Testimony of NYC Public Schools
On Remote Learning Failures in New York City Public Schools
Before the NYC Committee on Education
February 29, 2024

Statement of Interkhab Shakil, Chief Information Officer, Division of Instructional and Information Technology, NYCPS

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. My name is Intekhab Shakil. On February 26, 2024, I became the Chief Information Officer for New York City Public Schools. In this capacity I oversee the NYCPS Division of Information and Instructional Technology (DIIT) and am responsible for application development, cyber security, school planning and modernization, and infrastructure teams that serve the almost over million students and staff of New York City's public schools, as well as our families. I am joined by Scott Strickland, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Strategy and Governance, Zeeshan Anwar, Chief Product Officer, Johel Placencia, Chief Technology Officer, and Randy Asher, Deputy CIO of School Planning, Modernization, and Partnerships. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work to support and enhance the technology needs of our students and staff, along with the remote learning day on February 13.

I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the council for continuously advocating for the students of New York City and funding our technology efforts. In my new role as CIO, I look forward to working closely with the Council on behalf of our school communities.

Since this is my first time appearing before this committee, I would like to share a little about my background. With nearly 25 years of service to New York City agencies, including over two decades with the NYC Public Schools and recent tenure as Chief Information Officer at the City Law Department, I bring a depth and breadth of experience to the table.

During my time at NYCPS, I led the development of products such as NYC Schools Account (NYCSA), TeachHub, and Parent University, all aimed at enhancing the educational experience for students and families citywide. I was in DIIT when the pandemic hit in March 2020 and led the development of systems to support student device distribution and, as students and teachers returned to schools, the daily health screening system. As CIO at the City Law Department, a prime focus was cybersecurity, and I played a pivotal role in establishing a business-driven cyber risk program and strengthening agency security measures in alignment with citywide initiatives.

At the heart of my vision for technology for NYCPS is a commitment to the principles outlined by the Chancellor in his vision for our public schools. We are dedicated to fostering a safe and inclusive digital environment that caters to the diverse needs of our students and staff, ensuring

equitable access and support for all, regardless of their abilities. And, of course, prioritizing the reliable operation of our data networks, data centers, and enterprise systems to guarantee seamless delivery of educational services and resources. Finally, recognize that technology is not an end in itself but a means to empower our students for success in an ever-evolving world.

Overall, I am eager to provide the necessary tools that will equip our students not only in the classroom, but also in navigating the world beyond graduation.

I look forward to hearing your concerns today about the remote learning day on February 13. While we understand that technological glitches are an unfortunate reality, we take this incident very seriously and are dedicated to ongoing enhancements to our systems. Now, Scott Strickland, Deputy CIO for Strategy and Governance, will share details on last month's shift to remote learning.

Testimony of Scott Strickland, Deputy Chief Information Officer for Strategy and Governance, Division of Instructional and Information Technology, NYCPS

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and members of the New York City Council Education Committee. My name is Scott Strickland, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Strategy and Governance for the Division of Instructional and Information Technology in NYC Public Schools; from this past fall until last week, I served as Acting Chief Information Officer for New York City Public Schools. On behalf of Chancellor Banks, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Speaker Adams, Chair Joseph, and the entire council for your advocacy on behalf of all New York City school students and meeting their needs in the digital age.

I am here to provide testimony regarding the steps NYCPS took in preparation for a remote learning day, our experiences during the first citywide remote learning day since COVID on February 13, 2024, and the actions we have taken in response to the challenges students and teachers encountered that morning.

I want to emphasize our dedication to ensuring the smooth operation of our systems and services, particularly during remote learning periods. While we strive to minimize disruptions, it's important to acknowledge that we cannot guarantee that outages will not occur. However, what we can assure is our commitment to respond promptly and effectively to any issues that may arise.

2

Preparing to pivot to remote learning

This school year, NYCPS began preparing to pivot to remote learning several weeks earlier than in years past in anticipation of inclement weather. Three anchor documents were developed, updated, and shared broadly across the agency:
1. our Emergency Remote Learning Plan, required by NYSED, which outlines a plan should the NYCPS have to pivot to remote learning,
2. the Digital Classroom Labor Agreement, which required all teachers to establish a digital classroom by the end of September 2023, and
3. an annual update of the "Principal Assessment for School Readiness to Transition from In-Person to Temporary Remote Learning Checklist" InfoHub page, which houses all guidance and resources for remote learning, which all NYCPS educators can access.

Beginning in October 2023, we identified three priority areas to ensure schools would be ready to pivot to remote:
1. students will have access to a working device,
2. students can log in to their digital classroom, and
3. teachers have set up their digital learning environments.

Superintendent points in each district and technology directors in each borough were tasked to support schools directly with this effort. Additionally, our central offices began reviewing the percentages of devices assigned to students, percent of student logins, and percent of teacher logins on NYCPS systems.

To begin, we shared preparation guidance with schools, including a checklist that provided information on categories such as:
1. Devices for Students and Staff (Needs Assessment, Distribution, Tech Support, Connectivity at Home, Keeping Inventory);
2. Student and Staff Accounts (OneAccount4All/DOE central or school-managed accounts);
3. Digital Learning Environments (Learning Management System, Curriculum & Materials, Remote Classrooms);
4. Digital Professional Learning (DIIT Consultation, Online PL, PLCs, Staff Communication Portal);
5. Student Supports and Related Services (socio-emotional support, mental health support, Telehealth and related services protocols);
6. Attendance & Student Outreach;
7. Budget and Human Resources (funding, staffing, procurement, payroll, timekeeping, staff attendance); and

8. School Community Communications (office hours, parents/families, partners, remote inboxes, communication channels with families, including mail, emails, text, phone messengers, social media, etc.).

On November 27, 2023, schools were directed to conduct a pivot to remote practice both in school and at home; they were given a window of time for these practices to occur, by December 8, 2023. The exact date for each district was set by the superintendent. These expectations were communicated through systemwide email messaging to all NYCPS superintendents. Included in this message was a letter for superintendents to share with each of their principals, and a letter that principals could share with their families. (Remote Readiness Practice Plan Family Letter.)

The focus of the practice was to confirm that students had access to a working device, had access to the internet, and could access their digital classroom both in school and at home. In school, teachers were to ensure that students had guided practice on logging in via their NYCPS provided username and passwords. Principals and teachers had discretion as to any additional digital learning activities done during the classroom practice window. The at-home practice activity ranged from a homework assignment to an extension of the day's learning, conducted at home in the digital environment. These were activities to test access to the digital classroom for the student to complete asynchronously. By December 20, 2023, all superintendents confirmed their districts had completed the pivot to remote practice activities.

During the fall and early winter, NYCPS regularly communicated and collaborated with superintendents regarding device and account access, which we continue to do to this day. This included:
1. Ensuring superintendents knew what to do about centrally-distributed devices that were not assigned to students and student accounts with no logins.
2. Requiring schools to inventory and assign devices to students.
3. Distributing all central devices to schools that requested them—a total of 700,000 central devices from April 2020 through December 2023.
4. Helping principals gather information about home devices to ensure students' needs were known and accounted for—a total of ~50,000 personal devices.
5. Sending clarifying messages to principals on January 3rd that that they could send school devices home for a pivot to remote day.

Additionally, we worked within NYCPS and with our partners at NYCEM to improve our own internal communications and decision-making processes, to ensure we could have early and clear notifications to schools and families in the case of a remote day.

February 12—the day prior to the remote learning day

Once the decision was made on February 12 to pivot to remote learning, DIIT notified relevant vendors, including IBM and Nagarro for the Service Desk, to ensure they were prepared to support the hundreds of thousands of students, teachers, and central and support staff who would be logging on to learn and work the next day. We also held a meeting with superintendents to announce a weather-related systemwide pivot to remote learning the following day and to ensure districts were prepared for the transition. Superintendents were told to review the snow day closure guidance and to remind schools to send devices home with students who need them.

With regards to IBM, the DIIT team sent an email at 1:00 p.m. on February 12 indicating that February 13, 2024 would be a remote learning day for students, that we expected an increased load for user login authentications and to perform active monitoring. IBM acknowledged our notification soon after receiving the email.

## February 13—citywide remote learning day

On February 13, 2024, many NYCPS users—primarily students and teachers—were unable to log in to NYCPS systems at the start of the remote learning day. After investigation, DIIT determined that the issue was related to the user authentication services provided by the IBM Security Verify product NYCPS has been using for several years.

Overall, the issues began and were identified by DIIT around 7:45 a.m. IBM was notified at that time; IBM acknowledged receipt and investigated, and immediately began to work on a resolution, as did DIIT. After several corrective actions by both IBM and DIIT, the system appeared to be stabilized mid-morning. NYCPS systems, including the IBM system, operated without problems for the remainder of the remote learning day and since. Over 1 million students, teachers, and staff were able to log in to NYCPS systems on February 13.

While there is no definitive data about exactly how many students and teachers were affected, what we do know is that over 100,000 users were able to log in before 8 a.m., and between 15,000 to 40,000 users were able to log in every 10 minutes between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m., totaling over 660,000 users. By the end of the day, over 1 million students, teachers, and staff were able to log in to NYCPS systems on February 13.

The root cause of the issue was that the number of NYCPS users logging in prior to 8 a.m. to start their remote learning day exceeded the capacity of the system to handle that peak load.

On the IBM side, the actions they took included increasing the capacity of the NYCPS authentication services, along with adding more CPU processing power to one of their services and isolating NYCPS traffic to one server while moving all other clients to secondary servers.
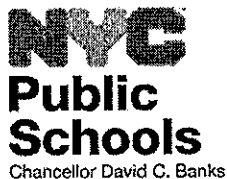
We also worked with IBM to turn off the alternative QR/picture-based authentication option, and have all users use the username/password authentication model. This option for younger children and special needs students was operating unpredictably under the peak load.

Following this first pivot to remote day, we were tasked with aggressively and accurately testing systems in the event of another systemwide pivot to remote. We know how frustrating it was for the many students and families who experienced delays when logging in for class and we are sorry we did not prevent this issue from arising.

What has happened since February 13

Since February 13, DIIT has been working closely with IBM to develop an immediate and longer-term plan of action to ensure that the problem we experienced on February 13 does not happen again on the next remote learning day. The immediate-term plan includes the possibility of staggered start times on remote learning days to distribute the peak load on the IBM user authentication service. DIIT successfully completed performance load tests on its staging environment which accesses an existing IBM pre-production IVS environment (400 transactions per second) provided by IBM for testing purposes. The objective of these tests was to establish measurements of the system's performance (performance baseline). This pre-production environment used by DIIT is a close replica of the live production environment. It is not yet an exact replica of the NYCPS production environment. Longer term, both DIIT and IBM are performing automated performance testing on their test systems to identify performance improvements that can be implemented to reduce the risk of overloading the system, even at NYCPS peak start-of-day volumes. In the past, while we had superintendents test in all their districts, we did not conduct a load test where all students and staff attempt to log-in at the same time; this would have been a substantial undertaking that would have disrupted school and/or families' and staff time at home. That form of testing is also not the industry standard in terms of testing – industry standard is automated load testing in a non-production environment, as noted above, similar to what we do in our other systems. We are continuing to consider the best way to test all of our systems going forward. As noted above, we are working with IBM to ensure we do all the automated load testing we can to ensure readiness.

We regret the problems caused by the issue with IBM's system capacity. We value IBM for their rapid and effective response to the problem and for being a longstanding partner that clearly prioritizes our students and families.

In conclusion, NYCPS and IBM recognize that the start of the remote learning day did not go smoothly, and both teams are working together to minimize the possibility of this occurring again in the future. Our students, families, and staff deserve better. We appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you.

**Testimony of the United Federation of Teachers
before the New York City Council Education Committee's
oversight hearing on remote learning failures in New York City public schools**

March 6, 2024

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the union's more than 190,000 members, I want to thank the New York City Council's Education Committee, especially Education Chair Rita Joseph, for holding today's public hearing on the failure of New York City to plan for and properly execute a pivot to remote instruction on Feb. 13, 2024.

That day's debacle cannot happen again. Let's review what happened.

Educators were ready with their virtual classrooms launched and lessons prepped. Parents, grandparents and caregivers took time that day to help their young children log on. Students showed up for class. Who wasn't ready? The New York City Department of Education.

And so when roughly 1 million students and adults attempted to log on within an hour window, the system collapsed. It was the virtual equivalent of children and educators showing up at a physical school building only to find the doors locked, the lights off and no information about where to go or what to do.

The DOE and its vendor, IBM, did eventually manage to stabilize the system. By 12:30 p.m. that afternoon, 970,000 teachers and students had logged into their classrooms. It was a testament to the relationships between educators, their students and the city's parents that education continued.

- At PS/MS 124 in Ozone Park, 6th graders continued their research for their project on Egyptian gods.
- At MS/HS 223 in the South Bronx, students were able to log into remote classrooms because the school kept its own email accounts as backup to the DOE's.

- At the Manhattan Academy of Arts and Languages, high school students showed up for their first-period algebra class and hung in until the system stabilized.
- At PS 136 in St. Albans, all 30 5th-grade students in an ICT class — a class that blends special needs and gen ed students — came for a full day that included a morning read-aloud and discussion of "Sofia Valdez for President," math exploration, and kudos at the end for all their hard work.

The DOE and IBM will likely spend today's hearing subtly — or not so subtly — blaming each other for the collapse. Our job, and yours, is to get them to move past the blame game and to create a better process for the nation's largest school system to pivot quickly and effectively to a day of remote instruction.

We have the following general recommendations for what the DOE must do throughout the year to ensure that remote learning runs smoothly when it is needed:

Communication
- Streamline communication among the DOE, schools and parents to ensure families have up-to-date information on remote learning procedures.
- Provide clear, concise and accessible instructions on accessing technology platforms and participatory guidelines.

Internet Access (this should be done quarterly throughout the school year)
- Ensure schools have sufficient internet-enabled devices available for checkout in case of unexpected school closures.
- Provide families with guidance on accessing free or low-cost internet for eligible students.

Equity and Access
- Minimize the digital divide by offering a variety of learning materials and technology options that cater to students' different needs and preferences (including for the students in shelters).
- Identify and support students who cannot access remote learning through digital technology.

Remote Instruction Plan
- Update the existing Emergency Remote Instruction Plan, which must include methods for ensuring devices, internet access, special education and related services for students with disabilities and preschool students with disabilities.
- Clearly define expectations for staff regarding the balance of synchronous and asynchronous instruction during remote learning days.

Supporting Teachers and Staff

- Ensure teachers have adequate time for Other Professional Work (OPW) and parent engagement activities per their contract where appropriate.

In addition, we recommend that the district enact the following policies to avoid any future repeats of this recent meltdown:

Remote Pivot Policies:

- Make the decision to go remote as early as possible to give families and school communities the maximum amount of time to prepare.
- Immediately create and share a crisis remote learning management plan so that all stakeholders, including school staff, families and outside vendors, know what the process is when technical difficulties make it impossible to use the system as intended on a remote learning day.
- Run at least one true stress test of the system before a remote day is needed, including a full simulation of what would happen when all students and staff simultaneously log in and access the resources available.
- Expand the external capacity of the DOE to address technical difficulties and provide support without extensive reliance on external consultants.
- Ensure that when external consultants or companies are used, they are included in any stress tests or other technical checks of the system and that their contracts hold them fully accountable for any failures of service.

We will continue to need the ability to pivot to remote instruction for short periods because New York City will continue to be buffeted by snowstorms, flash flooding and the smoke of Canadian wildfires, to name a few recent emergencies. In addition, the New York City school calendar now recognizes some 18 religious, civic and cultural holidays. The calendar no longer has room for students to be off for "snow days" if we are to meet the state's requirements of 180 school days and not have students in class into July.

