriers to care that disproportionately affect communities of color and offered actionable solutions for schools and youth organizations to better support holistic well-being. The students hope to expand their work through social media advocacy and a proposed youth wellness council in their school community.



Vertices Incorporated

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April 30, 2026

Testimony pursuant to the April 27, 2026, public hearing of the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations hearing of the

Dear Chair Willaims, Committee members and staff,

I write in support of Deputy Speaker and Committee Chair Dr. Nantasha Williams twin resolutions recognizing Alvin Ailey's life and legacy and honoring his contributions to American dance and the founding of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and declaring March 6, as Carmen de Lavallade Day in the City of New York.

I don't recall ever meeting Mr. Ailey in person, yet his work and vision and therefore those of Ms. De Lavallade as well, have had an extraordinary effect on the course of my life. Soon after abandoning my undistinguished career as a junior varsity college hockey player, I found myself in an orchestra seat at City Center to take in only the second ever live concert dance performance I would attend, the first having taken place in Boston less than a year previous.

American Ballet Theatre performed onstage that evening and much as I had in seeing the stars of the Bolshoi Ballet the previous autumn, I found myself, in spite of whatever reservations I might have harbored about this kind of dancing, more and more Impressed with each and every piece on the ABT program until Misha Baryshnikov's duet with Bonnie Mathis in Roland Petit's "Le Jeune Homme et la Mort," extended my appreciation to a degree I had only previously experienced in relation to live sporting events.

The final work of the concert, created only a few years earlier, featured a twin commission created by Alvin Ailey with an orchestral score by Duke Ellington. The work might be described as a plotless ensemble composition that in contrast to every other piece I'd seen that evening, featured none of ABT's principal dancers. By the time it finished, however, I found myself convinced that I understood something on a visceral level unlike anything I had experienced up to that moment. That piece changed my life, allowing me to imagine a world that I wished to inhabit and help bring into being.

It gave me the ridiculous courage to audition within a couple of years for a scholarship at the Ailey School where I would soon study briefly. Within 5 years of that night I presented my own first self-produced professional concert in a loft in Tribeca that marked the founding of my eponymous dance and theater enterprise. The journey from that career, lit by Ailey's vision of dancing as an all-embracing community, eventually brought me to the first NYC Dance Parade, a celebration of our city with which I have and continue to be associated for all of its annual iterations including the upcoming 20th edition scheduled to take place next month on Saturday, May 16th. Y'all will be welcome, so please join us!

In early 2015, I invited Dance Parade's Executive Director Greg Miller to accompany me to absorb Carmen de Lavallade's solo work *As I Remember It* at the Baryshnikov Arts Center. Immediately following the performance, inspired by her artistry, we approached her with an invitation to serve as Grand Marshal of that year's Parade and DanceFest. As she had throughout her long life, she graced us in ways we could not have conceived, standing atop her float at the age of 83 for the entire mile

and one half of the Parade to DanceFest in an elegant printed red silk dress designed for her by her late husband Geoffrey Holder and soon waving a banner she borrowed from a nearby Chinese troupe in the Parade line up and accompanied by another late living legend the dancer, choreographer, writer and fellow dance ambassador Gus Solomons, Jr. in a gift to the Parade and the City for which we would not have known how to ask.

She brought Gus along on that day in a way reminiscent of her invitation to her high school classmate Alvin Ailey and the city and the world continue to be touched and moved by her imagination of possibility and almost limitless generosity of spirit. I can think of no finer tribute than to have her birthday publicly marked in recognition of what she has brought to the City of New York.

I wish also to register my strong support for the Deputy Speaker's bill proposing a study towards the creation of designation of public memorials in sites of significant resonance in regards to the Draft Riots of July, 1863.

Thank you

To Whom It May Concern,

The New York City Junior Ambassador Program stands as a powerful and transformative initiative that affirms its value through the lived experiences of the students it serves. At Community High School, participation in this program was nothing short of life-changing. It opened doors that many of our students did not even realize existed and gave them the opportunity to see themselves as global citizens with the ability to influence real change.

Through the lens of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations, our students gained a deeper understanding of the world around them and their role within it. These goals are not abstract ideas; they are a blueprint for the future. For young people, particularly those in urban communities, they provide both awareness and purpose. Our students began to recognize issues such as poverty, climate change, education equity, and social justice not as distant problems, but as challenges they are capable of addressing. As the next generation of leaders, it is essential that they are equipped with this knowledge, as they will ultimately carry forward the responsibility of building a more sustainable and equitable world.

The significance of this program for urban students cannot be overstated. Too often, students in city environments are limited by access and exposure. The Junior Ambassador Program disrupts that narrative by placing students in spaces where their voices are heard and valued. It validates their experiences while expanding their perspectives. For many of our students, this was the first time they engaged in meaningful dialogue about global issues and saw how their local actions connect to a broader international mission.

Equally impactful is the program's ability to connect students with influential leaders, including figures such as the Mayor of New York City. These interactions are more than symbolic; they are foundational. When students can engage with decision-makers and see how leadership operates at the highest levels, it demystifies power and inspires confidence. It reinforces the idea that their voices matter and that they, too, can sit at those tables in the future.

These connections between students, educators, and civic leaders are crucial to the sustainability of not only the program itself but also the trajectories of the students involved. They create networks of opportunity, mentorship, and support that extend far beyond the classroom. The Junior Ambassador Program does more than educate—it cultivates agency, responsibility, and vision.

In every sense, this program is an investment in the future. It empowers young people, particularly those from urban communities, to see themselves as leaders, innovators, and advocates for change. The impact on Community High School students is clear: they leave not only more informed, but more inspired, more confident, and more prepared to shape the world they are inheriting.

