

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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October 30, 2025

Start: 1:17 p.m.

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HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 2

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Jennifer Gutiérrez
Shahana Hanif
Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Mercedes Narcisse
Pierina Ana Sanchez

A P P E A R A N C E S

John Sullivan, Superintendent of Transfer
Schools for New York Public Schools

Joe Luft, Chief of High Schools for New York
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Andie Corso, Chief of District 75 and School
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Flavia Puello Perdomo, Chief of Schools for
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Kimberly Ramones, Chief of Staff to the Division
of School Leadership for New York Public Schools

Josiah Irizarry, student

Eimi Herrera, student

Laura Lai, Senior Policy Analyst and Strategic
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City Comptroller

Jay Nanda, Urban Dove

Augustin Escamilla, Jr., student

Timothy He, student

Analisa Vestal, student

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

Lehla Tolbert, student

Rico St. Hilare, alternative school graduate

Melanie Rose Poggi, Internship Coordinator for
the JCCA at Liberation Diploma Plus High School

Rohini Singh, Director of the School Justice
Project at Advocates for Children

Joel Pietrzak, Staff Attorney in the Education
Law Project at the Legal Aid Society

Ryan Melis, Principal of New Ventures Charter
School on Staten Island

Anna Arkin-Gallagher, Associate Director of the
Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defenders

Jessica Balistreri, Data Analyst at the New York
Civil Liberties Union's Education Policy Center

Nelson Mar, Staff Attorney at Bronx Legal
Services in the Education Law Unit

Lara Evangelista, Executive Director of
International Network for Public Schools

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon. This is
3 a microphone check for the Committee on Education.
4 Today's date is October 30, 2025, Hearing Room 2,
5 recorded by Ginelle Yearwood.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon. Welcome
7 to the New York City Council hearing on the Committee
8 on Education.

9 At this time, please silence all
10 electronics and do not approach the dais.

11 Thank you very much.

12 Chair, you may begin.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: [GAVEL] Good
14 afternoon, and welcome to our oversight hearing,
15 Transfer Schools. I'm Council Member Rita Joseph,
16 Chair of the Education Committee. Thank you to
17 everyone who signed up to testify. We look forward to
18 hearing from you. The Committee will also consider
19 two pieces of my legislation, Intro. Number 1359, a
20 local law in relations to requiring the Department of
21 Education to report on manifestation determination
22 reviews, and Introduction Number 1360, a local law in
23 relation to outreach regarding youth program provided
24 by the Police Department.

25

Transfer schools were created as a second chance for young people who have disengaged from traditional school settings. They serve students who are overage and under-credited, who may be newly arrived in this country, facing housing instability, trauma, mental health struggles, caregiving responsibilities, returning to school after involvement with the justice system, or simply felt invisible in their previous schools. In short, transfer schools were designed for students who have been left behind by a system that too often was not built with them in mind. But that mission only works if these schools are supported to do what they were designed to do. Without adequate staffing, consistent funding, and fair accountability measures, a transfer school cannot be a bridge it was meant to be. It becomes a dumping ground, and that's not acceptable. Enrollment in transfer schools have seen a significant drop, even as the needs of the students have become more complex. Many schools are operating with fewer than 200 students, making them more vulnerable to funding cuts under the City's per-pupil model. Yet, small enrollments does not mean smaller needs. Transfer schools provide intensive wraparound

services, and they cannot function without sustained investment in staffing, counseling, and the Learn to Work program, which offers paid internships and case management.

The Committee is also concerned about accountability. By their very nature, transfer schools serve students that have difficulty graduating. This means that they cannot be easily evaluated using the same metric applied to traditional high schools. We need to make sure that the standard recognizes the real progress schools make, measured in credits recovered, attendance improvements, and students' re-engagement. At the same time, we've heard troubling reports that students, particularly new arrival, English language learner students, are being counseled out of their home schools and into transfer schools prematurely, even after failing a single Regents exam. That practice not only undermines the integrity of transfer schools, it raises serious equity and civil rights concerns.

Along those lines, the Committee is concerned about whether the legal and moral obligations to students with disabilities are being

met. Are IEPs being implemented in full, or are schools struggling to staff special education and related service positions? For justice-involved students, how well is New York City Public Schools coordinating with agencies like Probation, Social Services, and Youth and Community Development to ensure continuity when students return to their communities?

Today, we'll hear from students, New York City Public Schools, families, educators, and advocates. We ask, are transfer schools fulfilling their intended role? And that means understanding what works, where the gaps are, and what supports are available. It means examining whether New York City Public School funding, staff, accountability, structure reflect the complexity and the humanity of the students at these schools.

Thank you to the Members of the Education Committee who has joined us today, Council Member Lee, Council Member Narcisse, Council Member Dinowitz, and Council Member Hanif on Zoom. I would like to thank the Committee Staff, Alejandro Carvajal, Chloë Rivera, Katie Salina, Andrew Lane-Lawless, and Grace Amato, and my own Staff, Chief-of-

Staff Juvanie Piquant, Deputy Chief Joel Desouve, for their work on today.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone who wished to testify in person, today you must fill out a witness slip, which you can find on the desk of the Sergeant-at-Arms near the entrance. Please fill out the slip, even if you have already registered in advance, that you'll be testifying in person today. If you wish to testify on Intro. 1359 or Intro. 1360, please indicate on the slip whether you're here to testify in favor or in opposition to the legislation. I also want to point out that we will not be voting on any legislation today.

To allow as many people as possible to testify, we limit the testimonies to three minutes per person, whether you're testifying in person or in Zoom. I am also going to ask my Colleagues to limit their questions and comments to five minutes. Please note that witnesses who are here in person will testify before those who are signed on Zoom's webinar.

As a reminder to all our witnesses, please state your name prior to your testimony for the record. If anyone is here today, required

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2 accessible version of a presentation given today at
3 the hearing, please email testimony@council.nyc.gov.

4 I will now turn it over to Education
5 Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Good
7 afternoon. Now, in accordance with the rules of the
8 Council, I will administer the affirmation to the
9 witnesses from the Mayoral Administration. I will
10 call on each of you individually for a response.
11 Please raise your right hands.

12 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
13 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
14 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
15 questions?

16 John Sullivan.

17 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Joseph Luft.

19 CHIEF LUFT: Yes.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Andie Corso.

21 CHIEF CORSO: Yes.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Melanie Mac.

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Yes.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Flavia Puello
25 Perdomo.

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CHIEF PERDOMO: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Kim Ramones.

CHIEF-OF-STAFF RAMONES: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Kristen
Harris.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HARRIS: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Anna Pons.

STRATEGIC ADVISOR PONS: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL CARVAJAL: Thank you.

You may begin your testimony.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Good afternoon,
Chair Joseph and all the Members of the Committees on
Education here today. My name is John Sullivan, and I
am the proud Superintendent of our Transfer High
Schools. I'm joined by Joseph Luft, Chief of School
Support for High Schools within the Division of
School Leadership, and my colleagues in the Office of
Student Pathways and the Division of Inclusive and
Accessible Learning. We're pleased to be here today
to discuss the work we do in our Transfer High
Schools to provide a high-quality education to some
of the most vulnerable students in New York City
public schools. I thank the City Council for inviting
us here today and for your support of Transfer

Schools and of all of our students. We thank you, Chair Joseph, for your continued support and advocacy for our most vulnerable students.

I hope to use this time today to show you how Transfer Schools build bridges, not barriers, to education. I have served in the Transfer District for eight years, beginning my tenure as a Deputy Superintendent. Upon the retirement of my predecessor in the spring of 2021, I was appointed Superintendent. Prior to this role, I held positions as a high school principal, a network leader, and a classroom teacher. Throughout my career, I have been steadfast in my commitment to ensuring that every student has access to the resources, guidance, and opportunities necessary to achieve their academic success and personal growth.

Transfer High Schools are small, diploma-granting high schools that were designed to support high school students in need of an alternative learning environment from the traditional high school setting. Many of the students in Transfer Schools have disconnected from school before they have come to a Transfer School. The average Transfer School student comes to the District after spending one to

two years in a traditional high school. The average student is 17 to 18 years old, over-aged, and under-credited. They usually have fewer than nine credits and one or less Regents exams. Students often have attendance issues and are often already considered chronically absent when they arrive at a Transfer School.

Prior to the year 2015, Transfer Schools were part of their geographical high school districts. This resulted in uneven supports for students with disabilities and English language learners, as well as students' access to central resources. Transfer Schools only became a citywide district in 2015.

Today, Transfer Schools are a key part of central initiatives, such as New York City Solves, Learning to Work initiatives, Future Ready, and Project Pivot. As a district, Transfer Schools have expanded our work to support English language learners, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing. We have built community involvement by establishing advisories that include our students, parents, and principals.

There are a total of 51 Transfer Schools in New York City Public Schools. The Transfer High School District, under my supervision, is composed of 42 schools across all five boroughs. Five of the schools traditionally have served newcomers and English language learners. One school, Harvey Milk High School, traditionally has served members of the LGBTQIA-plus community. The Transfer Schools currently serve 8,734 students, including 2,082 students with disabilities, 2,608 English language learners, 1,986 students in temporary housing, and 106 students in foster care.

Through our partnerships with our community-based organizations, known as CBOs, Transfer Schools provide our students with the academic, social, and emotional support needed for them to have another chance to be successful in high school. Our CBOs also coordinate the Learning to Work programs, which provide students with work-based learnings and internships. Transfer Schools are no longer schools where students go to just finish what they are missing. They offer students a true high school experience, not just the minimum. As my

student leaders have proudly stated, Transfer Schools build bridges, not barriers, to education.

Transfer Schools enroll students on an ongoing basis. Students don't need to pass a test to enter a Transfer School and are often referred to one by an adult at their current school. Many of our students also find their way to Transfer Schools through the recommendation of a friend or a family member who has previously attended one. When students come to Transfer Schools for admission, their transcript is reviewed and the student and family is interviewed. For students to be successful, they need to desire to make a change and have a fresh start. As I remind our principals and our assistant principals whenever we gather, students who choose to attend a Transfer School are letting us know that they want a second chance to graduate high school, a second chance to be successful. Enrollment is contingent on the age of students. They need to be able to accumulate the 44 credits required to meet graduation standards, as well as the five Regents exams, by their sixth year of high school and by the time they are 21.

At times when a student or family feels that a Transfer School is not the right fit, then the principal and the district team support the student by either finding another Transfer School or working with our partners in D79 for possible enrollment in P2G or GED.

As the leader of the Transfer School District, I feel strongly that when students decide to attend a Transfer School, they make a statement that they want a second chance to do better. In the Transfer District, we have a responsibility to support each student who comes to us academically, socially, and emotionally, while challenging and pushing them to do their best. Doing the minimum is not a Transfer School option.

Under this Administration, we have implemented a number of strategies and initiatives to improve student learning. Student attendance is a strong focus of our district work. Back in 2021-'22, immediately after the pandemic, the district attendance rate overall was 56 percent. That includes a 51 percent attendance for students with disabilities and a 72 percent attendance rate for English language learners. In '24-'25, our overall

attendance rate improved 11 percentage points to 67 percent. Attendance of our students with disabilities climbed 10 points to 61 percent and 5 points for our English language learners to 77 percent. Compared to their attendance in their previous school, our data shows that students attending Transfer Schools improve on an average of 8.69 points. We've also worked and reduced our chronic absenteeism from 84.4 percent in 2021-'22 to 77 percent in '24-'25 and is currently running at 68 percent.

We're proud of these improvements while recognizing that there's still much work to do. To build our progress, each Transfer School has an attendance team that meets on a regular basis to monitor and address the ever-changing attendance barriers facing our students. We also share best practices in Transfer Schools. Those that have achieved success through such practices and strategies implement and share with their colleagues. As superintendent, my goal is to have all students graduate from high school and be ready for life after receiving their diploma. As a district, we ensure that our schools have programs like advisories, graduation guardians, weekend and holiday class

sessions. To support the non-academic needs of students, our Transfer Schools are staffed with social workers, advocacy counselors, and other highly skilled and trained personnel. Students' programs are tailored to their specific needs.

Our data shows that students passed Regents in their first year at a Transfer School at a 28 percent higher rate than they did in their traditional schools. During the '24-'25 school year, students who entered a Transfer School earned 3.7 more credits than they did the previous year at their traditional school. Transfer Schools stand by their students and give them additional time to graduate. Many of our students come to us after one to two years in a traditional high school and are often behind in credits and, essentially, they're pressing a restart button on their high school and academic careers.

Including students who receive a GED, the Transfer Schools six-year graduation rate is 61 percent, including 60 percent for students with disabilities and 40 percent for our English-language learners. The Transfer School anytime graduation rate, which includes our students who graduate after

their sixth year in high school, is 62 percent, including a 60 percent for students with disabilities and 46 percent for our English-language learners.

Through continued monitoring of student progress toward graduation requirements, students can be supported with the option of P2G and GED through District 79. As a key part of building bridges is ensuring that students are challenged with opportunities for advanced coursework, not just making up missing credits. We've worked to build the Advanced Placement AP program in the District. In 2021, 176 students in Transfer Schools took 242 AP exams with 69 scores of 3 or higher. In 2025, 505 students took 738 AP exams and 261 scored 3 or higher. Of those AP exams, 67 percent were taken by students who identified as Latinx or Black, and a total of 308 transfer students with disabilities and 259 English-language learners participated in AP classes.

To support students, we have also brought job certification programs into our schools. Our work with job certifications began through conversations with our parent advisory on how we can expand our Learning to Work programs. Our current job

certifications are also the result of student input based on career exploration and possible areas of future job interest. The Transfer District in '24-'25 had over 1,850 students engage in 2,450 college and career experiences. Those experiences included 850 internships, 350 career events, 250 college events and visits, 312 workforce trainings, 75 CPR trainings, 73 OSHA trainings, and 71 students participating in CDAS training. Of the students participating, 22 percent identified as English-language learners and 22 percent identified as students with disabilities.

Feedback and input from students, parents, and principals is not only important to me as a superintendent, but I also see it as an invaluable component to helping the district make progress. I have monthly meetings with students, parents, and principal advisors that provide authentic insight into the distinctive needs, challenges, and successes of our transfer high school community, ensuring that decisions are grounded in real experiences. By fostering open communication and collaboration, we create a responsive and student-

centered approach that strengthens pathways to graduation and post-secondary success.

The Transfer District continues to improve the support we have in place for students with disabilities and our English-language learners. We've worked with school teams to ensure that individualized education plans, known as the IEP, are brought up to date when students join our schools and that the IEP is a living document that is monitored and updated as the students meet the requirements for graduation. Transfer schools provide students with the opportunity to lead their own IEP review and learn how to advocate for their own educational needs.

Transfer schools have seen an increase in English-language learners in the last three years due to an increase in older student newcomers. We embraced those new arrivals by expanding programs in some of our schools and opening programs in others. With a limited number of trained ENL teachers, we have had to figure out how we could best support our teachers. The district team devised a professional learning program that included quality teaching for English-language learners, known as QTEL, training,

and best practices shared by our ENL teachers across the district, a mentoring program that teamed experienced ENL teachers with our non- or new ENL teachers. Through a grant from Dial, we were able to partner with the Internationals Network and their schools to provide professional learning to all of our principals and in-depth support to the schools in the district with the largest increase in English-language learners.

I've shared some areas where transfer schools are being successful. I now have some areas to share that are a continued challenge. Working with New York State Education on an equitable growth measure to assess the work of transfer schools. Under ESSA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, transfer schools are measured by the same accountability measures as traditional high schools, including the credit students accumulate and the Regents exams that students pass. Under ESSA, transfer schools are expected to meet a 67 percent graduation rate. This past year, I've been engaging with New York State Commissioner Rose's team to review how transfer schools are assessed, asking them to consider some growth measurements like improvement in credit

accumulation, improvement in attendance, improvement in growth in Regent passes, the earning of job certifications, and the ultimate graduation to be considered for future assessment measures of transfer schools.

Secondary of challenge, especially in the current environment, we're seeing increasing numbers of our English-language learners and newcomers that need to provide support for their families and are choosing to leave high school once their English proficiency is strong enough to obtain a stable job.

Third, we continue to provide professional development to all of our teachers and best serve our students, but we do face a shortage of licensed teachers, especially teachers of students with disabilities and English-language learners.

So in conclusion, transfer schools are committed to ensuring that New York City students have access to a high-quality education. As a district, we'll continue to support the most vulnerable students in New York Public Schools, giving them a place to belong, a place to thrive, and a place to learn to be productive citizens of the city, state, and country we all live in. The transfer

schools and I look forward to our continued partnership with the City Council to enhance the educational opportunities and experience of our students who have asked for a second chance.

As the students from Queen's Academy stated, the school offers a program that teaches students about working in the real world, which has been incredibly helpful. I've learned a lot and my supervisors are kind and supportive. I have an IEP, and Queen's Academy has provided everything I need to succeed. They hold regular meetings with me to track my progress and make improvements when necessary. I feel truly supported.

And as a parent from Concord High School shared with me, what stood out the most to me was how involved the school was. The texts, emails, and phone calls never stopped. And I'll be honest, at times it felt a little overwhelming, but now I realize it's because the staff truly care. They refuse to give up on their students or let them fall through the cracks. Concord High School didn't just help my kids succeed, it helped me as a parent feel hopeful again. For that, I will forever be grateful.

Before I close, I'd like to turn to the legislation. Intro. 1359 requires New York City Public Schools to report annually on manifestation determination reviews, the MDR, conducted for students with disabilities. New York City Public Schools is committed to ensuring that all students, including our students with disabilities, have access to a safe and supportive learning environment. MDRs provide important legal protections for students with disabilities. First and foremost, we aim to ensure that all stakeholders involved understand the process and their roles and rights throughout it. When everyone, school staff, families, advocates, have the same knowledge and understanding, we can collaborate in equitable and effective ways. We support the goals of the legislation and welcome an opportunity to add transparency on this issue and thank the Council for its continued leadership. Members of our team would like to speak more with the Council regarding the proposed legislation to ensure that the reporting requirements are consistent with the MDR process and what we are able to capture in our data systems.

With Intro. 1360, we support sharing information with families on youth programming. We

2 defer to our colleagues in the New York Police
3 Department on the content of the materials.

4 Chair Joseph and Members of the Council
5 here today, I personally invite you to join me on
6 visits to our amazing transfer schools where you can
7 meet our students, families, staff, and see our work
8 in action. Thank you, Chair Joseph.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.
10 I'd like to recognize Council Member Sanchez, also
11 Council Member Stevens. I know she was in a hearing
12 herself.

13 Thank you so much for that testimony. I
14 want to ask a few questions around what is the
15 average class size for transfer classrooms?

16 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Between 16 and
17 22 students is our average class size, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how is
19 instruction different from traditional high schools?

20 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So instruction
21 can be different in a lot of ways, Chair Joseph, and
22 that's a great question because if we just kept doing
23 the same old things, our students wouldn't make any
24 progress. So, a lot of times we will use things like
25 small learning groups in a classroom where students

are either directed to a group to help them with the skills that they're working on, and often our students will self-select. They'll look at the group and say, this is an area that I'm stuck on a problem and I'm going to go work on there so that I'm ready to go on to the next step in the process. There's also a lot of support given to students exactly where they are. So when students come in, we spend a lot of time getting to know who they are, knowing what they feel helps them learn, and then meeting them from that point on, so there could be ways for one student to really work on writing because that's an area that we see as a deficiency, but another student that excels, we don't hold them back. They'll move forward. We also, to a degree, do individualized programs so that students are able to progress at the pace at which they need to. So, for example, when a student comes to us and they may have passed all of their English classes in ninth grade, but they failed algebra, we're not going to hold them back and make them repeat ninth grade English. We're going to move them on to 10th grade English, but then review the algebra with them. And that will include additional services in the classroom, MTTS services outside of

the classroom, maybe an additional period during the day. It includes weekend programs, holiday programs. Many of our schools also run tutoring sessions after the regular school day where students can sign online and be supported by students while they're completing their homework. Also, if they missed a class so that they don't fall behind so it's just some of the things we do that makes it a little different than some of the traditional settings.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The extra tutoring that you provide, how many days a week average does a student can show up for tutoring?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, most schools do it between two to three days a week.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What support in the wraparounds are in place for re-engaging students who become disengaged at their original high school? Do you do an evaluation as to find out what went wrong at their previous schools and build from there?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, Chair Joseph, I wouldn't use the word evaluation, but I would say that while we interact and meet the student, that is part of what we try to learn from them through conversation in the interview and in the

intake process. We blatantly ask, what wasn't working for you, is there something that you can specifically point to. Sometimes we find out that it is a student just felt that the setting they were in was way too big. They felt lost. Other times we learn really personal things. Maybe a student had a child and they didn't share that or they're struggling with home care for the young child. Then we'll work with our partners in D79 with Life. I think one of the strongest things that we really do for our students is we use our social workers and our advocacy counselors and we really get to know and we ask those deep-rooted questions. As an adult, I can assume things that would hold students back, but when we just ask them, it helps us get to the root of the problem and to get some fixes into place.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: As they're enrolling in transfer schools, are resources readily available as they begin to tell you, hey, it's because I had a child, I don't have child care. It could be one of the biggest barriers that prevent this child from coming to school. We talked about Life, but outside of that, is there any other resources that we can provide for our young people?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Absolutely.

That's a great question. It really hits to what we do at transfer schools. Using the example of a student, either a male student or a female student that might have a young child, we have a tremendous partnership with D79. I can literally pick up the phone or send Superintendent Esperance a text saying, hey, I need this. Within the two seconds it took me to send the text, we have the ball rolling and we can help the students with that. If you look at some other areas where there might be some more difficulties, food insecurity and housing are issues. We depend then heavily on our partners in our community-based organizations to extend the resources that are within New York City Public Schools to the resources that they can also provide. I think that that is one of the things that really is unique about transfer schools is, in a sense, we can be one-stop shopping. We have these partnerships. They're here in the building. The other piece with that is once students get to know us, our community-based partners are part of our communities. It's not a stranger coming in. It's not somebody that I'm going to introduce you to them so that you can talk to them. They see them

every day. They know them. They trust them. That's the biggest piece about helping some of our students overcome their obstacles. From the minute the student comes to us, as soon as we can find out what the barriers are, we start to build the bridges over those.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's the purpose of transfer school, to remove some of those barriers.

How does transfer school address non-academic barriers such as depression, housing instability, or family responsibilities, which we talked about a little bit earlier, that contributes to students' initial disengagement?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We have guidance counselors and social workers, both DOE and that are part of our community-based organizations in all of our schools. I also have a social worker that leads my student youth development on my team. One of the things that we do monthly is we meet with all of the social workers, all of the guidance counselors, and we look solely at what are the needs that are coming from our students. Suicide ideation was a huge thing that we looked at last year. A number of students that were expressing it. We had staff in schools that

struggled. They didn't know what to do. We did tons of training for the parents. We also brought in some resources to work with our student advisory. One of the things that we recognized is sometimes as the adult, we might be the last to know, but often they're friends and they're peers, and we wanted them to be informed. What do you do if someone tells you this or you know something is happening? We've done training for that. We also brought training to our parents during our parent advisory. What are some things to look for? How do you help with a teenager that you're trying to get through to and they seem a little resistant? I think the important thing really is that we build this trust and students let us know the things that maybe they never let anybody else know in their other schools. We're able then to kind of find the resources. I mean, I won't sit here and pretend that I have unlimited resources because I don't, but we'll reach out. I'm not above and my principals are not above picking up the phone, calling one another, and saying, I have a student with this problem, can you help me? I have an email chain with all of my principals that I send out, like weekly updates in that. I'll be sitting with the

principal and say, I have a student that's having a problem with some housing issues. I'll say, you know what, throw it in the email chain and let's ask because somebody has someone in their schools and principals will jump right on and help give contacts, give names of people maybe in their community-based organization that can support and help and direct us. So, it really is using everything that's at our fingertips so that we can build these bridges.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course.

At what point does it come necessary for students to be recommended for a transfer school? I know it's attendance, but is that the only criteria that you look at?

CHIEF LUFT: Thanks for the question and good to be here and I appreciate you shining a light on this, something we don't talk about enough, so thank you for focusing the spotlight on transfer schools.

You know, there are really a number of ways that students will wind up at a transfer school. Sometimes they are referred from the traditional district school that they're in and they'll go for a discussion or consultation with the transfer school.

Sometimes the family initiates that as well. It can happen, as you know, for a variety of reasons. It may be that the student and the family are not happy with the school that they're in and feel like the student's not making sufficient progress there, feel like they need a different kind of setting. Sometimes the smaller, kind of more intimate setting of a transfer school is exactly what some students need to kind of get back on track and accelerate that pace. And sometimes the family, you know, if the student has been falling behind over time and it seems like a different setting that's going to allow the student some opportunity to accelerate, which can be hard to do sometimes in a traditional school. I think the complexity of what transfer schools do, you know, if we look at an average 10th grader in normal high school, kind of know most of the classes that they're all taking. If you look at a 10th grader in a transfer school, the variety of credit needs and Regents exams and other graduation requirements that they need can vary tremendously. I think one of the challenges that transfer schools meet and wrestle with is how do you meet all those very differing demands and how do you personalize the experience in

a transfer school. So, I think the reasons why they may get to the transfer school can vary quite a bit.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I think some of the young people we talked to, that was one of some of the things they like, it's personalized to them. It's not in a cookie cutter model and it's everyone else, but it's also seeing them.

We talk about suicide ideation a lot among Black and Brown students and that it's on the rise, and I think that's something folks are not talking about. And that's why it was so important for myself and Council Member Bottcher to make sure that 9-8-8 are available in schools, but, your caseload for social workers and guidance counselors, what does that look like?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So my caseload is, I believe it's every school has a guidance counselor and I have about 50 social workers across the district. And one of the things that we've also established in the district is kind of a support system. So, in the event that a school may have experienced a tragic event, a suicide in this..

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Or even gun violence.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Gun violence, absolutely. In a matter of five minutes, I can have social workers across the district over at that school. Every single principal in my district has committed to supporting one another. We also do workshops where we will join social workers from other schools to come and help run a workshop with the social worker or the guidance counselor on site. I think also through our advisories in our schools, we've created safe spaces where students do really find a connection to an adult in the building that they really trust. They look at them as a parent figure sometimes or someone that they really trust implicitly to go and share their deepest feelings with. And we spend a lot of time training the teachers how to respond to that, who to get involved, because the worst thing is to look at something and say, what could we have done? We need to look and say, we did this and we saved.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And in your school buildings, the social workers, what is the caseload for each of them in their schools? Do you know?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So it varies from school to school. In some schools, my enrollment

2 does vary. My smallest school is about 100 students
3 at the moment, and my largest has about 706. The
4 largest school has three or four social workers that
5 work throughout the day because that's also the
6 school that has my evening program, and then the
7 others might have one and then a guidance counselor.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So how long does it
9 take for students to see a guidance counselor if
10 needed?

11 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: My assessment on
12 that would be that they can see them pretty quickly.
13 In some schools, they have a signup system. And when
14 I'm visiting, I'll see the times and signups on the
15 wall outside. But I have never really encountered a
16 student when I asked them, do you get to see your
17 guidance counselor or your social worker that said
18 no, I've tried and I can't. I usually get I can see
19 them any time I need them.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. How many
21 transfer school students participate in the LTW
22 program and how are they selected for this paid
23 internship?

24 CHIEF LUFT: LTW, as you know, Chair, is a
25 really important part of the transfer school

experience. And I'm going to ask my colleague, Melanie Mac, to talk a little bit more in detail about the current state of LTW. Melanie.

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Good afternoon, Chair. Good afternoon, City Council.

So, Learning to Work, as you know, is a 20-year program. It was launched in 2005 as a youth development program. And the intention of LTW is, it's supplementing the supports that already exist at the transfer school and partnering a community-based organization with each of our transfer schools. So, what that looks like today is that we have about 9,000 students in our transfer schools that are supported through Learning to Work. There's an additional 5,000 who are supported through our YBC programs. And we have 19 CBOs that are working across 46 transfer schools and Superintendent Sullivan's portfolio and providing the services that include but are not limited to internships. So, the staffing that a CBO provides is offering social-emotional development, which you heard Superintendent Sullivan speak to, right. This primary person idea that it's incredibly important for a young person to know that they have a caring adult at the school that they can

come to, no matter what, to troubleshoot, to receive supports. Through LTW, students also get access to post-secondary exploration, the entire application process, work readiness, and internship placement. So, there's a suite of ways that the CBO staff is working with the high school staff at the transfer school in order to provide those.

Now, in terms of your question about students accessing the internships, we're really happy to say that year over year, we're seeing a steady increase in the number of placements that we're able to offer, and it is a really personalized process. So there is, you know, starting with the intake process when a student steps into a transfer school, they're working with their advocate counselor, they're working with the school staff to get a sense of the student's interests, to assess whether or not they are currently working and balancing school, looking at their readiness for work, looking at what other requirements are needed in order to complete their diploma. And it is through that assessment that they look at a student's readiness and interest in participating in work-based learning. Work-based learning is an entire spectrum

of opportunities. And so that's another great way that Learning to Work works with the high school staff to differentiate, right, because some students are in an internship, others are participating in work training or work readiness. Others are participating in panels and job shadowing and other types of opportunities that may not be a full-time internship, but are also like a meaningful and authentic way of starting to connect to work and to career opportunities beyond high school.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'd like to recognize Council Member Gutiérrez.

In Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes 31 million dollars for learn to work, but this funding is not baselined. How much learning to work funding supports transfer school and how are these funds distributed?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: All right. So, it's a 43-million-dollar program currently. 12 million of that is baselined funding, and 31 million is funding that has been sort of backfilled annually since stimulus funding expired, but it's not yet baselined. All of these funds get distributed through full value contracts to the CBO partners, the 19 CBO

partners that are supporting the 46 transfer schools and the 20 YBC sites, and those contracts largely fund additional staff, right, the advocate counselors, internship coordinators, program coordinators that are serving the transfer schools. And our Finance Department's continuing to work with our partners at OMB and advocating for baselined funding for the 31 million.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said it was 19 CBOs that are contracted?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Correct. And we can share that full list of the transfer schools and the partners.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The CBOs that are attached to these transfer schools.

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. During the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing, DOE mentioned working on new Learning to Work RFP. What is the timeline for the new Learning to Work RFP?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: As of today, the RFP is on track for being released in the next month so we're hoping by the end of November.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is the DOE open to increase the budget for LTW higher than the 31 million to include additional schools, including charter in the new RFP?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: There has been tremendous advocacy to expand to charter transfer schools, but also to additional district transfer schools that were not in the original contracts so definitely taking that all into consideration and the finance team.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Does it fill in the gap that I talk about? They fill in the gap that we're not filling in, right, because we only have, for example, one middle school transfer school. Am I correct? And it's called Reset. Am I correct?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, there are no middle school transfer schools. There is a restart program that is under District 79 that serves our students that are over-aged eighth graders, Superintendent Esperance and I do work closely for those students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students do you have in that program?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: That I can't talk to because I don't supervise the restart. But what we do do is where we share locations, often the restart students will participate in the transfer high school courses because they're older so they'll have some of their classes with their restart, and then they'll transition into some with the high schools, but it's not a transfer middle school...

(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Kind of, but not is.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We work closely. We're like good cousins. We work closely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. You're good cousins, but you're also the pipeline for that program, so I think... it's something that's common, and I see it a lot across the City, agencies don't talk to each other. They're doing the same exact work, but they don't talk to each other. I think there should be a relationship because you're going to build that pipeline that's going to come to you, and so if you're not talking, it's defeating the purpose of that vulnerability, that vulnerable community that we talked about that this is supposed to support so thank you for that.

So, what is the timeline for the new Learning to Work RFP, you told me next month?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Well, we're currently on track for the end of November.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And you are in discussion for those charter schools that does the transfer work?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: That was all taken into account through the preparation. Obviously, it's a really lengthy process. We also engaged over the past two years, all of our transfer schools. We work closely with Superintendent Sullivan. We spoke to students. We spoke to CBO staff. We talked to school staff about what does Learning to Work look like at its best. This was a program that began 20 years ago and was all things that needs to continue to evolve to best serve our students. And so that research, which we're happy to leave a copy for you, really calls out from students, from our staff, what are the things that are critical to retain as we think about this new RFP. So, we took that input very seriously as we worked on the RFP that's going to be released within the next month, hopefully.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how will New York City Public School balance the reality of a one-year only funding while working on the future of the program? How does New York City Public Schools support baselining LTW funding?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Yep. So like I mentioned, we've been working really closely over the past two years to ensure that when we release an RFP, it is with the voices of the students and the communities impacted by the program that have been part of that. So, that includes working really closely with our 19 CBO partners. We meet with them every month. We've done so for the past three plus years. And that's a space where we talk about what are the emerging needs, what is the strategy for the program, what are the things that are important in this RFP process, so that is an important part of how we've balanced. Continuing to have our Finance Department advocate for baselining the 31 million. And at the same time, we're working very closely with Superintendent Sullivan's schools. We're working very closely with the CBO partners in constant conversation around the things that are really the hallmark of the Learning to Work program. We've heard

from students that the advocate counselor is an incredibly important part of the program, that close relationship, and those relationships often extend into adulthood, right, and these young adults are coming back to us from transfer schools and talking about the relationship with that advocate counselor. College and career advising, given some of our students are entering directly into the workforce once they exit transfer schools. The work-based learning opportunities, but also credentials and like credentials of value that a student can take as they're completing their high school requirements. Also having a credential that's going to have value in the labor market that they can take directly with them for a strong first or second job, and balancing in many cases, both college and potentially a full-time position. So that's all been a really important part of sort of straddling, advocating for baselined funding, but also continuing to work on the future of the program. And what does it need to look like for the next 20 years, looking back on 20 years of this program?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. I was going to ask if students' voice were involved in this

2 RFP, if parents' voices, educators, CBOs, is everyone
3 at the table? Because these are the folks that are
4 directly impacted by the decisions we make up here.

5 Does New York City Public School plans on
6 issuing RFP if LTW is baselined? Is it the only
7 reason why you will issue the RFP if it's baselined?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: The
9 contracts are currently under an extension, and so
10 there is a plan to release an RFP. That advocacy for
11 the baselining is happening in parallel.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm sure I'm going to
13 hear that.

14 Will you need more than 31 million
15 dollars to add more schools to this new RFP?

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: We have
17 been currently advocating to ensure we are whole for
18 the footprint that we currently are. There are
19 implications that if we were going to expand
20 services, obviously that would have implications for
21 the budget. So, we're certainly aware of that and
22 have been primarily focused on making the program
23 whole for next year and beyond.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, I'm sure in the
25 next budget, we'll hear new needs for this program if

we want to expand. I know you guys are not shy to come and ask for money. You guys are not shy. You're not shy. So, make sure that if we want to expand, we want to perfect the model because there are gaps, right, and there's quite a few gaps in this program. If we want to perfect the model, we got to make sure the resources are in the right places to make sure that students are getting... the whole goal is to make sure we meet the needs of our students who were left behind, and it's also to look back and see where they came from from that school. Are we also having engaged conversation with that school where they came from as to meeting the needs of New York City kids? If I send a kid to school and they're telling me their school is not meeting their needs, are we also having conversation with that home school that they came from to make sure we're perfecting it? That should be something. And there should be surveys as to when they leave your program, what worked, what didn't work, and that data is supposed to drive that work because data drives my policy up here as the Chair, and it should drive some of the work that you guys do as well.

1 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: And I'll
2
3 say that where we do... Superintendent Sullivan could
4 speak to the home/school relationship better than me,
5 but through the research that we did that was both
6 talking to students and staff, but also looking at
7 the data, we saw that there was a positive
8 relationship between students who were experiencing
9 the LTW program supports, were participating in
10 internships. We saw higher attendance. We saw
11 attempting 3.4 more credits on average, earning five
12 more credits, passing more courses, and higher GPA.
13 So there certainly is a really positive relationship
14 that we see in the data between when you pair the
15 school and the CBO to provide this holistic academic,
16 social, emotional, and career readiness experience
17 together in an intentional way.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because we know a lot
19 of students don't learn the same, right, and that's
20 the model here that should be across the City.

21 How do you monitor and project enrollment
22 trends at transfer schools? How do you do that? I
23 know that's tough because you said enrollment is
24 year-round. How do you do that?
25

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we engage in the same process as other traditional high schools. We work with our budget team at the end of each school year and use the projection from the averages of where we were over the last couple of years and make a projection. I will say there are oftentimes where the principal and I will push back because we see where the trends come in, and trends might show us that during January is where we see an influx of students. We also do know that because of the way that we are set up and it is an open policy for enrollment that our budgets are always going to lag a little bit behind. So, for example, if we are planning for a certain number of students in certain types of classes, after October 31st when the budget is set, a couple of years ago we had an influx of older newcomers that needed ELL services at Independence High School in Midtown, and we kind of figured it out. And then we realized that the few students that came to us was going to turn into about 40 students because the Roosevelt Hotel was literally a block away. And so the principal worked with our CBO to see where they could support certain things with CBO money and we could allocate money to support

(INAUDIBLE) so you are 100 percent right when you say they pick up where sometimes we don't have enough. We support one another in those ways. But definitely the funding does often for transfer schools lack a little bit as our enrollments go up at the latter part of the school year.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For the last four years we've held your budget harmless under our leadership. Was that helpful?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: 100 percent helpful, yes, because it didn't force us to... would anybody say no to that? No.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course not. We knew it was important because you also receive a huge amount of our new New Yorkers that came into our system. I met quite a few of them.

In your testimony you talked about your relationship with International Network. How much did you depend on them when you were getting a lot of your new New Yorkers?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, Alan was on speed dial. I'm sorry, Superintendent Chang was on speed dial. I have had the opportunity to work with one of the international schools previously when they

were part of our district so there was a relationship there that I could reach out to, but they were tremendous supports when I needed to get professional development, not only for do you want to improve the strategies and the techniques of my ENL teachers, but I had teachers that had no training to work with students and English language learners and they wanted to and they were willing to so we worked with internationals. They came in, they did PD for teachers, they did PD for my principals. One of the most moving PDs that they did was to help the principals get our mind around what it's like to be a newcomer is they ran a whole half hour session in German. And we sat there trying to figure out and it really opened mindsets of like how we have to support these students and the PD was essential and it worked and it supported my team. Some of their teachers were the mentors that we set up. We had our school teachers from our schools that primarily support the newcomers, but then teachers from Alan's school stepped up and said we'll be mentors and they were accessible after teaching hours online, via email, via text to support our teachers that were struggling.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In schools who don't have enough ENL students, how do you coordinate with ENL coordinators to...

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I'm sorry, I missed the first part of the question, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Schools who don't have enough ENL because you need a certain amount to have an ENL coordinator, how do you coordinate between schools? Do you do two days here, three days here? How do they visit, evaluate your students for them to take placement? And how do they get the numbers of hours of ESL instruction that they're required by law?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we work very hard in our schools to meet that requirement. Sometimes we do lack behind. At this point in time, I don't have any sites where we're sharing teachers across sites.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So your schools are out of compliance then?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Some of them are, yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many? Do you know?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I don't know offhand, but I could get you... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You'll share that info. How about for special education?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We're in the same predicament with special education, whereas... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Out of compliance? That means students are not receiving their legally mandated services. How do you make that up?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we do a number of things with that. So, the first piece that I think is important to understand how we support students with that is when they come to us, we spend a lot of time, first of all, looking at the IEP that's coming with the student, talking to the student and the family, and assessing (A) is the IEP up to date and current, but also, are the services that are being prescribed in the IEP actually services that the student in a transfer school that's older would really benefit from, and we look at those. Often, we'll see things, and we'll be able to talk to a parent and say, are students in the classes that they'll be taking, there's actually only 12

students in that room. We have a lot of times we have additional teachers in the rooms. They could be ICT, but it could also be that we had, say, a social studies teacher, that we've teamed up to social studies teacher to co-teach a class, so that students get extra supports in those rooms.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is one of them licensed with special education? Is it an ICT setting, so at least the student's needs are being met... How many students that enter the transfer school system has to be decertified in order to remain in your program?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we don't necessarily decertify to help to remain in a program. We look to see where they most need the support. So, for example, a student that comes to us that may have passed all of their algebra courses and in algebra Regents and is now taking trigonometry, they might not need ICT services in that. They're in the advanced math class, and we will talk to the student and see what they think. And if the student says, no, I'm good, we would remove the support in math, but we would keep it in the science and the social studies and the English, where they're still struggling and

they still feel they need those supports. The other piece that...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So a lot of re-evaluation of IEPs happen.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We do.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How often does that happen?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I would say pretty regularly we review the IEPs, especially when students come in. We do see a number that come that aren't current, so we will do that right away. And then we will also work with students and families at the end of semesters and trimesters as programs are changing. Because the other piece to keep in mind here is students in transfer schools, we're not working on a grade like ninth grade, so they can be moving between grades and courses at different levels. They might pass all their Regents and still have a couple of classes left to take so based on where the student is. The other thing that we do in the district that has been very successful in students has really helped them learn to advocate for themselves, is we do start to teach students how to do student-led IEPs, where we work with them. We

1 teach them how to advocate, because I am a firm
2 believer that one of our most important jobs in a
3 transfer school and any high school is that when we
4 send students out into the world after high school,
5 they need to be their voice because there's not going
6 to be someone there. So, we teach them how to express
7 how they learn best, how to be able to say what
8 accommodations they need. And then they lead a
9 Committee through their IEP, where they can invite a
10 family member, a friend, a favorite teacher, and they
11 actually lead the IEP.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

14 CHIEF LUFT: Chair, can I add one point
15 just to tie together your questions about serving
16 ELLs and serving students with disabilities? I think
17 the goal is to get in compliance. The goal is to make
18 sure students are getting the services that they need
19 so I want to be really clear about saying that up
20 front. I think part of what Superintendent Sullivan
21 is describing here is while we're trying to figure
22 that out, we want to make sure that we're also trying
23 to serve students and make sure they're getting their
24 needs met and that they're progressing and they're
25 learning so those two things have to happen

simultaneously. We need to make sure that we're fully staffed. We need to make sure that the services are in place and students are programmed the right way. But we also want to make sure we don't...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you do have a staff shortage, right?

CHIEF LUFT: Excuse me?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You have a staff shortage.

CHIEF LUFT: In some cases, we do. And I think in some areas, it's because of the fact that we have students enrolling all year long. Sometimes the enrollment shifts, and the budget hasn't caught up yet. And then sometimes it is because the school has not been able to identify the right staff people up until that point. So, I think it's for both reasons. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The Council passed a local law that students with IEPs are supposed to also transfer to colleges. Are you working with that? When students leave the high school and they decide to go to college, are you working with the colleges to transfer their IEP or their special needs?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. How is New York City Public School ensuring transfer schools option are equitably available across all five boroughs?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, Chair, that's a great question. And when I first started in the district, it wasn't. We had schools that didn't serve our English language learners. We had schools that didn't serve our students with disabilities. One of the things that as a Deputy that I was adamant about and then as Superintendent was that we serve all children, that you can't tell a student you can't come here because you don't speak English, you can't come here because you have an IEP. And we now have supports for our students in all of our transfer schools, and we pay careful attention to trends that we're seeing, especially in the services for our English language learners. And in the last couple of years, we have opened and modified programs in schools to meet the needs in certain logistical areas where we saw influxes of students. So, for example, out in Flushing at Queens Academy, we had a very small ELL program there, and then all of a sudden, we saw a need for some ELL and bilingual services, and

the ELL population in that school has gone to about 80 percent so we opened up the program. We supported. They were part of the district PD. They worked with the Internationals. We got QTEL training in there. We worked with teachers that had ENL credits so that they could become dual certified. We also looked at what are creative ways that we could support teachers and students. We brought in paras and substitutes that spoke some of the language that the students spoke so that they could help us and work as interpreters. So, I'm very happy to say that we have work to do there, but we have come a very long way in the supports that we have for the students with disabilities and our English language learners. And it's something that I am completely committed to, especially as an uncle to a niece and nephew, both with IEPs, so I understand the struggle. I understand the confusion. I understand the frustrations.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you for understanding.

What factors are New York City Public Schools identify as contributing factors to recent enrollment declines in transfer schools? I know with the rise of ICE being around schools, I know that's

one of them. Talk me through the process of how...
First, let me recognize Council Member Shekar Krishnan. Thank you for being here. What's contributing to the recent enrollment declines?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we have seen some enrollment declines since pre-pandemic. We are on the upswing, moving back toward where we were last year. We served about 11,000 students through the course of the year. I think there's a couple of things there. I think under ESSA, traditional high schools can use their four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates so sometimes students will stay a little longer in traditional schools than in the past, where the four-year was the only option. I think that we definitely, this year, have seen a decline in our schools that serve newcomers. Especially one of my schools, Liberty High School, is down about 200 students from what their average enrollment has been in the last couple of years. But I think with that, it's also looking at how do we also build on the programs that we have at those schools, so one of the things we're looking at at Liberty is, how do we build a program that maybe would be more in line with the bilingual than just an

English language and an ENL program? And then we could serve students that are coming out of seventh- and eighth-grade bilingual programs that might be a little bit older than the average eighth-grader and have a place for them to go. So, I think it's also, and like Harvey Milk High School, which has traditionally been an LGBTQIA-plus school, now that we have safe havens in so many of our high schools, we don't necessarily need just one school for students in that community to go to. So, we are looking there at expanding the work there to LGBTQIA-plus and allies and students that are interested in things around social justice, using Harvey Milk's work as a launching point for getting involved in social justice and social programs. So, I think some transfer schools have been around a long time, and there is a need in some cases for us to look at what the initial missions were and what are the new needs of our students and what bridges we need to build. We can't just build one model of a bridge and leave it and say, well, that's the model. We need to say, times have changed, conditions have changed, what are the other bridges we need to build, and I think we're

in the process of doing that in our schools now to build up the enrollments.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's so important to have empathy in our classrooms.

How do you apply social emotional learnings to the curriculum? Not as a standalone, but as part of the curriculum for students in transfer school, because most of our students need a lot of our emotional support?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, in a lot of our schools, we start our classes with some kind of a mindset, check in with students. A lot of our students, as part of their daily classes, do have an advisory portion of the day where there is a check in with that. It's also too part of the work that teachers will often bring the guidance counselor/social worker in to do activities in the rooms. I think because we're also such small schools where we know our students so well, a lot of times teachers will read the temperature in the room and say, okay, we need to take a few minutes and we need to do a check in. But it is definitely part of the mindfulness and the starting of the day, the starting of classes, just like little check-ins.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Very important.

What are the current attendance and chronic absenteeism rate across New York City public school transfer schools? And how have these changed since the pandemic?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, post pandemic, we were running at about a 56 percent attendance in the district. We are now, at the end of last year, we have raised that up to 67 percent. And this year we are running at a 68.2 percent. That's like something that I am relentless on. I was sitting in a one-on-one with a principal this summer, and I said to her, you know, tell me what you did, because you did a considerable growth in your attendance, and she looked at me and she said, John, you won't let us forget it. Every meeting we talk about attendance. Every time you're in the school, you ask us what the attendance is today. You ask us what we're doing for the students that aren't here. She said, I couldn't get away from it, so the school couldn't get away from it. So it's become part of our community. And in another school up in the Bronx, one of the principals said to me, you know, I thought you were a little crazy when you told us you wanted to move this

attendance to 70 percent as a minimum, and then you started to bring my colleagues in and they were talking about the best practices they put into place and the movement that they were seeing, and I was like, well, he's not crazy, and now I have to get on board. So, I think it's something that I firmly believe students, you have to be in school. It's like the lottery. You've got to be in it to win it. If you're not here, you can't get what you need. And as the attendance goes up, the chronic absenteeism is going down, but it's something I talk about with the parents in our advisory. It's also something that's part of our student advisory work. And, you know, I always say to students, what's your school's attendance, what's the district goal, what's your school doing to improve that, and we give them projects to go back and work on with their student government. So it's keeping it at the forefront. It's sharing best practices for us. It's, you know, if a school moves 5 percent, well, now I want 5 more percent. Let's keep working on that. But I also do think we set goals that were attainable to schools so that both students could see their success, schools

could see the success, and then we just keep moving it up.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What goal has you set as a Superintendent of that district? What are your goals for that district? Did you set goals with teams?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Goals for...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Your attendance goals.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes. So, I set a district goal to get to 70 percent or higher this year. And for each school, we gave them a 10 percent goal based on where they ended last year. And that's part of our regular check-ins. That's part of our conversations. I start every meeting with, where are we, you know, what are we doing, what's working, what's not working?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you do home visits? I know transfer schools used to go to homes.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you do home visits? You still continue to do home visits?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We do home visits in a number of ways. Our CBO partners help us

with home visits. I also have a team of 11 attendance teachers that will report directly to me and work with my Attendance Coordinator that do home visits and are part of the School Attendance Teams. I also have a number of school personnel that, as part of their circular six-time, have volunteered to visit homes and principals that go to homes. So, that's an integral part of the work that we do.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And when we get there with your attendance teacher and realize what the problem, do you usually pair them with a social worker/guidance counselor to help with whatever that issue is?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yeah. To social workers/guidance counselors, the call to D79 for an appointment with LIFE. There's no lagging in that time. It's like as soon as we... if the attendance teacher doesn't know who to reach out to, the point person on my team where they'll email me directly say, just found this out from a student, who do we have that can support?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many days do you wait before you make a home visit?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: The attendance teachers have a schedule. They do that. I think our number is a little faster than in some other schools because our schools tend to have weekly meetings so if they're there on Monday, by Tuesday, Wednesday, usually there's a visit or an outreach to the family.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

CHIEF PUELLO PERDOMO: Just to add to that, I think one of the changes that we have done in the recent years is move the attendance teachers from working just assigning a school and then having to move to be assigned to a district. Also because of the way that we now look at attendance data, we increased recently the number of attendance teachers that serve transfer schools. And to just kind of solidify the number when you're looking at improvement, a little over 1,400 students are less chronically absent than compared to when we were pre-pandemic. So unlike other trends, the trends in transfer school, although there's tremendous growth, still to need to continue to do shows improvement. And that has to do with the ecosystem of support that exists within transfer school, in addition to the superintendency, but also with our partner CBOs and

the work that is done collectively to really create that individualized approach.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Great. I noticed in the Superintendent's testimony, there's about 106 students in foster care. How are you supporting those students, and do they know that you even exist?

CHIEF PUELLO PERDOMO: They do know that we exist. So in the data that I have, it's a little higher than that because it's John, I think might be speaking to the 42 schools that he has, but we have 51 across. So, one of the things that we have done is ensure the schools know who their coordinators are, so the team, as you know, which you helped to create is comprised not just of a citywide foster care manager, but also coordinators, so all of the districts are assigned to a coordinator and then also increase our collaboration with ACS. So, we do have MOUs and agreements that allow us both for our students in foster care and for our students in temporary housing to have exchange, to have that. And we have regular cadence of meetings with this agency, not to mention that the current Senior Executive Director of the Office of Students in Temporary Housing is a former transfer school principal who

founded and led our transfer schools for 18 years so she's very attuned to the needs of both students in temporary housing and foster care.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good. You're talking to each other. That's great. Something agencies rarely do.

How many vacancies are there for teachers at transfer schools across the city?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: 19.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 19. And how many vacancies are there for counselors at transfer schools across the city?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Zero vacancies for guidance counselors and one social worker vacancy.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how has bilingual teacher shortage affected instruction for language access for English language learners in transfer schools? We talked about that earlier. So, I'm going to double this question up. How many vacancies are there for bilingual teachers and ENL certified teachers at New York City transfer schools?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: One vacancy for ENL right now, and we hired about 80 new ENL teachers and four bilingual teachers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that was for the year 2025 into 2026 that you did this hiring?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. So New York City Public Schools does apply the same four-year graduation rate expectation to transfer school as it does to traditional high schools?

CHIEF LUFT: I'll start us off here. I think, you know, the traditional way of viewing high school graduation is four years. When we consider the diversity of starting points that transfer students have when they enter their schools, it's really important that we're sending a message that even if it does take you a little bit longer, it's okay. We want to support you. We want you to stay. We don't want you to drop out and we want to keep students on track. So, we really do look at five, six, and even seven-year graduation rates. The seven-year graduation rates would really be for students that are coming in later that have far fewer credits that are over age. And one of the ways that we

traditionally have tracked progress for high school students is roughly 10 credits per year that they accumulate. So, by the end of ninth grade, have you accumulated 10 credits? By the end of 10th, you should have 20. One of the things we look at for transfer schools a little bit differently is since you need 44 credits to graduate, where are you at that close to that halfway mark, so are you below 22 or are you over 22, right, so that's one of the differences if you look at the school quality reports for a transfer school. We do look at that metric a little bit differently since a student who does not have 10 credits at the end of ninth grade isn't necessarily off track in the same way that we might think about that in a traditional school. And then the question becomes, how do we help that student not only catch up but accelerate and get back on track, so that's one way that we look at it. And the other way is also making sure that when we're looking at the grad rate for students that are coming in at these different entry points that kind of thinking about that almost in a more individualized way as well and giving real true value to that fifth- or sixth-year graduation rate. We know for state

accountability, the four-year grad rate still does matter for federal accountability for ESSA. And we don't necessarily want students to take more time than is necessary, but we also want to recognize that sometimes it's a good thing that students need more time. And we want them to feel that it's okay to stay when it's necessary.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said you track that. How often does that student meet with a counselor to review that casework, caseload, student work, and say, hey, this is where you are, and do you help them set goals? And how is that done? And who is part of that conversation?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yeah. So, that happens on a very regular basis, Chair Joseph. It's often done by the advisor and the guidance counselors. A lot of our schools use an electronic grade book so students have access to their progress on a regular basis. And one of the things that we do teach students very early on is, what are the credits they need, what are the regions they need. We teach them how to access so that they can follow their progress. I think the other thing to really think about the work that our principals in our schools do

is, when students come to us, a lot of times they've been disengaged or they're disheartened, so we will also look at, what are courses that, as a student, you really feel you're good at. So we'll emphasize maybe those as the ones to get us started, and then we'll build the program out from there. There's regular check-ins with students, with their advisors, with the guidance counselors. Progress reports to keep families and parents involved are a regular aspect. We monitor. Each member of my team is assigned to... it's two members to four schools, and they work with principals on a monthly basis, three times a month, where we look solely at the attendance improvements, the students that are lagging, the students that are being successful, the same for credit progress. What are we putting into place? What are the supplies? One of the things we also worked on last year as a kind of pilot to see how we could additionally support students is, a group of five schools got together and we looked at how we could do shared instruction remotely. So that some of our students that might be older that needed one or two classes that a regular day program wouldn't necessarily support because there's only been so much

time in a day. Instead of holding them over a whole other marking period, a whole other semester, is there a course that's being offered at another transfer school that could be done in the evening so that student isn't held back? We have a variety of different ways that we program. We have schools that work on trimester, schools that work on semester, schools that work on cycles. So sometimes when we meet a student, they might come to a school and they might be 19 and they maybe need 10 credits and they want to finish, they want to get out and work. They're done with school, but they want that diploma. We'll map it out for them in the school that's a semester school, but then we'll say to them, okay, and in a trimester school, you could do it in this time. If the student says, I want to do that, we'll find them a trimester school and enroll them there. We have that ability within the district. So, it really is getting to know where the student is, where the student wants to be, and finding the program that fits best for them.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I like that flexibility where they can go in and out of different schools just to meet their needs.

How do you track and report post-secondary outcomes for transfer school graduates, including college, vocational credentials, and employment?

CHIEF LUFT: Similar to the post-secondary measures that we use for all high school students, those are some of the measures that we track. I'll let Melanie talk a little bit more about that. Why don't you pick it up from there?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Sure. Superintendent Sullivan can probably chime in as well, but it's similar to our traditional high schools. It's a requirement to track what our students' immediate plans after graduation. We also do a survey afterwards. We look at National Clearinghouse data. The most recent was in the 23-24 school year. The post-secondary enrollment rate was 22 percent. Now, that 22 percent contains some of the pathways that our students take. It's going to comprise students who go into college, students who go into some training programs, students who join the military. We also know from that number that there are many of our students who also will go directly into the workforce, which is not captured as cleanly

in our data. That's all the more reason why some of the collaboration around Learning to Work and the partnership with transfer schools is about how we make sure that those supports that are being offered are truly giving students a strong headstart on whatever that next step will be, including a strong first job via credential or via strong career advising and not solely college advising.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: One of the things that we've begun doing is with our job certification programs, we've been tracking what students are taking. The certifications that we brought in were based on student interest and student surveys. Our goal with that is to do a couple of things. First of all, when you look at the new portrait of a graduate, work-based learning is going to be an option and we wanted to get ahead of the next couple of years and figure out what works, what we needed to get into place. But it also, just as Melanie was saying, we have a large number of students that either need to go right into the workforce to survive...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Or they want to go to college but they need a job to help fund the schooling, the food, the clothing, and everything else you need to go to school, so we help them get a certification. First of all, what that helps is we cover the cost of the certifications. They're not making a choice in an academic diploma or certification. They do it simultaneously and they can leave with both. And then that often puts them in a position where they are now above an entry level when they go into the workforce, like our students that take OSHA training. They can skip that very low-level apprenticeship because they've had the training and they can start at the second level. The same with food handling. We offer phlebotomy. We offer some cosmetology courses. And each year we build on them. And again, through our model of how can we share, we're looking at, I can't have culinary and cosmetology and construction in every single school, but if we have them throughout the district, we're a district, so if a student from here wants to go there, we're figuring it out.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Go ahead.

1 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: The last
2 thing I'll add, you visited some of our future-ready
3 schools. Eight of our future-ready schools are
4 transfer schools that we've worked really closely
5 with John's team to think about those pathways in
6 tech, healthcare, education, business, where there's
7 a lot of opportunity in New York in the years to
8 come. How does that model apply in a transfer school
9 setting? And I think that that's been a really
10 important marriage of what transfer schools do really
11 well, what Learning to Work does well, with what
12 we're seeing is strong opportunity in the labor
13 market in New York.

15 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: And I will say
16 that the partnership really has brought ownership to
17 the schools and the work because it wasn't just
18 separate entities, it's two entities in the
19 Department really working together. We had a great
20 summer planning where we brought all of our schools
21 together and for two days. So not only did schools
22 get that time to do the planning, but they got to
23 share and go from room to room and see what others
24 were doing and brainstorm. It was an amazing event.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And see how they can always see the best practices.

The series of the next three questions are from Council Member Narcisse. Is the New York City Public School integrating vocational or career readiness programs like apprenticeship partnerships with trade unions and local employees into transfer schools? I think that's just for Council Member Narcisse, you can answer for her.

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: That's a really important part of the partnership between Superintendent Sullivan's district and the Office of Student Pathways, because just last Friday, we had a hundred employers from across the city, public sector, private sector, City agencies, unions, all coming together. They're part of our Industry Commission where all of the work-based learning opportunities, updates to curriculum that we need to make to stay current and relevant on the curriculum and experiences we offer students, that comes directly from our relationships with employers, with trade unions. And so that is an important part of the partnership that we have is looking across what are all the pathways we're offering, what are the union-

2 based opportunities, what are the opportunities
3 across different sectors, so that all connects to
4 what Superintendent Sullivan is speaking to.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how do you
6 recruit for new partnerships?

7 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I was going to
8 add to the previous...

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, please do. Please
10 do.

11 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Often the
12 certification courses that are taught are taught by
13 members of unions and organizations, so it creates
14 those links for students and direct connections to
15 entities outside of just the course.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that fair you
17 had, were all schools invited or just some schools?

18 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: All schools.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All schools are
20 invited?

21 Does New York City Public School
22 coordinate with Department of Small Business Services
23 or the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce
24 Development to match transfer school training and
25 local employers who are actually hiring?

1 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: I can
2
3 start and pass to John. We were part of yesterday's
4 announcement about the Youth Apprenticeship Civil
5 Service title, a huge deal for New York City where
6 we're leading the country because our youth
7 apprentices in transfer schools and high schools can
8 start their path towards strong civil service jobs
9 while they're still attending our transfer schools
10 and our traditional high schools. So that was one
11 example of a partnership across Mayor's Office of
12 Talent and Workforce Development and Small Business
13 Services and New York City Public Schools. So those
14 are the types of policy interagency programmatic work
15 that we do together.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Our young people
17 should be working in our agencies. A lot of these
18 agencies directly impact their lives, and we told
19 them that yesterday that they should be working in
20 these agencies to really make a difference. The
21 things they don't like to see, they should be in
22 there working to change it.

23 What is the student to teacher and
24 student to counselor ratio in transfer schools
25 compared to traditional high schools?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, the ratio in class size is about 1 to 16, and it's usually about 60 to a guidance counselor.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What portion of transfer school students are currently classified as ELLs and how has that changed over time?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So I currently in my district have about 32 percent ELLs, and that has increased from 2021 about 16 percent.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 16 percent.

And how does the New York City Public Schools allocate bilingual and ENS certified teachers among the transfer school? What's that process?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So we use the open market. We use our partnerships with our local universities. We in the district also hold hiring fairs. They don't necessarily allocate the teachers to us.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You turn around and hire them?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: And hire them the same way that the traditional schools do. One of the things that my district is strong at doing is sometimes based on a location, a school or a

principal might at times be more attractive to people because of where they're located. And they'll meet several candidates. They will then share the names of those candidates or recommend the candidates to other transfer schools to kind of keep the good resources we find within the district so we do a lot of work with that. But as far as, I wouldn't say anything is allocated to us because we go out just like everybody else does and we find the teachers and we make sure they're the right fit for our schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: A teacher told me parking is very important when they decide on where they're going to teach. That's so important. A teacher was like, Council Member, parking is so important. That's the first question I have. Is there parking?

So how does New York City Public Schools monitor whether transfer schools maintain equitable access for students with disability, foster youth, and students in temporary housing?

CHIEF CORSO: I can add for students with disabilities. Andie Corso, Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning. And we're very proud to partner with Superintendent Sullivan and two key members of

his district team. The district team is staffed with a specialized student support lead and an administrator of special education. And one of the things that those team members are tasked to do is to consistently monitor are all the services being delivered. We've seen extraordinary increase in provision of services under Superintendent Sullivan's leadership and with these extraordinary staff members. They provide training and coaching for schools to make sure that not only is there equitable access, but the students with disabilities can succeed when they are in the school. And our monitoring relationship, I think, is via positive and productive to be able to have those conversations and make sure that all the transfer schools are providing the supports for students with disabilities. And I really appreciate the partnership.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, but when I looked in your testimony, there's a low rate of our students with disabilities also graduating, if I was correct?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we're at about 61 percent of students with disabilities graduate, which is almost on par to our general ed

students, and there's a lower number of ELLs that graduate in the sixth year. We go up about 6 percent of ELL graduates when we look at the any time graduation rate.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a goal to raise those numbers as well?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: There is always a goal to...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did you set a goal with your team to raise those numbers?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes. We always look to increase. We're looking at at least a 5 percent increase this year. When we look at our numbers for this year's cohort, we, based on where we are right now, have already successfully graduated 57 percent of the students that sit in that cohort. So...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How do you support students with disabilities in making sure they are part of the LTW, their needs are being met through the LTWs? How does that work with students with disabilities?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: One of the things that I think is really amazing, Chair Joseph,

about my school communities, is you and I could walk a hallway and you would never know...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That should be the goal.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Who's a student with disability. Maybe you might know an English language learner if they...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Had a little accent or needed some help translating, but all of our programs are open to all of our students and we encourage our students to participate in as many things as they can. In some of the testimonies that I did share with you that students prepared and asked me to bring, there's some students that talk in there about their experience in their internships and how their internships really helped them master the English language because they felt while they were in the internship, they had to learn it. They wanted to learn it. They needed to figure out how to use different translation resources when they got stuck. But our students with disabilities, our English language learners, they are supported and encouraged to take part in all opportunities that we have.

1 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: John said
2
3 it, but Learning to Work at a transfer school works
4 best when it's doing what John shared, which is
5 authentic applied learning. So, your classroom
6 instruction, you're able to practice that and take
7 that into your mentorship conversation or to your
8 work experience, and so that kind of applied learning
9 for students with disabilities and our English
10 language learners is part of the impact that you hear
11 from some of the students who've graduated.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have some here
13 today that will also testify.

14 What metrics does New York City Public
15 Schools use to evaluate the impact of Learning to
16 Work internships on students' attendance and outcome?

17 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Thanks. So
18 some of that I shared before, but just to be clear,
19 students that participated in internships had higher
20 graduation rates, GPA, and attendance rates. So on
21 average, higher attendance attempted 3.4 more
22 credits, earned 5 more credits, passed more courses,
23 and had higher GPA. And then 97 percent of students,
24 and this is looking back a couple years just based on
25 how our data flows, 97 percent of students who

participated in internships graduated with a diploma compared to, at the time, the 62 percent of students who did not participate in an internship. So that applied learning, that connectedness to the real experiences that the CBO and internship can offer really hold through in attendance and in graduation.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how do you hold CBOs accountable for LTW placements?

No worries, no worries. I'm going to get to you right, John.

How do you hold CBOs accountable with LTW placements?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: So, there's an annual work plan that the CBO creates. It's developed in partnership with the school principal. So, a program director is sitting down with one of John's principals, and what sits in that work plan connects to what's in the contract. It also connects to what's in our college and career accountability in the school system. So, when we talk about individual progress reviews or IPRs, we're talking about additional college and career advising sessions. When we're looking at work-based learning, that is now taking a more prominent place in our

academic policy. Looking ahead to portrait of a graduate, those things are what sit in the work plan for the individual CBO as well. And that has to be done in consultation with the school because looking at the student body and the specific community, there's going to be different needs.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If CBOs don't meet the needs of your requirements, what happens to those CBOs?

SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: I have to stop turning this off. It's a contractual relationship. So, our job in the Office of Student Pathways is to monitor progress towards that work plan, towards those targets, towards the contractual expectations. In the cases where there are issues with meeting the student outcomes, providing the supports, having sufficient staff within the CBO team, we meet with the CBO. We create a remediation plan, and the ideal is the CBO fulfills that remediation plan. Typically, those are really constructive conversations. And in the event that that is not met, there are instances where a CBO no longer... they are out of contract with us and we look

2 for a CBO that is able to provide the services, is
3 able to meet the outlined contract needs.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So there is
5 accountability and responsibility. Good.

6 In the RFP, I know talking to some of the
7 CBOs, is there going to be a COLA?

8 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: The COLA,
9 so I may have to follow up on this because the
10 Finance Department will speak better than this Office
11 of Student Pathways will speak to COLAs. The COLAs
12 typically have come through like citywide adjustments
13 that are made. And so those ICRs, the COLAs have all
14 been a part of our CBO providers, but those have been
15 connected to like a citywide process.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because the award has
17 increased, but the pay hasn't.

18 I know you wanted to add on something. Go
19 ahead.

20 SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes. Thank you,
21 Chair Joseph. I was just going to add that it really
22 is a partnership between the CBO and the principal.
23 And one of the things that we've looked at is, when
24 you think about we're educating students
25 academically, we're also getting them ready for life.

Part of life is being responsible. If you have a job, you have to be there. So that's attendance. And we've worked with our CBO partners to make school attendance a component for students' work attendance. So, it's tracked and the principal and the CBO directors meet on a really regular basis, and they track the internship attendance to the school attendance, and they set goals for the students. It could be a little bit of like a reward. Attendance in school, you might get a little more work hours you might get. Or if you're not coming, they'll work with you to get some systems and structures in place to improve your attendance so that you can go back to the internship. But we use it to complement the work that we're doing and develop those strong habits that are going to be needed post-secondary when, you know, they have to be at work to get paid to pay the rent.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Got it. Thank you.

Is there a formal data sharing agreement or referral protocol between New York City Public Schools and other agencies to ensure continuity of care for students who are justice-involved, in foster care, experiencing housing instabilities?

CHIEF LUFT: I'll let Flavia add a little bit to this. I think transfer schools are part of whatever data sharing agreements that we do have as a district since they're part of New York City Public Schools, but I'll let Flavia elaborate.

CHIEF PUELLO PERDOMO: I can share and reiterate specifically for the Office of Students in Foster Care that we created in partnership with your leadership. We definitely have an agreement with ACS and also with DHS for students in shelters. And in addition to that, in the recent years we created an MOU also with Health and Hospital who was supporting most of our asylum-seeker students and our new New Yorkers. And in addition just to the regular data and in the case of DHS, we get a daily feed of data between the agencies. Within my team for those buckets, we also have ongoing relationship, right, which includes example like the event that you supported with Ina Mendez at ACS, right, because we are touching all of those students and life and working with their families so it only makes sense for us to be able to work collaboratively and think of plans and supports for those two areas that I work with.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about our justice-involved student?

CHIEF PUELLO PERDOMO: That specific support, if I'm not mistaken, is under Superintendent Esperance, under Glenda, because of the work that she coordinates.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Sometimes they come back into not necessarily all of them fall into D79 because D79 is also in my portfolio, so it's Horizon and Crossroads. But when they do come back into community, when they were justice-involved, what type of support do you provide for them?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, when a student comes back to us that they might have been incarcerated...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: We definitely have our social workers and our teams work with the student and the family for kind of coming back into the community and assessing the needs that the student and the family think they need. We definitely provide additional counseling time and time with social worker for the student. We will also, again, my great partnership with Glenda, we will often reach

out and see if there's any successes that we're seeing with the student so we can build on those. And sometimes a student comes back, and they might have been involved in a program that one school doesn't have, but we have it at another, and we want to continue that success and that student's feeling of accomplishments so we'll work with the family. Within my office, we can make that movement ourselves. But there's tons of supports that we give to our social workers and our guidance teams. And the biggest part there is we welcome them back. They don't feel like they're coming with a history that everybody knows and that they're wearing, and everybody's judging them. It's the supports that they tell us they need and the supports that we see, and that's how we put it into play.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We currently have two students from transfer schools that are in ICE custodies. What kind of support are you providing to students when it comes around immigration?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we've worked very closely with Project Soaring, and we have supplied both families with resources through Project Soaring as soon as we were alerted to the

circumstances. We currently have one student that is in custody in Pennsylvania, and my principal and my social worker do monthly home visits to the young man to ensure that he's getting the things that he needs, that he has a voice. They're in constant contact with the community where he is. This school is housed in one of the Quaker meeting halls here in New York, and they've connected with the Quaker community in Pennsylvania, and they are checking in on the student when we're not there and letting the principal know if he needs things.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a conversation about remote learning for these students to continue to get their education while they are in custody?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we have looked into that and have talked to Legal about how we might be able to do that. It's something that we're very open to, and just we'd be working around and figuring out the parameters. And Project Soaring is working with principals, and we're bringing people in to do workshops on Know Your Rights.

CHIEF LUFT: And I know John's mentioned Project Soaring. I think he meant Project Open Arms (INAUDIBLE)

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes. Sorry. Project Open Arms. My apologies.

CHIEF LUFT: We've made sure that during our superintendent office hours, during our most recent superintendent meeting that we had with all the superintendents citywide, Project Open Arms was there. We have been on calls, John and I, about the students that you just mentioned late at night on the weekends. I think our small but very mighty Project Open Arms team in collaboration with MOIA and advocacy of you and many other people on the Council. There's been a real sense of urgency about this from the Chancellor herself being very personally involved. And I think the question that you raised about instruction, there's some questions there probably about access to the students and access to school. A recent conversation that Superintendent Sullivan and I just had was, you know, the superintendent really wanted to personally connect with the student while he was being detained, and we wanted to make sure we did that in a way that made

the most sense. We had some very quick expedited conversations internally at Central with Legal and we found a way to make that happen. It was really important to everybody that student knew that we hadn't forgotten about him. And that while we're working on hopefully seeing him come home someday, we're trying to do everything we can to stay connected and provide some kind of support. I think it's hit us all very hard to see this happening to students. It's hit our school communities as well. So, I think some of the additional supports that Project Open Arms has tried to provide as well, like just recently we had a conversation with a principal who was not at a transfer school though about how to talk to the school community about how this is impacting the students and the other families there. So I think, you know, there's the impact on the student and the family that's directly affected by this, and then there's the broader impact on the whole school community, right, as well as our whole city. And I think this, given the number of cases that we've had to talk about this year, it's a pretty widespread impact. But I give Superintendent Sullivan a lot of credit for really seeing the sense of

urgency, especially with some of the older students in transfer schools, who are often carrying a tremendous amount of family responsibility as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They are carrying a lot of responsibilities.

All right. And your transfer school, all of your principals are trained on protocols around ICE?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

CHIEF LUFT: As have all the superintendents citywide. And again, just last week, I believe, we did a session...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the superintendents turn around and provide turnkey to their principals?

CHIEF LUFT: Yes. And there's been direct training for principals and other staff members as well. I don't have those numbers in front of me, but the number of both Know Your Rights training, but also just making sure that everyone at the school, as many people as possible at the school, are aware of what that protocol is. There've been repeated trainings around that. And the expectation is, yes, that that is also happening at the district level

2 after we're training superintendents and principals
3 as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And Project Open Arms
5 is providing resources to schools to know where they
6 are and where they're living?

7 CHIEF LUFT: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. What percentage
9 of New York City public school students without IEPs
10 receive suspensions more than 10 consecutive days,
11 school days?

12 CHIEF CORSO: Hi. Andie Corso again. I'll
13 be representing the answers to these questions I want
14 to answer first and provide a bit of context. Thank
15 you so much for asking.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You might as well sit
17 right there. I have a lot of questions for you.

18 CHIEF CORSO: I'm here for you.

19 So to answer the question directly, two-
20 tenths of a percent of New York City Public School
21 students without an IEP received a suspension of more
22 than 10 consecutive school days. To give that in
23 numbers, the data represents 1,343 students without
24 an IEP out of 620,275 total K to 12 public school
25 students without an IEP.

And just as a bit of context, we certainly know in the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning that behaviors communication, we don't want to get to a place where we have students suspended 10 or more consecutive school days, and we'll speak a bit more about that there. I also just want to acknowledge, and you certainly highlighted this in this meeting, the work around suspension and MDR is multi-divisional. I'm here from DIAL today, but please know I represent the work of Office of Safety and Youth Development, of Division of School Leadership. This is something that we have to wrap our arms around for multiple divisions.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's what I mean. I mean, in terms of agencies have to talk to each other in order for us to do this work. It's not a one person. It's a multifaceted problem. I get that.

So how many MDRs took place in 2024 and 2025 school year?

CHIEF CORSO: Yeah. I'm going to get that number for you. 1,550.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many students with IEPs receive suspensions of more than 10 consecutive days? And just a quick followup, when we

do suspend them, where do we send them? And do you track? Are they reporting to the sites?

CHIEF CORSO: Great questions. So first, in terms of the percentage of New York City Public School students with IEPs who received the suspensions, it's five-tenths of a percent of New York City Public School students with IEPs received a suspension of more than 10 consecutive days. And just for the numbers on that, that represents 869 students with an IEP out of the 191,436 total students, K-12 students who do have an IEP.

For the suspension, we do have in our standard operating procedures manual what happens during the suspension. We have alternative learning centers for older students or partner buddy schools for younger students, for students while they're serving a suspension.

In terms of attendance, we do track attendance at the ALC or at the buddy school so attendance is consistently tracked. I don't have the information here today what those attendance numbers are.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But you will kindly send it to me.

CHIEF CORSO: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Of the MDRs were students in New York City Public Schools and how many were from charter schools?

CHIEF CORSO: One thing, I'm going to make a quick system note here and also share it. CSIS and some other New York City Public School systems don't include MDR information regarding charter school students, but our CSCs do manually track such information. Just a caveat there, manual tracking sometimes is not perfect data. But according to the data that we have for the 2024 and 2025 school year, the regional CSCs conducted 380 MDRs for students attending charter schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. And of those MDRs in 2025 school year, how many and what percentage result in finding that behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability?

CHIEF CORSO: Yeah. So out of the total MDRs held, 22.7 percent, or 352, were found to be a manifestation of the student's disability. We actively monitor those outcomes and are supporting and look to see, literally going through spot

checking, does that finding make sense based on the other information that we see.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And when students are suspended, what support are in place for them to come back to their home school? What supports are in place to welcome them back into community?

CHIEF CORSO: It's a huge area of focus. That re-entry is so critically important. We have two sides of that. One is what's happening at the ALC or at the buddy school, and then what's happening at the returning or receiving school. One of the extraordinary innovations we've worked on this year, and this is through the leadership of the ALC, is to have students make a plan. What's the actual intentional plan for re-entry? Who's an ally at the school that they can work with? What are their goals? What's their value to the community? I'm not going to say this work is where it needs to be. This is an ongoing work, but making sure that that re-entry is planned, is collaborative, is thoughtful, and centers the student is a key to success.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely.

How many and what percentage resulted in finding that behavior was not a manifestation of the student's disability?

CHIEF CORSO: Of the total number of MDRs held, 77.3 percent, or a total of 1,198 students, were found not to be a manifestation of the disability.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Why the numbers are so high?

CHIEF CORSO: I'm glad you asked. When we benchmark this, these are pretty consistent percentages, which doesn't mean there's not a problem. We look nationwide, and this is in range. It's also higher than it has been in history for us, and that doesn't mean there's not a problem. One of the things that we're really looking at is, are our schools, and we support them on this, doing the functional behavior analysis, what is the function of the behavior, and a behavior intervention plan, which is actually behavior science to support the student to meet their needs. Are those things happening before we get to a suspension or MDR, but certainly once we're at the MDR phase. Again, we know behavior is communication. What need is not being met?

Particularly for our students with IEPs, there are two important things that must be looked at at the MDR. One, is this related to the student's disability, positive manifestation, but also, is the student receiving the services on their IEP? That is a critical responsibility that we have as a Department of Education. If they are not receiving the services that we say that they need in their IEP, then that should be a positive determination. That's consistent and ongoing training that we support our schools with.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That was one of the things I asked earlier around making sure they are getting their legally mandated services on their IEPs.

CHIEF CORSO: Exactly.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is any way there's any behavioral specialist around to also evaluate? Is that something considered in schools that behavioral specialists will be needed? Because guidance counselors sometimes cannot do that work. Psychologists cannot do that, but a behavioral specialist should be on board to do those type of work. For me, the numbers are very troubling.

2 CHIEF CORSO: Understood.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We have to find a
4 root cause...

5 CHIEF CORSO: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In order to have
7 solutions for our young people. This leads to so many
8 things. This leads to criminal justice involvement.
9 That's where we don't want our students to end up.

10 Of the MDRs where there was a finding
11 that behavior was not a manifestation of
12 disabilities, how many and what percentage included a
13 parent representative, such as an attorney or
14 advocate?

15 CHIEF CORSO: Three answers to this
16 question. One, we absolutely believe families need to
17 have advocates, have the right to have advocates, and
18 the advocates, we do have advocates that are free of
19 charge. One of the things we work with advocates on
20 is on the MDR letter, actually having the contact
21 information for those folks so that families, it's
22 right there in order to get free or low-cost legal
23 advocacy and support.

24 We have a systems problem that I'll share
25 with you. Right now, the New York City Public Schools

data system for suspensions in MDR does not track the role of MDR participants except for the parent. The other role says other. We have requested, in terms of the system upgrade, that we actually have the capacity, instead of it to say other, we actually have the capacity for it to have an advocate role or a legal representative role so that that's differentiated for us, which we can then pull out from the data. The request has been made, but the system has not been modified yet to provide that data.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long ago did you ask for this change that's taken so long? Let me know who I need to have a conversation with.

CHIEF CORSO: Will do. We'll absolutely get that information to you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because, again, the numbers are alarming for me.

Do parents automatically get information about MDRs? Is that an option or they find out later on they could have had that versus here's the information.

CHIEF CORSO: Same time.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Same time.

CHIEF CORSO: Same time. And that was a great partnership with advocates. Advocates really came to us and said, there's not enough uptake on our services. We know it makes a difference. It makes a difference to have an advocate there in the MDR and in the meeting, which is why we collaborated with them to make sure it's at the same time they get a notice, the information is there.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many and what percentage of MDRs were conducted within 10 school days of the date of the referral to Committee on Special Education? What number and percentage were conducted more than 10 days after the date of referral?

CHIEF CORSO: This is going to be a similar answer to about three questions, which I'm going to acknowledge is deeply unsatisfying. Right now, for this question and a few more, the answer is we track this internally but do not yet have public reporting and auditing of this data. This is why we're in such support of 1359 and deep gratitude for your partnership and leadership on this. We have to have this transparency. The public deserves this information and it will help us do better. Because we

don't, the law will help us get the auditing of the data in order to have public reporting, but we do not have public reporting on this data right now.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm so happy for that legislation.

CHIEF CORSO: Yeah. Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What numbers and percentage of MDR determinations were appealed by families last year? How many were appealed?

CHIEF CORSO: We had eight due process appeals related to MDRs in the 2024-2025 school year. Of those, six resulted in favorable outcomes for families.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: See, so you see when parents are informed, they're also very empowered to make better decisions for their children.

What number of percentage of those appeals you said was successful was all of them?

CHIEF CORSO: Six out of eight, so 75 percent.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Now, let's talk about some money, right? New York City Public Schools' favorite topic, money.

How does New York City Public Schools' per-pupil funding model account for mid-year enrollment changes and expense for students' absences?

CHIEF LUFT: Could you read the last part of the question about absences?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. How does New York City student per-pupil funding model account for mid-year enrollment changes and extended student absences?

CHIEF LUFT: So, transfer schools are largely funded the same way that other schools are funded, as you know, in terms of the way FSF works. They do receive the same weights for ELLs, students with disabilities, and the (INAUDIBLE) SDH weight, and then there's also the additional transfer weight. So, normally, we're looking at October 31st register deadlines. If there's a mid-year adjustment, which as of right this moment, we do not have a decision on that for this year, that's not something that New York City Public Schools can unilaterally decide. The Administration would have to weigh in on that. But as I think Superintendent Sullivan described earlier, right, one of the challenges we face in transfer

schools is that because we have students coming in regularly throughout the year to a degree that we don't see in traditional high schools, that is a factor in some of the challenges that we've been discussing in terms of special education services and services for ELLs as well. So, when there have been mid-year adjustments, transfer schools have benefited from those as well, which I think are particularly important to transfer schools, if we're being honest. I think they're important to all schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely.

CHIEF LUFT: Everyone needs that funding, but because of the nature of enrollment in transfer schools, I think it's a particularly important issue for them as well.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How often do you appeal for funding?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: So, we appeal pretty regularly, especially during our initial enrollments. We often push back on the number that comes based on trends that we see, and trends that we see especially later in the school years, which is directly the point that Chief Luft is talking to,

like, you know, after October 31st, it becomes a different world for transfer schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Which is tomorrow.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Yes.

CHIEF LUFT: Yes.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Pointedly, Halloween.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How does New York City Public School evaluate whether current funding levels are sufficient to meet mandates to support ELLs and students with disabilities in transfer schools?

CHIEF LUFT: I will say thank you for having this hearing, because that's one way that we do that. All right. In fact, we're having this conversation now. You know, I think part of, I mean, I think what Andie Corso just talked about in terms of some of the issues that we have, and a lot of what Superintendent Sullivan has described, I think we've made some strides in funding in that we do have additional funding over the last couple of years now. I think it's three years ago when we adjusted the formula, that there are additional funds going to transfer schools. But again, I think we've

acknowledged some areas where transfer schools have some unique challenges that I think they're using the funds they have strategically as possible. I think Superintendent Sullivan is working with principals to make sure we're making the best use of those funds. But again, there are some unique needs to transfer schools. But we hope that the additional funding that's flowed to transfer schools over the last couple of years has certainly benefited and helped. But we always welcome continued advocacy to make that better for transfers.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. That's the reason why this hearing is happening, is to see where the gaps are and how can we support and how can we make it better and stronger. You have young people that depend on this, and we want to make sure when they go through our school system, they have a good experience and good outcomes.

So, how does New York City Public Schools adjust transfer school funding to account for increased enrollment of newly arrived asylum seekers, students?

CHIEF LUFT: I mean, currently, similar to what we do with other high schools, right? So in past

years when we have had mid-year adjustments, again, transfers have benefited from those. Short of that, they are without a mid-year adjustment, there wouldn't be a significant change in funding in the middle of the year or later in the year.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How are transfer schools affected by potential federal cuts to Title I funding in Fiscal 2026?

CHIEF LUFT: With the caveat that I'm not the finance team, but I can speak to this a little bit and certainly follow up with anything else that you might need. There's currently about a little over 15 million, about 15.1 million in Title I funds that go to transfer schools. We don't know of any Title I cuts currently. But obviously, if that were to be the reality, we would have to look at that. As of right now, we don't know of any specific cuts.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how much does the State allocate for transfer schools in Fiscal 2026?

CHIEF LUFT: There are about 8.4 million of C4E funds and another 915,000 of NYSTL funding.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Say that again?

CHIEF LUFT: 8.4 million C4E funds and about 915,000 of NYSTL funding.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: There's an additional
3 issue for middle school students who are overage,
4 under-credited, because there's only one option,
5 Restart Academy, that we talked about earlier. How
6 many students are overage in grades under seventh
7 grade? Do we know?

8 CHIEF LUFT: Chair, we did get the number
9 for you. We went to the question you had asked
10 earlier, so I can share that with you now.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. And I'll send
12 you the series of questions I need answered on
13 Restart. How many seats? If students are turned away
14 from transfer schools, what are the options for our
15 students?

16 CHIEF LUFT: Sure. And the Restart overall
17 enrollment is 378. There are 83 students who are
18 eighth graders. I can give you more of a breakdown by
19 the other grades as well if you need it. We can share
20 that with you.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you want me to
22 send you those questions and then you'll give me a
23 breakdown?

24 CHIEF LUFT: Sure. If you like the precise
25 numbers.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. I can do that.

3 CHIEF LUFT: And I'm sorry, if you could
4 share the other question again?

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Say that again.

6 CHIEF LUFT: Was there an additional
7 question? Just want to make sure to respond.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. We'll send them
9 over to you.

10 I got another incoming question. Would
11 New York City Public Schools be open to issuing a
12 school allocation MOU on Learning to Work funding in
13 future years to track CBOs funding and level by each
14 transfer school?

15 CHIEF LUFT: Melanie?

16 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: Can you
17 repeat that?

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Sure. Would New York
19 City Public Schools be opening to issuing a school
20 allocation memorandum on Learning to Work funding in
21 future years to track CBOs and funding levels by each
22 transfer school?

23 SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MAC: It's a
24 good question that I don't have an answer to right
25 now, but I'll say the current structure is we can

track the funding levels by school because each CBO is allocated a specific amount per school that looks at their enrollment and receives a contract that's proportionate to how many students they're serving at the school.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, the amount of students they serve, that's how the funding is allocated. Okay. Thank you.

We're good. All right.

CHIEF LUFT: Thank you.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'll send the follow-up questions to Amoy and Micah to answer the questions we couldn't answer today.

CHIEF LUFT: We appreciate you spending this much time on transfer schools. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I think there should be a middle school, but we're going to talk about that.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I'd love to do some visits if you're available.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Huh?

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: I'd love to do some visits when you're available.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, I'm always ready for a school visit.

SUPERINTENDENT SULLIVAN: Good. We'll get some on the calendar.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes. Yes. Thank you so much.

And we will take a five-minute break just to set up for public testimony. Thank you so much.

Thank you. I now open the hearing for public testimony.

I remind the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recording as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, fill out the appearance slip with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have three minutes to speak on today's oversight topic or legislation.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of the testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

I will now call the first panel. Lara Lai, Eimi Herrera, Jai Nanda, Nanda, if I butcher the name, forgive me. Last name Nanda, N-A-N-D-A. Josiah Irizarry.

Well, hi and welcome. You may begin.

JOSIAH IRIZARRY: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Josiah Irizarry. I am 17 years old, and I am finishing my second year at Urban Dove Team Charter School II, Bronx, a transfer school for over-aged, under-credited students. I started my high school career at Bronx Bridges High School, but I struggled there and fell behind. There was a lot of

bullying that became overwhelming and stopped me from focusing on school. My counselor told me about a DOE transfer school called Bronx Regional High School that was similar, that was smaller, and could better support me because they had a program called Learn to Work that offered a lot of services like internships, college support, and counseling. When I went there, though, they told me they were worried about my attendance from my prior school. The interview process was also very cold, and I was not sure that I would get the support I needed. However, I soon found out about Urban Dove, a charter transfer school. They didn't care about my previous attendance, and they made me feel like I would be safe. They accepted me and I love this school and I am doing much better. It is not an easy path, but I am working hard and gaining confidence in myself. But when I got to Urban Dove and asked about Learn to Work, I was told they didn't get a Learn to Work program because they are a charter school. How is that fair? If Bronx Regional had taken me, I would get Learn to Work, but because they wouldn't and Urban Dove would, I don't get it. It makes no sense. I am still me. What difference does it make which public school I attend? All

overage, unaccredited public school students who are working hard to get back on track deserve the same support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

EIMI HERRERRA: Good afternoon. My name is Eimi Herrera and I am 17 years old. I go to New Dawn Charter School in Brooklyn. Before I begin, I do want to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story.

Prior to attending New Dawn Charter High School, I was a student at FDR High School. When I first entered FDR, I was a good student until I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. My academics started taking a turn for the worse. I became distracted and lost focus. School was not a place that I enjoyed going to anymore. I would miss classes because I did not like going to school, which ultimately led to me failing my classes. At that point, it felt like I was throwing my dreams away just to fit in with the crowd. This was also a difficult time for my mom who did not know what to do. While exploring new options for me to go to school, one of my teachers suggested that I attend New Dawn Charter High School. This was one of the

best decisions ever because they supported students like me who had so much potential to succeed but needed a new start. Since attending New Dawn, I have become a much better student and person in general. I have As in all my classes and nearly perfect attendance. I feel supported by my teachers and have been learning career skills throughout my internship program as well. This helps me better prepare for my future career, which puts me a step ahead once I graduate high school. While at New Dawn, I found out that the Learn to Work program was not offered in transfer charter schools due to funding being limited to only public schools. I do believe that transfer charter schools do a great job in helping students like me succeed and that we should be given the same resources and access to this program as other public schools who have Learn to Work. I am here today to speak on behalf of myself and other students like me who attend transfer charter schools and would greatly benefit from Learn to Work programs. Education is the gateway to success and what better way to prepare us for our futures by giving us all access to the same resources. Me attending a transfer charter school should not exclude me from the benefits offered by

the Learn to Work program. I am sharing my testimony in hopes that you will consider giving me and other students like myself access to these programs that give so many other students a start towards having a successful future. Thank you.

LARA LAI: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and hello to my fellow panelists. It's an honor to be sitting here with you.

My name is Laura Lai, and I am the Senior Policy Analyst and Strategic Organizer for Education in the Office of New York City Comptroller, Brad Lander. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Starting in the spring of 2022, New York City began to welcome the arrival of tens of thousands of asylum seekers and other immigrants. An often-overlooked population of new arrivals are the unaccompanied young people, generally between the ages of 16 and 24 years old. Between January 2022 and 2024, according to the DYCD Youth Count Survey, the number of homeless young people in New York City nearly tripled from 2,094 to 6,823, with the rise likely due to the increase in unaccompanied immigrant youth. While we are past the peak of this trend

perhaps, transfer schools are an important educational resource for unaccompanied youth in New York City. However, there remain several barriers for students from non-traditional backgrounds such as this to connect with transfer schools and begin the enrollment process. First, there are extremely limited transfer school seats, and those are reserved for students that these schools deem able to graduate by 21. There are only five transfer schools created to support new arrivals. In recent years, some transfer schools, as we heard earlier, have made a deliberate effort to expand their English language services, such as Brooklyn Frontiers, but it has only 175 seats.

Second, transfer schools work on a referral basis, and immigrant youth are often in need of enrollment without previous placement in a traditional high school and without a guidance counselor or a parent to refer them. Newcomer youth must enroll in school at Family Welcome Centers in person where advocates have told us that staff are poorly trained to assist this population of students and unable to provide the need of referrals for transfer schools. Staff at Family Welcome Centers do

not track the number of seats available at transfer schools, which makes it even harder for newly arrived students to find placements. Officially, Family Welcome Centers accept walk-in appointments, but advocates have reported that youth have been turned away because they didn't have an appointment or because they didn't have a parent with them, which is actually not required. The New York State Department of Education issued guidance in 2016 that districts cannot force students to pursue a GED, yet we have heard numerous reports that unaccompanied youth have been pushed by Family Welcome Centers into GED programs and discouraged from attending high school. (TIMER CHIME) We have several recommendations in our written testimony that I would be happy for you to take a look at when you have a chance.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. And that was one of the things we brought up in the welcoming centers. And believe it or not, International Networks are not allowed to go there. That's something we need to work on with New York City Public Schools. Micah's here taking notes to have international schools at the welcome centers. I told him that since 2022. Nobody's listening.

LARA LAI: Thank you, Chair. My schools would be helpful too for enrollment, honestly.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yep. And also language barrier also becomes a huge issue so we got some work to do.

Do you find it easy to meet with your guidance counselor or social worker at your schools?

EIMI HERRERRA: Yeah. I always have the opportunity to go talk to my counselor or my mentor, which is actually back there. She is always there available for me whenever I need help or whenever I need to talk to her, and my principal and really any teacher that I need to talk to will always be available for me to talk to them.

JOSIAH IRIZARRY: Yeah. Same here. When I feel like accessing somebody in my school, like my social worker principal or my coaches, they're very open to me. To me, they really inspire me to really look up to them because they show so much good sportsmanship, and I really enjoy that in my school because not much schools will provide that. It's just difficult for some kids to feel like they're in a safe space. But in my school, everyone is always like when I come into school early in the morning,

everyone's always excited to see me. And it makes me feel motivated to keep doing what I do and just progressing more and further.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you to guidance counselors and the social workers for your service. Thank you.

What additional supports are available for you at your school? What additional supports would you like to see? Don't be shy.

JOSIAH IRIZARRY: I do have a lot of support when it comes to if I'm feeling down or if I'm dealing with struggles. It isn't easy as a kid, especially as a teenager who's in high school, going to a transfer school. When I need an opportunity to talk to somebody or feel like I'm not alone, it's always an open door, and they give me what I need. They provide me with what I need. They make sure that I'm not by myself or fighting my battles alone, and I really enjoy that.

EIMI HERRERRA: I don't really have any complaints. I get everything I need. I get all the support I need. But some of my friends have complained to me about their internship programs, how they heard. Some of my friends do complain about the

money because apparently they're not getting enough or they're getting paid limited. But I don't really know what to tell them to that. They have told me that they want to transfer to a different school because of that. I try to convince them not to, to give it a chance. But I guess to a point.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We hear you loud and clear on the LTW, the opportunity. They are working on the RFP now, so hopefully you guys get included and not left behind.

Go ahead, Mr. Urban Dove.

JAI NANDA: Jay Nanda from Urban Dove.
Thank you to the Council. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've spoken on this topic many times. I won't reiterate all my words. But I do think there are a couple of key points that are important to understand. The DOE has a 30-billion-dollar plus budget. Including charter transfer schools in the Learn to Work program is a rounding error. I mean, it's ridiculous how little money we're talking about. So it really comes down to a philosophical question. These students have already made that case. I'm not going to waste your time making that case. We are not asking for DOE transfer schools to get less money in

their grants to give us a contract. We're asking for the pot to be increased. We're not asking for money to be taken away from transfer school kids across the city. We're asking for a few extra dollars to be added to support all transfer school students across the city.

Charter transfer schools play an important role, frankly, in this landscape. For Urban Dove's part, we take 15-year-olds. Many transfer schools don't. We don't have any requirements in terms of graduating by 21. Other transfer schools do. We don't have minimum credits. We don't have minimum reading and writing and math skill requirements. So we provide an important landscape, as Josiah mentioned. The DOE transfer that he wanted to didn't take him, which is fine. I know Bronx Regional High School, it's excellent, but it doesn't take every transfer school student. So, we need to find enough seats for all of them to find a home where they feel safe, and the Learn to Work program should follow suit and provide funding for all the transfer school seats that are providing safe spaces for students. Mayor Eric Adams has written in a letter that he supports this position. We have it in writing and

have had it for the last five years. This is not a political issue anymore. This is simply a matter of allowing this new RFP that is coming out that we have waited many years for and you have been championing this cause for as long as anyone can remember. We have finally gotten to the point we have been promised. A new RFP is coming. Great. Let's just add a few sentences and make sure all the students are taken care of. We've done the hard work. This is easy. Not doing this would be a travesty. And anything that Urban Dove can do, and I know anything that New Dawn can do to support you and your efforts, all you have to do is ask and we appreciate your time and efforts and appreciate your time today. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much. Thank you for being here. Continue to use your voices as young people to fight for the things you need. Thank you.

Lara, I saw your recommendations. I'll follow up with you offline and see how we can implement them or at least advocate for implementation.

LARA LAI: I think some of them are funding recommendations that you've heard before, but I think the enrollment and the Family Welcome Center, the enrollment on MySchools option and the Family Welcome Center recommendations are especially important.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much.

The next panel, Melanie Poggi. Am I saying that right? If I butchered it, forgive me. Augustin Escamilla, Jr., Rico St. Hilare, Nyla Jones, Analisa Vestal, Timothy He, Lehla Tolbert.

Whenever you want to start. Wherever you want to start.

AUGUSTIN ESCAMILLA, JR.: Good afternoon. My name is Augustin Escamilla, Jr., and I attend Liberation Diploma Plus High School. Prior to enrolling here, I was heading down the wrong path. I was failing every single class, missing weeks of school at a time, and simply lacked motivation. The environment at my previous school felt very robotic. I wasn't treated like a person but ignored and neglected, defined on my grades. However, everything changed when I came to Liberation. I applied, was interviewed, and quickly felt like this place was a

place where I can truly thrive. Mr. Manny, the counselor who conducted my interview, took the time to understand who I am, learn about my goals, and discuss how I can achieve them. After touring the school and meeting some of the staff, I had a strong sense that this was the right environment for me. As I began attending Liberation, I continued to get to know the staff and familiarize myself with the school culture. In my first week, I went on a trip that proved to be extremely helpful. What I really appreciate about Liberation is the small school community where everyone knows each other and the staff genuinely cares. It feels like a family here. Unlike my previous school, I often felt invisible. At Liberation, if you miss school, someone is sure to reach out to your family directly to make sure you stay on track. They're committed to making sure you don't slip through the cracks. Recently, JCCA conducted a check-in with all the students, asking important questions about our home lives and mental well-being and assistance. Many of the staff members I've connected with have similar experiences and come from challenging backgrounds themselves, even having attended alternative schools. I am now on track to

graduate in either June or August, depending on whether I complete extra work. Additionally, I've started thinking about going to college, thanks in part to conversations with Ms. Rashida and Mr. Ofrela. After hearing from an FDNY firefighter who visited our class, I'm considering pursuing a career with the Fire Department. These are dreams I would have never imagined for myself while I was at my previous school. Liberation has truly given me and many other students a second chance at making something of ourselves. It's a place where I feel supported, motivated, and encouraged to strive for more than I ever thought was possible. Thank you.

TIMOTHY HE: Hi. My name is Timothy, and I'm currently in Liberation Diploma Plus. Before I came here, I went to (INAUDIBLE) High School. During my time there, I felt like I wasn't heard when I needed help, and whenever I struggled, they just moved on, and I ended up feeling unmotivated to go to school. This happened until my sophomore year. I rarely showed up, and when I did, I found it boring and hard to stay engaged during class. One day, my counselor suggested I transfer to an alternative school to give me a better chance of graduating on

time and getting my credits. At first, I thought Liberation would be like any other high school, with only more work, since they told me I'd earn more credits at a regular high school. But when I started Liberation, everything changed. The staff made me feel welcome in a way I had never experienced before. If I needed to talk about something, they didn't just listen passively or brush me off. They actually engaged with me and actually helped. For the first time, I felt heard and supported. Before coming to Liberation, I didn't see the point in trying, but here, I felt motivated again. I started showing up every day, and I felt like a new person. The school provided me with the help I needed to understand my work, and they didn't just focus on my academics. They took the time to talk about my future, what I wanted to do, and how to prepare for my career. It was something I hadn't seen other schools do, and it made a huge difference in how I viewed my education life. After being here for a little over a year, I got into the JCCA internship program. I'm really grateful for it. It gave me a glimpse of what adulthood and working life are like. The experience has taught me new responsibilities, and it fits into

my schedule in a way that doesn't overwhelm me. It's been a real eye-opener and prepared me for a real world. Without Liberation, I honestly don't think I would have achieved the things that I've accomplished or developed the skills that I have now. The teachers and counselors here have been instrumental in helping me realize my potential, and I'm truly thankful for all the support they've given me.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Go ahead.
There you go.

ANALISA VESTAL: Is it on? Oh. Hi, my name is Analisa Vestal. Good afternoon. I'm a student at Liberation Diploma Plus High School. There was a time where I struggled with not only school problems but also personal issues. They always say family comes first, but once I started applying that phrase into my life, I started losing track of where I placed myself and couldn't keep up, as if I was stuck in place. Don't get me wrong, I love my family to death, but I know it would hurt me worse to keep having myself to fail, not only in school but also in life. In my old school, it was very much all chaotic and mixed up to the point where not a lot of people, including me, got to receive the help that was really

needed. At that point, as if I wanted to give up, until I was introduced to Liberation Diploma Plus High School, my second home and my safe space. As soon as I entered into my first year at Liberation, I felt at peace. I started coming to school more, getting good grades, going to special events. Yeah, for me, there can be a little ups and downs here and there, but for the most part, I feel like I was living it up at Liberation. I am very thankful for Liberation staff and JCCA because they really took me in and took the time to get to know me, making me feel respected, helping me with any personal or school issues, which created a new soft spot into my heart. The JCCA internship has played a big role in my life, helping me grow personally and professionally, creating many different opportunities and paths for me to take when leaving high school and entering the real world. To be honest, I have never seen a high school that can do what Liberation has done, and I'm very thankful to Liberation and JCCA staff for allowing me to take a pause and reset and for seeing the best in me. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I hope you were not nervous.

LEHLA TOLBERT: Good afternoon. I'm Lehla Tolbert, student at Liberation Diploma High School. Everyone who ends up at Liberation Diploma Plus will always have a memorable experience that brings growth to their life. My safe place, family, and a place to call home is Liberation Diploma Plus. I've had a memorable history with this school. They always make me feel appreciated and never left out. They greet us with good morning, asking if we're okay, tell us we are loved, and that means a lot even if it doesn't show. I remember a time my entire apartment caught on fire while I was sleeping, and I lost everything I owned to my name. I never mentioned anything to the school yet, and I received calls and messages from the principal and staff the following morning because they saw it on the news. My principal called me to come to the school and gave me 300 dollars for anything I needed. At that time, I was still in shock, but I appreciated that because I had nothing and I didn't know where to start. Liberation has changed my life, and I say this because coming from a school where everything is brushed to the side, not cared for, or chaotic, is what I needed. I honestly feel like I should have started at Liberation years

ago, and I wouldn't have gone through certain situations, but it's a part of growth, and that's something that always helped me realize. I appreciate that they make time for every student to get to know them personally because that helps in situations where a student may be feeling down, so they already know how to approach. I also want to mention a recent time where I was going through and not having anywhere to stay. I was in a shelter for the first time in my life. I felt like my life was over. I had no place to lay in peace, and I couldn't attend school because the place I was in was really far away. I came to school to let them know I might not be able to come for a while, and I was really embarrassed to explain my situation because I've never been in before, but they listened. I even cried to them because they were so understanding while I was going through a lot of pain. The entire time I've been at this school, the environment has impacted my learning as well because they take the time to help students with work and make sure they make your learning a priority. Nobody is ever left out. All of the story Liberation is always there for times I feel

lost or get off track to stay in the right direction.
Thank you.

RICO ST. HILARE: Hello. My name is Rico St. Hilare. I'm a graduate of Liberation Diploma Plus High School. I was invited by Ms. Poggi to talk about my experiences with the internship program. The JCCA internship program is very helpful for students because it prepares us for life after school. It gives us responsibilities like coming to school on time, getting good grades, and handling conflicts correctly. We get work experience, and most importantly, we get paid. We aren't treated like kids. We're treated like adults, and we're expected to act that way. Every two weeks, Ms. Poggi holds these group meetings with all the interns where we get split up into groups and do many different types of activities. We have been able to improve our team building skills, interpersonal skills through interviewing each other and talking about life and what type of person we want to become. I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for the internship. Thank you.

MELANIE ROSE POGGI: Good afternoon. My name is Melanie Rose Poggi. I'm the Internship

Coordinator for the JCCA at Liberation Diploma Plus High School. School and work are usually spaces where we understand there's pressure to present a perfect image of ourselves. Liberation is a school that relieves our students from this performance. At Liberation, we encourage our students to find power in their authenticity and vulnerability. Not only do staff and students share similar upbringings, but we work together as a team to build their character, enabling them to overcome any barriers. We understand that everyday life constantly redirects and deters us from our goals. This is especially challenging for the youth to navigate in a large school, where they often feel lost and overlooked. We encourage our students to feel free to share any struggles that prevent them from focusing on school, no matter what they are, and we assist them in any way possible. Whether it's conflict with family, friends, needing extra food at home, wanting a job to contribute to their household, or just needing a moment to take a mental break from class, every student at Liberation knows they will find someone in the building who will listen and come up with solutions. Our personal relationships with our students give us the

opportunities to see our kids as a whole individual, not just as a student. As the JCCA Internship Coordinator, I understand what it's like to end up in a transfer school. My task is to provide students with work experience, but I also encourage our students to find their voice and be confident. We want our students to become strong advocates for themselves, their families, and their communities. We understand that a career or profession should be carefully selected based on the problem our students want to change in the world. Belief in themselves and in a cause larger than themselves is what will provide our students with lifelong success, not just a job. Our individualized meetings with our students allow us the opportunity to provide a job site that aligns with their long-term career goals.

You've heard a few testimonies from our outstanding students here today. I would also like to shine a light on two of our JCCA interns who are not here today, Melvi Aldana-Lopez and William Maynard. Melvi showed interest in social work and education, which led her to intern at PS188 in Coney Island. She shared that she wanted a full-time job after her internship ended. With encouragement from myself and

her advocate counselor, Ms. Sherrell, Melvi spoke up for herself and was offered a chance to work at the school after graduation.

William Maynard showed interest in the medical field, which led him to intern with us at South Brooklyn Hospital. After graduating, he got a full-time job in the Department of Transportation. In July 2025, he was named Employee of the Month and featured in their digital magazine.

These success stories remind us why the work we do at Liberation matters. Our students are not just learning how to earn a paycheck. They're learning how to believe in themselves, speak up, and pursue meaningful futures. Watching them grow into confident adults ready to take on the world is our greatest reward. Thank you all for your time here. I appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you. Thank you to each and every one of you. You are the reason why I do this work. I am inspired by young people every single day. They know that, and that's who I fight for across the city, and they know that too, right, so the future looks bright. I'm proud of each and every one of you today. Continue to show up.

Continue to take up space. Continue to show up for yourselves and your friends. Bring one with you. Continue to rise. That's how we win, right? So I hope this young lady, I forgot her name, I hope things are better for you, Lehla. It is. But that's what community is, right? This is the village. They show up for you, and they had your back, and I'm happy you're in a better place now. So young people, keep fighting for yourselves. I was an educator before I became a Council Member, and for 22 years, I taught New York City kids, but I wanted to be on the outside to continue to fight in a different way, in policies and investments, and making sure that you show up in spaces. So today, my heart is so warm. You have no idea how happy I am. I've been to your school already. I visited your school. I know all about it. I went there, and I felt the warm and fuzzy feeling that that school provides for you, and every kid should have that warm arms to wrap around them. So continue to model and continue to bring that same energy to the spaces, but don't forget to go back and get somebody else that may need that same kind of love that you're getting.

So how do you think your school does well? All the other fuzzy things that they do for you, the snacks that you get at the door. See, I know, right? How does your school change your plans for your future? Anyone can answer that question.

I didn't hear from you. Are you hiding from me?

NYLA JONES: I know, I'm scared, but...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'd love to hear from you. You have a testimony as well?

NYLA JONES: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please share. Please share.

NYLA JONES: My name is Nyla Jones. This is my first year at Liberation Diploma Plus High School anyways. I came to a point in my life where I felt like I didn't want to go to school anymore. I wasn't getting good grades, and that's because the motivation was very low, because I wasn't making a 3.0 GPA. I felt like I wasn't worried about school, and that's because the friends I had, they would give me, tell me to try to skip school, stay home, you don't need school, and I felt like that wasn't my friends in life, because I wanted to become something

more in life and be more independent. First, I wasn't thinking about finishing school anymore until my friends told me about Liberation Diploma Plus High School. I researched it so I could know more about it and see what it's about. It's a school that helps you gain more credits, and you can get your school diploma faster. When I came to Liberation Plus to find an application, they told me about an internship that could help you find a job while you go to school. I liked the sound of that because it gave me a motivation to come to school every day and try hard. My first year at the Liberation Diploma Plus High School, I had seen that my GPA was a 3.0. I was so shocked and happy, because I never thought I could have made it. Now, the motivation that I had came from Ms. Poggi giving me a chance in the JCCA internship. It had given me a lot of growth and adulthood opportunities and organizations that I learned. I feel like now that I'm in this school, it's told me a lot of things that I never knew I could do before, and now I'm going to try to go to college and become the independent woman that I want to be and who I can be. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you.
3 Let's put it on some of the adults. What do you want
4 adults to change in New York City public schools to
5 understand students in transfer schools? What should
6 I be working on? You got an idea? You could start
7 sharing and then... go ahead.

8 LEHLA TOLBERT: Maybe the school schedule,
9 getting up early in the morning. I hate getting up
10 early in the morning, but maybe that.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Maybe staggered hours
12 to come in.

13 LEHLA TOLBERT: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. You hear that,
15 Micah?

16 LEHLA TOLBERT: Maybe school lunch. We
17 talk about this all the time.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, yeah. Tell me
19 about school lunch. I did a whole hearing on school
20 lunch. Talk to me about that.

21 LEHLA TOLBERT: It's not that bad. Most of
22 the students, if we come in early, we get to go
23 outside and take a little time to ourselves and get
24 lunch outside. Then we come back in, and then we go
25 back to our class. It's not that bad.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's not that bad, but you don't eat the food they serve in the cafeteria?

LEHLA TOLBERT: No, I go outside.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it that bad?

LEHLA TOLBERT: It's not bad. I just rather go outside.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Fresh air is good. Vitamin D is good, right? I agree. I agree. I agree.

You guys feel known and cared by by the adults in your school buildings?

LEHLA TOLBERT: Yes. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Very?

LEHLA TOLBERT: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. I should see more of you guys going back to become teachers in that school building. We need more teachers across the city.

What kind of supports academic emotional career have been most helpful to you? Y'all didn't think I was going to have questions?

LEHLA TOLBERT: Probably our Future Ready class.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm.

LEHLA TOLBERT: Yeah. We are able to research our career jobs and high school, no, not high schools, college schools or trade schools. We're able to seek and research different opportunities or things we want to do in life. Then our teacher, Mr. O, we call him Mr. O. He might throw in a little fist bump, high five, a little heart. He's so random.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We need random teachers.

My future firefighter.

AUGUSTIN ESCAMILLA, JR.: Thank you. I wanted to add on to what she said. Our Future Ready class is a very good class. We get to really explore and see what we want to do for ourselves after high school. It's also preparing us for after high school as well. Not too long ago, they brought in an FDNY firefighter. That was very interesting, not only for myself, but for other students as well that want to pursue that path. There will be other opportunities where they bring in car mechanics or trade school, people that are going through the trade school process. They just bring in people that are going through that experience. It might motivate someone in

2 the classroom that they want to do that. They want to
3 do that path and they want to take that career.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can each of you share
5 with me your career path? What are you thinking?

6 ANALISA VESTAL: My career path, I want to
7 be a cosmetologist. I want to own my own business. I
8 want to be my own boss.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All right,
10 entrepreneur. I love that.

11 LEHLA TOLBERT: My career path, I'm
12 thinking of real estate agent or maybe a teacher,
13 maybe.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We need more
15 teachers.

16 LEHLA TOLBERT: Maybe a teacher, but yeah.

17 NYLA JONES: At first, when I was in the
18 fifth grade, I always wanted to be a teacher and a
19 therapist, but after I seen the money rates, it's not
20 for me. I'm sorry. I'm trying to make a lot of money
21 and better. At my other class, we had a little lesson
22 on what we want to be. I had looked in nurse clinical
23 specialists. I see that's more for me. You could also
24 still work with kids that need special needs help. I
25 feel like that's a future that I want to see in.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, teachers are broke, I know.

TIMOTHY HE: For my future path, I want to be in the military. Once I get out of the military, but during the military, I do want to be a mechanic or electrician, but once I get out, I want to go to trade school and become an electrician.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I love it. What branch of the Armed Forces?

TIMOTHY HE: The Army.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you're my future firefighter.

What about you?

RICO ST. HILARE: I either want to be a comic book artist or an animator.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I love that. Well, thank you. Oh, you drew me. That's not me, right?

RICO ST. HILARE: That's not you. That's not you.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Just checking. Just checking. Just checking.

Listen, my hearings are really about you guys. That's why I'm going to make sure you're come back anytime, reach out to our offices, anything we

need to advocate for you. I am truly your champion and your voice in the City Council. If you never had anyone fight for you other than your school, you have me. So thank you.

Rohini Singh, Ryan Melis, and Joel Pietrzak. If I mispronounce, forgive me. Forgive.

ROHINI SINGH: Hi, Council Member Joseph. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rohini Singh, and I direct the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children. For more than 50 years, AFC has worked to ensure that all New York City students have access to a quality education. Each year, we help thousands of families navigate the school system.

Today, I'll focus on some key recommendations for transfer schools, as well as Intro. 1359. So transfer schools, as we heard today, are vital alternatives for students who struggled in traditional high schools, especially overage and under-credited youth, court-involved youth, students with disabilities, and older immigrant students. We've helped countless students apply for and navigate transfer schools, and many of our clients rely on transfer schools as the only viable and

appropriate education option within the New York City public school system. Yet too many still face barriers to access and they receive inadequate supports. So, as we heard from others today, we urge the City to expand transfer school options for older immigrant youth who are often turned away without other placements. We ask the City to strengthen supports for students with disabilities who are sometimes denied entry or lack needed services, improve access to information about transfer schools by reinstating the transfer school directory and ensuring that staff in schools and Family Welcome Centers are trained to guide families on the application processes for transfer schools, and to baseline funding for the Learning to Work program, which provides essential academic and career readiness support and is set to expire in 2026.

AFC also strongly supports Intro. 1359. Students with disabilities are suspended at much higher rates than their peers, often for behavior directly related to their disabilities. The MDR process is meant to protect them, but it's applied inconsistently. Transparency through regular public data reporting will help identify inequities and

guide reforms. AFC recommends that Intro. 1359 be strengthened by aligning it and incorporating it into existing special education reporting laws to ensure consistency and integration with other City data on students with disabilities. Reporting data by community school district, not just by individual schools, to capture district level trends and avoid redactions due to small sample sizes. Disaggregating data by key equity factors such as income status, race, gender, English learner status, housing or foster care status, disability type., and grade level to better understand disparities, and also by adding new data points to ensure fairness in the MDR process, including whether parents had representation and the types of infractions that led to MDRs. Attached to our testimony are two proposed amended versions of the bill for you to review.

Thank you, Chair Joseph, for championing this important bill and for highlighting the urgent need to improve the transfer schools. We look forward to working with the council to ensure that all students have equitable access to education and fair discipline processes. Thank you.

JOEL PIETRZAK: Hello. Hi. Hi, Chair Joseph. My name is Joel Pietrzak. I am a Staff Attorney in the Education Law Project at the Legal Aid Society. I represent students at suspension hearings and manifestation determination reviews. MDRs are a vital protection for students with disabilities and the citywide data surrounding these meetings is sorely lacking. This lack of data contributes to the lack of progress in ensuring that MDRs are and continue to be the protection they are intended to be for kids with disabilities. We greatly appreciate Chair Joseph's efforts to remedy this problem by introducing this reporting bill.

In collaboration with advocates throughout the city, the Legal Aid Society had conversations with Chair Joseph's office and has offered edits and suggestions to this reporting bill. That said, there are two additional critical pieces of data we are requesting to be added to the bill. The first involves students who do not have an IEP or 504 plan but are entitled to an MDR anyway. These are called deemed to know students because their schools, based on certain criteria set forth in the federal law, know or should know that that child has a

disability despite not having an IEP or a 504 plan.

Very often, we will be engaged in a suspension case

where a student does not have an IEP or 504 plan at

the time of the incident for which they were

suspended. However, we often find that there were

signs from before the incident that showed that the

student may have a disability. If any of these signs

are present, the student is considered a deemed to

know student and the school must complete expedited

evaluations and hold an MDR despite the lack of an

IEP or 504 plan. By collecting information about how

many students who do not have an IEP or 504 at the

time of the suspension but who receive an MDR anyway,

we can start to extrapolate regarding how many kids

may be entitled to the MDR protection but are not

being identified as kids with disabilities.

Additionally, most deemed to know cases will have an

advocate involved which further shows that there are

many kids out there not getting this protection if

they are not represented. Adding a data point showing

which cases are deemed to know and which have

advocates present will help us track this and

estimate the number of students who are not getting

an MDR they are entitled to.

The second important data point deals with the IEP disability classifications of students with IEPs who receive favorable or unfavorable MDR outcomes. With respect to disability classifications, we often see that behavior for students with academically focused classifications on their IEPs like learning disability or speech language impairment is less likely to be considered a manifestation than if the classification is emotional disability or other health impairment. It is very clear on the MDR worksheet that all DOE schools are required to complete at MDR meetings that the classification is only one data point in the MDR analysis. After all, students' primary issue may be a learning disability but that same child may also have behavior stemming from ADHD, anxiety, autism or any other number of impairments. When the MDR team just looks at the classification, it misses the full disability picture. Thus, DOE should be required to report on classifications and corresponding outcomes in order to analyze whether school teams are appropriately considering more than just one classification.

With respect to transfer schools, we greatly appreciate the Committee's concerns about the lack of seats, bilingual educators, and middle school programs for students in need of an alternative to traditional public high schools. New York City Restart (TIMER CHIME) programs and transfer schools provide a vital lifeline allowing young people to re-engage after disrupted education and get back on track. Specifically, students in Restart programs serving middle schools are able to gain essential skills that allow them to continue to high school. However, citywide there are only six middle school locations with about 25 to 30 students per site. Far more than 180 middle schoolers are overage and under-credited so we urge the DOE to create additional restart seats to serve more students.

Thank you to the Committee and thank you Chair Joseph.

RYAN MELIS: Thank you. Hi everybody. My name is Ryan Melis. I am the Principal of New Ventures Charter School on Staten Island. We are a transfer charter school who serve a population of students between the ages of 16 to 21 and who are identified as overage and under-credited. Chair

Joseph, just seeing you in the assembly, the way you light up amongst these students' testimonies really show that you care and we appreciate that deeply and your work is acknowledged and appreciated by all of our students. I want to thank everybody for being here today. To Chair Joseph, thank you to the Committee Counsel and last but certainly not least, thank you to the student advocates here testifying. Your courage, your leadership, and determination is truly inspiring by you being here today. Whether you know it or not, you're pioneers for change and proof that second chances, voice, and advocacy can truly change the world, so thank you.

At this time, I'd like to read two testimonies from New Ventures students and alumni. Both students apologize for not being here on this tropical, sunny October afternoon, but the weather became a dangerous factor from Staten Island and we deeply apologize.

Good morning. My name is Olivia Valerio. Before I transferred to New Ventures Charter School, I was failing every class. I didn't believe in myself or think that I can ever turn things around, but with the support of my teachers and the opportunities that

this school gave me, I went from failing every class to graduating with honors. That transformation changed my life and showed me what I was truly capable of when I had the right support and opportunities. When I joined New Ventures, the internship program changed my life. I didn't know what to expect. I was offered a choice to choose one of 77 internship experiences that New Ventures built and created throughout their years being open. I chose an education internship with a teacher who had once been an intern herself and was now working full time at the school. Seeing how far she had come made me realize that this program could lead to real opportunities and lifelong success. It gave me purpose. It gave me confidence and the belief that my future could be different, but the truth is many of my peers never got the same chance. Without funding and resources, so many students at New Ventures and other charter schools around the city had to make impossible choices. Some were the sole financial providers for their homes. Others were young parents or caretakers for younger siblings. Many worked multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Because our school didn't receive Learn to Work funding, those

students couldn't afford to participate in internships without giving up their jobs. They wanted to graduate. They wanted to build a better future, but without the ability to earn money while they learned, too many were forced to choose survival over success. The Learn to Work program has the power to change that. If New Ventures and other schools received the same funding and resources as other DOE schools, it would open doors for thousands of students across New York City. It would give them a chance to gain real world experience, earn an income, and stay on track toward graduation. I am living proof that this program works, so let's give every young person the chance to turn their dreams into realities. Please support this RFP and ensure that all charter school students receive the same resources as their peers together. We can change lives. At this time, I implore you to please do the right thing. Let's give equal opportunity to thousands of more students. They should not be slighted just simply because they made a decision for a better education.

Sorry, I went over a little bit. May I read a second?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, oh, sure.

RYAN MELIS: Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. My name is Alyssa Vasquez. I'm a proud alumni of New Ventures Charter School. I once sat in a classroom not knowing what my future would look like, and now I'm here speaking on behalf of students who deserve every opportunity to build one. When I came to New Ventures, I wasn't just looking for a school. I was looking for a place that believed in me. (COUGH) Excuse me. Traditional schools didn't fit my life. I had responsibilities and challenges that made it hard to show up the way others expected. But New Ventures saw me for who I was and who I would become. They didn't ask, what's wrong with you. They asked, what do you need to succeed. And that question changed everything for me. New Ventures' mission is simple but powerful to prepare disconnected and at-risk youth for success, not only academically, but as confident, capable young adults. One of the most transformative parts of this mission is our internship program where students apply classroom learning in real work spaces. But here's the truth. Many of our students couldn't afford to take unpaid internships. Some work before

and after school to help their families. I know the struggle firsthand. During my time at New Ventures, I worked overnight shifts, clocking out at 5 a.m. and showing up for class at 10 a.m. I was doing everything I could to help my family while chasing my dreams. No student should have to choose between supporting their family and pursuing their education. When you grow up in a community where every dollar matters, your time has to matter too. Paid internships change that. They give students the chance to focus on what matters, their education, growth, and future without sacrificing their well-being. This isn't about handouts. It's about fairness. Our students bring real value to the placements and deserve real wages in return. When students are paid, engagement and attendance rise. They take pride in their work and begin to see themselves as professionals. We're not asking for luxury. We're asking for equity. When we invest in our youth, we invest in our city's future. New Ventures gave me a second chance, and my internship there gave me an opportunity. Let's make every student who comes after me get that same chance. Thank you for your time, your belief, and your

commitment to our students. It's time to make an impact, and the time is now.

Chair, please note that both of these students are now educators in our Integration Charter School District. As you said, we do need educators. Our internship pipeline from internship to education has now created upwards of 12 teachers within our Integration Charter School District. Thank you for that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Would you submit your testimony online? Yeah, because I would love to see your recommendations as we work out this bill. This is just the Intro. We get to work out the bills and make some changes. I also have your recommendations, and I do agree. As you heard in testimonies, our ENLs and our students with disabilities are not getting their legally mandated services on both ends. We want to make sure they have the support that they need. Hopefully, with the new RFP, you guys are included in the LTW. We want all of our children to have all of the experiences.

Thank you so much, and I have both of your testimonies, and we will be looking for your

recommendations to add on to the bill. Thank you so, so much. Thank you, advocates. You're welcome.

Anna Gallagher, Jessica Balistreri. I butchered it. Forgive me. Nelson Mar.

ANNA ARKIN-GALLAGHER: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Anna Arkin-Gallagher. I'm the Associate Director of the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defenders. Thank you, Chair Joseph, for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

BDS's Education Unit provides legal representation and informal advocacy to our school-age clients and parents of children in New York City schools. A significant number of the students we work with qualify as overage and under-accredited and have been retained at least one grade. As we've heard from so many today, for these students, transfer schools offer a chance for them to reconnect with their education. Many of the young people our office has served have appreciated the small size, flexible programming, and Learn to Work or other internship opportunities available at transfer schools. Despite the positive experiences many of our clients have had with transfer schools, we find it is often

challenging to help our clients get into these schools because of the decentralized nature of the application process, and this is particularly frustrating in light of what you noted about the declining enrollment in these schools. In order to apply to transfer schools, students need to contact each school one-by-one. When we're helping our clients enroll, we find it's often difficult to find out which transfer schools are even enrolling, what the enrollment process is, what the criteria are for admissions, what the timeline is. For example, the New York City Public Schools website about transfer schools has only the most minimal information about transfer schools and still references remote learning, which has not been in place, as we all know, since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Family Welcome Centers, as others have noted, often have limited information. We've had Family Welcome Centers give young people information about transfer schools that are not currently enrolling. Young people interested in exploring transfer school options are, by definition, behind in school. Many of them have become disconnected from their education. Some haven't attended school for some time. But often

when our office first meets them, these young people are enthusiastic about the prospect of re-engaging with school and working on an accelerated pace towards their high school graduation. But over and over, we see this lengthy process of enrolling and trying to contact schools that may not have space means we're not able to seize upon that enthusiasm. We've worked with many students who've become so frustrated by how long the enrollment process takes that they drop out of school for good. So, we really urge New York City Public Schools to streamline the process so that more students don't experience this discouragement, ensuring there's up-to-date information available both online and at the Family Welcome Centers.

Our written testimony will contain additional suggestions regarding transfer schools. I did want to note that while I focus my testimony today on transfer schools, BDS does also strongly support (TIMER CHIME) Intro. 1359 to improve transparency regarding manifestation determination reviews. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify.

JESSICA BALISTRERI: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph. My name is Jessica Balistreri. I'm a Data Analyst at the New York Civil Liberties Union's Education Policy Center. I'm here today to offer our qualified support of Introduction 1359 and opposition to Introduction 1360. Exclusionary school disciplines such as the use of out-of-school suspensions has demonstrated discriminatory impact on students of color and students with disabilities. Students of color with disabilities are especially at greatest risk of suspension, with Black students with disabilities over four times more likely to face suspension compared to their White peers without a disability. In an analysis that NYCLU conducted, we found during the 2023-2024 school year, 43 percent of all superintendent suspensions in the city were issued to students with disabilities, despite these students making up only 22 percent of DOE enrollment that year. This is two and a half times the rate of their peers without disabilities. Under federal law, students with disabilities facing lengthy or multiple out-of-school disciplinary suspensions are entitled to additional due process protections in order to prevent schools from pushing them out of the

classroom due to behaviors related to their disability. However, the manifestation determination review, or MDR, process is often inequitable. For example, parents often receive improper notice of a suspension hearing or MDR, causing them to be unable to attend. Additionally, it is often that MDRs occur beyond the 10-day time frame, causing students to miss school improperly before receiving a determination of whether their behavior was a manifestation of their disability. Some advocates and families believe this is done intentionally, a loophole exploited by schools to remove students from class without adequate cause. MDRs also result in inequitable outcomes for students of color with disabilities. Studies show that MDRs are more protective of White students with disabilities, with Black students with disabilities more likely to face exclusionary discipline. Schools are not currently required to report on whether procedural violations occurred throughout the MDR process, leaving a massive gap in our understanding of how these systems are working. In order to protect these especially vulnerable students, the public must have access to MDR data to help us better promote solutions to where

things aren't working. We urge the City to adopt Introduction 1359 and commit to protecting the constitutional rights of students with disability through increasing data transparency and accessibility around school disciplinary practices. We also recommend strengthening the bill by adding additional language and data collection to allow for greater insight into MDR outcome disparities through intersectional examination.

In addition, we urge the council not to pass Introduction 1360. We ask instead the Council direct resources, attention, and support to agencies and non-profits established for the purpose of supporting young people rather than engaging their programming with the threat of police surveillance and the full weight of the criminal legal system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to collaborating with you to protect our students.

NELSON MAR: Good afternoon. My name is Nelson Mar. I'm a Staff Attorney at Bronx Legal Services in the Education Law Unit. We're part of Legal Services NYC, which is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the country. For over 50

years, LSNYC has fought for social, racial, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. Education attorneys at LSNYC fight for students to access appropriate special education services, combat the school-to-prison pipeline, support healing-centered schools, enforce family language access rights, and so much more. Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee of the City Council for this opportunity to discuss Intro. 1359 and the importance of manifestation determination reviews and its process in New York City public schools.

Manifestation determination reviews are an extremely helpful process in both disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline and supporting the success of students with disabilities who engage in disruptive behaviors. As you know, students with disabilities as a group experience one of the highest disproportionality rates, as my colleague here mentioned just before, compared to other student groups. In many past years, they have had the most extreme rates of disproportionality. All this means is that students with disabilities are interacting with the discipline process frequently. But what we

don't know is if the New York City Department of Education is properly protecting the rights of students with disabilities who are being disciplined. That's why Legal Services NYC supports Intro. 1359 with some additional amendments to better capture data points related to marginalized communities. Some of those data points have been mentioned previously by our colleagues at Advocates for Children and Legal Aid. We also submitted a document to Committee Staff prior to today that highlights some of those changes.

LSNYC is one of the few organizations that provide representation at suspension hearings and manifestation determination reviews. Unfortunately, too many of our experiences at MDRs show that the Department of Education is not properly implementing the MDR process as required by law. Too often, school staff use an improper analysis in answering the question of whether the behavior is a manifestation of a student's disability. More problematic, we have heard from clients that they are treated very differently at these meetings depending on whether they show up at the MDR alone or with an advocate. The little data that we do have from the DOE (TIMER CHIME) that we actually secured through a

Freedom of Information Law request shows that this is more the rule than the exception. You also heard it today from Andie Corso. LSNYC and our colleagues at Mobilization for Justice secured data for the 21-22, the 22-23 school years, but the DOE still has not responded to our follow-up FOIL requesting data for the 23-24 school years. We're glad that they have the 24-25 data. We just wish they would share that with us. That underscores the need for this reporting bill. We're happy to hear from the Department of Education that they're supportive of bringing more daylight on this issue and that there's a consensus that MDRs can serve as a vital tool to supporting students with disabilities and actually supporting the teachers as well. As we point out in our testimony, one of the biggest challenges facing educators is disruptive student behaviors. There's a desperate cry by many educators for more support in this area.

We want to thank you again, Chair Joseph, for introducing this bill and shining a light on this important need for greater data transparency.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

Are teachers, from your knowledge, are teachers notified of MDRs? Do they know? Just for probably adding, maybe this could be a bundle legislation package. Are educators have a one-sheeter on MDRs?

NELSON MAR: A worksheet?

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No. A one-sheeter, like a FAQ.

NELSON MAR: Oh, I am not aware.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, I think maybe that's what we should be focusing on as well. Because as an educator, I never got a paper, a FAQ or anything on MDRs.

NELSON MAR: Oftentimes, in our experience, the only people at the MDR are the parent, someone representing the District, and often someone who was either familiar with or involved with the incident. Not so much the student's teacher or people who are familiar with the student...

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: With the student who have daily interaction with them. They should also have that type of information.

Question for you. You opposed 1360. What was the reason? It was actually inspired by young people. Tell me.

JESSICA BALISTRERI: Yes. So, we believe that instead of funding the NYPD to run youth programs like sports leagues and tutoring, the City should instead support and robustly fund the opportunities for these students within New York City Public Schools, the Public Schools Athletic League, and the Department of Youth and Community Development, which are meant to support our youth and not police them. The NYPD youth programs exist within a broader policing strategy, which is inclusive of surveillance of students, so social media monitoring, interfering with student discipline, harvesting of student data. It's also well-documented the NYPD has used its youth sports leagues to surveil Muslim, Arab, and Middle Eastern children and families. The irreparable and large harm the NYPD has caused New York communities of color has broken their trust in almost every conceivable way. We need to be supporting our schools. We need to be funding our schools and our school's youth programs instead of funding the NYPD.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have a question. This is a booklet. It's not a funding. We're not funding NYPD. NYPD has a series of youth-led activities, and young people wanted to know where they are. We're not funding. This has no type of funding at all. This is just for informational purposes because these programs live on their websites, but it's five pages deep. You have to dig onto the fifth page to find their drone program, their robotic program, so this was requested by a group of young people. They wanted to know, okay, when we move along and you say, hey, move along in the streets, they wanted to know what resources were available, so this was a booklet just to say, just like I would have created a booklet through DYCD to say these are the programs that they have so this is a booklet to create the programs that NYPD already runs. Go ahead.

JESSICA BALISTRERI: We understand, and we think that we should emphasize the youth programs within New York City Schools, just ensuring that students are able to build relationships in those schools and emphasizing the trust within educators, social workers, school staff. So, we understand it's

not funding. I apologize if I misspoke. But it's more directing students and focusing on the resources within our schools.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Yeah. Because I was a little confused. It was just for informational purposes, and this was inspired by some young people who wanted to know where did these programs live, not on their website, because the website is so horribly built, just like New York City Public Schools. You have to go through five different, just to find one information. I meet with youth and education advocates once a month, and that was a recommendation from them that we want to know where these information live, because I don't have time, Chair Joseph, to go on a website and look for stuff in five pages. So, that's where that came from, but it was just the booklet to say, this is where the programming lives. Not to fund them, not to direct them there, but this is where it lives, and it's optional.

JESSICA BALISTRERI: And yeah, I just want to emphasize that. And also, in addition, the Council should emphasize funding the New York City Public Schools, just speaking generally, and they do that.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This Council has stepped up and fund a lot in New York City Public Schools, everything, even the Learn to Work; Work, Grow, Learn. There was only 2,100 seats. This Council expanded it to 5,000. So we have been stepping up, but I also listen to the young people, right? I'm supposed to be their voice. So if they ask for something, if it's doable, we do it.

All right. Thank you so much. And you already emailed the recommendations and the add-ons to the bill, right?

Okay. Thank you.

I'm calling for Christopher Leon Johnson.
Christopher Leon Johnson.

He is not here.

That concludes the in-person portion of our public testimony.

We will now move to remote testimony. If you're testifying remotely, please listen for your name to be called. Once your name is called, a Member of our Staff will unmute. You may then start your testimony once the Sergeant-at-Arms sets the clock and cues you to begin.

And I will call the first panel, Lara Evangelista and Mark Konslavs (phonetic). Sorry for the butchering.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

LARA EVANGELISTA: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and Members of the Council. My name is Lara Evangelista. I'm the Executive Director of International Network for Public Schools.

Since 2004, International Network has partnered with New York City Public Schools to ensure that multilingual learners, students who bring incredible linguistic and cultural assets to our schools, can access high-quality education and graduate prepared for college, career, and civic life. International Network proudly supports one of our own transfer schools, Ellis Prep in the Bronx. This is the school where Dylan Contreras attends, one of the first known NYCPS students detained in his immigration hearing in May and remains detained today. Over the past three years, through our Project Soaring Initiative, we've also partnered closely with six transfer high schools that were serving growing populations of multilingual learners, providing intensive PD, coaching, and strategic planning

support, including the school Superintendent Sullivan mentioned today. Through the support of NYCPS, we also collaborated with the Transfer School District to provide professional development more broadly to their schools in meeting the needs of their MLLs. Transfer schools play a uniquely important role in our city's education ecosystem, serving students who are over age and under-credited, many of whom who have faced interrupted education, housing insecurity, and the challenges of recent migration. These schools provide individuals pathways, deep relationships, and wraparound supports that help young people re-engage and thrive. I saw this firsthand when I was the Deputy Superintendent of the CIOB district, where in addition to Ellis Prep, I supervised seven other transfer schools. However, transfer schools and others that serve our highest need students and take them year-round, like our 15 other International High Schools, are currently facing budget pressures due to enrollment shifts linked not just to the general enrollment decline in the city, but to the broader political and migration landscape. We urge the Council and NYCPS to find ways to continue to support transfer schools and other schools serving the

highest need students at this time. These schools cannot continue to meet their students' complex academic and social emotional needs. They're penalized for factors behind their control. At a moment when so many young people are depending on them, we must invest in these schools that give students a second chance and a pathway to success. Thank you, Chair Joseph, for your ongoing commitment to equity and opportunity for all New York City students.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Lara. One of the things we wanted to find out, is there any conversation on having International Schools table or at the Family Welcome Centers?

LARA EVANGELISTA: Well, we certainly do it as much as we can. And some Family Welcome Centers, we are able to send staff. It's been an ongoing conversation. We work closely with the district and the district, the CIOB district has also helped. They sent representatives this week, I believe, as well as ours, but it depends. Sometimes we can come in and sometimes they really want a DOE employee to be there.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you.

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2 LARA EVANGELISTA: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The following
4 witnesses will also sign up to testify remotely. Mark
5 Konslavs, if you're online in here or here in person,
6 please raise your hand. Or is there anyone else
7 present on Zoom who has not had the opportunity to
8 testify but wish to?

9 No hands.

10 Seeing no one else who wishes to testify,
11 this hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 24, 2025