We need the flexibility of short-term remote instruction for emergencies. It is the DOE's responsibility to make the transition as seamless as possible.

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
MARCH 6, 2024

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Joseph and the members of the Committee on Education for holding this important hearing.

In 2020, New York City students experienced an unprecedented disruption in their learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time, the city's over one million students had to switch to virtual learning—and while this was necessary to slow the spread of COVID, we are still feeling the effects of this today. The sudden dependence on technology to access school deepened education inequities already present in our schools, with low-income students, students with disabilities, ELL students, and students in temporary housing the most impacted. These disparities were not unique to NYC: a report released last year by UNESCO, the United Nations' educational and cultural organization, found that this was a worldwide problem.[1] The disparity between those who have access to the internet and those who do not—known as the digital divide—existed long before the pandemic, but was laid especially bare when it determined which kids were able to go to school.

I want to applaud the city for providing hundreds of thousands of iPads and other electronic devices to students who needed them during remote learning. The pandemic forced us to address the fact that access to the internet and electronic devices have become an integral part of students' education, and the DOE now has a reserve of iPads and ChromeBooks to distribute to students who need them.[2] Still, many students went weeks or months without access to an electronic device or broadband connection during the pandemic, and troubleshooting technological issues was particularly difficult for families who do not speak English or have limited English proficiency. Additionally, the devices that students received during the pandemic are no longer WiFi enabled; WiFi ports and access were disabled in 2023 when those contracts expired.

Many students did not attend school at all for long periods of time during remote learning, and chronic absenteeism has been elevated since the switch to remote learning: for the 2020-2021 school year, the rate of chronic absenteeism was 41 percent,[3] and while that number has come

---

[1] https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/ed-tech-tragedy
[2] https://cdn-blob-prd.azureedge.net/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/emergency-remote-instruction-plan-092823.pdf?sfvrsn=c635752_6#:~:text=existing%20DOE%20contracts%20or%20coordinate.to%20students%20who%20require%20them.
[3] https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2022/9/16/23357144/chronic-absenteeism-pandemic-nyc-school/

down, it remains above rates prior to the pandemic. This cannot be entirely attributed to the way the city handled remote learning—many students are struggling with trauma experienced by the pandemic, and the transition from being isolated in their homes to returning to school is challenging. For students who lost connection during the pandemic, it can be difficult to re-engage them. But many students have been discouraged or left behind, particularly students with disabilities who did not receive all the compensatory services to which they were entitled during virtual learning, and ELL students, who were doubly isolated both by school closures and language barriers.

In 2020, then-mayor Bill de Blasio announced that students would have virtual learning days in lieu of snow days, a policy that Mayor Adams has continued due to the increased number of holidays on the school calendar. However, when the city experienced heavy snowfall last month and students were instructed to log in to school at home, the system crashed, leaving many students and teachers unable to log in to Zoom, Google Classroom, school email accounts, and even attendance tracking tools. It is concerning to me that, prior to the snow day issues, NYC Public Schools did not have a permanent Chief Information Officer for months. The DOE was also aware that they were already over their contract in TPS (400) for years and lacked an auto scaling contract necessary to do a fully remote day. While one day lost to technical difficulties is not the end of the world, COVID has taught us that we need to be prepared to provide our students with the best possible education in any circumstances.

Thank you.

Opening Statement of Vanessa Hunt,
Senior State Executive for New York, IBM Corporation –

Submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Education
Date: March 6, 2024

Chair Joseph, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today on a matter of great importance to all of us at IBM.

My name is Vanessa Hunt. I am IBM's Senior State Executive for New York. I have worked with the City of New York in many capacities for the past 17 years.

I would like to start by underscoring that IBM is a New York-based company and that for us, the New York public school system is more than just another client. For many IBMers, New York City Public Schools is the system where our own children learn and grow. We take our work for the city's school system personally, and we recognize the special responsibility that comes with delivering technology in support of nearly one million students, their families, and their dedicated educators.

The New York Department of Education uses IBM Security Verify – or ISV – as its remote login and identity management system. It allows students and teachers to securely access the department's online resources, including its remote learning platform.

We understand how frustrating what happened on February 13th was to the school system's students, families, and educators. It would be a disservice to them not to identify the true root cause of this event, and it was not a failure of IBM technology. In fact, IBM has routinely supported this platform at levels far beyond what was designed, tested, and contracted.

Our contract, signed in 2019, established a simultaneous use threshold of 400 transactions per second – that's simply a gauge of how many users can login at any given time. In good faith, IBM has on multiple occasions increased the capacity of this system beyond the contracted levels—at no added cost to the DOE—to meet the school system's evolving needs.

ISV is like a secure door into the DOE's systems. Over time, by adding more users and applications behind that door, the department was increasing the number of people

trying to come through. Demand that was easily managed with 400 transactions per second in 2019 often required 1,000 transactions per second in recent years. We continued to highlight that demand growth to DOE while also supporting the system as good partners.

The department's use of ISV was simply not contracted to support nearly one million students and their teachers logging in at the same time. On February 13th, the Department of Education had a closet door when it needed a barndoor. At over 2,000 transactions per second, everyone tried to rush through that door at once. Balancing that traffic over time would have resulted in a better outcome.

Thanks to the strong partnership between DOE staff and IBM, the remote login issues were resolved, and the system successfully processed over one million logins.

IBM has taken additional steps in response to what happened on February 13th – namely, increasing the ISV login capacity to more than five times our contracted level and keeping it there. Our team has worked hand-in-hand with the DOE to put in place short and long-term solutions to ensure that the understandable frustration students and teachers experienced that day does not happen again.

I am very encouraged by the way our teams have come together over the past three weeks to learn and apply the lessons of this event. We have delivered to the DOE a detailed action plan with next steps that should be taken to ensure a seamless remote login experience.

Long-term, we continue to recommend that the school system transition to a dedicated, auto-scaling ISV solution, which can automatically throttle to meet the volume of user demand. We have shared with the DOE team that implementing this long-term plan will require updates to our contract for the school system's use of ISV. And we very much want to participate in any future snow day and remote learning drills or simulations.

IBM is proud to be a New York company, and I cannot stress enough how committed IBM is to our partnership with New York City and the New York City Public Schools.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our perspective. I am happy to take any questions.

###

Testimony on Remote Learning Failures in NYC Public Schools

March 6, 2024

To the Committee on Education:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MSEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

On February 13, NYC public schools held classes remotely due to inclement weather. The decision was announced the previous day, so that families had a chance to prepare. The larger plan the Mayor and the schools Chancellor have made for NYC public schools' ability to transition seamlessly to virtual learning when necessary has been in the works for much longer: Schools did a practice run of what a remote learning day would look like back in October, and in December, families were urged to make sure all of their school accounts were up to date, just in case of an emergency remote learning day. However, despite this preparation, when over a million students tried to log into class on February 13, many found they were unable to due to technological outages that were linked to the schools' virtual platforms. Preliminary data showed that school attendance dropped about 9% between Monday and Tuesday (from 87% to 78%, respectively), and a survey conducted by the Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE) revealed that many of the students who struggled to attend class that day were students with disabilities.

This survey included the responses of 753 parents of children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and revealed that only 53% of these students who attended a school in Districts 1-32 were able to access all of their classes. For students attending a District 75 school, that number was only 41%. 13% of students enrolled in a D1-32 school were unable to access any remote classes at all, as were 28% of students enrolled in D75 school. If pivoting to remote learning is going to become the standard when physical classroom presence is impossible, these numbers aren't acceptable.

However, while both disabled and nondisabled students experienced difficulty attending virtual class en masse, students with disabilities face a unique issue when it comes to remote learning: a student with an IEP is entitled to related services, such as occupational therapy or speech therapy. Those services are not necessarily offered remotely. According to this CCSE survey, 27% of students enrolled in D1-32 did not receive all of their related services remotely on February 13, nor did 36% of students enrolled in D75 schools.

Those numbers are unfortunate, not only because students missed out on the supports that allow them to fully engage with their learning material, but because this issue was not unexpected. In the 18 months that NYC public schools incorporated some form of long-term remote learning into class schedules, tens of thousands of students missed out on their mandated services, resulting in the filing of the federal class action complaint *Z.Q. v NYC*

Department of Education by Advocates for Children against the both the NYC and the NYS Departments of Education. The complaint states that the DOE failed to provide students with the technological devices and specialized instruction they are legally entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that adequate measures were not taken to ensure that virtual learning settings would be conducive to students with disabilities which make it difficult to sit still or look at screens for long period of time, and that the DOE did not provide adequate interpretation services for parents who speak a language other than English, which interfered with parents' ability to assist their child when they struggled with remote instruction. The complaint further states that students who experienced a gap in their education due to these missed or interrupted services could not depend on receiving compensatory services in a timely manner.

This complaint was initially filed in November 2020, and its 2022 dismissal was reversed in 2023. The DOE cannot say it did not anticipate challenges in providing students with disabilities with the supports they are entitled to remotely. Investments need to be made in providing resources for families whose children might face additional struggles with learning remotely. These include finding alternatives or compensatory options for mandated services that require a physical presence (like occupational therapy), providing more interpretation services, and investing in more hiring in special education in general (through expanding recruitment, mentor, and incentive programs), so that existing shortages of instructors and providers of related services are not further exacerbated by a change in learning environment. If a pivot to remote learning in emergencies, like the expected snowstorm on February 13, is going to remain standard in NYC public schools, figuring out how to provide related services remotely must be as much of a priority as sorting out the technical issues that prevented students from logging on in the first place, since both issues prevent students from participating in class, and students with disabilities are less likely to have that lost time made up to them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Email: msenack@cidny.org Phone: (917)-415-3154

EAST
FLATBUSH
CDC

2/27/2024

Education Committee
New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the East Flatbush Community Development Corporation to express our deep concern regarding the failures of remote learning in New York City public schools. As an organization dedicated to the well-being and development of our community, we have witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by students, parents, and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote learning has been a significant challenge for many families in East Flatbush, particularly those without access to reliable internet service or adequate technology. The lack of in-person instruction has resulted in learning loss, decreased engagement, and increased disparities in educational outcomes among our students.

Given the ongoing uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and the challenges of returning to full in-person learning, we strongly recommend that the New York City Department of Education provide parents with the option to enroll their children in a virtual learning program. This option would allow families to choose the learning modality that best meets their needs while ensuring that students continue to receive a high-quality education.

We believe that offering a virtual learning option would not only provide flexibility for families but also help address some of the issues that have arisen from the transition to remote learning. Additionally, it would ensure that all students have access to a safe and effective learning environment, regardless of their circumstances.

We urge the Education Committee to consider our recommendation and take action to implement a virtual learning option for parents in New York City. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you to ensure the success of our students.

Sincerely,

William Hazell
Deputy Director
East Flatbush Community Development Corporation
www.eastflatbushcdc.org

InsideSchools

New York City Council
Education Committee
Oversight Hearing on Remote Learning Failures
in New York City Public Schools
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair

March 6, 2024

Testimony of InsideSchools

Good afternoon and thank you Chair Joseph and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Natasha Quiroga and I am Director of Education Policy and InsideSchools, of The New School's Center for New York City Affairs. For twenty years, InsideSchools has served as a vital resource for millions of families throughout their children's K-12 education by serving as the one-stop-shop where NYC families, including immigrant families and newly arrived migrant families living in temporary housing, can better understand New York City public schools.

During the pandemic, InsideSchools supported families to navigate online learning and produced several reports on the well-documented digital divide and solutions to equitable remote learning for all children. Data shows that remote learning during the pandemic further increased inequities for our most vulnerable students. Low-income students of color in NYC experienced almost twice the learning loss of their white peers after the pandemic. Students in poverty were chronically absent at a rate of almost twice as high as their peers from families above the poverty line.

Unfortunately, the digital divide continues for the City's most vulnerable students, as displayed during the most recent transition to remote learning on February 13th. Families who struggled to access the internet and devices during the pandemic don't necessarily have access now. There are an additional 36,000 newcomer students living in temporary housing who didn't experience remote learning during the pandemic in NYC and are unfamiliar with the devices, software, and protocol used.

While some students were loaned tablets by their schools for the remote snow day, logging in still presented challenges. Many families struggled to log in despite waking up at 5am in preparation where they encountered error messages and lagging connections. 23% of the parents we surveyed said their children were unable to participate in remote learning that day. Some parents relied on help from other parents to eventually connect later in the day.

These challenges are compounded for newly arrived migrant children living in temporary housing. Wi-Fi is notoriously slow and unreliable in shelters. Children

have limited access to computers or any device and parents are unfamiliar with DOE technology platforms. During our workshops at shelters, InsideSchools has helped many parents create MySchools accounts and even email accounts. We also met a few mothers who don't have a cell phone. For these parents, how are they supposed to connect with the school or other parents if they have trouble logging in on remote learning days?

The lack of devices and technology also impacts the effectiveness of school communication with the most vulnerable families. Many families we help in shelters were unaware they had to apply to middle or high school. If parents don't know about this application process, an effort that DOE and schools spend months disseminating information and translating into multiple languages, how will they find out about remote learning on such short notice or get support the day of?

The environmental conditions of children who live in overcrowded households and in temporary housing further amplifies the disadvantage. Struggling to concentrate on online lessons is even harder in a small hotel room with siblings and parents. English learners face the additional challenge of navigating a remote learning system ill-equipped to support their needs.

Families need access to the technology as well as instructions and day of technical support on how to connect so their children can access remote learning. Beyond access and infrastructure, schools and teachers need sufficient support and professional development to teach effectively online. A sudden snow day does not allow for adequate lesson planning. Some parents also reported that their children's teachers were unable to log in, resulting in messages sent via Google Classroom and children completing homework packets offline.

Funding to support school and shelter-based staff to better support immigrant students and students living in temporary housing as well as funding for culturally and linguistically-responsive community-based organizations that can more effectively support our immigrant children when the system fails to do so are critical in ensuring equitable education for all. Investments in establishing a NYCPS Immigrant Family Communications System that supports the Office of Language Access and Marketing and Communications at the DOE to take into account families' varying levels of literacy and access to digital media would also help improve communications with families. We urge DOE to share their plan in developing future remote learning days and more effectively supporting the City's most vulnerable families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your interest and support of children, youth, and families in New York City.

Submitted by:
Natasha Quiroga
Director of Education Policy & InsideSchools
Center for New York City Affairs
The New School

Contact: quirogan@newschool.edu

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paullett Healy

Address: D75 community

I represent: ✓

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ellen Mc Hugh

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/6/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natasha Quiroga

Address: 79 5th Ave NY NY 10003

I represent: Inside Schools

Address: 79 5th Ave NY NY 10003

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

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Senack

Address: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ Brooklyn NY 11213

I represent: Center for Independence of the Disabled NY (CIDNY)

Address: 1010 Avenue of the Americas 10018

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kesi Gordon

Address: Queens NY

I represent: NYIC

Address: Manhattan, NY

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aracelis Lucero

Address: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ Bx NY 10473

I represent: Masa

Address: 2770 Third Ave Bx NY 10455

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

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor   ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: VANESSA HUNT,

Address: _____

I represent: IBM

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor   ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Intekhab Shakil

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor   ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Scott strickland

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

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

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Zeeshan Anwar

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Johel Placencia

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Randy Asher

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

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

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimberly Ramones

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emma Vadehra

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Danielle Dimango

Address: _____

I represent: NYCPS

Address: _____

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