Kindest regards,

Keisha Allsop

Dr. Rose Reissman – City Council Testimony-

Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations-

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Topic – United Nations Junior Ambassador Program-Carly Avezzano-Strategic Relationship Director-NYC Mayor’s Office for International Affairs

Good morning. By way of introduction. I am proud Brooklyn born and bred, Flatbush, Loews Kings, Erasmus High School, Windsor Terrace, Dr. Rose Reissman, a Brooklyn daughter. I am a published Ascd, Iste, Ncte, Penguin and Corwin writer in the field of multicultural, global student leadership, America 250 student citizenship and literacy read aloud. In that context, I developed all those skills and fluencies in Brooklyn at Ditmas IS 62, 700 Cortelyou Road, Brooklyn 11218 Windsor Terrace, Kensington, District 20. The school under the leadership of Superintendent David Pretto and its Principal Marielena Santiago, herself a leader in the LRE- Law Related Education Network, plus its Assistant Principal Michelle Buitrago, a literacy leader and Sofia Rashid head of the eighth group and born in Morocco and Beatriz Bortle, a fervent social and emotional education learner in charge of the arts and seventh grade.

When Ms. Santiago became Principal of Ditmas she envisioned cultivating student skills as junior ambassadors within Ditmas. Ms. Santiago is deeply focused on infusing her school, given its over 24 percent MLL or from MLL

families number of students, with take action engagement in international student cultures, values and family connected awareness and global peaceable citizen now actions. She and her team participated in Ukraine War school wide events as well as organize a yearly cultural, education, performance and dance school wide event, Carmen and World Cup players would enjoy.

In 2022-2023, she endorsed Keitha Rhoden, the head of Student Leadership Council (which Ms. Santiago developed herself) to apply for the United Nations Junior Ambassador Leadership Program for her student leaders. Ms. Rhoden's passion and expertise as a person with roots in Jamaican culture and a talent for nurturing student middle school leaders, led to Ditmars selection as one of the twenty schools to participate in this program.

With an application form and excellent online after school collaborative SDG Sustainable Development Goals support from the tech savvy Take Action Global founder Jennifer Williams, Koen Timmers, and Riley Justis run professional development program, Ms. Rhoden, Ms. Michelle Myers, Guidance Counselor Global citizen and I got to network with savvy empathetic talented and tech expert international teaching peers . Our grades 7 and 8 student leaders collaborated from their classroom atop the second floor of Ditmas on Cortelyou Road and east 7th street to design their own banners for their SDG research project, see the banner above. These were later their own tee shirts for the share ceremony at the end of the project. They artistically took charge and ownership of their project. When the head of the

program so wonderfully booked students from international cultures with an ambassador leader from one of these cultures, Jamaican Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Brian Wallace, the students joyously prepped specific questions for him about his country's economic, political, and educational challenges. They asked him why he went into diplomatic as opposed to government leadership and he answered honestly. The conversation convenes in our school library which is a makerspace, MLL literacy, Rendell read aloud and student favorite space. Amy Mathis runs it.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/e3jAp3wuqNYSBXN8>

The class visit to the United Nations with a guided tour especially for them and their being greeted, as “Junior Ambassadors” was a revelation as we learned this was first ON SITE and a first ever even virtual tour for all of them they were truly pandemic deprived. The ceiling, meeting rooms, staff, general assembly and even the souvenir component of the center plus the art that depicted the goals and personalities they had peripherally studied were all revelations for the students. They were transformative. The same goes for the outside twenty school Junior Ambassador Network gathering where although they knew there were 19 other schools, they were physically shocked to actually visit and meet other students by their poster stations. A mini Junior Ambassador Summit foreshadowing adult leadership. They met the US Ambassador to the United Nations.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/vvvATJuoVaMqEQgB7>

Outcomes qualitative and quantitative:

Creative Teacher wrote about the students podcast produced by teacher Marissa Silverman.

Pennsylvania Council for Social Studies shared the podcast and the student newsletter for this project taking its readership beyond NY State borders.

Fiza Kamran is now in high school, a rising junior and working as a student leader for Non-Violence plus won a logo Get the Vote Out contest run by Pennsylvania Council for Social Studies.

Xilen Liang now in high school, also a rising junior, returned to Ditmas on a day off from high school to propose an international student leadership project.

Recommendations:

As in the field of dreams movie, if United Nations Junior Ambassador Program could expand its network, the many schools who have had transformative programs could voluntarily support district and close to school neighbors on site or online. This would provide leadership opportunities for students and teachers already trained to disseminate results.

Council might fund their constituent schools who because of the few places have never worked with the program or cannot repeat it due to limited funds and staffing.

There could be a free on site junior ambassador tour, summit or global tech project opportunity so these practiced junior ambassadors get a chance during vacation time to network with their peers and grow their skills.

There could be an online blog for them to personally publish their insights, ideas and share global triumphs/challenges.

The Council has a myriad of testimonies advocating for expanding successful and needed programs, given these heated, divisive times and the proven talents, wisdom and opportunities of this program sowing tomorrow's plants of peace and collaboration in today's young leaders, led by empowering junior ambassadors this year so future years reap their creative, global fruits of peace.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carly Arezzano

Address: 2 UN Plaza, 27th floor

I represent: Mayor's office for International Affairs

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ana Maria Archula

Address: _____

I represent: Mayor's office of International Affairs

Address: 2 United Nations Plaza

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bridget Hoptman Sigal

Address: 2 Ctr St

I represent: Manhattan Borough President

Address: 2 Ctr St

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms