

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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Monday, March 18, 2024

Start: 10:35 a.m.

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
James F. Gennaro
Jennifer Gutiérrez
Shekar Krishnan
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Pierina Ana Sanchez
Lynn C. Schulman
Althea V. Stevens
Carlina Rivera
Gale A. Brewer
Lincoln Restler

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

David Banks
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education

Daniel Weisberg
First Deputy Chancellor
New York City Department of Education

Emma Vadehra
Chief Operating Officer
Deputy Chancellor, Operations and Finance
New York City Department of Education

Seritta Scott
Chief Financial Officer
New York City Department of Education

Carolyn Quintana
Deputy Chancellor
Teaching and Learning
New York City Department of Education

Kara Ahmed
Deputy Chancellor
Early Childhood Education
New York City Department of Education

Flavia Puello-Perdomo
Chief of Schools
Community Sports & Wellness
New York City Department of Education

Tamara Mair
Senior Director Program Implementation
New York City Department of Education

Paul Thompson
Executive Director
Office of Arts and Special Projects
New York City Department of Education

Christopher Tricarico
Senior Executive Director
Office of Food and Nutrition
New York City Department of Education

Robin Davson
Deputy Superintendant
New York City Department of Education

Gina Romeo Pollina
Chief of Staff
Office of Safety and Youth Development
New York City Department of Education

Aimee Lichtenfeld
Director
Special Projects, Mental Health
New York City Department of Education

Jay Findling
Director
Emergency Readiness, Safety & Security
New York City Department of Education

Christina Foti
Deputy Chief
Special Education
New York City Department of Education

Mirza Sanchez Medina
Deputy Chief
Division of Multilingual Services
New York City Department of Education

Nina Kubota
President and CEO
NYC School Construction Authority

Cora Liu
Vice President
Capital Plan Management
NYC School Construction Authority

Kevin Moran
Chief School Operations Officer
New York City Department of Education

Scott Strickland
Deputy CIO of Strategy and Governance
New York City Department of Education

John Shea
CEO, Division of School Facilities
New York City Department of Education

Thomas Taratko
Chief Executive for Space Management
NYC School Construction Authority

Michael Mulgrew
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United Federation of Teachers

Henry Rubio
President
Council for School Supervisors
and Administrators

Donald Nesbitt
Executive Vice President
Local 372 DC 37 AFSCME

Donovan Swanson
Representative, Antonio Reynoso
Brooklyn Borough President

Arie Schaer
Junior, High School of American Studies
at Lehman College
Coalition for Asian American
Children and Families

Olivia Mok
Senior, Eleanor Roosevelt High School
Coalition for Asian American
Children and Families

Harpreet Singh
Senior, Stuyvesant High School
Coalition for Asian American
Children And Families

Haixin Wu
Junior, Manhattan Hunter Science High
School
Coalition for Asian American
Children And Families

Julianne Huang
Senior, Staten Island Tech
Coalition for Asian American
Children And Families

Kulsoom Tapal
Coalition for Asian American
Children And Families

Chaplain Sandra Mithcell
New Settlement Parent Action Committee
Dignity in Schools

Lexi Greenberg, Student
Restorative Justice Action Team

Angel Ramirez, Student
YA-YA and Dignity in Schools Campaign

Tina Zheng, Student
YA-YA and Dignity in Schools Campaign

Eman Gad
Policy Coordinator
Girls For Gender Equity

Adonte Dacosta
Junior, Manhattan Early College
School for Advertising
Brotherhood Sister Sol Liberation Program

Khin Mai Aung
Mid-Atlantic Executive Director
Generation Citizen

Christine Montera
Teacher and Dept. Leader, Social Studies
East Bronx Academy for the Future

Richie Morales, Student
Senior, East Bronx Academy for the Future

Maira Chugui Tenezara
Senior, East Bronx Academy for the Future

Emily Garcia
Senior, East Bronx Academy for the Future

Ambreen Qureshi
Executive Director
Educational Video Center
It Starts With Arts Coalition

Mously Thiam
Junior, Ellis Prep High School

Ilona Nanay, Teacher
Teachers Unite

Alexis Kirkman Palmer
Senior, Harvest Collegiate High School
Youth Leader of the Circle Keepers

Wellington Ballzuena
Student, Gregorio Luperon School
Brotherhood Sister Soul
Liberation Program

Juleka Mamhmoun
Sophomore, High School for
Environmental Studies
Organizer, Teens Take Charge

Chassidy Lucas
Student, Community Health Academy
of the Heights
Brotherhood Sister Soul
Liberation Program

Calvin Zhou
Sophomore, Brooklyn Technical High School
Organizer, Teens Take Charge

Abbie Watts
Director of School Food Advocacy
Community Food Advocates

Yusen Liu
Senior, East-West School of
International Studies
Youth Food Advocate

Ameera Sajjad
Sophomore at Francis Lewis High School
Youth Food Advocate

Univ Felipe
5th grader at PS 153
Youth Food Advocate

Lakeisha Felipe
Student, Community Health Academy
of the Heights
Youth Food Advocate

Assafaou Illassou
Sophomore, Clara Barton High School
Youth Food Advocate

Jared Alford
Freshman, Brooklyn College Academy
Youth Food Advocate

Faith Catherine Jones
Junior, Brooklyn Technical High School
Youth Food Advocate

Shirley Huang
Senior, Midwood High School
Youth Food Advocate

Faria[sp] Tahia[sp]
Junior, Long Island City High School
Youth Food Advocate

Kamora Salmon
Sophomore, United Charter High School
Youth Food Advocates

Leslie Gomez Rivera
(speaking for Joshua Fan)
Sophomore, Hunter College
Youth Food Advocate

Dhalilim Alban
Junior, Queens
Urban Youth Collaborative

Julieti Dela Cruz, Student
8th grader, Staten Island,
Make The Road New York
Urban Youth Collaborative

Kwasi Melendez
Junior, Brooklyn
Make The Road New York
Urban Youth Collaborative

Malik Mattison, Student
Senior, Brooklyn School for
Math and Research
Make The Road New York

Nicholas Rosario
Discovery High School, Walton Campus
Sisters and Brothers United
Urban Youth Collaborative

Ava Harris
Sisters and Brothers United
Urban Youth Collaborative

Nigella Gregorio
Junior, Thomas Jefferson High School
Future of Tomorrow
Urban Youth Collaborative

Aylin Frias
Student, Franklin K. Lane High School
Future of Tomorrow
Urban Youth Collaborative

Randi Levine
Policy Director
Advocates for Children of New York

Nickesha Francis
Emergency Coalition to
Save Education Programs

Maggie Moroff
Arise Coalition

Kadisha Davis
Parent
Family Homeless Coalitions

Caitlyn Passaretti
Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens Committee for
Children of New York

Gregory Brender
Daycare Council of New York

Kimberly Olsen
Executive Director
NYC Arts in Education Round Table

Annie Minguez
Vice President of Government and
Community Relations
Good Shepherd services

Rachel Forsyth
Good Shepherd Services

Elsie McCabe Thompson
Mission Society of NYC

Dr. Sonayi Beckles-Canton
Citywide Council for Special Education

Dawn Yuster, The Legal Aid Society
Staff Attorney, Education Advocacy
Project
Legal Aid Society

Melinda Andra
Director, Education Advocacy Project
Legal Aid Society

Nancy Bedard, Legal Services, NYC
Legal Services of New York City

Molly Senack
Education and Employment Community
Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled,
NY

Dr. Dennis De Guzman Caindec
Internationals Network

Natasha Quiroga
Director of Education Policy
Inside Schools

Lauren Melodia
Economist, New School
Center For New York City Affairs

Dr. Jennifer Cadenhead
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education
& Policy
Columbia University

Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education
& Policy
Columbia University

Safiya Raheem
Director of Advocacy and Communications
Harlem Grown

Turner Johnson
Chef for Wellness in the Schools

Janani Venkataraman
Chef for Wellness in the Schools

Anthony Spino
Chef for Wellness in the Schools

Allison Marino
Director of Public Affairs
Edible School Yard NYC

David Bartolomi
Director of Youth Development
Family Cook Productions

Briona Black
Executive Director and Lead Educator
Leap Better Foundation

Logan Vanhoutte, Student
2nd Grader, Brooklyn Brownstone School

Nora Moran
United Neighborhood Houses

Debra Sue Lorenzen
St. Nicks Alliance

Lulu Fogarty
Director of Education
Symphony Space

Michelle Kraus
Manager, Social Work and Intake Services
Disability Justice Program
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Steven Morales
New York Policy Director
All Our Kin

Michelle Noris
Parent

Debra Freeman
Four Freedoms Democratic Club

Megan Demarkis
Mixteca

Milena Mohica
Education Coordinator
Mixteca

Trenton Price
Executive Director
Salvadori Center

David Adams
Chief Executive Officer
Urban Assembly

Lori Cochran
Parent, New York City

Jennifer Choi
Founder
NYC Parents of Teens with Disabilities

Minister Sandra E. Hynson-Simpson
Parent and Grandparent, New York City

Herman Francis, Jr.
Former Community Board Member

Andrea Orzola[SP]
New York Edge

Jasmine Rosa
Brenda Vargas, NYC Citizen
Cynthia Suarez-Espinal, NYC Citizen
Christopher Rizzo, NYC Citizen
Greg Mihailovich, American Heart
Association

Virginia Diaz-Mendoza
Professor
City University of New York

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

Ryan Ford
Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program
College of Staten Island

Cristie Scott
Special Education Teacher
Burch Family Services

Smitha Milich
Senior Campaign Strategist for New York
City
Alliance for Quality Education

Olympia Kazi
Parent, New York City

Emily Hellstrom
Literacy Academy Collective

Tanesha Grant
Mother and Grandmother
Parents Support and Parents New York
Moms United for Black Lives

Venus Sze-Tsang
Parent, New York City

Cynthia Seiden
Principal
Birch Soundview School

Leslie Martinez
Parent, New York City

Paula Magnus
Deputy Director
Northside Center for Child Development

Paullette Healy
Disability Advocate

Lupe Hernandez and son, Nico
Parent, New York City

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Can I have
3 everyone's attention, please? Can I have everyone's
4 attention, please? Thank you. Good morning and
5 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
6 the Committee on Education. At this time, we ask
7 that you silence all cell phones and electronic
8 devices to minimize disruptions throughout the
9 hearing. If you have testimony you wish to submit
10 for the record you may do so via email at
11 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. If you require
13 translation services, they are available outside in
14 the rotunda. At any time during the hearing, please
15 do not approach the dais. We thank you for your
16 cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good morning. Thank you.
18 Good morning and welcome to the fiscal 2025
19 Preliminary Budget hearing for the Committee on
20 Education.

21 [GAVEL]

22 My name is Rita Joseph and I'm the Chair of the
23 Education Committee. This morning we will be
24 discussing the department's \$31.5 billion fiscal 2025
25 as presented in the Preliminary Financial Plan. This

2 afternoon, we will be discussing DOE's capital plan
3 with School Construction Authority. Thank you to
4 everyone present here and to those of you who are
5 testifying remotely.

6 New York City public school has the largest
7 budget amongst city agencies as \$31.5 billion, or 29%
8 of city City's overall budget of \$109.4 billion for
9 fiscal 2025. It also has the largest budgeted
10 headcount among city agencies at 138,016.

11 In the Preliminary Budget 2025, and as the Chair
12 of this committee, I continue to push hard for
13 accountability and accuracy to ensure that the budget
14 for the largest city agency actually reflects the
15 needs and interests of its residents.

16 The 2025 Preliminary Budget is \$24.5 million less
17 than the fiscal 2024 adopted budget. This seemingly
18 small gap fails to capture an important story that is
19 the heart of the need for our hearing today. While
20 the department's budget has grown over the past few
21 years, it did so with expiring stimulus dollars that
22 were intended to be used for short term programs
23 aimed at COVID recovery reopening schools. However,
24 New York City public schools use these time-limited
25 federal dollars to fund both longstanding and

2 underfunded programs. The short-term programs to
3 prevent learning loss and provide mental health
4 support services were crucial. And so the questions
5 now remain if we believe the need still exists for
6 investment in these programs. The answer is a
7 resounding yes.

8 While fiscal 2025 sees the exploration of \$1.9
9 billion in stimulus funds, the plight that the budget
10 has also been cut deeply by PEGs drastically
11 jeopardizing the department's budget. To think
12 funding education of students in New York City is not
13 an essential service that should not be immune to
14 PEGs please city wide is preposterous.

15 Altogether, the department's current and out year
16 budget was cut by \$3 billion over the last two fiscal
17 plans this fiscal year. The impact is felt this
18 school year when food items started disappearing for
19 menus. Community Schools are scrambling to determine
20 what services could be sustained and what couldn't.
21 Schools began restricting after school service as per
22 diem and procession reductions were placed. It was
23 reported that several district 75 schools serving
24 students with special needs were digging deep for
25 supplies to serve their students.

2 The fact that our school system is in this
3 position today is absolutely unacceptable to me. In
4 the meantime, the department failures to provide
5 obligated services has been inflating budget, yet New
6 York City public school is still struggling to
7 provide these mandated services to students.

8 Between the last two financial plans funding for
9 Carter cases has increased almost half a billion
10 dollars, with costs associated with lawsuits against
11 the New York City public schools for expediting
12 impartial hearing has further enlarged the expense.

13 This is all happening while the underspending in
14 District 75 schools even taken a PEG on less
15 anticipated spending. In the District 75 November
16 plan, the department had also cut back on the
17 expansion of early childhood to a total of \$170
18 million over the last two financial plans. It has
19 been The Administration's trend of cutting funds
20 since last fiscal year on the planned expansion of
21 the 3K Program which doubled in enrollment when more
22 seats became available with investment of stimulus
23 dollars in 2021 to 2022 school years. And although
24 the program has seen increased enrollment in the past
25 two years, this administration still contends that

2 vacancies exist. But the report that the city has
3 touted as necessary to see whether the seat can be
4 utilized is still not here. Even as a cut to 3K and
5 other early childhood programs are being made.

6 The fiscal budget is reduced by 1.8 in stimulus
7 dollars from the adopted budget, additions to the
8 cuts The Administration placed on DOE through the
9 PEGs. This set of cuts in City funds impact program
10 services by approximately \$708 million.

11 These reductions impact services such as early
12 childhood, community schools, preschool special
13 education, Summer Rising, restorative justice, mental
14 health for all, arts instruction, public school
15 athletic leagues, bilingual education, academic
16 recovery supports. I cannot emphasize how pivotal
17 these critical programs are for the well-being of our
18 students.

19 It is The Council's responsibility to ensure that
20 the City's budget is fair, transparent, and
21 accountable to all New Yorkers. It is essential that
22 the budget we adopt this year is transparent,
23 accountable, and reflective of the priorities and
24 interests of the council and the people we represent.
25 This hearing is a vital part of that process, and I

2 expect the DOE to be responsive to questions and
3 concerns of councilmembers. I look forward to an
4 active engagement with The Administration over the
5 next few months to ensure that the fiscal 2025
6 adopted budget meets the goals The Council has set
7 out. I would also like to acknowledge my cousins--
8 my colleagues that are here that are present today.
9 My cousins? I'll take y'all. I will take y'all!

10 [LAUGHTER]

11 Councilmember Louis, Councilmember Dinowitz,
12 Councilmember Schulman, Councilmember Gutiérrez,
13 Councilmember Restler, and Councilmember Lee.

14 I'd like to-- Now I'd like to turn to our first
15 witness panel. I will turn to the Committee Counsel,
16 Nadia Jean-Francois to administer the oath. Thank
17 you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Good morning,
19 everyone. We will now hear from The Administration.
20 Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation.
21 Panelists, please raise your right hand. I will read
22 the affirmation once and then call on each of you
23 individually to respond. And all the people here for
24 question and answering with DOE can also raise your
25 right hand please. Thank you.

2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
3 and nothing but the truth before this committee and
4 to respond honestly to Councilmember questions?

5 Chancellor David Banks?

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Dan Weisberg?

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Emma Vadehra?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Seritta Scott?

12 CHIEF SCOTT: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Kara Ahmed?

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: I do.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Flavia Perdomo?

16 MS. PERDOMO: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Carlyne Quintana?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Paul Thompson.

20 MR. THOMPSON: Yes.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chris Tricarico.

22 MR. TRICARICO: Yes.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Robin Davson?

24 MS. DAVSON: Yes.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Gina Romeo?

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25

2 MS. ROMEO POLLINA: Yes.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Aimee Lichtenfeld?

4 MS. LICHTENFELD: Yes.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Tamara Mair?

6 MS. MAIR: Yes.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jay Findling.

8 MR. FINDLING: Yes.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much You may
10 begin your testimony.

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Okay, good. Good afternoon
12 and thank you Chair Joseph and members of The
13 Council's Committee on Education for inviting me to
14 testify today about the fiscal year 2025 Preliminary
15 Budget. I'm joined by First Deputy Chancellor Daniel
16 Weisberg, Deputy Chancellor of Operations and
17 Finance, Emma Vadehra, and Chief Financial Officer,
18 Seritta Scott.

19 It has been a productive transformative year.
20 Since I last addressed you we launched New York
21 City's public schools' signature initiative, our top
22 priority, to build bright starts for our students,
23 NYC Reads. NYC Reads is a comprehensive approach to
24 literacy with-- with district-wide adoption of a
25 unified curriculum, aligned to the science of

2 reading, intensive Professional Development, and
3 Continuing coaching on the curriculum, academic
4 screening, and intervention and supports for students
5 at risk of dyslexia. This is the right approach and
6 long overdue. Reflected in the fact that we are
7 making this transformational change in deep
8 partnership and with the full support of our
9 educators and their representatives, the United
10 Federation of Teachers.

11 We are equally grateful to have the commitment
12 and collaboration of The Council of School
13 Supervisors and Administrators, and of our school
14 leaders who are essential levers in this systemwide
15 shift.

16 Phase one of NYC Reads launched this school year
17 across over 90% of our early childhood portfolio, and
18 in grades K to five across nearly half of our
19 community school districts.

20 Phase two will begin in September, by which point
21 NYC Reads will be active in all early childhood and K
22 to 5 classrooms across the entire city.

23 When our kids read well, it sets them up for
24 success in school, work, and life. And when NYC
25 makes big moves on literacy, the impact reaches far

2 beyond our five boroughs. We inspire cities and
3 states across the country to follow suit.

4 Once students have a bright start, we must put
5 them on the path to a bold future. We do that
6 through our college and career pathways work, which
7 we've expanded in groundbreaking ways that reimagine
8 the middle and high school experience.

9 Next year, we will expand the reach of our
10 signature Future Ready NYC program where students
11 prepare for high-demand jobs and healthcare,
12 education, business, and technology, with more
13 industry-focused areas on the way.

14 We've also doubled the number of students in
15 multi-year, employer-paid apprenticeships in
16 partnership with New York Jobs CEO Council.

17 We are bringing new, accelerated high school
18 programs to our families in historically underserved
19 communities, including Bard Early College high
20 schools in both Brooklyn and the Bronx, Motion
21 Picture Tech High School in Long Island City, and a
22 new Healthcare High School in 2025 in deep
23 partnership with Northwell Health, and with a nearly
24 \$25 million investment from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

2 And building these bowl futures is not reserved
3 for high school. Our Save for College Program with
4 NYC Kids RISE has expanded citywide to provide
5 savings accounts for college and career education to
6 over 200,000 students starting in kindergarten.

7 Of course, our children cannot benefit from a
8 bright start, nor prepare for a bold future if they
9 do not feel healthy, safe, and valued. This is
10 especially true for our most vulnerable students,
11 including the approximately 36,000 migrant students
12 we've enrolled through Project Open Arms.

13 In partnership with DHS, DOHMH, and others, we
14 supported students' academic transition, social and
15 emotional well-being, language access, physical
16 health, and much more.

17 Our schools have done a phenomenal job welcoming
18 these students into our classrooms and caring for all
19 involved. As I visited schools across the city, it's
20 been deeply uplifting to see the ways that teachers,
21 school leaders, parent coordinators, and all of our
22 school-based staff have truly opened their arms, as
23 have their peers. These individuals are the real
24 heroes of this story, and they represent New York
25 City public schools at our best.

2 And these students are getting the extra support
3 thanks to our revised Fair Student Funding formula,
4 which has added \$100 million to support students in
5 temporary housing and schools serving high
6 concentrations of students with needs.

7 In 2023, the PEP voted on a new formula, the
8 first time in seven years that we substantially
9 revised it, and we did so in close collaboration with
10 parents, advocates, PEP members, and other
11 stakeholders.

12 We've also addressed safety and belonging in a
13 number of other ways. In January, I announced our
14 comprehensive plan to meet the moment, and ensure
15 every student and staff member feel safe and
16 supported in NYC public schools, especially in light
17 of rising antisemitism and Islamophobia. We took a
18 critical step in our professional learning work just
19 last week, with citywide training for principles on
20 how to lead conversations on difficult subjects, and
21 how to apply our discipline code in fair and
22 effective ways. We are also ensuring all of our
23 students feel seen and heard in our schools'
24 curriculum. And just recently, we launched Volume
25

2 One of our newest Hidden Voices series, the stories
3 of the global African diaspora.

4 To support our students' mental health, we have
5 added daily mindful breathing, additional school
6 based mental health clinics, and Teen Space, an
7 innovative new telehealth therapy program with the
8 city's health department. And we've also expanded
9 Project PIVOT, which has brought in trusted
10 community-based organizations to support violence
11 prevention, and social emotional learning at 257
12 schools.

13 To continue this learning year-round, we've
14 offered full day summer programming two years in a
15 row to an unprecedented 110,000 K to 8 students in
16 our wildly popular Summer Rising program, and we've
17 already opened enrollment for summer 2020 for more
18 than a month earlier than last year.

19 And importantly, all this work has been grounded
20 in deep family and community engagement. Consider
21 our support for students with disabilities: Last
22 year, we formed an advisory council to reimagine
23 special education, which recently delivered its
24 recommendations, including more specialized programs
25 closer to home. In parallel, we expanded our

2 incredibly in demand and highly effective AIMS, Nest,
3 and Horizon programming for students with autism.

4 Our efforts have produced results. Our 2023 test
5 scores grew 12 percentage points in math in nearly
6 three percentage points in ELA, outpacing gains in
7 the rest of the state, and reducing gaps between
8 black and Hispanic students and their peers.

9 We also saw our first enrollment increase in
10 eight years. New York City public schools, students,
11 and families are feeling the positive momentum. We
12 are absolutely heading in the right direction.

13 Now, let me speak about our finances. Our fiscal
14 year 2025 Preliminary Budget total totals
15 approximately \$39 billion, which includes \$31.5
16 billion in operating resources, and another \$7.5
17 billion for education related pension and debt
18 service funds.

19 We are grateful for the recent good news that
20 there will be no further PEGs this budget cycle, but
21 I want to be very transparent. We have already faced
22 a series-- a series of previous PEGs, and we face
23 challenges ahead.

24

25

2 First, we are still working to implement the
3 significant budget reductions from the November and
4 January plans.

5 In addition, we have our stimulus cliff. Almost
6 \$1 billion of stimulus funding currently supports an
7 array of essential programming, including social
8 workers, community schools, pre-K special education,
9 3K, arts programs, students in temporary housing
10 coordinators, pathways programming, bilingual
11 education programs, and much more. These are hugely
12 popular and successful programs, and our students and
13 families will feel the impact if they are
14 discontinued.

15 And lastly, as you know, from our recent hearing,
16 with the Education Committee, we have the challenge
17 of implementing the class size legislation. At full
18 implementation, we estimate \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion in
19 additional teacher costs alone. And that's on top of
20 what we already spend in our schools. And the
21 independent Budget Office estimates \$1.6 to \$1.9
22 billion annually. Compliance will also incur tens of
23 billions in additional capital costs. We recently
24 received recommendations from our Class Size Working
25 Group on how to best implement the law. But no

2 matter how you slice it, there will be serious trade
3 offs.

4 City tax levy money is our largest source of
5 revenue, in FY 25, projected to be at 58%. So, to
6 that end, I want to recognize The Council's critical
7 role in our city's budget process, as well as your
8 advocacy at the state level on behalf of our schools.
9 We welcome your continued advocacy for additional
10 resources from city, state, and federal sources. We
11 will also need your engagement along with the
12 engagement of all of our community stakeholders on
13 how to allocate our finite resources. We want and we
14 need to hear from you. What are your programmatic
15 priorities? But just as importantly, what do you
16 believe we should stop supporting at the current
17 levels if we do not get the additional funding?

18 This notion that we can maintain all of these
19 excellent programs without any tradeoffs is, in my
20 judgment, unrealistic. It's a math that I'm really
21 not familiar with. I believe in being very
22 transparent with our school communities, and I'm very
23 open to your suggestions on how we should navigate
24 the impact of our multiple compounding budget
25 challenges. We all must grapple with these tough

2 choices if we're going to continue to advance our
3 mission for students and families.

4 So, in closing, please know my administration's
5 open door policy is not just a slogan. We value your
6 ongoing partnership and participation in providing
7 the students of New York City to high quality
8 education they deserve. We all are champions for our
9 children. And we must work together.

10 So thank you, and I look forward to hearing your
11 question.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Chancellor Banks.

13 I'd like to recognize on Councilmember Shekar.

14 So my first series of questions is going to start
15 around early childhood, right? So first-- I know.

16 Before I begin my line of questioning, I also want to

17 acknowledge on the early childhood budget matter, I

18 want to acknowledge the fact that today we're not

19 sitting here worried about payments. So, thank you.

20 That was passed over to Deputy Chancellor Ahmed. And

21 we have not been hearing as much as we've been

22 hearing about payments. So, that's a good thing.

23 That's a positive. Thank you.

24 This question is for Deputy Chancellor Emma. I

25 have a question: Do you believe in the value of

2 impact of Early Childhood Education, particularly for
3 working families?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I do.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: According to reports,
6 right?, New York City public schools will be
7 insinuating \$170 million cut in early education
8 spending. Is that correct?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: The impact of the
10 January and November planned PEGs was \$170 million.
11 Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Who decided that Early
13 Childhood Education needed to be cut by \$170-- \$170
14 million?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Those were PEGs that
16 came from us-- to us from OMB. As you know, all of
17 the PEG process is a constant back and forth across
18 it. But that's where it came from.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you produce a report for
20 my committee on evidence that you've also submitted a
21 new need request to OMB to reverse the \$170 million
22 cut? If not, why didn't your office submit a new
23 need request to OMB?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We are in a constant
25 series of conversations with OMB about all of our

2 budget needs for this year and next year, throughout
3 the-- throughout the process, which we have been
4 going through and are continuing to go through.

5 As you know, for next year, we do not have a
6 budget yet. We look forward to getting our budget
7 from the City and the State in terms of overall
8 funding, and are very eager to get as many of our
9 PEGs as well as our stimulus programs funded through
10 that process.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Let me say, Chair, before, if
13 I can also. The cuts that are being affected in
14 early childhood are extremely hurtful to the entire
15 enterprise of early childhood. And I want you to
16 know that we share the concerns of anyone around
17 early childhood.

18 This is a major priority for us. I have
19 personally been in deep conversation with The Mayor
20 and The Mayor's office around Early Childhood. And
21 maybe this will prevent a whole series of questions
22 that remain. But I am fighting like heck to make
23 sure that those cuts are restored, and I have great
24 confidence that in the coming weeks, we will have
25 really good news around Early Childhood. The Mayor's

2 office, City Hall, feels the same way. And this
3 notion that we are going to have these cuts remain in
4 place to the detriment of our community and our
5 parents who need it so desperately-- this is a
6 priority for me. And so while I cannot tell you
7 definitively today, we're still waiting for our
8 Accen-- the Accenture report, which we expect the
9 first week of April. From there that will provide a
10 lot more clarity around the seats. Deputy Chancellor
11 Ahmed can speak to that part of it, if there are any
12 questions around that. But at the end of the day,
13 New York-- The parents of New York City are waiting
14 to see if these cuts are going to be restored. I'm
15 fighting for that to happen. And I believe that is
16 exactly what is going to happen in the coming weeks.

17 So I can't say much more than that right now.
18 But I'm very confident that we're going to resolve
19 that issue.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But Chancellor, I have
21 another question for you.

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Sure.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If data is supposed to
24 inform decision, you still don't have the Accenture
25 report, how could you go ahead and make such

2 decisions to cut Early Childhood, when you were
3 waiting for the very report to make that decision?

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No, I--

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Make that make sense for me.

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right? Yeah. No, it is--
7 it's been a very tough process, as you know, with the
8 Accenture report, where we stood with the Accenture
9 report. We had hoped to be able to have that process
10 move along, but we were-- we were informed by OMB
11 that we had to-- to affect these PEGs that were sent
12 to us. And-- And I think-- And that has been a
13 challenge. It has been a challenge. It has been our
14 best ability to try to determine numbers without
15 having all of the data. So, it is what it is. But
16 we are now, waiting now to have much more clarity
17 which we expect to have over the next couple of
18 weeks. So, we can-- we can argue about what happened
19 in the past. I'm telling you, I'm very focused on
20 what's coming over the next couple of weeks, when it
21 will be much clearer where we stand. And I expect
22 for Early Childhood to be able to stand strong when
23 this process is over.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I understand that but
25 several times The Administration testified before me,

2 and it was always about, "We have many-- too many
3 seats, with misallocation seats." That was usually
4 the case. Not, "Let's cut it." I don't have data to
5 cut it, but it was always about misallocation.

6 So can you guys-- Is that correct? That's what
7 you told me on several occasions that it was
8 misallocation of seats, versus cutting it, as two
9 different things.

10 CHANCELLOR BANKS: It is it is a complex issue in
11 terms of that. We believe that there is in fact--
12 that it has in fact been a mass-- misallocation of
13 seats. So, we still stand very firmly by that. And
14 when the report from Accenture comes out, we'll have
15 a much greater degree of clarity around that.

16 But nonetheless, we were informed by OMB that we
17 had to place these PEGs in order. And that's where
18 it-- that's where it came from.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But you have a history of
20 shifting seats versus cutting. See shifting seats,
21 the seats-- the seats would still exist, but just
22 somewhere else. Cutting them is meaning that they
23 will no longer exist for the families that need the
24 seats. That's what I'm alluding to.

2 So, there's a difference in shifting seats, and
3 then there's a difference in cutting seats.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I understand. Absolutely.

5 And so I think-- [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED:]

6 Deputy Chancellor, do you want to speak to that at
7 all, in terms of what our position has been with
8 respect to the shifting of the seats, number one, [TO
9 COMMITTEE:] And then I'll speak to the cutting.

10 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Yeah, absolutely.

11 And good morning. Good morning, Chair Joseph. Yes,
12 that has been our position, and that's what we've
13 been doing. And so, nobody's wanting data more than
14 myself to make these decisions, and we've been
15 looking forward to that, but we haven't waited.

16 So, our team has used any piece of data that
17 we've had, and really drawing on the voice of our
18 program, and our program leaders, and our school
19 leaders to make incredible shifts so that families
20 have seats in the immediate. Through that work,
21 we've been able to reduce the oversaturation, right?,
22 the misallocation of seats by over 8,000, and shift
23 7,000 seats within that so that families benefit,
24 whether that be converting unused pre-K seats to
25 toddler seats, or unused toddler seats to 3K seats

2 based on what the needs are of the community. And
3 that work absolutely has to continue.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that was all-- You did
5 that based on waiting for the data in order to move
6 these seats around? Okay.

7 First Deputy Chancellor have a quick question for
8 you. Does the office-- Does the Office of Student
9 enrollment report to you?

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes, they do.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You He previously stated in
12 hearing before me that every child that needs 3K seat
13 can get a seat is that correct?

14 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I don't know
15 if that was exactly my testimony. What I have said,
16 and what we continue to hold to is every child-- what
17 we are trying to do is make sure that there are seats
18 for every child that needs one.

19 As you know, particularly when you talk about
20 Early Childhood location matters a lot. So, you may,
21 as a parent, want a particular program that may be
22 filled up, you may not be able to get that program
23 which is a half a block away. But we will always
24 endeavor to give you as programs-- placement as close
25 as possible.

2 So, I want to be clear. It doesn't mean that
3 every parent who applies gets their top choice. But
4 the-- our goal is always to make sure that we provide
5 a choice to every family.

6 So, why does the enrollment office, which reports
7 to you, caution parents during enrollment process
8 that they may not receive an offer to a program due
9 to limited availability of a seat, which results in
10 being placed on a waitlist? Does being on a waitlist
11 guarantee you a placement instead of program?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Being on a
13 waitlist does not guarantee you. What we're trying
14 to be sure parents--

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But in your testimony,
16 you've always said, "3K. If you apply for a seat,
17 you'll get a seat."

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: If you apply
19 for a seat, you will get a seat. You may not get--

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But you just said--

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --the seat in
22 the program. Uh, I was a trial lawyer for a long
23 time. I can do a lot of cross-examination Chair.
24 We-- We are letting our parents know that they may
25 not get a seat in the program that's the top choice.

2 That's-- That's responsible, to let parents know--
3 We don't want parents thinking you apply to one
4 program, you're definitely going to get that
5 particular placement, although many times they do,
6 but we will get you a placement as close as possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So last summer, when offer
8 letters were sent to families, there was a waitlist
9 for 3K and pre-K families. If yes, what were those
10 numbers?

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I don't have
12 it in front of me, but we'll get you numbers for the
13 waitlist. To be clear: you asked about
14 misallocation of seats. There were waitlists in some
15 places, in some zip codes. In other zip codes, there
16 were empty seats, unused seats. That is what Dr.
17 Ahmed is talking about, shifting that--

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But how do you know there--
19 how many seats there is if they're being waitlisted?

20 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Well, we know
21 how many seats are available in a particular zip
22 code.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I just asked so you said
24 you'll get back to me.

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: You asked me
3 about the number of people on the waitlist.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. How many. Yes.
5 Correct.

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: That's
7 different than the number of seats, right?

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No.

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: It's not?

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, I asked you how many
11 parents-- if you can tell me how many-- There was a
12 waitlist for 3K and pre-K, right? So, what were
13 those numbers? How can you cut or put people on
14 waitlist if you don't know how many seats you have?

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Not only do we
16 know how many seats we have--

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah.

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --we supplied
19 that to you.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. You said you'll get
21 back to me on that.

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: No, no, let me
23 be very clear. I guess I'm not expressing myself
24 well. You asked for the total number of people on a
25 waitlist, and I don't have that in front of me.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The total number of the
3 waitlist and the total seats you have available.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: The total
5 number of seats we have supplied to you by zip code,
6 by seat type, repeatedly.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many seats do we
8 have available?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: How many seats
10 do we have available in what seat type?

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 3K and pre-K?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'll take a
13 look. I don't know if we have those numbers.

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Roughly 23,000 seats
15 combined.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Combined-- [TO COMMITTEE
17 COUNSEL:] Who's the next person.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Schulman.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Councilmember Schulman.

20 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you, Chair. Thank
21 you for this great hearing. Chancellor, good
22 morning.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good morning.

24 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: It's always good to see
25 you. And I just want to say that, you know, I want

2 to thank you and your staff for a lot of the things
3 that you've been doing. And, I also want to say our
4 kids only get one chance at a good education. So, I
5 have a couple of questions: One, I want to talk
6 about the Carter cases.

7 So-- give me one second. So, what-- what is the--
8 - I understand that the-- the budget amount for the
9 Carter cases has gone up substantially. So, it's
10 over a billion dollars now. Can you talk about the
11 details of that?

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yup. [TO FIRST DEPUTY
13 CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:] Dan, do you want to speak to
14 that.

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah, good
16 morning, Councilmember.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR
18 WEISBERG:] And then please just offer some
19 clarification. Because we've been hearing different--
20 - people have been using different numbers. So let's
21 offer some real clarification and a distinction in
22 those numbers.

23 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Maybe the
24 Chancellor wall will have Deputy Chancellor Vadehra

2 start with the numbers, then I can talk about the--
3 the drivers.

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, the number for
5 the-- what we call Carter cases, special education
6 cases, is \$1.2, almost \$1.2 billion for this year.
7 And that's the number we'll be talking about. [TO
8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:] Go ahead, Dan.

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And so,
10 councilmember, as you know, we say Carter cases, we
11 use that as kind of shorthand?

12 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Right.

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: There are
14 really two cat-- two big categories of cases, two big
15 categories of cases that are filed, due process cases
16 that are filed. On the one hand, you have cases
17 where parents are saying they can't get an adequate
18 placement in a New York City public school, they're
19 sending their child to a private independent school,
20 and are seeking reimbursement for tuition. That--
21 that number has increased, but relatively modestly.

22 Then you have the second category of cases, which
23 is a child who is in a parochial or independent
24 school, who is not seeking tuition, but is seeking
25 services. For example SET services, Special

2 Education Teacher services. Those cases
3 councilmember have exploded.

4 So, we have gone from several years ago, having
5 about 5,000-and-change due process cases. This year,
6 we received 23,000 of these cases. Again, the driver
7 has been that second category of cases where you have
8 parents who are seeking services for their children
9 who are in parochial or other schools. And that is
10 what we've been seeking to-- to address, because that
11 has spiked tremendously and it has driven those cost
12 increases you're talking about.

13 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. So that everybody
14 knows, we're talking about kids with special needs.

15 So, Chancellor last year, you had a Zoom call
16 with-- with members of The Council about trying to
17 lower the cost because we could use that money for
18 other things. And-- And it's very impor-- We-- So
19 we have-- So for example, in my district, which is
20 District 29 in Queens, the MELS school-- I mean,
21 there are-- there are places that have amazing,
22 amazing classes for D 75 students.

23 So, are we-- What are we doing to replicate
24 that? What are we doing to-- to try and drive down

2 the cost of these cases? Because every year they go
3 up.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Ultimately to drive
5 down the costs, we've got to expand on the wonderful
6 programs that you're talking about. We've begun that
7 process. We got a long way to go, if we want to see
8 significant reductions in that.

9 Christina Foti, who's on our team, has our
10 Special Education work, can speak a little bit more
11 clearly to-- to where we are with it.

12 CHIEF FOTI: Of course, we're-- we're committed
13 to replicating our high-quality programs, and are
14 well on our way. The Chancellor in his testimony
15 mentioned our work around reimagining Special
16 Education in the Advisory Council Report. One of the
17 major findings of the report was that we needed to
18 replicate these high-quality programs, just as you're
19 saying.

20 We are starting with-- with three pilots, where
21 we're going to be providing every kindergartener with
22 autism (and autism being our fastest growing and
23 largest growing education classification) with high-
24 quality, specialized programs. We have not been able
25 to do that in the past, and so this is very exciting.

2 We have waitlists, as you know, on these programs,
3 particularly our AIMS program, which is our-- Demand
4 is growing the fastest in that program. And so, for
5 every family that comes in, into those districts, we
6 are going to be offering them one of these high-
7 quality programs so that they do not have to seek
8 private school options.

9 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: So, can you get us a
10 list of where those pilots are, and what the what the
11 plans are?

12 CHIEF FOTI: Of course.

13 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: That would be-- That
14 would be great.

15 CHIEF FOTI: Of course. And I can tell you
16 quickly that it's districts 5, 12, and 14. And I'm
17 happy to provide more detail.

18 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: And so, D 75 schools are
19 not funded through Fair Student Funding, and their
20 school budgets are not as transparent as other school
21 districts.

22 [BELL RINGS]

23 D 75 parents are concerned they are not able to
24 look up their school budgets online, and are not able
25 to plan in the same way as General Education parents.

2 So, explain-- Can you explain why D 75 school budgets
3 are not available to the public?

4 Chair, thank you for allowing me to... Okay.

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Um, I really
6 appreciate the question. One of the recommendations
7 that came out of the Fair Student Funding group last
8 year was to figure out, actually, how to make all
9 school budgets transparent, which we deeply agree
10 with. I appreciate the D 1 through D 32 information
11 is online, but it's still not really accessible to
12 most people.

13 So, coming out of that we're doing a lot of works
14 to make D 1 through 32 school budgets more
15 accessible, which we'll be rolling out this spring,
16 and then we'll be turning to D 75 to do a version of
17 the same. It's a little complicated, so we're doing
18 it in phases, but we will be doing the same thing.

19 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: I understand.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And we think it's
21 really critical information for the community.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: If you could give a
23 timeline, like a year from now, seven months from
24 now, six months from now, whatever it is, that would

2 be helpful, so that we can tell folks in our
3 districts.

4 Chair, can I just ask one other question?

5 So, as the Health Chair (and Chancellor, you
6 mentioned, health is really important to our kids)
7 can you tell me how many full time-- Does every
8 school have a full time nurse?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: All of our schools
10 have full time nurses. We're meeting all our
11 mandated nursing one-to-one needs. And that is--
12 that is one of the critical investments we made with
13 stimulus dollars. Those costs are continuing to
14 grow. We're continuing to work with OMB to meet
15 them.

16 COUNCILMEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you. And we just
17 passed legislation to codify HealthyNYC, and we're
18 looking forward to working with the schools on
19 expanding that too into the school system and taking
20 care of our kids.

21 Thank you very much Chair for the-- for your
22 accommodation.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course. Councilmember
24 Dinowitz.

2 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair. Good
3 morning, New York City public schools. It's like
4 half the staff right here. There are a lot of you.

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: It's a big agency.

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I appreciate your
7 comments about meeting the moment, making sure our
8 students are supported. I want to ask a few
9 questions about those.

10 The citywide PD on difficult conversations for
11 principals: That was a mandatory PD?

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes, it was.

13 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: And did that extend to
14 the teachers as well?

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No, we did that for the
16 principals to start with, the school.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay, so--

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: With the principals, and then
19 they will in fact turn key to the to their teachers
20 in their schools.

21 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: We hope.

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, that's what we expect.

23 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: But did those difficult
24 conver-- That's a very generic thing, and we know
25 since October 7 there certainly has been an increase

2 in Islamophobia and antisemitism. Do those trainings
3 specifically, talk about the Middle East, and did it
4 specifically talk about antisemitism and
5 Islamophobia, and have conversations around that?

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So, it's a
7 good-- So, they touched on it. But these
8 conversations, you're exactly right, Councilmember.
9 These were the front-end training. We want to make
10 sure everybody is comfortable dealing with any manner
11 of difficult conversation. But, what we are-- what
12 we absolutely expect is, at the school level, we are
13 providing additional resources, content, and we will
14 provide additional training services as well,
15 specifically geared to Islamophobia and antisemitism.

16 We're looking at some of the providers that do a
17 great, kind of, objective job of digging into those
18 areas specifically. So, the idea is: This is the--
19 This is the first thing that the Chancellor says:
20 For the principal, the principal has to be
21 comfortable dealing with controversial issues.
22 That's what this training was about. Next step is at
23 the school level, providing a greater level of depth
24 around Islamophobia--

2 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I hope they're
3 comfortable, it's--

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: What was that?

5 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I said-- I said I hope
6 the principal will be comfortable in their
7 discomfort. Of course, I would think that the
8 trainings for difficult conversations would have
9 happened in their initial training on becoming a
10 principal, perhaps when they were pedagogues. I
11 would think at this point, months later, after
12 October 7, the need for conversation specifically
13 dealing with the rise in antisemitism and
14 Islamophobia we are seeing in our city and across the
15 world would be specifically addressed.

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Councilmember, I just-- let me
17 just say--

18 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I am going to-- I just
19 want-- I do want to ask one question about it: Is--
20 You have a quality review, rubric, you have a
21 Danielson rubric, you have lots of rubrics to use to
22 measure student, teacher, principal, school
23 performance. Do you have a rubric to assess the
24 success of these particular trainings and programs,

2 specifically as it relates to discrimination, acts of
3 bias?

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I can't say we
5 have a rubric.

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: But certainly
8 we are going to do an evaluation of the impact of the
9 training at every level.

10 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Right. So I-- The
11 assessment criteria will be a critical component to
12 know if these trainings are impactful, or in a worst
13 case scenario, or the fact may be perpetuating bad
14 stereotypes.

15 What has-- How many reported incidents of
16 antisemitism and Islamophobia in schools (that
17 includes student-to-student, staff-to-staff, student-
18 to-staff) have been reported since October 7?

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Let me get
20 you-- let me get you that one.

21 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. We'd have to get-- We'd
22 have to get back to you. Because-- And we can get
23 those specifics to you. We have issues of a wide
24 range of bad behavior that goes beyond Islamophobia,
25 beyond antisemitism. It includes homophobia. It

2 includes racism. It is a wide range of issues of
3 adults very often behaving badly. And so, it's not
4 just limited to those two, but we will get you to
5 numbers in terms of what we have.

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: And I don't mean to
7 downplay any others, but I think I think a lot of us
8 can agree that statistically-- and this is why the
9 data is important; I don't want to downplay any sort
10 of hate at all--

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Please.

12 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: --but statistically, I
13 think a lot of-- there's a consensus that the forms
14 of hate that I am referencing have seen a stark
15 increase since October 7, and that's why the data is
16 important.

17 As the Chair mentioned, data-driven
18 conversations, data-driven instruction, is what we do
19 in our schools. We expect it here in The Council as
20 well.

21 These trainings that you provide to the
22 principals, I will note that we did get a commitment,
23 I believe, last October that these trainings would be
24 shared with us? To date, they have not been, whether
25 that's with respect for all trainings, DEI trainings,

2 they've not been shared with us. But is there a
3 person-- Is there a Title 6 coordinator at the
4 Department of Education handling both the training
5 and the-- the reporting of these incidents?

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: There is
7 absolutely a Title 6 coordinator who is definitely
8 receiving the data. That's not the same person who's
9 organizing the trainings though.

10 [BELL RINGS]

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. The trainings are--
13 The trainings are essentially organized by our Deputy
14 Chancellor for Leadership, Danica Rux. But any other
15 information, we'd have to get back to them on.

16 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: But we're
17 happy to share the content. I mean, we're happy to
18 share the content of the training with you, for sure.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Is that what you're asking
20 for, when you say sharing the trainings?

21 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: We've-- Well, we got a
22 commitment that you would share it. It's just that
23 it hasn't been done despite asking a number of times.
24 And part of the purpose of this, you-- I mean, you
25 were on that-- you were on that meeting. Part of the

2 purpose of it is to ensure that it is reflecting the
3 reality that we are in now to make it as robust as
4 possible and supportive for our teachers, principals,
5 and students as possible.

6 Has the-- Have these trainings been updated, and
7 have the Chancellor's regulations been updated since
8 October 7, or since the Biden-Harris Administration
9 announced their updates to Title 6 protections?

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: The
11 Chancellor's regulations have not been updated. The-
12 - Our office of our Chief Diversity Officer is
13 reviewing all trainings. There is no mandatory
14 implicit bias training at this point. But we are
15 absolutely reviewing the content for the optional
16 trainings that exist. And then as they say, we are
17 looking into specific training content relating to
18 Islamophobia and antisemitism. But we don't-- That
19 we haven't-- we haven't finalized yet.

20 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: All right. It's--

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And we-- Just
22 to be clear, we also, -- and I hope, I believe we've
23 shared this with the Council -- we have updated the
24 resources that we are providing to schools specific
25 to antisemitism and Islamophobia. We continue to do

2 that. We continue to want to work with you and
3 others to find, you know, really good high quality,
4 objective, accurate content that we can provide the
5 schools. Many of them are using it. I don't want to
6 don't want to leave the impression that we don't have
7 principals, and teachers, and guidance counselors who
8 aren't doing amazing work in this area specifically
9 on antisemitism. That is happening in part because
10 we're-- we are providing this content. But what
11 we're looking into his actual structured training
12 around it.

13 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I'm sure there are many
14 schools, individual schools that are doing a
15 wonderful job building community. And as we've seen
16 in-- in the papers, as I've seen on WhatsApp, there
17 are a lot of schools that are failing to meet this
18 moment. And at the top is the New York City public
19 school, the Deputy Chancellors and the Chancellors.
20 And I cannot stress enough the importance of this
21 moment, and how it feels that the urgency is not
22 felt.

23 The statements are wonderful, I feel that this is
24 a value that you share. But the work is not getting

2 down to the schools. And as a result, more and more
3 students and more and more teachers are suffering.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I would say this: I
5 would-- I would probably push back a little when you
6 say that, you know, lots of schools are not-- Any
7 school that has demonstrated any level of
8 antisemitism is too much, or Islamophobia, or any
9 other form of hate, is too much. This is a very,
10 very large system. We have 1600 schools. And so
11 when we see a percentage of schools that are
12 appearing in a newspaper, or we've got reports about,
13 we are dealing with that, and we are responding. But
14 I would not take that to suggest that there are a
15 majority of our schools where there is rampant
16 antisemitism or anything along those lines.

17 I think our school principals, and our
18 superintendents, and our teachers, quite frankly, are
19 doing a great job during a very difficult moment
20 where they are, in fact, affected by what is
21 happening all across this country. So, it is not an
22 easy time. We're working. We continue to work.
23 We've met with lots of different organizations who've
24 offered up a wide range of supports, and we're
25 looking at all of it. But, we have to do it in a way

2 that's reasonable and responsible, and it doesn't
3 just happen overnight. So, we are-- we're working to
4 get it right.

5 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: From-- to a trialer, I
6 do want to clarify, I by no means said majority, a
7 majority of schools.

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So--

9 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: But it is important to
10 clarify that it is a difficult moment, and we are--
11 our kids and our teachers are counting on all of you.
12 They're counting on you to provide the support. They
13 need the structure, the clear guidelines at this
14 moment in everything from Chancellor's regulations,
15 to support for Title 6 coordinators, to support for
16 this DEI training, and bringing in the affected
17 communities in a more robust way, and with more
18 urgency is what is needed at this moment.

19 And I know I have made clear for many months now
20 that I'm here as a partner, and we cannot be partners
21 if the information that we've requested is not
22 shared, if the data -- that is public data, by the
23 way, that should be public data -- is not shared.

24 And with that, I want to thank to the Chair for
25 the extra time on the clock.

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. And I want to follow up
3 with you as well, because it is unacceptable to me
4 that the information you're requesting is not shared.
5 And I want to make sure that we do immediate followup
6 on that with my team.

7 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember.

9 I'd like to acknowledge Councilmembers Brewer,
10 Sanchez, and Rivera.

11 Councilmember Lee.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Thank you Chair Joseph. I'm
13 on this side, sorry. I'm switching it up.

14 I had questions on three different topics. And
15 so I'll just ask them all at once and, you know, you
16 guys can answer accordingly.

17 So, I know my colleagues, some of them also will
18 be asking about school foods and meals and
19 everything. But I wanted to focus specifically my
20 question on the contracting process. Because I
21 remember in previous hearings, I had asked questions
22 about how many contractors there are for school
23 foods, I believe there was mentioned of three for all
24 of our students. And then I remember when I asked
25 what the timeline is for the RFPs, I believe it's

2 five years or three -- I can't remember -- renewals
3 for the contractors for the school foods.

4 And so I guess my question is around the
5 contracting, because is there an opportunity to open
6 it up to more different types of food contractors,
7 especially the ones that have transitioned from
8 GetFoodNYC, to be able to be competitive. And also
9 with competitiveness comes perhaps more diversity
10 regarding the types of food that is served, as well
11 as different costs that perhaps other meal providers
12 can do it at a lower cost. And, you know, just
13 because when I look at school foods across the US, as
14 well as different countries across the world, you
15 know, the quality, and the food, and nutrition that
16 other students are getting seem to be much better
17 than what we're offering in New York City. And I
18 know we're following the DOH guidelines about school
19 nutrition and all of that. But even with that, I
20 feel like we could be doing better as New York City.
21 So, that's my first sort of topic.

22 And the second one is Mental Health Continuum, \$5
23 million. We're good, right? Is that in the
24 executive budget? That's my question. Because of
25 course, I'm always thinking about mental health

2 services in schools, and I know traditionally on The
3 Council, we've put in that \$5 million and just wanted
4 to see if that could be added to the executive
5 budget.

6 And then finally, my last question is around D 75
7 schools. I'm just wondering about the budget,
8 transparency, and if there's a way to have that be
9 more transparent-- is it-- because my-- my-- also
10 thinking is that if we don't make sure that we're
11 using the D 75 schools wisely, in terms of their
12 budget, as well as putting more resources in versus
13 cutting it, it could also potentially add to more
14 costs with Carter cases and other things. So they're
15 all tied together. And so my question is: wouldn't
16 it be better to invest upfront, make sure that our D
17 75 students are getting the help they need in order
18 to avoid other costs later down the line?

19 So, if you could speak to that as well.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: On D 75 -- so, I
21 answered this a bit before -- we are looking at how
22 we can increase transparency around D 75 budgets. We
23 think it's really important. We're starting with D 1
24 through D 32. But we will move on to D 75. I
25 absolutely agree that it's a critical investment.

2 Our D 75 budget has been growing generally. But I
3 agree there is a-- which is reflected in the budget--
4 but I agree there's a lack of transparency that we
5 can continue to work on.

6 On food I'm going to-- I'm going to toss to Chris
7 over there. I will say just as a point of
8 clarification, and then Chris can talk about this
9 more, because it's something he works very hard on
10 every day, I think what you're talking about is the
11 distribution contracts, which is different from where
12 those distributors actually get the food from, where
13 we've been working hard to continue to diversify
14 those.

15 So, I think he can speak about that process and
16 some of the checks on it, and then I'm happy to take
17 followups.

18 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Yeah. So, if you could
19 actually speak to both, because I'm curious to know
20 about where the food is coming from as well as the
21 distribution of it, if you could speak to that.

22 MR. TRICARICO: Good morning, and great question,
23 Councilmember. Thank you. And Emma, thank you.

24 So, we do have three main distributors that
25 actually deliver our food, store food, and buy a good

2 portion of our food. We also have several other
3 manufacturers that we have contract direct
4 relationships with, that we send that food to the
5 distributors for them to store and deliver to all of
6 the schools that we service, not just the New York
7 City public schools, but also the charter and non
8 public schools that we service.

9 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: And how many are those?
10 Sorry.

11 MR. TRICARICO: How many--?

12 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: And are they subcontractors?
13 You said it's contracted directly, right?

14 MR. TRICARICO: So those are contract-- those are
15 all contractors. We have direct contracts with them.
16 The food that the food distributors buy, they have--
17 we have subcontractors that work for the food
18 distributors that we purchase the food from?

19 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay, and is there a way to
20 get a list of those?

21 MR. TRICARICO: 100%. I can provide that list to
22 The Council.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: And just roughly how many?

24 MR. TRICARICO: Uh, more than 30.

25 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: More than 30. Okay.

2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And I would just say
3 and so for example, that's where we've also tried to
4 increase MWBE spend and diversity that comes from
5 those subcontractors of the distributors in a lot of
6 ways, as well as some of the direct contracts.

7 On Mental Health Continuum: Not reflected in the
8 Preliminary Budget. Very much hope it's reflected in
9 the executive budget, which I believe is the same
10 process and timeline as last year.

11 CHIEF SCOTT: Or the adopted budget.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Or the adopted
13 budget.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay. And with my last 17
15 second, sorry, just clarification on the social
16 workers as well, in the schools. I've been hearing
17 mixed things from my principals and different
18 schools-- Like, I know some of them have shared
19 social workers across multiple schools. But, you
20 know, how possible is it to ensure that we're having
21 mental health providers in each of the 1800 schools
22 across New York City?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, at this point, we
24 have-- student's in all of our schools have access to
25 some set of mental health supports. That might mean

2 a social worker, that might mean a guidance
3 counselor, that might be a school-based mental health
4 clinic, that might be a CBO partner, and students in
5 all of our schools have access to one of those, but
6 not necessarily all of those.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Basically, just some form?
8 So in other words they have some access--

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I'm sorry, yeah. So,
10 students in our schools have access to some form of
11 mental health supports through one of those ways.
12 There's-- There's different ways that they're getting
13 that access. Yeah.

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But also--

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And we're
16 continually-- Oh, sorry.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. But through-- through--
18 But the stimulus funding, the stimulus funding that
19 is running out has been used to support-- [TO DEPUTY
20 CHANCELLOR VADEHRA:] How many of those?

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: 440 of the social
22 workers. Not the others.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right. So that's a challenge
24 there.

25 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay, thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember. I
3 just want to pivot off of that real quick. Um,
4 preschool special education: We understand this
5 currently hundreds of children waiting for seats in
6 their legally mandated preschool special education
7 programs. With the numbers continuing to rise,
8 providing these classes is not optional, yet the city
9 has not committed even to extending the \$96 million
10 average in annual investment made over the past two
11 years.

12 What is the current number of children waiting
13 for seats in preschool special education class today?

14 CHIEF FOTI: Approximately 600 students are
15 waiting for seats, Chair. However, we're doing
16 everything we can to arrange for services while they
17 await their seats, and understand that all-- all
18 students need their placement.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the timeline to get
20 these students in school. There was an announcement
21 that was made in 2023, along with the Chancellor and
22 the Mayor guaranteeing every child in 2023 will have
23 a seat.

24

25

2 CHIEF FOTI: Yup. So we've seen some-- some
3 progress via the contract enhancement. The
4 enrollment as you know--

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry. I need to swear you
6 in first.

7 CHIEF FOTI: Yes. I'm sorry, I forgot to remind
8 you of that.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No problem. Do you affirm to
10 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
11 truth before this committee and to respond honestly
12 to Councilmember questions?

13 CHIEF FOTI: I do.

14 And so I will defer to my colleagues on-- on
15 timelines specifically. But I-- But I can tell you
16 that we are doing all that we can on a rolling basis
17 to provide supports in the interim.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And going forward-- going
19 forward, these students will have a guaranteed seat?

20 CHIEF FOTI: I'm going to... [FIRST DEPUTY
21 CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:] She's asked me if there's
22 going forward...

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For preschool with special
24 education-- that's our Carter cases that we just
25

2 talked about, that's ballooned that \$2.2 billion
3 right now.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm sorry,
5 Chair. So, the question is: Going forward, do we
6 have a guarantee that we will have--

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For our preschool with
8 special education?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I mean-- I
10 believe, you know, Chancellor will jump in on this,
11 but that-- that's a-- We certainly hope so. That's
12 the goal. That's-- That's the step that The Mayor
13 took at that announcement in 2023. I think that that
14 is a-- ultimately a budget question. But yes, that's
15 certainly the goal we're driving towards.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And this is a year later.
17 What was the hope? Mm-hmm. Go ahead.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I think-- I think at
19 that time that that announcement was made, we had a
20 we had a handle on what some of those numbers were,
21 but those numbers have gone up since the time that
22 that announcement was made. And I think that has
23 been part of the-- the challenge that we that we had.
24 I think the Mayor said that-- we said it very
25 confidently at that time. But if you remember,

2 we've-- we've brought in thousands and thousands of
3 new students in a very short time period, which has
4 caused some of these numbers to go up, which has made
5 it more challenging for us to be able to actually to
6 meet that number.

7 The number that we were focused on at that time
8 was one that we thought we were reasonably going to
9 be able to make. But it has gone up dramatically
10 with the influx of migrant students, which has made
11 it-- That's part of what this challenge has been.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But that was prior to the
13 numbers of migrant students was coming in. This was
14 in the spring of 2023. We're going into the spring
15 of 2024. This is one year later. We still have
16 students at home. And this is the very thing we
17 talked about. These are the cases that will turn
18 into Carter cases because a lot of students did not
19 get mandated services.

20 Where are we are mandated services? Are they
21 getting them on a regular basis since they're not in
22 schools?

23 CHIEF FOTI: Well, in terms of mandated services,
24 our last report indicated that 63% of students in

2 preschool are getting services. On our school age
3 front we are-- we hit record high. We are at 90%.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The majority of the \$96
5 million went to contract enhancement to allow CBOs to
6 pay for their preschool special education teachers,
7 the same amount as the teachers in pre-K general
8 education classes. Given that vacancy rate is
9 already high among these positions, how will how will
10 New York City public schools ensure that it will meet
11 its legal obligation to provide special education
12 services if these teachers lose their enhancement and
13 see a salary decrease? That's where we talk about
14 our 4410. We made a big announcement around 4410.

15 CHIEF FOTI: Well, you know, we were able to fund
16 500 DOE-operated special class seats, which has
17 helped. That is outside of the contract enhancement.
18 That is what the New York City public schools have
19 added. As you know, we've also been able to add some
20 administrators on the-- who do the preschool special
21 education process, which has also helped here.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Where do we stand on the
23 4410? It was a one-time enhancement.

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: That is part of the
25 stimulus money that is running out at the end of this

2 year, and that will expire. And to your earlier
3 questions that the Chancellor responded to: We
4 absolutely met the goal of which we set out to do
5 back in 2022, which was to ensure that we had 800
6 seats based on the projected need at that time. We
7 exceeded that and helped to stabilize over 6500
8 seats, support pay parity, salary increases. But
9 absolutely, that is funding that will run out, and
10 those supports will look very different.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Chancellor, you started
12 talking to City Hall and OMB about the 4410
13 enhancements?

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely. It's all part of
15 the equation.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And now-- Do you have a
17 timeline on when you might have an answer?

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No timeline on it yet-- on it
19 just yet. Just know that these conversations are
20 happening behind the scenes on a regular basis. And
21 all of these things are very important to us. But as
22 you know, ultimately the budget that we are dealing
23 with here is-- it's a little-- it involves City Hall
24 as well. So, it's not just the budget that I'm
25 working with. They recognize the needs that we're

2 talking about. And so working behind the scenes to
3 try to get it done.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We want to make sure we
5 maintain that work sector.

6 Councilmember Restler?

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much, Chair
8 Joseph, and thank you Chancellor Banks and Deputy
9 Chancellor Weisberg, and the whole DOE team. My
10 mother told me to always start with a compliment, so,
11 I want to thank DOE leadership for partnering with--
12 with me and my office on a bunch of great
13 initiatives, when the Arab-- when the Arabic language
14 Arts and Cultural Program was under attack at PS 261,
15 the leadership at Tweed absolutely had the schools
16 back, and I appreciate it. You found a new home for
17 MS 915, one of the best middle schools in District
18 13. The DSF team has done a great job, and is doing
19 a great cafeteria upgrade at PS 34. You've partnered
20 with my office to fund us a safe passage program in
21 downtown Brooklyn to keep high school students safe.
22 And you're working with us in District 14 on a new
23 anti hate and antisemitism curriculum that we're
24 rolling out in a few middle schools later this
25 spring.

2 So, thank you on each of those front--

3 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I appreciate that.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: And many other good
5 things that you've been working with us on.

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: We can leave it at that, right
7 there, Councilmember, if you want.

8 [LAUGHTER]

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER. Sure. Done, done.

10 No, I'm just kidding. Now we're going to get
11 started.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Now we get started.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So I'm happy to hear
14 Chancellor that you're on our side and advocating for
15 restoration in funds for Early Childhood Education.
16 But I'll tell you after we've already experienced a
17 billion-dollar cut to early childhood in last year's
18 budget, and another \$170 million cut, mid-year budget
19 for the out years, I'm deeply concerned about the
20 future of Early Childhood Education in New York City.

21 You know, on the pre-K side, we've seen
22 enrollment is down 20% since pre-pandemic, for pre-K.
23 There's still 70,000 first graders that are going to
24 school every year in New York City, but we no longer
25 have 70,000 kids in pre-K, that's down to 58,000

2 kids, and 3K enrollment is half as many first graders
3 are in 3K as in-- are in 3K as in first grade. About
4 36,000 in 3K, about 70,000 in first grade. So, we
5 have a ton of work to do to actually get kids into
6 the seats. But when you look at the data, the
7 problem is, despite what The Administration has said
8 that there's going to be a seat for every kid and
9 family who wants one, in 19 of 32 school districts in
10 New York City, we had more applicants for 3K than
11 kids enrolled. Is that correct, Deputy Chancellor?

12 [INAUDIBLE]

13 In 19 of 32 districts in New York City we had
14 more kids apply than actually enrolled in-- than were
15 actually enrolled in 3K seats.

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: I don't have
17 application data. [TO FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR
18 WEISBERG:] I don't know, Dan, if you have.

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Well, you sent it to us
20 on Friday. So, we looked through it, I can tell you
21 that it's accurate. So--

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: I'm sorry,
23 Councilmember Restler. So, I-- The First Deputy
24 Chancellor oversees the Office of Student Enrollment.
25 That's why I defer to him to him--

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Please. I apologize. Go
3 ahead.

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: --to see the
5 application data. I did not but we could definitely
6 check on that.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Deputy Chancellor, do you
8 want to confirm that one for me?

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I trust that
10 you're-- I don't have a broken down by district. But
11 that may well be.

12 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So, in a healthy majority
13 of districts in New York City, more families are
14 applying for 3K than actually enrolling because we do
15 not have the seats. So, in those 19 districts where,
16 in a district like district 11 or district 12 in the
17 Bronx where 130% as many kids are applying as
18 actually enrolling, or 150% in District 12 are
19 actually applying as-- as enrolling, three kids
20 applying for every two kids actually enrolling.

21 What are we doing to expand seats? Isn't the
22 mid-year cut that you all just announced going to
23 mean that there's more districts next year that have
24 more kids applying than enrolling? That we have less

2 of an ability to meet demand as a result of these
3 cuts?

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: [TO DEPUTY
5 CHANCELLOR QUINTANA:] Do you want to tell him about
6 shifting seats?

7 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Sure.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: And is anything being
9 done to address the existing gaps where we're clearly
10 not meeting demand?

11 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Yeah, sure. I
12 continue to say, and I will continue to say, as I've
13 shared with you previously, and I just shared with
14 The Council this morning: Our team has continued to
15 do the work to shift unused seats. There were--
16 There was a misallocation of seats. That's what we
17 inherited. And we've been shifting them for about a
18 year and a half. That work--

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate that, Deputy
20 Chancellor, but that wasn't my question.

21 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Well-- So, to
22 answer your question of getting it to where there's
23 unmet need, that has absolutely been the goal. There
24 are-- There are completely an oversaturation of

2 seats in certain areas, and there's unmet need in
3 other areas. I'm not disagreeing with you.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Do agree that there--
5 You do agree that there is a significant unmet need
6 in many neighborhoods and communities around New York
7 City?

8 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: In various areas,
9 there are, and of different age groups.

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. Well, I do really
11 appreciate you acknowledging that. And it just makes
12 it further-- it just further undermines why-- the
13 Mayor's argument that we could afford another \$170
14 million in cuts after already cutting a billion
15 dollars to Early Childhood Education programs.

16 This is literally pushing working families
17 outside-- out of New York City, where they are paying
18 more in child care than rent, because they cannot
19 find 3K seats in their community, and I'm happy to--
20 I've offered-- The Mayor's happy to come to
21 Greenpoint and meet with my families who can't find
22 seats in our community. This has to be addressed.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I agree.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So, I will give you some
25 credit. You've improved significantly on the

2 enrollment rates for the school-based and the center-
3 based seats. That's a good thing. Where we are
4 doing abysmally bad are on the extended-- the
5 extended-year seats. And as every family in New York
6 City knows-- working class family in New York City
7 knows, you cannot work if you don't have a full day
8 seat to take your kid to. And so we're looking at
9 40% of seats, extended-day/extended-year seats, are
10 getting filled. What are we doing?

11 So let me-- Actually, can I just ask a couple of
12 technical questions on this? The current timeline
13 for families to be deemed eligible: Are you able to
14 provide us with a timeline on that? Is it within--
15 Are all families deemed eligible within 30 days, as
16 is required?

17 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: It is required by
18 the state for families to be deemed eligible within
19 30 days. Our office actually reduced a three-month
20 wait time when we got here down to two weeks on
21 average. So, that is-- that is not the barrier.
22 We're lifting barriers.

23 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: But can you tell us the
24 percent of families that are deemed eligible?

2 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: It varies. I
3 mean, it varies by, you know, timeframes.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESETLER: Okay.

5 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: It varies by peak
6 seasons--

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Can you give--

8 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: --but issue again
9 with EDY seats-- and I just-- you know, I've shared
10 this before, again: They need to be in the right
11 space. And so, I want to say thank you to Chair
12 Joseph and to The Council for the \$15 million that
13 was provided to extend hours before and aftercare of
14 school day, school year seats. Where there are not
15 EDY seats in this moment, where there is not year-
16 round programming, I couldn't agree more. Families
17 don't stop working at--

18 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: But Deputy Chancellor,
19 with all due respect, there are 13% of seats are
20 getting filled in District 16. One of the poorest
21 districts in Brooklyn, in Ocean Hill, Brownsville.
22 We're looking at-- There isn't a district in New York
23 City where you are reaching-- where you are filling
24 80% of the extended-day/extended-year seats. In most
25 districts, it's under 50%. So, we are doing a

2 terrible job at actually reaching out to families
3 and-- and helping them through the eligibility
4 process, and connecting them to full-day free
5 childcare and educational opportunity that they
6 desperately need. Right? Only 40% of the seats are
7 getting filled, and we are under enrolling in every
8 single district in New York City. So, to tell me
9 that it's a question of where seats are is not the
10 problem. The problem is we're not working with
11 families to effectively make it through the process.

12 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Yeah, I would
13 disagree with that, simply because we've seen such an
14 increase and such a change in the application
15 process, and the turnaround time, and the removal of
16 the long delays.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Well, I--

18 TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: And so we are
19 going to continue at that work. We're going to
20 continue to move seats where they're needed. We're
21 seeing a difference already with the-- over 270
22 children benefiting from having the EDY, or the
23 extension, I should say, of year-round, or extended-
24 day hours from The Council's money in different
25 districts where there was not a need.

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I have to tell you with
3 all due respect, truly Deputy Chancellor, I can hear
4 that there are some areas of improvement such as the
5 wait time. But every single district in New York
6 City: we're looking at significant numbers. In most
7 districts, a majority of extended-day seats are not
8 being filled. So, to say that we're doing well is
9 just not right.

10 What I would ask is you work with us. We're--
11 We're putting a lot of vouchers out into the world
12 for exactly the same population. Are we-- Can we do
13 more to enroll those kids into extended-day/extended-
14 year seats? We're doing a much better job with the
15 family childcare programs for the extended-
16 day/extended-year seats, of filling those seats. We
17 need to be doing it across the system.

18 This is a critical resource that we really deeply
19 believe in in The Council. That's why we put funding
20 into this year's budget.

21 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yup.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: But the numbers are still
23 showing that we are doing an abysmal job. And so,
24 I'd ask that you partner with us--

25 CHANCELLOR BANKS: We will.

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: --to help work together
3 so that we can address these-- because this is a
4 crisis situation that we have a huge unmet demand for
5 the seats, and the seats are going unfilled. So, I'd
6 love to work with you and your team--

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Absolutely.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: --to understand where in
9 the-- what the eligibility data actually is--

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: Absolutely.

11 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: --and how we can do more
12 to handhold our families to get them into the seats,
13 because the demand is so overwhelming, and the seats
14 are going unfilled. That doesn't work.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Let's do it. Let's do it.

16 We pledge to work with you. And immediately
17 after this hearing, we will reach out to follow up
18 with you right away.

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: All right. I'm sending
20 an e-mail right now.

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR QUINTANA: That's fine.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you Chancellor.

23 Thank you, Deputy Chancellor. Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember
25 Restler.

2 Councilmember Shekar.

3 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: Good morning. Thank you
4 so much, Chair Joseph. And good morning to everyone
5 here. Good morning, Chancellor. Nice to see you
6 too, and thank you for your testimony.

7 I would summarize it like this: I know my
8 colleagues have hit different points. I think, you
9 know, I would say first of all, I appreciate you all,
10 Chancellor, you at the top and everyone on your team
11 have been very responsive and communicative on
12 different issues that I've reached out about, that
13 our colleagues have reached out about. So, I
14 appreciate that very much.

15 I think the bigger frustration I have overall--
16 and I know Chancellor, you mentioned you got-- had
17 conversations with City Hall and the Mayor, is that--
18 is City Hall's, really, lack of commitment and
19 support for working families in this city. And one
20 of the best ways to show that is through our
21 education system. And the cuts that we're seeing,
22 and the different programs that are being affected
23 are things that in \$110 billion budget, of which
24 education is a third of that at roughly \$30 billion,
25 \$35 billion. We shouldn't-- These are programs that

2 you could easily find the money for if the will is
3 there. And I'm going to go through some of them.
4 But the biggest chal-- the biggest problem and
5 frustration I see is just these-- we are cutting from
6 all the different institutions and pillars that
7 support working families, Early Childhood Education
8 being the most fundamental. We know how crucial it
9 is. It's an investment for the future. And the fact
10 that City Hall and the Mayor can't see that, and it's
11 chip-- and they're chipping away at this is really
12 shocking.

13 And so, I know the conversations are happening,
14 and I appreciate that. But on that note, I'm going
15 to go through a few different things and programs
16 that are facing cuts, that the dollar amount is not
17 significant in the grand scheme of things, but the
18 investment is significant. So, I just want to say
19 put-- that's putting aside the whole 3K piece,
20 because I think that is-- that is the most glaring
21 from a value standpoint, from a financial standpoint,
22 glaring cut in this budget, and there are many for
23 when it comes to education.

24

25

2 So, putting that aside, because that's being
3 addressed as the number one, or you know, the-- the
4 most glaring issue.

5 First, let's start with school lunches. So, I
6 raised this, and I know Chair Joseph raised it too at
7 our OMB hearing. The cuts to school lunches. First
8 of all, on one note just seem completely silly. And
9 I saw it from looking at my school's lunch menu. But
10 not only are they silly, we're talking about how
11 serious they are. This is a time when the New York
12 Times reported the child poverty rate is the highest
13 it has been in a decade. One out of four children is
14 living in poverty. And at the OMB budget, hearing
15 the response to testi-- that my questions was-- and
16 Chair Joseph's questions was that kids are eating
17 more. That's why they're eating more. Because our
18 child poverty rate is so high. Now I appreciate
19 there's been a restoration of school lunches...
20 mostly. But there's still more to go. And so from
21 an administration that prides itself on healthy
22 eating, healthy living: What is the commitment?
23 What are the conversations with City Hall to restore
24 school lunches, that should never have been cut in
25 the first place?

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Yeah, no, listen. I--
3 I agree. It was-- It-- This issue became like
4 Foodgate, you know, which was-- It was-- It didn't
5 need to happen as far as I'm concerned, okay? And,
6 and I'm glad that it was just a temporary respite.
7 What's interesting about it, though, Councilmember: I
8 don't think it affected, you know, the ability for
9 kids to eat. All kids were still going to get a full
10 meal. We were talking about some very specific menu
11 items, which initially, when we put them on, I see a
12 lot of pushback from parents saying, you know, "My
13 child doesn't want these bean burritos," you know,
14 "You're going to make my child starve by putting
15 stuff like this on the menu." And then after a
16 while, everybody got used to it, and as soon as it
17 came off the menu temporarily, we started hearing,
18 like, you know, "Oh, my God, how could you take away
19 the bean burritos," and some of these other choices?

20 We were able to close the gap on that. We're
21 still working on it. I've-- But I don't want that
22 to somehow suggest that there's a child in our school
23 system that's going to go hungry. Because I think
24 there were about three menu items that were taken off
25 for a couple of weeks. We are fine. We've restored

2 most of them. And I think in the long haul, it'll--
3 it'll be just fine.

4 I think it speaks to a larger issue, though,
5 around what you're saying. I'm interested in hearing
6 the other things that you do, in fact, have on-- have
7 one the list.

8 But the good thing for me was: We heard from the
9 kids themselves across the city. And I will tell you
10 our process that we engage with our-- with our
11 office, really, that is led by Chris Tricarico, you
12 heard a moment ago: All the selections that we make
13 on our menu are driven by students. So, we listen to
14 the students. This is not just a bunch of adults who
15 determine what's going on the menu.

16 But I don't know that we spoke to the students as
17 we remove some options from the menu, and the kids
18 that their voices be heard very clearly. We-- And we
19 responded, and we're back on track.

20 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: Well, I hope to see, and
21 I agree: The loudest constituents you're going to be
22 hearing from, holding you guys accountable, are going
23 to be all the children of our New York City Public
24 Schools, as they did before. I heard it my home too.

25 But I think part of it is we're almost--

2 [BELL RINGS]

3 We're getting there. We're not fully restored.
4 But I think it's not just the availability of food.
5 It's that they won't eat it if it's not the variety.
6 I'm a vegetarian. My kids are vegetarian. We saw
7 cuts there too. And so, I think if we want to be
8 teaching our children about healthy eating and
9 healthy living, these initiatives have to continue.
10 And I hope to see the full restoration.

11 But let me run through-- Sorry, Chair, if I can--
12 - Just a few other cuts as well.

13 The-- We talked about obviously 3K. But I know
14 Chair Joseph talked about preschool special
15 education. So, that's a \$96 million cut. These are
16 our most vulnerable-- We're talking about early
17 education on most vulnerable students, and of that
18 subpopulation that is even more vulnerable.

19 So, what have your conversations been in talking
20 with The Mayor and City Hall about 3K and Early
21 Childhood Education about, specifically, as part of
22 that restoring the preschool special education cuts?
23 Is that on the table too in these conversations?

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, it's part-- It's on the
25 table. It's all part of the same broad conversations

2 that we're having, that these are our most vulnerable
3 populations. This is where we're hearing the most
4 from around this entire city. So, not just from The
5 Council, but we're hearing it as well. And I'm
6 making sure that City Hall is hearing it just as
7 clearly. They are-- They're also hearing it
8 directly.

9 So, that's why in my conversations with them-- I
10 cannot tell you definitively, but I will tell you I
11 feel very confident that a lot of these issues are
12 going to be solved for as they work together with The
13 Council to-- to make sure that we solve-- The issue
14 around 3K should not continue to be a problem for the
15 city in the wake of some of these cuts that we've
16 had, and I expect that some of that will be solved
17 for in the coming weeks.

18 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: Okay, to be continued.
19 The next one is on bilingual education. A \$10
20 million cut there. You know, my district, I'm always
21 a big vocal champion of bilingual education. But now
22 it's even more crucial with so many asylum seekers,
23 students, and families coming here too. And The
24 Mayor, at the same time is blaming asylum seekers,
25 while cutting all these social services including

2 bilingual education. So, what is the plan? Will
3 that be restored in the executive budget? Why was
4 that cut in the first place? And frankly, we need a
5 lot more than \$10 million for bilingual staff and
6 education in our schools.

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So bilingual
8 education along with special education, pre-K, were
9 both stimulus-funded programs. That the \$10 million
10 you're talking about, there's other money that goes
11 into bilingual education. But those are both
12 stimulus-funded programs. So, it's not that they
13 were cut, it's that they're part of our ongoing
14 conversations to try and restore funding for all of
15 those as we move forward.

16 I would just note, really, really proud actually,
17 of the work our schools have done to welcome our
18 asylum seeking students. And there's other pieces of
19 that stimulus list that are also really critical to
20 support those students, like our coordinators for
21 students in temporary housing, which are also
22 supporting those students, and which are also on that
23 stimulus list.

24 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: And I know there's a lot
25 more about-- about those issues as well. But I would

2 just say, you know, it's-- it's not enough and we
3 can't be in a world where we're throwing our hands up
4 in the air saying, "Federal stimulus dollars are
5 running out, and that's that," right? These are--
6 These are real investments that we should be making.
7 And so bilingual is a good example of-- we can't say,
8 "There's no federal dollars, we can't do it." This
9 should be something we're prioritizing, even before
10 the increase in asylum seekers coming here, always
11 should be prioritized in our schools, bilingual
12 education bi-literacy. But now it's even more
13 crucial.

14 So, I want to flag that as that's a really
15 important one for an administration committed,
16 supposedly, to these values. That's a really
17 important one to be-- Especially if we're placing
18 asylum seekers front and center, as The Mayor is
19 doing and blaming them. This is an investment to
20 actually support asylum seekers and families among
21 all New York City students.

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: You know, Councilman, the only
23 challenge that I do have here, and I agree with you.
24 I've got a list here, as you all have as well, around
25 all of these programs that have been funded by

2 stimulus dollars. And figuring out now how do you
3 put them into a space with-- where they're supported
4 by sustainable dollars is-- is not an easy deal. But
5 it but it's a full list, including community schools,
6 SCH coordinators, school nurses. I mean, it's a full
7 list. Every one of them deserves to be supported.

8 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: No, I-- Right. Right.

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But you're talking about the
10 tune of billions of dollars that I'm not sure--
11 unless we're getting more help from the state, where
12 it's going to come from. If we had the dollars--
13 I'm not trying to cut any of these programs.

14 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: And look, I-- Generally-
15 - I know that, and I believe that, but I think that
16 is a-- Well, we need to see-- There's a role for
17 every level of government to play in this, no doubt.
18 But there is-- That's the conversation with The Mayor
19 and with City Hall to have is exactly-- I do believe
20 with the numbers we're talking about, the programs,
21 and the budget of the Education Department, that if
22 The Mayor has the will to invest in these programs,
23 City Hall can do it. And I think that is a
24 conversation which you are having with City Hall but

2 need to continue. These are things where, if the
3 intention is there, they can be funded.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But we're--

5 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: I'm short on time. I
6 just want to go through this.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Okay.

8 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: Sorry. It's just my
9 last two final things is Operation Backpack is a
10 program that provides backpacks and supplies for
11 students in temporary housing. I believe-- I could
12 be wrong on this number. I think it was like a
13 \$250,000 contribution from DOE. But that was also
14 cut. And so is-- what is the intention to restore
15 that? Why was it cut? Is there a discussion to put
16 that money back in, to provide backpacks and supplies
17 to students?

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, I'm not even I'm not
19 exactly sure. The backpack program, I'm not exactly
20 sure where that is. But we can look into that and
21 get-- and get back to you on that. But I-- [TO MS.
22 PERDOMO:] Flavia. Are you familiar with the
23 backpack?

24 MS. PERDOMO: Good morning, Councilmember and
25 Chair. What I can say is that I believe that the

2 specific programs that you're flagging was funded
3 through the Department of Homeless Services.

4 However, we have continued to work with providing
5 school supplies, backpacks, even as of recently
6 through the Students in Temporary Housing Team, we
7 deployed school supplies across multiple districts.
8 So I'm happy to talk to you more, but know that they-
9 - these resources are still coming and are being
10 provided through the DOE fund, and through also
11 stimulus funding at this point.

12 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: And thank you for the
13 information. Although I wish that program hadn't
14 been cut. I would just looking at all of these, you
15 know: Backpack school supply program, bilingual
16 education, preschool education, school lunches,
17 right? We're talking about all of these safety net
18 supports for families, for immigrant families, for
19 working families in our education system that are
20 being cut or under attack.

21 And so again, it goes back to what I said at the
22 beginning. It raises some very serious questions
23 about this administration and this City Hall's
24 commitment on these issues.

2 The last thing I'd just mention is the Urban
3 Advantage Program is-- it has not been caught, but I
4 want to flag it as something that DOE should continue
5 to support. It provides science training, education
6 -- STEM is so important -- teacher certification and
7 training. I add that to say: It's not being cut,
8 but these are all things that we'd like to see
9 restored, continued, and supported, because you're
10 fundamentally supporting working families in doing
11 so.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I would just say, just to wrap
13 up, but I know that the Chair is getting ready to
14 shift to someone else, I would simply say this: The
15 Mayor is not Mr. Mean. He's not here, just like, "I
16 want to just randomly cut programs." What he is
17 working with the reality of the dollars that he has
18 to work with. And-- And so am I. And so, at the end
19 of the day, what I do welcome the most is, as I've
20 heard-- I've heard Chair Joseph say many times, is
21 working together to encourage the State and the
22 Federal Government to continue to, you know, provide
23 additional dollars. Because you can pick any program
24 and say "it's only \$250,000", "it's only \$3 million",
25 how big-- you know, how much-- how-- you know, how

2 effective is that when you talk about the whole
3 budget?

4 But at some point, that \$3 million means
5 something. When you when you start to put all these
6 programs together, you're talking millions and
7 millions and millions of dollars that effectively we
8 do not have, and they were fund it by the stimulus
9 dollars which were always temporary dollars. And the
10 notion that somehow or other, those billions of
11 dollars will go away and we-- we shouldn't have to
12 make any adjustments? We should still just be able
13 to make it happen, because He's The Mayor. It's just
14 not realistic. We've got to-- We need to fight for
15 more dollars. That's-- That's the bottom line as far
16 as I'm concerned.

17 COUNCILMEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Um, thank you,
19 Councilmember.

20 On the state funding, the governor's budget
21 provides \$250 million additional for school aid. The
22 Senate and Assembly: One House supports providing
23 \$130 million more. What are your plans for that
24 additional dollars?

2 CHIEF SCOTT: How you doing? So we-- Once the
3 adopted budget happens, we'll actually be able to
4 make a set of decisions about how the funding is
5 going to be used. But until then, until the enacted,
6 we don't know how much is actually going to come to
7 New York City. So, we just have to wait for the
8 enacted budget.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Have you been working with
10 the State to help fill in the gaps that the federal
11 dollars will be leaving behind?

12 CHIEF SCOTT: We've been having conversations
13 with the State as well, in terms of the federal
14 stimulus dollars that are leaving is leaving our
15 budget.

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I would just note, as
17 you know, the amount of increase they're talking
18 about is nowhere close to the amount of the stimulus
19 cliff we actually face for next year. We're glad to
20 see that it looks like the inflation adjustment that
21 the Governor proposed has-- is not-- does not appear
22 to be what the legislature is moving forward on,
23 which would be an additional \$130 million for New
24 York City public schools kids, but it still gets
25 nowhere close to the size of the stimulus cut.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Keep lobbying.

3 Councilmember LOUIS?

4 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Madam Chair,
5 good to see you Chancellor, and your Dream Team.

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: It's good to see you as well,
7 and I appreciate your leadership on what's happening
8 in Haiti right now. I've been seeing you out there.
9 And those students in our schools matter deeply to us
10 as well. And-- And I salute you and what you've been
11 doing to call the attention to that part of the
12 world, which has not gotten nearly enough attention.

13 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Right.

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And I very much appreciate
15 what you're doing.

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you for that. I look
17 forward to your continued partnership with that, as
18 well as me and Chair Joseph trying our best to
19 support Haiti.

20 All right, I'm going to ask questions about
21 school. And I'm just preparing you and your team for
22 the short questions.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Sure.

24 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: School lunch in central
25 Brooklyn, initiatives on student retention, and

2 school psychologists and family workers. And the
3 last one will be on restorative justice.

4 So, the first one is in regard to the Admin's
5 response to an incident in my district and in
6 neighboring areas regarding spoiled moldy food that
7 was served to-- to students. I wanted to know what
8 steps were taken to address the negligence to protect
9 scholars that participate in the school food program.
10 How was the-- How has the Admin communicated with
11 parents on-- Sorry, how has the Admin communicated
12 with parents, and what will the communication and
13 messaging be moving forward to gain back the trust of
14 parents who have children in schools (and this is
15 particularly high schools) that participate in the
16 school food program? And did the November PEG impact
17 the school food budget and the quality of food that's
18 served to students?

19 This next question is about school psychologists:
20 What is the budget for school psychologists and
21 family workers in FY 24? And how does that compare
22 to FY 25? And how much stimulus funding is there
23 remaining in FY 24 for these particular positions?

24 And this question came from a principal that is
25 watching right now and taunting me on this.

2 "Migrant children are allowed to register in city
3 schools but when they leave the city, they are not
4 leaving contact information so that we can discharge
5 children from schools, which affects attendance
6 rates? How can we assure that we can do right by our
7 migrant children, by making sure they are safe in new
8 cities and discharge them appropriately so that it
9 doesn't impact their attendance rates for the
10 schools?"

11 So that's from a principal in the district.

12 And can you provide an update on efforts to
13 improve school safety and security measures across
14 the district? That is because we don't have crossing
15 guards at three schools in our district, and we have
16 had children who were hurt or died fatally from car
17 crash-- a car crashing into them.

18 And the last one is: Can the Admin elaborate on
19 recent initiatives on programs aimed at reducing
20 dropout rates for high school students?

21 Sorry for the barrage of questions.

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No that's okay. You know how
23 to get them all in. Right. So the spoiled-- the
24 issue of the spoiled food: Chris, do you want to
25 speak about what happened there?

2 MR. TRICARICO: Thank you for the question,
3 Councilmember. We serve over 900,000 meals a day.
4 If there were any incidents or situations with food,
5 we investigate immediately and remediate immediately.
6 The situation in Brooklyn, we were there days after
7 we found out about the incident, but the staff on
8 site who is trained in food safety reported back to
9 us that there were no reported incidents at those
10 schools, even though there were press-related
11 incidents that came out.

12 I visited all of the schools actually last week
13 to inspect every single site, and every single site
14 visited did not have any issues with DOH violations
15 or any reports of DOH violations for the past couple
16 of years that inspections did happen.

17 The staff that we have, over 8000 of them, are
18 trained in food safety, and are responsible for
19 making sure students at every single school get
20 nutritious and delicious meals daily.

21 It's really important that we communicate with
22 school communities, which we do, we do that through
23 the principles at every single school. We make sure
24 that every single meal is looked, at every date is
25 checked on our products, and we're cooking at the

2 right temperatures. I would love to say that we are
3 trying to be perfect every day. We are. But when
4 incidents happen, we will make sure we take care of
5 it. But I want to just make sure that communities of
6 those schools and all schools understand that we take
7 food safety as the most important part of our job
8 every single day doing that to make sure kids are
9 getting the right nutrition.

10 As far as what was in the press, I cannot answer
11 to that. But I can tell you that the staff at all of
12 those schools made sure that kids were getting the
13 right nutrition, the right food, and looking at the
14 menu to make sure kids were being engaged about the
15 food that they were being given.

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: So, I appreciate the
17 response. It's not a good enough response. We have
18 pictures of moldy food that kids ate already. And no
19 one from the DOE ever followed up with these parents.

20 I did a walkthrough at the school last year,
21 November, the same issue happened at that time.
22 While we appreciate the change in menu and diversity
23 for food options, parents were not followed up with
24 after this incident. And we have asked for that. No
25 one ever followed up.

2 [BELL RINGS]

3 So, we have to create some type of system, that,
4 one, where we could communicate with parents to
5 address the issue and create trust. So, we have to
6 figure that out right away. This happened two weeks
7 ago.

8 MR. TRICARICO: I would personally follow up with
9 those parents. When we reached out to all of those
10 schools, we did not get any information about those
11 incidents, or--

12 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: I have the pictures, so I
13 could show you.

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: So we'll-- we'll working with
15 the Councilmember right away to do immediate followup
16 on that for sure.

17 On the school-- school psychologist question?

18 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Yes.

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, on school
20 psychologists, the specific breakdown for
21 psychologists we're going to need to come back to you
22 about. The stimulus money, just to say, that it is
23 supporting almost 100 psychologists. That money you
24 said, "Is that available this year?" That money will

25

2 be available throughout the rest of this year, but is
3 again on the list of stimulus cliffs for next year.

4 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: And--

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And we'll get we'll
6 get the breakdown for psychologists.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: The extra 100
8 psychologists. That is the expansion that DOE was
9 able to implement about a year and a half ago?

10 MS. LICHTENFELD: No, I don't think so.

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO MS. LICHTENFELD:] Is that
12 what we got?

13 MS. LICHTENFELD: Musical chairs. Sorry.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: No worries.

15 MS. LICHTENFELD: So, during pre-Covid-- One more
16 time. Pre-COVID we were able to add a cohort of
17 additional psychologists and itinerant co-
18 psychologists, which is, I think, the cohort you're
19 thinking about.

20 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Yes.

21 MS. LICHTENFELD: The stimulus funded
22 psychologists are our most recent addition, and--
23 that Emma was just speaking of.

24 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: That 100?

25 MS. LICHTENFELD: Yes.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: And will that be consistent
3 for FY 25?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: It's on the list of
5 stimulus-funded programs that we're continuing to
6 advocate for funding for.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Okay will support it.

8 CHANCELLOR BANKS: The question you had about the
9 migrants, and the discharges. Flavia?

10 MS. PERDOMO: So, I think I first will say that,
11 im, it will be great to like exchange information of
12 the school specifically. So, for that principal
13 who's watching so that she knows that she has a teen
14 here and at the district level that we can support.

15 So, the reality is: Provided that our student
16 remains in a school register, that is going to impact
17 attendance, and it's going to impact the rate of the
18 school. But in addition to that, to discharge
19 students, we have to adhere to both chancellor
20 regulation and state regulations. So, ensuring that
21 we, first and foremost, have a school where a student
22 has enrolled, if they have decided to move out of the
23 state is one of the provisions that we have to do to
24 ensure that the student is accounted for.

2 After a certain period of time, if we're able to,
3 like, track contact of the students, the school can
4 certainly go back, and in some instances you can
5 apply that discharge retroactively so that it has
6 less of an of an impact on the attendance.

7 So, I think if you're able to share the DVA, and
8 I can connect with you at the end, so we can work
9 specifically with that principle in partnership with
10 the superintendent to ensure that we're clear.

11 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Right.

12 MS. PERDOMO: But in terms of locating those
13 students, if they're concerned: We certainly have
14 attendance teachers. We also have the Students In
15 Temporary Housing Team--

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Right.

17 MS. PERDOMO: -who works with the shelter. And
18 then one of the things that we have done fairly
19 recently, with support of The Administration, is we
20 have created a new MOU with Health + Hospital, and
21 HMH, and some of the places who are supporting the
22 HERRCs, which allow us to more easily exchange
23 information.

24 So, we should-- By all means, if a student was in
25 a school and is no longer here, be able to work with

2 our partners to figure out where that student is at
3 this time.

4 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: So, I'll connect with you--
5 I think the issue-- I think you just raised it, is
6 the attendance teachers. They're having
7 complications with that transaction. So, I think
8 that's where we need to-- to kind of fit in and see
9 how we could be supportive to attendance teachers to
10 grab that data.

11 MS. PERDOMO: Yeah, absolutely. And let us know.
12 But the attendance teachers in-house is not always
13 the person who's doing the discharge.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Exactly.

15 MS. PERDOMO: But happy to talk about each of
16 those and partner and continue to create clarity.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And Flavia, the drop out-- the
18 dropout question as well?

19 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: The programs that are being
20 implemented to address--

21 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Dropout prevention.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: --dropout rates so that
23 there's more retention instead of reduction.

24 MS. PERDOMO: So-- So, what I can say, in terms
25 of dropout at the high school level, I know that, you

2 know, a lot of the work that we're doing both in
3 terms of providing, like, virtual school, also
4 looking at alternatives for our students, whether it
5 is maximizing opportunities, such as, like, our
6 transfer schools who focus on over-age, under-
7 credited.

8 So, I don't think it's a single strategy, but
9 it's really looking at that individual student and
10 what their needs are.

11 But ultimately, in addition to that, there's like
12 that intersections between finding the appropriate
13 program for students and also working with our
14 attendance teachers to ensure that, if we do have a
15 student who ultimately decided that there's a true
16 forward path-- pathway for that student, so that at
17 the end, they have an alternative for their
18 education.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Okay.

20 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And then the question around
21 the school crossing guards. It's-- the crossing
22 guards, a lot of people think work for us. They work
23 for the NYPD.

24 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Right. We're aware.

25 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Okay, so--

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: But we need support from
3 DOE regarding--

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely. So, if you just--
5 let's-- let's follow up on that, and you let us know
6 exactly what you're talking about.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Mm-hmm.

8 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And we have some influence
9 there in terms of making sure that need-- that need
10 gets met.

11 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. Thank you,
12 Madam Chair.

13 CHANCELLOR BANKS: All right. But we'll
14 certainly follow up. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But every time, um, NYPD
16 come here, they say there's a shortage. So...

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, it is.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: There's a shortage in school
19 crossing guards because of salary.

20 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the majority of the
22 workforce is women of color. So, maybe we need to
23 start talking about contract and pay raises for
24 crossing guards in order to obtain them. Retention
25 is very important.

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'd like to acknowledge
4 Councilmember Stevens and Gennaro.

5 On school nurses, how many do you have that are
6 full time?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Do you mean full time,
8 or staff as opposed to contract?

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Full time. I'm-- The
10 contract question is coming.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Let me-- Give me a
12 second to find it. Hold on a second.

13 I need a second. Do you want to do the next one?

14 [10 SECONDS SILENCE]

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Do you want to go to next
16 question, or do you want to wait until she finds out--
17 -

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many are contracted
19 nurses?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: I'm getting both.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, it's a series of
22 questions, Chancellor. Do you want me to jump around
23 while she looks for it?

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Do you want to...?
25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'll call on councilmember
3 Brewer.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. On--
5 Let's start with Arts Education. How many schools
6 lack an arts instructor, certified, and what-- what
7 is this as a percentage? How many students are not
8 meeting their state mandated level of arts?
9 Obviously, we'd like to have a report. I just
10 remember years ago, I think the Bloomberg
11 administration actually had reports on a regular
12 basis about this issue.

13 And how much stimulus funding is expiring on Arts
14 Education? That's question number one.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Mm-hmm.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: On the school food, we--
17 Chris does a great job. I was at a high school
18 yesterday for one of their wonderful musical
19 programs, and all they did is talk about school food.

20 The kids don't like it, no matter what we do.
21 And so my question is: Does it need more money?
22 Does it need a variety? Does it need what
23 councilmember Lee suggested, different subs? And
24 what is-- And how many vacancies are in the school
25 food office? That's a question about school food.

2 I also want to know about school buses. You
3 know, the cost and percentage of on time? I know you
4 have a-- you're working with Via. Hopefully that's
5 helping, but I don't know.

6 I also want to understand the charter schools.
7 I'm not a big charter supporter, I'll be honest with
8 you. Everybody knows that. And I don't understand
9 why we have to pay them so much money. How much are
10 we paying them? Is there anything we can do about
11 that cost?

12 And then just finally, groups like YAI are owed
13 like \$12 million. So, just generally, how are we
14 addressing some of the issues regarding the
15 nonprofits that still need to be paid? I know you're
16 working on it, but \$12 million is owed to YAI. Thank
17 you.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: YAI. Well, Paul Thompson, who
19 has our arts office: Did you get the questions up
20 front on the arts?

21 MR THOMPSON: Yes, yes. Yes. Good afternoon,
22 Speaker Joseph and Councilmembers. The answer to
23 your question is that there are 307 schools without
24 certified arts teachers.

25 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: 307?

2 MR. THOMPSON: 307. Yes. Now, that should also
3 be understood in the context of-- based on the
4 2022/23 Arts In The School report, that 99% are
5 principals in elementary schools (one through five),
6 99% of principals in middle schools (that would be
7 six through eight), and 100% of high school
8 principals (nine through twelve), reported that they
9 were teaching at least one arts subject in their
10 building.

11 So, while there is a shortage of the 307
12 teachers, that's not to say that there are no arts in
13 those schools.

14 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So, that would mean they
15 have to have an outside organization working with
16 them. Is that what you're telling me?

17 MR. THOMPSON: That's exactly right. So, we have
18 a longstanding collaborative relationship to the
19 cultural arts partners and organizations in New York
20 City.

21 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I know every last one of
22 them.

23 MR. THOMPSON: Yeah, they're amazing. And
24 really, the experiment of Arts in New York City
25 public schools would not happen without them.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. I'm just saying, I
3 appreciate this information. I think that one group
4 working with, I don't know, 200 to 800 students is
5 just not enough. So, all I'm saying is: What would
6 be your cut to the Feds in terms of dollars? What is
7 that number if there is one? And what else are you
8 suggesting that we do for the arts? Because whatever
9 you're saying, it's just not enough. I see the
10 schools. They need more.

11 MR. THOMPSON: Well, I will go to my colleagues
12 when it comes to budget in relationship to the arts.
13 But what I would say is that it is our position:
14 Yes, absolutely. It would be ideal to have a
15 certified arts teacher in every single one of our
16 schools.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So, what are we doing to
18 do that? Is that the shortage of teachers? Or is it
19 budget? Or is it both?

20 MR. THOMPSON: It's both. I mean, one of the
21 things that we're doing within the arts office to
22 help support our schools is really help to support
23 principals in a way that we have not before.

24 So, principals have an incredible amount of
25 discretion. They do the hiring. They're also

2 responsible for the tenure process along with
3 superintendents with principals. So, our office has
4 set out with new programs to work with-- specifically
5 with principals so that we can best advise them on
6 how they're using the arts, to embed it in their
7 schools' instructional philosophies, just into the
8 bedrock of what they do, so that they're thinking
9 about the arts when they're hiring.

10 We're also working with principals to make sure
11 that they understand how to work and coach with
12 teachers while they're going through their
13 probationary period working toward tenure. And so,
14 for the arts office, that's where we have the most
15 window into helping support teacher retention.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay, does anybody know...
17 Go ahead.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. No, I was-- So on the
19 food, I'm going to suggest we do a road trip with
20 you, with Chris Tricarico, because--

21 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: We're going to go eat?

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, let's go eat. Yeah,
23 let's go visit some schools. Let's go eat.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: But we have to do it with
25 students.

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. No, with-- absolutely
3 with students. There are lots of schools where I
4 would go, and I've gone, and kids absolutely love the
5 food. So, I don't know. It's just one way they all
6 love it, they don't love it. But where we find that
7 kids are not satisfied and not getting what they
8 really think they need, let's-- let's follow up. But
9 we'd love to follow up, because I know you brought
10 this up several times we'd love to get out there.

11 [BELL RINGS]

12 Talking about your question on the buses: Emma,
13 real quick.

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, before we get to
15 buses, there's about \$41 million in federal stimulus
16 funding for arts this year. We're spending about
17 half a billion dollars total. And about \$41 million
18 is the federal money. \$25 million of that is going
19 out to schools for schools to spend on arts, and the
20 rest is some restorations. The previous
21 administration replaced some previously existing
22 programs supported by tax levy with stimulus dollars,
23 and so there's another \$16 million.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So that could be--

25 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: On busing-- Oh.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: --that could be cut. That
3 is what you're saying? Or...

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: That whole-- I mean,
5 again, we are advocating for none of this to be cut.
6 But the full amount is that \$40 million. And yes,
7 it's all federal dollars, federal expiring dollars.

8 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Expiring dollars.

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And then--

10 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Buses.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: --on busing.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Yup.

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So-- So, Via's great.
14 We're really proud of the work we've done to roll out
15 Via this year. It is now citywide. We have families
16 downloading the app and using it every day.

17 In the future, Via will allow us to look at on-
18 time arrival. Honestly, the first thing we
19 prioritized was families knowing where their kids
20 were. And so that's phase one, and that's what we're
21 doing. We're going to sort of move through the next
22 round of information for families, sort of push
23 notification for families about their bus coming, and
24 then it will comprehensively give us on-time

2 information after that. So, it's down the road, but
3 it's not available now.

4 We do get information from bus companies when
5 buses are late. But frankly, it's self-reported and
6 not very reliable, so we don't really rely on it.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So when do you think that
8 on-time--

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I need to double
10 check on the latest implementation plan, and we'll
11 get back. It's not for this fall.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So, it could be '25?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yeah. I'll double
14 check that. And the total spend there is roughly in
15 the \$1.7 billion amount for our transportation.

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: The charter schools question.

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes,
18 Councilmember. So, there's about \$3.2 billion.

19 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: \$3.2 billion.

20 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Where we're
21 essentially a pass-through. That's the, you know,
22 per pupil, essentially, that goes to-- to charters.
23 Then there's about \$235 million that is the rent
24 assistance for charters. That's about \$235 million.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: And that number is up from
3 past is that correct?

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: That number is
5 up. Again, you know--

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: How much--

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --as much as
8 you know--

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: She said how much is it up?

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Uh, year-over-
11 year, I don't know. Emma may have that. She'll pull
12 it.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So, what are we doing
14 about it? We just have to do it? Or is there
15 something we can do to say to the State that this is
16 not acceptable.

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: It's a
18 mandate. It's a state mandate. And the law
19 basically provides-- we either provide, or--

20 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: But we don't say anything
21 to the State, like, we don't-- "This isn't right."

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm sorry,
23 Councilmember.

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Do we say anything to the
3 State like, "This is not appropriate." Do we fight
4 this?

5 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Well--

6 CHANCELLOR BANKS: It's in the law. It's in the
7 law, and that's been-- that's been-- it's a
8 challenge. We are basically a pass-through. The
9 State says, you know, these students who attend these
10 schools are students who deserve supports just like
11 everybody else.

12 And that's part of the reason why we also try to
13 keep the charter schools in our traditional public
14 schools when we have space, because if we don't,
15 we've got to spend even more money to put them in
16 their own space.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Well, that's a whole other
18 topic, Chancellor.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's a whole other. Yup.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: That's a whole other
21 topic.

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: You mentioned something about
23 the nonprofits.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Yeah. YAI is old, and
25 there may be others. I just didn't know how you were

2 addressing some of the back-owed dollars to some of
3 these nonprofit. Why is \$6... \$12 million owed?

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm not-- I'm
5 not familiar with that particular nonprofit,
6 Councilmember, is this--

7 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay.

8 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Are they special-- that's
9 special ed?

10 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Special ed. Special ed.

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right. Right.

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah, so we've
13 gotten a number of inquiries. That, you know, these
14 typically are providers I talked about in response to
15 Councilmember Schulman, who were providing services
16 to students who are in independent parochial schools.

17 Those are driven by these due process cases.

18 Just to say: This is-- This is not as simple as "we
19 got an invoice from one of our contracts, and we
20 pay." As we heard about in Early Childhood, we've
21 smoothed out a lot of that. This is-- We actually
22 have to track it from the-- the judge essentially
23 ordering particular services.

24 So, just-- we'll look at this particular one for
25 sure, and get back to.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. YAI is a little bit
3 different, but you can definitely look at it. And I
4 do want to say thank you for briefing, Chancellor,
5 with the elected officials on a regular basis. Much
6 appreciated. And as I say at every hearing: DOE is
7 doing a phenomenal job with the migrant families.
8 Phenomenal. And obviously I go to all the Open Arms
9 meetings. But I want to say congratulations to the
10 parent coordinators, teachers. Those students: We
11 want to keep them in the schools.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

13 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: They are making a huge
14 difference. There was one yesterday I saw that had
15 written a composition for an amazing musical right
16 there on stage. Just done recently.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Wow.

18 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you appreciate that.

20 [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA:] If you want to give
21 the Chair...

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember.
23 You have my answers on the nurses?

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So the number of DOES
3 staff nurses is 684. DOHMH is 1071. And contract
4 nurses is 1523. And the-- the spends behind that, in
5 New York City public schools were spending about \$225
6 million, DOHMH \$42. And obviously, those bounce
7 around.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Let's go back to
9 transportation a little bit. How much are the
10 students impacted by the 60-day shelter who had to
11 move to different parts of the city opted to stay in
12 schools they were originally enrolled in? How many
13 have chosen to enroll in schools closer to the
14 shelter? How is DOE helping students on transport
15 from shelter to school? Is rideshare still in use?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So in terms of the
17 number of students directly impacted by the 60-day
18 rule, we'll have the best data on that once we fully
19 operationalize the MOU that was previously mentioned.
20 Because then we can ensure we can share data about
21 individual students between York City public schools,
22 the HERRCs, NYSEM, et cetera.

23 What we are seeing so far based on our estimates
24 is that it's a fairly low number of students who are
25 moving shelters and schools. Their are students

2 moving schools, and there are students leaving the
3 system, but the actual percentage of students moving
4 shelters and schools is fairly low so far. From our
5 estimates. We don't have the actual data yet.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you'll be able to get me
7 some concrete data, right?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Once we fully
9 operationalize the data sharing is when we'll really
10 know who has received the 60-day notice and ensure we
11 can tell where they're-- where they're going. Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's reported that Head
13 Start staff who work at CBOs and are part of DC 37,
14 DC 1707, Local 95 have lost their health insurance.
15 The City is part of that collective bargaining
16 agreement?

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'm not sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I guess you'll get back to
19 me on that.

20 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Give us that one more
21 time. I just want to make sure we got that real
22 quick.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The question is: It's been
24 reported that Head Start staff who work at CBOs and
25 are part of DC 37, DC 1707, and Local 95 have lost--

2 lost their health insurance. The city is part of
3 that collective bargaining agreement?

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED:]

5 Do we know that? Do we have that?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: [inaudible] While
7 we're not the employer of those staff members, we
8 certainly can look into that.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So what is the city going to
10 do to reinstate the health insurance of these staffs
11 immediately?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: That would-- Again,
13 those would be questions, I think, outside of New
14 York City public schools. But we can certainly look
15 into what information the Office of Labor Relations
16 and others have regarding the collective bargaining
17 agreement.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You'll make sure you keep
19 The Council in the loop as this happens.

20 We understand that negotiations between the City,
21 DC 37, DC 1707, Local 205, and the Daycare Council
22 for CBO teachers and staff working in Early Childhood
23 Education programs are ongoing. Does New York City
24 Schools support salary parity for this workforce to

2 match the deal that the city and UFT struck in June
3 of 2023?

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, it's-- all right. Yes.
5 We are we are supportive of that. So we will-- we
6 will keep The Council abreast of how this plays out,
7 this process. But we absolutely want to see the pay
8 parity. But we're working together with the City
9 around that issue. It's all connected to this whole
10 Early Childhood paradigm.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. That workforce
12 will be gone.

13 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No, we get it.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And we'll right back at
15 square one.

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I get it.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Councilmember Sanchez.

18 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much Chair,
19 and good afternoon Chancellor, and Deputy
20 Chancellors.

21 First, I wanted to just take a moment to echo
22 each and every one of my colleagues who has talked
23 about their concerns with cuts to 3K and pre-K.
24 It's-- It's really nerve wracking. As-- As the mom
25 of an 18-year-old, hearing parents and--

2 [BACKGROUND VOICE]

3 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: 18-year-old. Yeah.

4 Minus a lot of years, because he's 18 months.

5 [LAUGHTER]

6 Me and you girl, the three of us.

7 It's just very concerning to hear the parents in
8 my district with their concerns. So, the first
9 question that I wanted to ask is a clarifying
10 question: You mentioned earlier in response to one
11 of Councilmember Rita Joseph's questions that there
12 were 23,000 seats combined. Are those waitlisted?
13 Are those-- those 3K, Pre-K waitlist numbers?

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: No, the-- that was in
15 response to how many seats are currently available
16 for families. There's 23,000.

17 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. And
18 could you provide The Council a breakdown of the
19 location of those seats?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Absolutely. Yes. We
21 have, and we will continue to do so.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Great. Thank you so
23 much. And I also want to follow up on Councilmember
24 Restler's line of questioning regarding districts

25

2 where demand outstrips capacity. And on the flip
3 side, districts that have excess capacity.

4 And I just-- You know, I don't know this stuff
5 as well as some of my colleagues, and I-- I'm having
6 a lot of trouble understanding that discrepancy
7 between 3K, Pre-K enrollment numbers in the school
8 day-- school year category, versus extended-day, just
9 because it would seem that most people, like, you
10 know, most working parents would need the extended-
11 day. So, can you re-explain why that is? What--
12 What is the discrepancy from DOES's understanding?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Sure. So, with the
14 extended-day/extended-year seats, we also have to
15 understand that they come with a large application
16 process and federal regulations, which also includes
17 citizenship status, to be clear. So, not every
18 family is eligible for those seats.

19 And so, when we look at our Headstart seats,
20 those are year-round programming, and those are
21 extended-day, and those do not have a citizenship
22 status. So, a lot of the work that we've continued
23 to do is to make sure that we can get the seats in
24 the right place. So, it's not to say-- I would never
25 disagree, and I've said here publicly a number of

2 times that families are in need of extended-days and
3 extended-year programming for their children,
4 especially working families.

5 But not everyone will be eligible for the
6 existing EDY seats. There are other types of
7 programming, there are other types of options that
8 we're looking to put into place, and also to shift
9 those seats to spaces where they're actually needed
10 and where they can be used. So, there are nuances
11 there. But that is the work.

12 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. And with
13 respect to, just, the hours: What exactly is the
14 difference between the hours in a school-day/school-
15 year and an extended-day/extended-year?

16 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Sure. So many of our
17 extended-day/extended-year seats may-- sites may open
18 at 7:00 and close at 5:30 or 6:00, right? Compared
19 to a very traditional school-day/school-year seat
20 that may be somewhere between 8:00 or 8:50 to 2:50 or
21 3:30.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you.

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: And 10-month
24 programming, I should say, versus extended-year,
25

2 which would be 12-month programming, because families
3 don't stop working on June 30.

4 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you so
5 much. Okay, and is there in the conversations -- and
6 considering eligibility with federal funding sources,
7 I imagine -- is part of right-sizing the DOE,
8 rededicating funds to extended-day/extended-year,
9 funds that don't have the same kind of restrictions?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: So adding funds to
11 increase that: That is something that actually The
12 Council has done through the \$15 million that they've
13 provided. Taking school-day/school-year seats and
14 adding on hours, and putting the seats in places
15 where there are no extended-day/extended-year seats,
16 and/or limited ones, or limited year-round
17 programming through Head Start.

18 And as I said, we've already seen the difference
19 there, where there is no application or eligibility
20 status, but it already is supporting the families
21 that are living in those districts.

22 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay. Thank you so much.
23 And my next question is a follow up to Councilmember
24 Krishnan, who was asking about bilingual education.
25 And we talked about the \$10 million that we're losing

2 due to federal stimulus funds, or, you know, that
3 we're not-- that The Administration, The Mayor has
4 not proposed replacing. I want to highlight that
5 only 46% of these bilingual-- these English language
6 learner students graduate from high school in four
7 years, even before the pandemic.

8 So, just for-- for the record, can you share how
9 this funding, the \$10 million that we're slated to
10 lose in The Mayor's Preliminary Budget: How has that
11 funding been used and what impact has it had?

12 [BELL RINGS]

13 [BACKGROUND VOICES]

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No. Mirza.

15 MS. MEDINA: Good afternoon. I need to be sworn
16 in.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the
18 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
19 before this Committee and to respond honestly to
20 Councilmember questions?

21 MS. MEDINA: I do. Thank you. Can you repeat
22 the question please?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry. Can you just state
24 your name for the record?

25 MS. MEDINA: Mirza Sanchez Medina.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

3 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Yeah. With respect to
4 \$10 million that are being cut to bilingual education
5 programs due to expiring stimulus funds, how has--
6 how had that funding been used, and what impact did
7 it have?

8 MS. MEDINA: Thank you for the question,
9 Councilmember. So, during the pandemic we know that
10 there were a lot of needs and challenges. We used
11 funding to ensure that we provided resources for
12 families and units for students in the classroom.
13 But in addition to that, because social and emotional
14 learning is so important when supporting multilingual
15 learners, we worked on developing programs like Dream
16 Squad, where schools learn how to work with
17 multilingual learners and then build teams, and build
18 programs, and the Chair has been in-- has visited
19 some of our programs.

20 We also build programs like the Immigrant
21 Ambassador Program to support in collaboration with
22 CUNY to ensure that, again, schools knew how to work
23 with the increased number of migrants, especially to
24 schools that did not have that experience.

2 And we've also provided professional learning
3 through the districts directly to schools. We were
4 able to-- in addition to that, open 66 new bilingual
5 programs. So, we're working on what we call the
6 bilingual revitalization, which means that we are
7 working to strengthen those existing programs, but in
8 addition to that work with schools that never had
9 bilingual programs on a three-year continuum: First
10 year we're learning together; second year you open
11 your program, we build that continuity, because we
12 want to ensure that these schools continue the
13 programs after we have the funding. And in addition
14 to that we provided funding to schools to have a
15 libraries, culturally and linguistically responsive
16 libraries.

17 Earlier, there was a question about older,
18 multilingual learners. We worked with the
19 Superintendent Sullivan of the transfer schools, and
20 we opened six new programs within those existing
21 transfer schools to ensure this staff knew how to
22 work with multilingual learners, that they did a
23 whole plan to work with the families, and in addition
24 to that, we provided-- brought in professional
25 learning to ensure that they continue.

2 We have other partners that work with them. The
3 International Networks continues to work with them
4 when we couldn't continue the funding. But part of
5 the work that we're doing is to-- how to ensure-- is
6 not just to build the program, but also build the
7 foundation for the program to continue in the absence
8 of funding.

9 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. And just--
10 just to clarify: Everything that you've just
11 described all of these supports: That is slated to
12 be cut in The Mayor's preliminary proposed budget?

13 MS. MEDINA: So, what is slated to be cut is the-
14 - the additional funding that we sent to schools to
15 support, but the division of multilingual learners is
16 set to continue the work moving forward.

17 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: All right. Very
18 problematic. Thank you so much, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

20 Councilmember Gutiérrez? No Rivera.

21 Councilmember Rivera.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Good afternoon, everyone.

23 Hi. I am councilmember Rivera. How are you doing?

24 So, thank you for everything that you do. Thank
25 you especially-- I want to echo a lot of my

2 colleagues who mentioned your work also with families
3 seeking asylum, and their presence in our school
4 system. I especially see that in districts 1 and 2
5 in Manhattan. I know we're all experiencing this.

6 A couple of followup questions to what my
7 colleagues asked. Let me start with my brilliant
8 colleague to my right. You mentioned the \$10
9 million-- the \$10 million dollars in expiring
10 stimulus funding for dual language. Is it-- Are you
11 all talking to OMB and City Hall about possibly
12 baselining that funding, that \$10 million?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: All of these things
14 are on the list of programs we're talking to OMB and
15 City Hall about in terms of the expiring stimulus
16 dollars, and our desire to continue these programs.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. So, it's not just that.
18 It's a wide range. You've got people here who are
19 going to be testifying today, whose-- whose work is
20 on this same list. And they all do critical work,
21 every single one of them. So, we're-- we're not just
22 talking about one specific thing. It's-- it's a wide
23 range. And City Hall and OMB would love to do all of
24 them. [CHUCKLES]

25 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: All right, well--

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But the reality is just, where
3 the funding is going to come from to do them all.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Well, Spanish-English
5 dual-language programs are really important for
6 ensuring that students can learn in their own
7 language while gaining fluency in English.

8 School District 1 has a few elementary school
9 dual language programs but no middle school programs.
10 And given the influx of immigrants of every age who
11 could benefit from dual-language programs, have you
12 considered opening a citywide Middle School for
13 English language learning?

14 MS. MEDINA: That's a-- That's a great idea.

15 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: I have-- and I have a
16 great location for you too.

17 MS. MEDINA: Okay.

18 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: School district 1 is
19 ideal. We actually are looking at a space in what we
20 call Junior High School 56 on Montgomery Street, and
21 we're working with Superintendent of district 1,
22 Carry Chan, who has been incredibly dedicated to this
23 work.

24 MS. MEDINA: We are actually in conversation with
25 her and her team about opening programs. I will tell

2 you, as a former principal of a-- all bilingual
3 programs, and having students coming from all over
4 the city, it's extremely important to have these
5 programs.

6 Part of the work that we're doing with bilingual
7 revitalization is precisely that. We mapped out the
8 city, and we looked at where are the opportunities,
9 and we've had conversations with superintendents,
10 with principals. That's why I'm saying-- I smile,
11 because I know we're having that conversation with
12 Superintendent Chan about opening bilingual programs,
13 and working with her district and her team as well.

14 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Yeah, we're very excited.
15 And my-- the location might technically be Henry
16 Street, but you know, LES, Lower East Side.

17 So, we're very excited about that possibility.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Let's-- Let's sit down
19 and work-- Let's sit and talk and follow up on that.

20 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Okay, so while we're in
21 the Lower East Side, last August the Chancellor
22 joined me at PS 188 to see a program with the
23 Literacy Academy Collective, which--

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

2 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: It was a Summer Rising
3 site. It was a new program in which DOE teachers
4 were trained by a teacher from Windward, which is one
5 of these premier schools that really, um-- It focuses
6 on children living with dyslexia and other language-
7 based learning disabilities. I guess "premier" is a
8 way of saying "private", okay? That was--

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: We have some-- We have some
10 premier schools in our public schools that are not
11 priate.

12 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: That's what-- I want to--
13 I don't want to get the words mixed up here. We have
14 a fantastic school system that we need to invest in,
15 and it's the public school system.

16 But these Windward teachers came in, they had the
17 "Preventing Academic Failure". It was a structured
18 literacy reading program, and you seem to really
19 enjoy the program and see the benefits. In fact,
20 it's being expanded this summer, but-- because of
21 funds from Trinity Wall Street.

22 And so, I wonder, are there any plans to expand
23 and address the disparities covered in this
24 curriculum? Specifically, what The Administration is
25 doing to support students living with dyslexia?

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: So we have-- And that was a
3 great school visit. It was apparent that-- that she
4 had almost had everybody in tears as she talked about
5 her son, and just how disconnected he was from school
6 until he was-- got that level of exposure and
7 support. It was amazing.

8 We have met with members of the Literacy Academy
9 Collective about very specifically expanding and
10 scaling their work. So, these conversations are
11 happening now, and I'm very hopeful that we're going
12 to be able to do something.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: And generally just with
14 students living with dyslexia, what is The
15 Administration doing?

16 [BELL RINGS]

17 Thank you, Madam Chair.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Yup. [TO: CHIEF FOTI:]
19 If you want to just talk a little bit more?

20 [TO COUNCIL:]Just the broad work, because this
21 has been a priority area for us around students with
22 dyslexia.

23 CHIEF FOTI: Thank you. The move, as you know,
24 Councilmember Rivera, the move to-- from Kid to
25 Phonics, and mandating that has been a huge asset for

2 our kids with dyslexia because they too have
3 universal access to a curriculum that teaches them
4 Phonics that they can actually learn from.

5 And so that is like our number one universal
6 safeguard for kids with dyslexia is making sure that
7 in kindergarten to second grade, no matter where they
8 are, no matter what school they attend, they're going
9 to be in the classroom, that's going to be using an
10 Orton-Gillingham based, which is an evidence based
11 program that is shown to work with-- with-- for
12 students with-- with dyslexia. So that that's the
13 number one.

14 Number two: We've been really happy that there
15 are AIS, that's Academic Intervention Coordinators at
16 the district level, that are working with schools
17 across their districts to ensure that when that
18 curriculum or if-- if that curriculum or-- or
19 whatever ELA curriculum isn't working, that schools
20 have a set of tools to use for interventions. And
21 that has been another success-- successful
22 initiative.

23 On the special education side, we've been
24 training our school psychologists on how to assess
25 through psychoeducational assessments for where kids

2 might have delays that are associated with print-
3 based disability. So, while psychologists-- school
4 psychologist can't diagnose for dyslexia, we can
5 certainly identify where those gaps are, and then
6 match up instructional strategies that will address
7 those gaps.

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Just one-- one
9 other note, Councilmember. I appreciate your
10 interest and support for LAC. They're-- We're very
11 grateful to them. They're a really important
12 partner. And one of the exciting things that we're--
13 that partnership-- that has come out of that
14 partnership is the South Bronx Literacy Academy. So
15 I understand, it's not-- it's not lower Manhattan,
16 but we're so pleased that we're able to offer to the
17 families in the South Bronx the same sort of
18 structured literacy program that is so effective for--
19 - for students with dyslexia and other print-based
20 disabilities.

21 So, we're learning a lot from the-- from that new
22 school, and I hope that we're going to be able to
23 expand on that.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Thank you. And the
25 families of the South Bronx are certainly deserving

2 of that investment. So, I appreciate it wherever it
3 landed. And I just want to echo all the support for
4 arts and education, and ensuring that we get that
5 curriculum implemented more broadly.

6 Thank you, Madam Chair for the time.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember.

8 A quick question for you: Could you provide the-
9 - Please provide the Committee with an update on
10 dyslexia-- the dyslexia screening pilot program at
11 East River Academy, which was supposed to have begun
12 in January? Where are we on that?

13 CHANCELLOR BANKS: All right. We have to get
14 back to you on that. And hopefully we get that
15 before this session is over here today.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Have teachers needed for
17 this program been hired and trained for dyslexia
18 screening?

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'm not sure. And as soon as-
20 - we'll get-- let's get it downloaded. So, we'll
21 come back to you on it.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So I'll pivot back to that
23 question while you look for the answer.

24 I have a quick question for you on pay parity:
25 The Comptroller's Office of Budget estimates that of

2 January 2024, the city would need to provide \$41.6
3 million annually to bring the salary of CBO teachers
4 up to par with their DOE counterparts.

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Kara, do you have--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's a budget question.
7 Can I get someone on the budget team to answer that,
8 please?

9 CHIEF SCOTT: So we don't have an estimate on the
10 pay parity for CBOs. D.C. Ahmed, I don't know if you
11 have anything in your world. But from the budget
12 standpoint, we don't. We work in partnership with
13 OMB and their labor team on those issues, particular
14 issues.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you'll get back to us,
16 the Council, once that's done?

17 CHIEF SCOTT: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, have your full-time lead
19 teachers with Early Childhood, how many are employed
20 by DOE, and how many are lead teachers in CBOs?

21 And Chancellor is not going to like what I'm
22 going to say. You didn't do your homework.

23 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm sorry,
24 Chair. What was the last-- I'm working on-- with--

2 Christina Foti is going to give the answer on River
3 Academy.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So what efforts are being
5 made to make the CBO salary par with their New York
6 City public school counterparts? What are we doing?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I mean, this
8 is--

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We're going to lose that
10 sector.

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: As we said,
12 this is a budget issue. It's-- it is going to
13 require a funding stream which hasn't existed up till
14 now. Pay parity-- It's not like pay parity used to
15 exist, and now it doesn't exist. It never has
16 existed. We agree. It's a huge problem. The
17 Administration, including The Mayor has made clear
18 this is a big priority. This is-- This is clearly a
19 dollar-- a dollar and cents issue.

20 If we can find the funding, we would love to have
21 broad universal pay parity and have that baseline.
22 But-- But it is right now, it has to be a new funding
23 stream that's identified.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: \$41.6 million annually. So,
25 get that report to me, please.

2 Councilmember Gutiérrez?

3 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Uh, Chair, did
4 you want to hear from Chief Foti? About River
5 Academy and their dyslexia program?

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes, please. Thank you.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you.

8 CHIEF FOTI: Chair, we're doing our homework
9 every day. I promise you. This is a passion for all
10 of us.

11 So, in terms of dyslexia programs in East River,
12 I'm going to refer to my paper, because I'm not the
13 person who has been working on this but this is--
14 this program has been living and teaching and
15 learning under Deputy Chancellor Quintana's
16 leadership, and I know this is something that is
17 incredibly important to her.

18 So, far, the dyslexia screener has been provided.
19 It makes-- Age 18 to 21 identified as being at risk
20 are referred to New York City public schools for
21 additional screening. That screener-- The screeners,
22 and to avoid any edu-speak, are the same screeners
23 that we're using, and our school psychologists are
24 using, and our teachers in New York City public
25

2 schools are using, which we know are-- are the most
3 effective.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students are you
5 serving?

6 CHIEF FOTI: I don't have that here, Chair, but
7 we'll certainly be happy to get you a full update.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, that section, that whole
9 section of the questioning will have to be answered,
10 because there's more questions, but if you don't have
11 any answers, there's no need for me to go forward.

12 Councilmember Gutierrez?

13 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Chair. Good
14 to see everyone. And thank you, Chancellor and
15 Deputy Chancellors. Many-- Many questions have
16 already been raised. So, I will limit the repetition
17 of questions. But I also just want to start with a
18 compliment and just give you all your flowers for NYC
19 Reads. I've heard really, really positive feedback
20 from parents, from schools, and from kids themselves.
21 So, that's really, really incredible. And I'm happy
22 to see it fully expanded in the next coming school
23 year.

24 I wanted to ask about-- In a previous education
25 committee hearing regarding class size reduction,

2 something kind of piqued in one of the testimonies
3 regarding the realities of looking for class space
4 and potentially utilizing 3K space in these school
5 buildings. Can you all share if there's been any
6 more update or any more information since that
7 hearing about, kind of, how you're all thinking about
8 creating space in schools that need it, essentially,
9 the tradeoff being 3K, which, obviously, we go really
10 hard for here.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So there's actually a
12 lot of trade-offs in terms of the space and
13 buildings, and the Class Size Working Group, which is
14 the group that recommended we look at 3K space,
15 actually also asked us to ask principals to look at
16 other space in buildings that is not being used for
17 classroom space. So, they made both of those
18 recommendations.

19 Since we were here a couple of weeks ago, that
20 continues to be one of the recommendations from the
21 working group. It's certainly not something we want
22 to be doing, right? One of the things we pointed out
23 in that hearing is it's not just 3K space, there's
24 art classrooms, there's CBO space. There's a lot of
25 spaces in our buildings that are not going to class

2 size reduction now, that we believe are serving an
3 important purpose, and that we don't want to be
4 repurposing for class size reduction. That's one of
5 the reasons-- I know capital hearings are next. But
6 that's one of the reasons there's a capital cost.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I would just say that to you,
8 Councilmember: That's a really critical question
9 that you're asking, and it is one of the challenges
10 that we now face. There are lots of issues that you
11 all fight for as city councilmembers that are--
12 Based upon the way we have to implement the Class
13 Size Law, it is going to put a lot of other issues in
14 danger. And 3K and 3K seats in our public schools is
15 one of them.

16 So, we got a law that's been mandated by the
17 State that says "you've got to lower that class
18 size." And if the only way we can lower the class
19 size is to remove the 3K Programs out of that school
20 to free up the space to do it: What am I supposed to
21 do? I've been mandated by the law, by the State to
22 do that.

23 And there are a number of other things that are
24 going to have to take place, in order for us to be
25 fully compliant with the law. It's not a law that

2 you passed, but it's a law that was passed through
3 the state legislature, and I have to take--

4 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: A law that I support.

5 And you-- Just-- Just to clarify, though: Do charter
6 schools have the same mandate of class size
7 reduction?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: The law does not
9 apply to charter schools, and doesn't apply anywhere
10 else in the state besides New York City.

11 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Fantastic. And so
12 we've already emphasized the problem that it is for
13 public school advocates, many of whom are on The
14 Council for the amount of money that is being
15 budgeted to cover rent and private spaces, while
16 we're having this conversation and 2024, the
17 realities of class size reduction, and-- and having
18 to trade off 3K spaces.

19 I don't have a lot of time left, so I just want
20 to go through my next two questions, but thank you.

21 On the childcare providers pay parity for CBO
22 staff, I just-- I want to compliment you, Dr. Ahmed,
23 I think you've-- you've come to Council many times
24 and testified on how much better you're doing, on how
25 the unit is doing on reimbursing these providers.

2 Can you speak to a little bit more where we are and I
3 just wanted to uplift in the instances in schools in
4 my district, you've been super helpful, as you have
5 in other council districts. But I do think that that
6 key-- that piece is crucial to how we talk about
7 funding our childcare providers when we're not even
8 paying the existing contracted ones on time, or at
9 all. And that to me does go hand in hand with pay
10 parity. So, can you speak a little bit if there's
11 any more improvement that you can share with-- with
12 how that's gone?

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Absolutely. And thanks
14 so much for-- for your feedback. That always means a
15 lot, and it's much appreciated.

16 There's been incredible improvements in the
17 system. There were many processes and internal
18 external processes that were eliminated to really
19 improve the efficiency of the system, and to
20 streamline it even more than we did within our first
21 year of this administration. And I think it's
22 really, really important to note that, just from July
23 to December, right?, in this fiscal year, we saw an
24 increase by over 130% during the same time period
25 last year in invoice submission--

2 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Of on-time-- of invoice
3 submission? Okay.

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Right. Which is huge.
5 From July to December, we saw over a 244% increase in
6 vendor invoice payment compared to last year. So,
7 there have been several systems put into place to
8 support providers in submitting invoices. There have
9 been several supports put into place to refine and
10 improve the actual system and eliminate any
11 burdensome requirements to ensure absolutely timely
12 payment and supports for all of our providers.

13 [BELL RINGS]

14 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Chair, can
15 I ask one more?

16 I am encouraged, Chancellor, by your-- one of
17 your first answers to Chair Joseph about the
18 realities of 3K. And, you know, how hard you're
19 fighting. I don't think-- I don't think any of us
20 want to walk into our communities and, you know, say
21 that 3K is cut. Can you-- And I know that these are--
22 - you're limited in how much you can share. But what
23 is the budget amount, if you can, um, that you are
24 all fighting for in restoring some of these cuts?
25 Because there were multiple PEGs in November and in

2 January, and obviously we're talking about federal
3 dollars upwards of like, \$460. So, just curious on
4 what that amount is, as much as you can share.

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: All right. Very specifically,
6 we're talking about the \$170, and then the \$92, which
7 is part of the stimulus cliff as well.

8 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Which is also going to have an
10 impact.

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: As well as the Special
12 Education pre-K seats that were mentioned earlier,
13 which is also part of the stimulus cliff, and that's
14 also about \$90 million.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, thank you. Thank
16 you, Chair.

17 CHIEF FOTI: Chair, may I get back to--

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're welcome.

19 Councilmember Stevens?

20 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Well, good afternoon.

21 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good afternoon.

22 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: How you guys doing. I
23 know you've had a long day. You guys have been doing
24 great.

2 Just a couple things even before I start my
3 questions in thinking about-- Obviously, with class
4 sizes, I think this is something that we all could
5 agree on. However, understanding that the State also
6 needs to do their part. So, want to continue to
7 uplift and say let's work together to figure what
8 that looks like. Because I think that it was a
9 mandate that was done with good intentions, but also
10 not thinking about how they have not invested in
11 funding in DOE for a number of years and have now
12 placed this in the lap of-- by saying, "We fully
13 funded you guys." That really grinds my gears. I
14 don't like things that don't make sense.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Agreed.

16 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: And even with the 3K, I
17 think, you know, we have to come to a place where
18 it's like, we got to figure out how to fix the
19 system, because that's part of the issue. And I know
20 you guys have been literally trying to put gauze on a
21 wound that's been bleeding for a number of years.
22 And so, although you've made progress, it doesn't
23 necessarily feel that way, because it's still
24 hemorrhaging. And so thinking about how do we, like,
25 pause to figure out how to really fix this. And--

2 And I've spoken to you guys a number of times, so
3 thinking about how-- to make sure that we're your
4 thought partners in this process, as we're continuing
5 to fix and change it. Because everyone wants it, and
6 we want it to work, but if it's not working and we
7 don't fix the systemic issues, it's going to continue
8 to have vacancy. So, I definitely want to continue
9 to work with you guys on that.

10 I have like three buckets. It is going to be
11 Summer Rising, obviously. And I got-- I was looking
12 at a report today around, like, the new arrivals and
13 young people. And then the last one is just LTW.

14 So, I'll start with Summer Rising.

15 Can you-- Everyone knows I have some issues with
16 Summer Rising, because the model in theory makes
17 sense, but like it's struggling, especially when
18 young people want to be out exploring the city. And
19 because of the way it's set up, kids can't really do
20 that. But I know a lot of the pushback is, like,
21 this is to help and support academics. Has there
22 been any academic assessments done for us to see the
23 progress has been being done? And if so, could you
24 share that information?

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR
3 VADEHRA:] Do we have any?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We are just looking
5 at the data from last summer. So, we can certainly
6 share that with you, yes.

7 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I would not suggest just
8 about last summer. I mean, this-- this-- we're going
9 to talk third summer. So, I would love to see how we
10 have been progressing, and also understanding and
11 taking into account of COVID. But I think that it's
12 important because it's being touted that the reason
13 we keep going to Summer Rising is because it's around
14 the academics. And we know that summer camp also
15 produces the same type of help with summer learning
16 loss. And so, when we're thinking about fiscal times
17 an additional \$80 million dollars was given because
18 of the sunset with the federal stimulus to DOE to do
19 this program, and thinking about, "Well, we probably
20 could have used that somewhere else," and thinking
21 about does this part-- this relationship in this way
22 continue to make sense, with federal money being a
23 main culprit of Summer Rising, and how do we kind of
24 start thinking and adjusting to other ways? So, I

2 would definitely love to see those numbers around
3 academics.

4 And then the other thing even around Summer
5 Rising, I know we have been doing great efforts-- we
6 just had this call with DOE and DYCD around the-- the
7 efforts that we're making around collaborations. But
8 still talking to providers, they still do not feel
9 like it is an equal partnership. They still feel
10 like they are being told things by DOE, and DOE is
11 the lead, and they are kind of like working to meet
12 your goals.

13 And so can you talk about me-- how can we make
14 this summer feel much more collaborative, and not so
15 DOE-heavy, and making sure that providers are feeling
16 just as respected in these conversations as DOE
17 staff?

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Well, I'm certainly
19 open to that level of collaboration, and would love
20 to even follow up with you. Maybe we can, together,
21 work to convene a group of our CBOs from around the
22 city who are a part of this and work with us, in
23 figuring out how we can in fact work together,
24 because we certainly don't want the model to be just

2 a whole range of just academic supports, which our
3 kids do need.

4 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Agreed.

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But I'm a big believer also
6 that education happens outside of the four walls of
7 the school--

8 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Agreed.

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: --and creating these other
10 opportunities where kids do get a chance to
11 experience the city as part of their learning
12 process. It is part of the design, but if folks are
13 feeling as though they're not getting, you know--
14 CBOs are not feeling like they're really playing a
15 significant role here and they're kind of second-
16 class citizens to what we're saying, let's-- let's
17 let's talk about that. I would love to.

18 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah. We definitely have
19 to address that, because I think it feels that way
20 often because it's like, "Oh, we're not in the
21 classroom, kids are learning." And we all know that
22 it's just not the case--

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's not the case.

24 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: --and that's not true.
25 And I've given pushback-- the problem with DYCD of

2 around thinking about, and the model, I'm thinking
3 with you guys around the structure, because if it is
4 so structured, that between eight and twelve, you
5 have to be in a classroom, every city-- every kid in
6 the city or in the program can't go on a trip at 12.

7 And then my last point is middle school: we don't
8 have Fridays anymore. We are failing our middle
9 school young people, right? We are cutting their
10 programs extensively. Now they're only going to be
11 there Monday through Thursday, and Friday was the day
12 that they did trips, or they had additional supports
13 and did their groups, and all these things. And now
14 that's the thing that is being cut.

15 [BELL RINGS]

16 I'm very concerned about this, while at the same
17 time we have our juvenile justice centers increasing
18 in numbers. And so, what are we doing about this?
19 And I know that you guys have very limited ability to
20 push back. But, like, it just does not make sense to
21 me.

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, I will just say
23 we share your concerns fully, and appreciate you
24 continuing to advocate for that funding. Obviously,
25 as folks know, that was a PEG that was a reduction to

2 DYCD's is Summer Rising budget that particularly
3 impacts middle-- middle school students, four to six,
4 and Fridays. We completely agreed. Like, that's why
5 we're investing so much in Summer Rising broadly that
6 is a critical program for our kids, including our
7 middle school kids, and our-- you know, would very
8 much hope to see that restored.

9 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, it's really-- it's
10 one of the things that's keeping me up at night right
11 now with our young people, especially our middle
12 school students. Because as these numbers rise at
13 Horizons and our juvenile justice facilities, it
14 makes sense, because we're cutting the programs that
15 are keeping them out of those places.

16 And Chair, I just have two more questions.

17 I just read an article around, like, how new
18 arrivals are having challenges with enrolling in
19 schools, and are being encouraged to go to GED
20 programs and-- and on long waitlist to be enrolled in
21 school. Can you guys talk a little bit about this
22 issue? It was just-- I can tell you what-- where I
23 read this too.

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. We did see that
25 article.

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: You thank you,
3 Councilmember. Yeah. And I think this is referring
4 to our older students.

5 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Mm-hmm. Yes, it's the
6 older students, guys. But they are students too.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah, older
8 students who-- obviously, these-- these are all our
9 kids, and we care a lot about them. And the adult
10 education programs that they are trying to get into,
11 the-- the issue is largely by geography. And it's--
12 that's not their fault. It's our fault, having space
13 in the program and the borough where they're living.
14 And so, we're looking to address that right now.
15 It's not that we're casting them aside. It is that
16 they are saying (rightly so) "I'm staying in Queens,
17 I'd like to go to the adult ed program in Queens, and
18 you're telling me there's no space," particularly in
19 the middle of the year.

20 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So, we're
22 looking into what we can do to accommodate that--
23 that demand, again, by geography. Because it's not
24 so helpful to that young person to whom we say, "Oh,

2 you know, we might have a space for you in Brooklyn
3 or the Bronx."

4 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENTS: Yeah. I mean, it's one
5 of those things where it's like it-- we should be
6 talking about it. And I think sometimes, especially
7 with the older population of the new arrivals,
8 they're kind of getting lost in the shuffle. And
9 this is one of the places that I don't want them to
10 get lost in. So, let's definitely continue to have a
11 conversation on what that looks like.

12 I'm also thinking about, like, we have a lot of
13 international high schools that are doing amazing
14 work and have been doing amazing work for a number of
15 years. Just thinking about how are we using them as
16 a model to support some of these other schools with
17 these high influxes? And I'm sure those principals
18 might have some ideas and some suggestions. I know,
19 I was working with the Speaker's office to do a
20 roundtable with some international school for us to
21 think about it. So, maybe that's something we can
22 collaborate on so that they can be helpful in-- as
23 we're, like, our new normal, because that's what it
24 is. This is going to be our new normal for a while.
25 And so, thinking about how DOE put things in place to

2 make sure that they're getting the services and
3 things that they need as well.

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We couldn't
5 agree more. And one of-- one of the places you hear
6 us constantly giving our gratitude to our educators
7 in the field: international high schools are doing an
8 amazing job. They always do an amazing job.

9 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah. They've been doing
10 great work, silently for a number of years.

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: If you
12 remember-- What's that?

13 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Like really quietly,
14 they've been, like, doing--

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Quietly for a
16 number of years.

17 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah.

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And
19 particularly with this influx of newcomer New
20 Yorkers, they are doing just incredible work.

21 And so where we can enroll young people,
22 teenagers in Claremont in the Bronx, or, you know,
23 another great international school, that's-- we're
24 doing that. Some of our older, you know, young
25

2 people, they're looking for some a little different
3 there.

4 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, we should
5 definitely just think about how to use them as a
6 spotlight, and I'm sure they have a number of, like,
7 ideas, because this is what they've been doing, like
8 I said, quietly for so many years, and I want to
9 kinds of talk about it. So, I'd love to continue to
10 collaborate with you guys on that.

11 And just the last thing: it's not necessarily a
12 question but a comment. Learn To Work programs,
13 LTWs. That-- I started out working in LTW programs
14 as an LTW coordinator at Smith High School for a
15 number of years, and this is one of the programs that
16 I feel like does not get enough attention and
17 support, and these programs have been being cut
18 quietly over the years.

19 And when I am thinking about, reimagining the
20 workforce for young people, this is one of the places
21 I think we should be investing in. When we're
22 talking about young people working and having
23 academics, this is a model that we have that we know
24 works, and I am not understanding, like, how-- how
25 are we not investing in it? And what does it look

2 like? So, I would just love to hear: What are you
3 guys doing to make sure that we're continuing to
4 uplift LTW programs, and making this like a true
5 pathway into careers and exposing young people to the
6 different things that we need? Because I'm, like, I
7 love Community Schools and love them for what they
8 do. But they're not LTW programs. And it's not the
9 same thing. And I feel like they often are getting
10 conflated.

11 So, I want to know: What are you doing around
12 LTWs? And how can I work with you guys to continue
13 to uplift this work, continue to make sure this
14 becomes a priority again in the city? Because we
15 really have to think about how are we creating real
16 pathways for young people into careers, and I believe
17 this is one of the places that we should be investing
18 in, but we keep missing the mark. Thank you.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I appreciate it. And we're
20 doing a lot of work around career pathways work. You
21 and I, I think, are overdue for a real sitdown,
22 right? So, this has to be one of the immediate
23 things that comes, because I would love to delve very
24 deeply with you into each one of these issues that
25 you raised. I'm in full agreement with everything

2 that you said. Please know that. And let's just
3 continue to fight.

4 You guys are the ones that have to negotiate this
5 next budget with The Mayor. And so, these are the
6 issues that have got to be on the front burner.

7 I deal with the budget that I'm given, not the
8 one that I wish that I had.

9 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: No, I agree. I agree.

10 CHANCELLOR BANKS: So, you're the negotiating
11 partners in this work. So, you've got to fight to
12 keep the things in that you think are critically
13 important. And then you know, it's my job to
14 implement them as they come out.

15 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah.

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's why I have all these
17 people here ready to testify, because they also got
18 to advocate for the things that they think are
19 critically important. And I'm not in disagreement
20 with anybody that's here.

21 But at the end of the day, I've given a finite
22 pot.

23 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yes.

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And then I've got to just work
25 with what I've got. Not-- You know, there's a lot

2 of stuff that I wish that I had. Just the question
3 now is going to be about who makes it into the pot?

4 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, but I definitely
5 just want us to make sure that we're uplifting it.
6 Because I-- I've been here for two years. And I
7 rarely hear anyone talk about LTW programs. And like
8 I said, I worked in the LTW program for a number of
9 years, and I know that it works. Like, I know that
10 it works, and you can look at the data and the
11 evidence from-- from years that it works. And this
12 is what young people need. And it supported families
13 and young people, and it gave them a chance to have
14 internships and be in careers in places that they
15 would have never been without those opportunities.

16 So, I want to make sure that we continue to
17 uplift that, and I'm definitely ready to take it on
18 as a fight.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'm coming to meet with you in
20 the next-- within the next two weeks.

21 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Absolutely. You got my
22 number. All right, thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember
24 Stevens. And that's why when we were in your
25 district last week, we made sure we let the

2 participants of LTW tell their stories. And they
3 were very impactful stories. If you watched, I did
4 stream it live.

5 I had a question for Summer Rising. We know this
6 year we put in \$80 million. FY 25, I'm seeing zero.
7 Where is the money coming from to continue to fund
8 this?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: At this-- At this
10 point, the City has just funded it for this summer.
11 We will continue to advocate to continue the program
12 after this year.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because the families will
14 not be happy not to have their Summer Rising.

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And one quick
16 correction, in FY 25, that is actually where this
17 summer funding sits. So, that \$80 million is in FY
18 25 for this summer--

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For this summer.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: And in the out years
21 it is zero.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In the upcoming summer.

23 Thank you.

24 Community schools: Since 2014, community schools
25 have worked alongside schools in meeting the needs of

2 the whole child. They support both families and
3 students. They prevent dropouts, improve attendance,
4 facilitating engaged program and arts, robotics, and
5 more.

6 New York City public school utilized stimulus
7 funds to restore previous cuts and to expand
8 programs. Funding levels for the initiative are
9 currently at their historical highs. But with the
10 expiration of federal stimulus dollars and PEGs
11 imposed on the program, these services are in flux
12 for the next year.

13 So, what is the budget for community schools for
14 fiscal 2024?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Roughly \$125 million,
16 of which roughly \$50 to \$55 million is stimulus.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much-- How much of it is
18 funded with stimulus dollars?

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: \$50 to \$55.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the budget for
21 community schools in fiscal 2025?

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: It is currently, like
23 all the other stimulus programs we've been talking
24 about today, it's currently that amount minus the

2 stimulus. We expect the rest of the funding to
3 continue.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you'll get an exact
5 figure to me, right?

6 How many additional community schools are added
7 since the infusion of stimulus funds into the
8 program?

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR
10 VADEHRA:] About 100?

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Roughly 113 are
12 funded by stimulus dollars.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the total number of
14 community schools now?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: 421, roughly.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many community schools
17 will remain after these funds expire? And what do we
18 do to maintain community schools?

19 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, as I said the
20 funding for the Community Schools besides the 113, we
21 expect to continue into next year. It's from other
22 funding sources that are baselined from the State
23 that we can continue to rely on. The funding for the
24 113 stimulus-- stimulus-funded community schools,
25 just like every other stimulus program we are talking

2 about, will depend on our final budget and how many
3 of those programs that can continue to support.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much is the budget for
5 community schools reduced to the PEG in fiscal 2025
6 and out years?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: \$8 million in 2025
8 and out years.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Considering the important
10 support community schools provide to students and
11 families during the-- during and since the pandemic,
12 why was it decided that this program would be part of
13 the PEGs? Who decided that this should be part of
14 the PEGs, and why?

15 CHIEF SCOTT: So, it was just one of-- one of the
16 many things that we had our back-and-forth
17 conversations with, with OMB as we were working
18 towards meeting the target that was provided to us.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you provided the cuts to
20 the community schools as...?

21 CHIEF SCOTT: We provided an entire-- we provided
22 a list. And again, having some back and forth with
23 OMB about what are going to be the more valuable
24 options.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And Community Schools was
3 one of them?

4 CHIEF SCOTT: Community Schools ended up making
5 the list.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what else was provided
7 to OMB? That should be on the chopping block?

8 CHIEF SCOTT: Um, there-- there were a wide
9 ranging of back and forth, again, with OMB. We kind
10 of just had conversations about our entire budget,
11 and looking within every-- every corner and crevice
12 that we could, with the-- with the eye on ensuring
13 that we did not cut any of the schools.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because community schools
15 are scrambling with the first round the PEGs, the \$10
16 million, every community school was scrambling to
17 decide which program should we keep, which program
18 should we cut?

19 CHIEF SCOTT: Yes. And then it was ultimately
20 restored in the preliminary plan, the \$10 million for
21 fiscal year 24.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So-- Okay. I'll come back
23 to you.

24 Um, I want to talk about Carter cases and Connor
25 cases. How many Connor cases do we have?

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: 23,000.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much?

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: 23,000 this
5 year kind.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Connor cases, or Carter
7 cases? Or are they combined? You have Carter cases
8 and you have Connor cases.

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Combined.
10 Combined. All-- This is all due process cases.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm. You have 23,000
12 altogether?

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So in 2019, you spent \$499
15 million on Carter and Connor cases. In 2023, you
16 spent \$1.1 billion, a 114% increase in just five
17 years. So, in fiscal 2024, you budgeted \$1.2 billion
18 on Carter cases with the budget expected to further
19 increase. Why the increase in Carter cases in such
20 recent years?

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: It's-- Chair,
22 it's driven by the due process cases that are about
23 services. That's really driving the lion's share of
24 it. So when you see over the last eight or so years-

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: She can't hear you. Speak up.

3 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: More-- More
4 than quadrupling the number of cases, that's being
5 driven by cases brought by families that have kids in
6 parochial and independent schools who are seeking
7 services, largely set services. That's-- That's
8 what's driving it. You're right. It's been a-- it's
9 been a huge spike, a huge recent spike. You're 100%
10 correct about that. When we analyze it, that's--
11 that's what it has-- that's what's driven that spike.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you agree with me that
13 the preschool special education children will, down
14 the road somehow, become our Carter cases as well?

15 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: They certainly
16 could. They certainly could, Chair. And just to
17 say, to add to what you heard from Christina Foti and
18 from Dr. Ahmed, it's not just District 75.
19 Certainly, we want to make sure that we are
20 maintaining and in some cases expanding our quality
21 District 75 programming. But a lot of the great
22 programming that we're putting in place, like for our
23 kids who are on the autism spectrum, is not District
24 75. This is inclusive programming in our D 1 through
25 32 schools, and we're very excited about that. We

2 also, with you, we believe that the more quality
3 programs we can provide in D 1 through 32, and in 75,
4 are going to cut down the number of Carter cases.

5 The other-- The other steps that we are taking,
6 Chair, and this is something to be clear: We're not
7 just sitting back passively, just on a legal
8 mechanics side. So, we moved all of these cases from
9 independent hearing officers who (to make a long
10 story short) could take as much time as they felt
11 like to resolve cases, to our-- our OATH-- our OATH
12 office, our Office of Administrative Trials and
13 Hearings. These are full-time hearing officers.
14 They move-- They move the cases much, much more
15 quickly. That's been very helpful. We've also put
16 in place some recommendations regarding the per-hour
17 rates that are being paid for services, because in
18 some cases, they were \$300 an hour, and places like
19 that without really a justification for that.

20 So, we're trying to bend that curve in various
21 ways. You're right: The long-term answer for the
22 Carter cases is to make sure those-- those children
23 are being enrolled in our schools, in quality
24 programs.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Why there's never a
3 differentiation between Carter and Connor cases
4 anytime you come here, because when I ask for
5 separate data on the Connor cases, no one can tell
6 me, versus the Carter cases. We know they're two
7 different things. So, I would love to have some data
8 on those separate...

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Happy to give-
10 - Happy to separate that data. We can absolutely do
11 that for you.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it something that non New
13 York City Public Schools consider changing, why they
14 currently-- I just asked that. What is DOE's short-
15 term and long-term plan to deal with escalating costs
16 of Carter and Connor cases.

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah. That's
18 large-- that's largely what we're talking about. The
19 long term is to-- to expand our high-quality programs
20 for students with disabilities in our schools, and
21 particularly in our D 1 through 32.

22 The short term is to put some cost controls in
23 place, and make sure that the cases are done quickly.
24 Parents deserve that too. They shouldn't have to
25 wait a long time for these things to be resolved.

2 And we are making good progress on that. But I will
3 say: We're still seeing this avalanche of cases.
4 It's not sustainable for it to continue to rise at
5 the same level.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: According to a report from
7 IBO, the majority of Carter cases is coming-- is
8 cutting from special education classrooms, where you
9 cut \$100 million in fiscal 2025, and \$200 million in
10 2026. Why are you cutting special education
11 classrooms to fund Carter cases?

12 CHIEF SCOTT: Yeah. So, we're not cutting educa-
13 - special education classes to support Carter cases.
14 That was surplus funding that OMB shifted from one
15 area to the next. But, it did not have any impact on
16 services provided for special education students.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In the students not having
18 any seat at all, especially for our pre-K schools,
19 with disabilities, you said how many of the services
20 are they receiving? They're mandated to receive how
21 many services Chancellor Foti?

22 CHIEF FOTI: All their services. They're
23 mandated to receive 100% of services.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They're receiving-- How many
25 are they supposed to...?

2 CHIEF FOTI: In preschoolers or school age?

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Preschool.

4 CHIEF FOTI: Preschool, 63-- 63%.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 63%? And how-- When do you
6 plan on bringing that up a little? That's still a
7 little low.

8 CHIEF FOTI: It needs to be 100%, chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes. Because that's why our
10 cases are so high.

11 So, in the last year, an average actual budget
12 over the last three fiscal years, \$1 billion-- why
13 are you budgeting only half of that for 2025 in your
14 Carter cases?

15 CHIEF SCOTT: So, it's-- Typically we've been
16 dealing with it one year at a time. And so
17 throughout the year, we'll work with OMB in terms of
18 what the projected estimate is, and then they will
19 actually put the money up in the budget. So, the
20 drop just reflects us having to continue to talk with
21 OMB to ensure that we are fully budgeted for those
22 expenses.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said on the record,
24 there are no cuts impacting special class-- special

2 education classrooms, as I see that you're shifting
3 money around with the special education.

4 CHIEF SCOTT: The shift was not intended to
5 impact any special education classes. No.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I was told the same thing in
7 November. And that's not what I got in return. So,
8 I want to make sure you're saying it on the record.

9 Um, when we talk about the Accenture report,
10 right? The OMB director testified the Accenture
11 report was completed for the report on 3K in pre-K
12 seats, right? And the city contracted Accenture to
13 provide the report over a year ago, and The Council
14 have not heard or seen this report. When do we
15 expect to get that report? It's been a year. And
16 all my educators know: Data drive our instruction,
17 data is supposed to also inform your decisions as
18 well.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED:]
20 Do you know?

21 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR AHMED: Hi, Chair Joseph.
22 There is a report that's underway now that will be
23 expected in April.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because on the onset of
25 Early Childhood, right?, there was this robust

2 outreach, just-- I saw Early Childhood every single
3 place that turned. What happened? What-- What made
4 it different. Recently it was Councilmember Stevens
5 who was outside campaigning to make to make sure that
6 folks knew about this program. What went wrong here?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So we were--
8 You should have seen some of the social media ads,
9 you should have seen some of the bus ads, some of the
10 MTA--

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Where were they?

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Where were
13 they? All over the city.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. I saw one on a bus
15 one time.

16 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: All over the
17 city.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I saw one--

20 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I've seen them
21 a bunch. I've seen him in those digital kiosks--

22 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --on the
23 Number 7 train. I've seen them on buses. I've seen
24 him on the subway, down in those digital-- They are
25 in those digital windows.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You've got to take pictures
3 and send it so I can have evidence--

4 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Oh, I'm
5 definitely going to do that chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: --because I never saw them.
7 I saw one. And that was on the Number 7.

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Okay. We'll
9 check on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, we've got to do better
11 outreach. We have to do better. The Council is out
12 in the streets. So, two weeks ago, Councilmember
13 Stevens led a delegation of colleagues to go to do
14 outreach on 3K.

15 Chancellor, you were going to say something?

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: No, I think that's great.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We outside! The Council was
18 outside.

19 [LAUGHTER]

20 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Outside! So, we outside!

21 [LAUGHTER]

22 Listen, let's continue to do that.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We were outside.

24 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Because the reality is that we
25 should all be a part of this process, of spreading

2 the word. Every one of you are the leaders in your
3 districts, everybody in The Council, and whatever
4 support they need from us to help to get the word
5 out. And-- but we've got them out on taxis and buses
6 and subways. And in fact, we got some data, right,
7 that we should be sharing (if Chair does not already
8 have that) in terms of some of the outreach that we
9 have done. The outreach has not been less than it's
10 been in the past.

11 And so, it may not feel that way in certain
12 places. I'm not sure. But let's share what we've
13 got. I had a whole briefing on this about a week
14 ago.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, Chancellor, that
16 should be the-- the thing, right? There should be a
17 connection where we-- were we're not reaching--
18 there's communities that are hard to reach. What are
19 we doing to reach those communities?

20 And we've been working hand in hand with you. We
21 ask you to come to our events. We support your
22 events.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Sure.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We put it out on our
25 newsletters. We send it out to families. Whenever

2 the flyers come out, Deputy Chancellor Ahmed sends it
3 to us, and we share it within our networks. We share
4 it with families. We translate them. We send them
5 out to all of the communities.

6 So, we've been working with you hand in hand.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's my point.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, what's going on?

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: You're-- You are helping to
10 promote it, right?

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. We've been promoting
12 it.

13 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Already. That's right.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The only--

15 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I just-- I just wanted to
16 add that it was a great event. But we did do that
17 with the Day Care Council. And so, I do want to
18 think about how do we also partner with you, because
19 you guys were-- I keep telling you all we're here,
20 and I know I speak to y'all, but I don't know if that
21 sentiment is necessarily felt. So, we should do
22 another one, right?, and we should all do it in
23 partnership with the nonprofit agencies, and DOE, and
24 City Council, because I think that that piece was
25 missing. So, let's think about doing another day,

2 and I will lead it, and we'll make sure that we get
3 some more people, and we'll be back outside.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Let's do it.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have a question about
6 portals: How does New York City Public School notify
7 schools of all developing technology tools available
8 to the administrators?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: When we develop the
10 tools? Like our grading your messaging app?

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So we do-- I mean,
13 first of all, when we develop those tools, we are
14 engaged-- we engage our school principals and our
15 teachers in the process of developing those tools, as
16 well as in continuing to update them.

17 When we push out information, it depends a bit on
18 what the information is. So, every time we update
19 our grading and messaging app, we actually send an
20 email out to principals, but we also work through our
21 SPOCs, through our borough technology directors,
22 depending on what it is.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And those messages will
24 stand out in the languages that the families do
25 speak, right? Or is it just mainly in English?

2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I apologize. I was
3 speaking about the ways we are communicating with our
4 school staff.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm.

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: The messaging for
7 families where schools choose to use, our messaging
8 app is something that can be translated, yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah. Because-- Okay.

10 How are schools able to provide feedback on the
11 usage of DOE tech tools? Let's say I use your-- one
12 of your tech tools, and I want to give feedback. How
13 do I do that?

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Sure. So-- So happy
15 to have a more extensive conversation about this, if
16 you want, but our technology team working with our
17 borough technology directors, are SPOCs are in,
18 basically, a constant set of conversations with
19 schools about the tools we've developed ourselves.
20 So, again, as I said, sort of our grading attendance
21 and messaging app, which we rolled out last year,
22 we've made a series of updates to that over the
23 course of the past year and a half, pretty much all
24 of which were based on input from school

2 administrators or teachers as piece of that, and
3 that's a constant, ongoing conversation.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you publish data on
5 technology tools available to New York City schools?
6 Is it-- Is it something you make public, or no?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: The tools we've
8 developed, or the tools that--?

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm.

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Obviously, schools
11 can purchase their own tools as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are the schools-- the tools
13 you put out?

14 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I don't know that we
15 publish specific data on it. I think it's publicly
16 available information on our website and other
17 places.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. It's on the website?
19 Okay. So, in the district this year, there are 19
20 schools who regularly rely on new vision portal to
21 plan for students and keep track of their progress.
22 Will New York City Public School make sure the tool
23 will continue to be available to them.

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So the New Visions
25 Data Portal as well as the Affinity contracts for New

2 Visions, and a set of other affinity organizations
3 are all things that were-- existed prior to the
4 stimulus dollars. The previous administration took
5 out the tax levy and put in stimulus dollars. So,
6 those are also on the stimulus cliff list.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, they're also on the
8 list? Okay.

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yup. That's what I mean.
10 Another great, great program.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I saw you making lists,
12 Chancellor Banks. You've got to share that list with
13 me.

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [LAUGHS] No, just a list that
15 we shared. No, no, no. I'm just writing down some
16 other notes.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

18 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But-- But, I just want to say
19 publicly also, New Visions, the Affinity Groups are--
20 are-- the work that they do is an example of some of
21 the best work in the city.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct.

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And it's what makes this so
24 challenging, that there's so many great things that
25 are on this list, that had been funded by-- by

2 stimulus dollars. So, we're going to continue to--
3 to look at this.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I see you have proposed cuts
5 Affinity Schools and partnerships. What impact do
6 you think this programming will have on our schools
7 if we don't have them?

8 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I think it will have
9 significant impact. You know, I-- Listen, I-- I
10 come from the Affinity network. I was one of the New
11 Visions schools. I was a New Visions principal two
12 times, with-- with the Bronx School for Law,
13 Government, and Justice, and _____ Academy. I've
14 been around, and I've watched their work grow and
15 expand. I was one of the early principals in their
16 work. So, nobody has to convince me just how
17 critically important what they do is, and they're
18 serving hundreds of schools. We want to see it
19 continue. We've got to fight to get more dollars,
20 because right behind them are community schools.
21 Right behind them are people who are fighting to keep
22 the arts going. The list is filled.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: LCW. You heard
24 Councilmember Stevens: LCW.

2 CHANCELOR BANKS: Right. They're all amazing--
3 amazing programs. So, I don't want-- we're not
4 trying to pit anybody against each other.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Nope.

6 CHANCELOR BANKS: But we've got-- I think what
7 all it is really suggests is, we've got to fight as
8 hard as heck with the State to get more dollars. We
9 need more dollars to keep all of these great programs
10 alive. And that's really what it kind of comes down
11 to.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We can't go backward. Have
13 you-- When-- When you decide to make cuts, do you
14 engage the larger community, parents, administrators,
15 students about the cuts that are coming? Or is it
16 just a big surprise?

17 CHANCELOR BANKS: No, I mean, you know, we talk
18 to a wide range of-- of folks, and we and we
19 certainly talk to our-- many of our school principals
20 as well, and we try to get input from them. We get
21 input from parents. We get input from a wide range
22 of-- of partners. So, yeah. So we-- This is an
23 administration that does in fact, try to engage. We
24 do. We listen. We try to be responsive. I think
25 there are very few places that you would go where

2 people say, "They don't even engage with us," or
3 we're not listening. We do listen. And we do
4 engage. And we have an open-- and we're as
5 transparent as we can possibly be. That's who I am,
6 personally. That's what I believe in.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Correct.

8 CHANCELOR BANKS: But it is tough when you sit in
9 this seat.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's hot, right?

11 CHANCELOR BANKS: Yeah, it was just hot. It's a--
12 - It's a tough seat, because you recognize that--
13 that there's great programs, and that there's not
14 necessarily enough dollars to support everybody's
15 program. And that's, that's a real challenge.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, in terms of engagement,
17 like you said. So when-- When you were thinking
18 about community schools, who did we engage in that
19 conversation around that, when we decided to cut \$10
20 million? Was there any conversation with
21 administrators, providers, students?

22 CHANCELOR BANKS: On-- Well, I don't know that
23 we looked at it so much as just community-- community
24 schools, per se. But-- But we talked to
25 superintendents, we talked to principals. And-- And

2 I know-- I know the work of the community schools.
3 So, you know, I don't I don't need, I don't need to
4 be engaged to kind of figure out, "Is this a good
5 program? Is it a worthwhile program?" It is more
6 than worthwhile program. The challenge is that we've
7 got over 300 schools that are already baselined.
8 They're-- They got sustainable funding. They're
9 fine. But a little more than 100 schools were
10 supported by stimulus funding prior to this
11 administration. And-- And so yeah, so when we're
12 told by OMB and City Hall, like, we've got to make
13 cuts. You know, there are no places that we're
14 cutting that feel good. They really aren't. And--
15 And we've reduced our headcount. Dan, what was the
16 number on our reduction on our own headcount?

17 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: In our central
18 office--

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What areas did you do your
20 headcounts? What areas did you do reductions?

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: In virtually--
22 In virtually every central office. But totaling over
23 600 vacancies. These are obviously not with-- with
24 people occupying them, but over 600 positions were

2 eliminated in order to protect schools as much as
3 possible.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Yeah. It's important
5 to note, Chair, that we've not cut any school
6 budgets. I've heard people say that from time to
7 time. We've-- In fact, we've increased school
8 budgets this year. So, they've been no cuts.
9 There's no principal in New York that can point and
10 say, you know, "My budget was-- My budget was cut
11 programmatically." We've worked really hard to make
12 sure that schools was safe, and we tried to get to as
13 many of these other areas before we got anywhere
14 close to schools. And that's a commitment that we're
15 still trying to make.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many vacancies-- How
17 many teacher vacancies do you currently have?

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: It's at about
19 1% is our vacancy rate, currently.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many teacher vacancies
21 do you have that are special education and bilingual
22 teachers?

23 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: That's at
24 about 1.4%, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And of the number, how many
3 are vacancies for ESL teachers? And are we meeting
4 all of the ESL mandated services?

5 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: That one I
6 don't have on hand. I'll have to get you for ESL.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And, of course, we're going
8 to talk about: What's the current implementation of
9 Class Size Law? How many additional teachers in each
10 of these shortage areas do you anticipate we will
11 need in the next two to three years?

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: [TO DEPUTY CHANCELLOR
13 VADEHRA:] Do we have a breakdown of-- in the
14 specific areas, specific shortage areas?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We do. So for the--
16 We do for special ed teachers in particular, who are
17 going to be a disproportionate amount of the total,
18 and of course are a shortage area already. So, of
19 the 10,000 to 12,000, somewhere between 3,000 and
20 4,000, we expect to be special education teachers.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How about bilingual
22 teachers?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: That breakdown, I
24 don't have in front of me, and it is a little more

2 complicated, but we can see what data we can crunch
3 to-- to share that.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And then do you have enough
5 ENL coordinators as well? And that's a historically
6 shortage area as well.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: It's always been a shortage
8 area, yup.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what are we doing to
10 recruit and retain teachers?

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Well, a number
12 of things. Probably the-- the most important is the
13 contract that we were able to reach with UFT, which
14 provided significant increases to our teachers.
15 Obviously, nobody goes into teaching to get wealthy,
16 but you do need to pay the rent. And we're very
17 happy and proud that we've been able to work with UFT
18 so that now an eight-year teacher, an 8th-year
19 teacher is able to make \$100,000, or more. So, you
20 know, that's-- that's very, very important.

21 The other thing that we're doing, Chair, that
22 we're very excited about, that's happening in real
23 time, is offering a hybrid work to teachers. And
24 people don't think of-- you know, a lot of white-
25 collar professionals are able to work at home for

2 some period of time, which can be a, you know, a big
3 benefit for-- for people. And they don't think about
4 teachers and other pedagogues.

5 So, we are because we're putting in place our
6 virtual programming, one of the upsides of that is
7 that you can create teacher programs just like you're
8 creating student programs, which include virtual
9 coursework off hours, which is great for-- for
10 students who work or have other obligations. They
11 can take the course (high school, I'm talking about
12 high school students) in the evenings and on
13 weekends. The same is true for teachers.

14 So, you might have a teacher who's able-- you
15 know, who's coming in Tuesday, Wednesday, and
16 Thursday, their normal hours in person, but Monday
17 and Friday, they're doing the evenings from home.
18 So, we think that's going to be not just a retention
19 tool to, you know, kind of help lower the job stress
20 some, but a-- but a recruitment tool. We're hoping
21 that we're able to recruit from our, you know,
22 outlying suburbs, shortage area teachers, just the
23 ones you're talking about, because they can't work
24 hybrid in their districts, but they can in New York
25 City. So, we're very excited about that in addition

2 to the pay increases for our teachers who really,
3 really deserve it.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In the ESL shortage area,
5 how are we doing with recruiting ESL coordinators,
6 ESL teachers?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We-- It is--
8 As the Chancellor just said, it's a chronic shortage
9 area. So, we don't get as many applications per
10 vacancy as we get, for example, for common branches,
11 for elementary. But, you know, we-- we do-- we're
12 not seeing a huge vacancy rate. We're able to fill
13 most of those-- most of those areas.

14 So, I do have a little bit of data, just an
15 answer, Chair, to your earlier question: For
16 bilingual common branches, we have 11 vacancies
17 currently. In bilingual special education, we have 8
18 current vacancies. So, we don't want to see any
19 vacancies but right now it's a relatively small
20 number. We have about 2,000 active bilingual
21 education teachers.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We should encourage our
23 common branch educators to get extensions in ESL.

24 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: 100%. 100%.
25 Couldn't agree more.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have a question from one
3 of my student groups. They wanted to know: Last
4 year the budget included terms and conditions
5 requiring reports on restorative justice spending.
6 The report tells us that FY 23, \$3.87 million went
7 unspent. Could you-- Could you tell me why?

8 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Do we have RJ? Do we have--
9 Robin, do you think you can answer that?

10 MS. DAVSON: That's a budget issue.

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Unspent dollars?

12 MS. DAVSON: I can do that.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi. Could you state your
14 name please first?

15 MS. DAVSON: Robin Davson.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Have I-- I've sworn you in,
17 right?

18 MS. DAVSON: Yes.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, go ahead.

20 MS. DAVSON: Hi Good afternoon. So, as I
21 testified last time during Council, the unspent funds
22 was because of some funds that we received a little
23 late in the year, and we weren't able to spend it.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What happened to those funds
3 when they were not spent? They move them around? Or
4 you kept them in the same pot?

5 MS. DAVSON: So the funds that we did have, we
6 spent on the programs, and the balance of the funds,
7 they go back into the budget.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They go back into the
9 budget. So, between NYPD and New York City Public
10 Schools, we have allocated \$400 million to the budget
11 to have NYPD personnel in schools.

12 We have the largest school police force in a
13 country with an authorized headcount of 4,126. Is
14 this-- this is more than all social workers,
15 counselors, restorative justice practitioners, at a
16 time when the education budget is facing massive cuts
17 to those positions. This is my group's-- Would you
18 consider putting in-- eliminating the current 492
19 vacant police positions so that you can instead fund
20 staff-- staff for children like social workers,
21 guidance counselors, restorative justice positions?

22 CHANCELLOR BANKS: The-- Every time I visit a
23 school, I hear from students and staff the importance
24 of those personnel in the buildings as well. So,
25 they play to me just as important a role in keeping

2 our kids safe. While I've been sitting here today,
3 having this hearing, we had three students who were
4 slashed at Port Richmond High School, and I'm trying
5 to get regular updates on how those kids are doing,
6 including one who was just rushed to the hospital.

7 So, I tread very lightly when we start talking
8 about removing school safety agents from our schools.
9 We're not even at the number that we were pre-
10 pandemic, although the numbers have gone up since
11 we've been here. I think they all are important,
12 including the social workers and the counselors,
13 school safety. So I don't want to pit one against
14 the other. They're all important, and we're looking
15 at each one of them. All of it is on the table for
16 us to review.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's for our students. Go
18 ahead. Somebody else was going to say something
19 else? No.

20 So, metal detectors: The Mayor shared in a press
21 conference last last week that you, Chancellor Banks,
22 are using a version of a new technology that's easier
23 to use than traditional large scanners that are
24 really intrusive. Could you elaborate on that? And
25 what-- what would be the cost of that?

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Who's going on that?

3 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Jay is.

4 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Okay, good. Have we sworn Jay
5 in?

6 MR. FINDLING: Yes.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Our-- Our person who's the
8 director is Mark Rampersant, who's out, not feeling
9 well today.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

11 CHANCELLOR BANKS: But Jay, have they sworn you
12 in?

13 MR. FINDLING: I was sworn in earlier.

14 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Okay.

15 MR. FINDLING: So, I can't speak to the budgetary
16 portion. We'll get that information to you. But
17 what I can speak to is the type of devices that are
18 being used, and these are devices that are smaller,
19 more compact, but just as effective with regards to
20 detecting the trace amounts of metal.

21 We had piloted them in a number of schools. We
22 have begun rolling them out with the NYPD, so that
23 all of our schools that are full time and random
24 scanning will in fact get these units.

25

2 They're very similar to devices that we see now
3 at arenas, two separate bowls about six feet in
4 height. So schools can brand them, so they're a
5 little bit more welcoming. They don't feel as if
6 they're so intrusive.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the cost, you said?
8 And how many...?

9 MR. FINDLING: I don't have info-- info on the
10 cost. We'll have to get back to you.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We need numbers.

12 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, they need the numbers.
13 So we've got to--

14 MR. FINDLING: Absolutely.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: We should be to get that
16 today.

17 MR. FINDLING: Absolutely. Yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I need numbers. Thank you.

19 The school-- The Council works to ensure funding
20 for new positions, including social workers, guidance
21 counselors, psychologists. How to the cuts to the
22 school budget's hiring freeze impact schools ability
23 to keep counselor and social worker staff?

24 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So there were not
25 cuts to school budgets, as the Chancellor said.

2 There have been a number of increases to school
3 budgets over the course of this year. The hiring
4 freeze did not impact school-based staff. It was
5 about central staff.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did you add any?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Did we add any...?

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: School-based staff?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So our-- I'm not
10 sure I understand.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did you secure funding for
12 new-- new--

13 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I mean, yes. As--
14 Right, sorry. So, let me try this again. Schools
15 received additional funding this year. As you know,
16 schools have a lot of flexibility over how they use
17 that funding. They may have used it to hire-- used
18 it to hire additional teachers, they may have used it
19 to hire social workers, arts programs, they might
20 have done it-- used it for after-school programming.

21 And so across the system schools use those
22 additional dollars in different ways. We maintained
23 our central commitment to the social workers that
24 were funded by stimulus for this year.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what's the plan for the
3 social workers funded under the stimulus? There's
4 quite a few of them.

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: There are. There are
6 440, as I said a little while ago, and as with the
7 rest of the stimulus programs, they are on the list
8 of potential cliffs that we are hoping for money to
9 fund.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you got to talk to the
11 State to do more.

12 How is was the New York City Public School-- How
13 do you check access to support staff? How do you
14 know how many schools have to... How do track that?
15 How many support staff at a-- at one given school?

16 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Well, I mean,
17 we-- we obviously see the numbers of support staff by
18 title. We can see it by school. You know, luckily,
19 parents can see it by school, as well, on the
20 website. You know, so this is not-- You know, we
21 don't have a-- a goal or metric for particular
22 support staff typically. But we-- our
23 superintendents are certainly looking at-- looking at
24 that-- how principals are spending their money to see
25 whether there's adequate support staff and whether

2 there's a right balance between pedagogical staff and
3 support staff. So, it's something we monitor. We
4 don't have a particular metric that we look at on
5 that.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. What is the
7 budget impact on restorative justice after the
8 stimulus funds expire?

9 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So this year, there's
10 about \$5.5 million in tax levy going into Restorative
11 Justice, and another \$8 million in stimulus funding
12 going into Restorative Justice.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the-- What is
14 Project PIVOT's budget for 2025?

15 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Project PIVOT is also
16 currently stimulus funded. The \$15 million that is
17 going to project PIVOT this year is also on the
18 stimulus list.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's on the chopping block.
20 Councilmember Stevens?

21 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: [INAUDIBLE]

22 [LAUGHTER]

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I got you all the time.

24 Which-- How many nurses were funded with stimulus
25 funding?

2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I don't have the
3 number of stimulus funds. I'll get that. But it's
4 \$65 million in stimulus funds this year, out of the
5 number I said earlier.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what's the current
7 budget for nurses in 2025?

8 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Let us check that.
9 We should have this here. Nurses, as you probably
10 know, are another place where our budget in the out
11 years does not reflect our needs in the current year.
12 So, in addition to the stimulus money, OMB also moved
13 in \$87 million in the last plan to nurses, and we'll
14 continue to work with them on that full funding for
15 the out years to maintain that.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many nurses does that
17 support?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I'll check on that
19 number.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In the 2024 Mayor's Report,
21 it shows that the average just 53% of early-learn
22 seats were utilized in FY 23, down from 76% five
23 years ago. These seats are largely state-funded via
24 the state portion of the Child Care and Development
25 Block Grant.

2 How can you explain the sharp drop in
3 utilization, especially when in the same timeframe,
4 New York State increased income limits for the
5 program, thus making it more family eligible-- more
6 families are eligible?

7 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I think this, Chair,
8 goes back to some of the things we've mentioned
9 already here today, which is around the fact that,
10 while we can't deny that families do need extended-
11 day/extended-year programming, the eligibility
12 process for extended extended-day/extended-year and
13 the location of many of those seats, doesn't meet the
14 needs of all the families that actually could be
15 eligible for such.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And why are not drawing down
17 on those dollars?

18 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So, in fact, our team
19 has done incredible work to actually draw down on the
20 dollars in more years than then in the past in the
21 present. So, we've done incredible work in
22 collaboration with ACS to really claim on those
23 dollars, and to actually make sure that those
24 children that are actually eligible for those seats
25 that were claiming for those seats.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

3 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Lots of work that had
4 to be done to transform the system yet again,
5 technical system, and programmatic system.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I hope we get it right.

7 Remote learning: What has been done to ensure
8 that students in temporary housing have Wi Fi enabled
9 devices for remote learning since the contract to
10 provide this has now expired?

11 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So we are continuing
12 to work with OTI to make sure the shelters have Wi Fi
13 access, and Wi Fi access that is working, and we're
14 upgrading our planning with them as we move forward.
15 I think we're actually getting a briefing from them
16 this week on what they're seeing in terms of access
17 in shelters.

18 In terms of LTE service, that is something that
19 was funded via-- again, via expiring federal funds.
20 Not actually the stimulus funds we've been talking
21 about, but an entire separate set of federal funds
22 that are now gone: the emergency connectivity fund.
23 We are looking at ways to ensure schools can still
24 access LTE service for individual devices now that

2 those central dollars are gone. But really working
3 with OTI on the shelter pieces a big part of it.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because we will have more
5 remote days. I just want us to make sure that we are
6 prepared for remote.

7 Um, has there been any further conversation about
8 possible changes to the contract with IBM? When we
9 had IBM here, they said the contract has to be
10 changed in order to meet the needs of New York City
11 students.

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We are in ongoing
13 conversations with IBM about both the ability of
14 their system to fully serve our students on a remote
15 day, as well as the contract to support that. So,
16 yes, those conversations are both going on.

17 CHANCELLOR BANKS: And I'll be meeting shortly
18 with the CEO of IBM. So, we are going to have some
19 very direct conversations around how we're going to
20 be-- how we're going to support one another. So, to
21 make sure that when we're when this happens, again,
22 we're fully ready.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Does the city have an
24 estimated IBM-- what the cost would increase if we

2 were to increase the contract? What are the changes
3 to the contract?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So there's different
5 ways we're looking at changing the contract, as we
6 discussed on that day. One would be about increasing
7 the TPS that are available to us regularly, one would
8 be about an auto scale solution. Those would have
9 different costs associated with them, and we're
10 working with IBM on which of those makes sense, and
11 which will better support our kids.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You will make sure you tell
13 the Council when you do that, right? We would love
14 to hear that-- um, how the implementation for remote
15 learning is looking with the contract. We would love
16 The Council to be involved in that.

17 So let's-- let's do this one: Class size. I
18 know that you believe you'll in compliance for 2024
19 and 2025. How does-- 2025 and 2026 will be the first
20 year in school with full class size requirements. Is
21 that correct?

22 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: So we do believe we
23 will be in compliance next year. As we discussed at
24 the recent class size hearing, we are expecting to
25 put in place some policy changes to make sure that

2 it's true, in terms of flexibility of principals over
3 their budget and uses of space. But yes, we do
4 believe with those changes, we'll be in compliance
5 next year. We intend to remain in compliance after
6 next year as well. But we do expect there to be more
7 substantial shifts. We are looking at the
8 recommendations of the Class Size Working Group, and
9 we talked through a number of the challenges at that
10 hearing, of course, in terms of trade-offs around
11 budget space and enrollment.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's your favorite word:
13 Trade off. If so, in what plan, and what fiscal year
14 does New York City Public School intend to budget
15 this headcount for teachers? What year?

16 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Could you say that again?
17 What's the question?

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the budget for
19 teachers? How are you going to implement that in the
20 budget, as you need to hire teachers for class size?

21 Chancellor's face is priceless right now.

22 [LAUGHTER]

23 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Listen, we've got to hire, as
24 we said, on our estimates, anywhere from 10,000 to
25 12,000 teachers. We do about 4,000 teachers a year.

2 This is again-- It's going to be another major
3 challenge, not only financially, but from a
4 substantive standpoint. We're in the middle of a
5 national teacher shortage. And we basically have to
6 triple the amount of teachers that we are hiring in
7 order to meet this law. So, no easy-- no easy
8 answers to it. We're going to work with our
9 partners, UFT and others to figure out how-- how do
10 you do that without lowering the standards? Parents
11 want smaller class sizes, but they also don't want us
12 to just grab a warm body off the street to say, "This
13 is now your new teacher."

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's right.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: So, if you've got-- if you're
16 saying-- if the point is to maintain high quality
17 teachers, and-- and we struggle every year to meet
18 the 4,000 and now we've got to go up to 12,000, we've
19 got some real challenges in front of us, that I don't
20 have the-- I don't have all the answers for that
21 right now. So, this is worked up behind the scenes.
22 We're still grappling with it and trying to figure it
23 out.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: To do teacher recruitment,
3 the First Deputy Chancellor said he has a plan to
4 recruit teachers.

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, we've got a clear plan.
6 There are a number of things that we are looking at
7 in terms of teacher recruitment, and-- and much of it
8 also involves, you know, recruiting teachers from--
9 from somebody else's backyard, you know, from-- from
10 from other districts, even outside of New York City,
11 to entice them to come to New York City to work, to
12 live. And then there are folks who are international
13 that we're going to be looking at as well.

14 So, it's all part of an overarching plan that
15 we're looking at. I'm just saying that in spite of
16 it all, it will be a challenge to meet these numbers.
17 They are very significant numbers. These are not--
18 This is not a small bump in teachers. This is a
19 major transformational set of hiring that has to
20 happen if this law is in full compliance, and-- and
21 that is just to suppose that we've got all of the
22 space to hire all-- to place all the teachers with
23 new classrooms that are going to be needed.

24 So, this this law with a five-year timeline on it
25 is-- is very ambitious.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you believe there'll be
3 an increase in capital funding to allocate creation
4 of new classrooms?

5 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Do I believe there will be?

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I think we're going to have to
8 lean in and-- and make sure that there is. But, you
9 know, there are lots of other things that parents and
10 families also want with the school construction
11 capital plan. And, so-- Listen, this has been
12 something that's been prioritized, that we're going
13 to have to lean into. But our estimates is that it
14 is going to cost over \$20 billion. And we're already
15 in a five-year capital plan now, all right?, where
16 there's a small percentage of that that's going to
17 class size.

18 So, this is going to-- this is going to take some
19 time. And, Chair, I will tell you also: When we
20 think about, not just the capital plan, if you even
21 had the money, you will need the physical space for
22 some of this as well. I can give you a high school
23 and tell you it's overcrowded, and say that school
24 needs the equivalent of almost another school
25 building in order to meet the compliance of the law.

2 And yet there is no space around the school to
3 put-- to place it. Where would you even place it,
4 even if you had the dollars to build it? It's not
5 like in New York City we've just got a ton of space
6 right next to every school to go up or out.

7 So, each one of these presents its own unique set
8 of challenges. I think the schools in New York City
9 that are struggling the most with class size are the
10 ones that I think a lot about, who really need the
11 most help, and how do we get to them first and
12 foremost. But there are lots of other schools, also,
13 which don't have as significant a challenge around
14 class size. But yet they also find themselves within
15 the law. And we have to be responsive to them, as
16 well. And so it's a challenge. It's a challenge
17 that awaits us, and we've got to figure out how to
18 get it done.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We're here for that.

20 Chancellor, you described the success of NYC
21 Read? What is the budget for the program for fiscal
22 2025 for Early Childhood and K to 5?

23 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: \$55 million is the K
24 to 5.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about Early
3 Childhood? Is that under the same budget, or that's
4 a different budget?

5 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We'll get back to you
6 on that.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the budget for
8 Future Read NYC for the next fiscal year?

9 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Future Ready?

10 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: We are continuing to
11 work on the budget for that, given it as one of-- it
12 is largely stimulus funded and caught up in the rest
13 of the stimulus programs.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I asked this earlier, but
15 I'm going to ask it again. How many schools are
16 impacted by the loss of federal stimulus funding for
17 nurses, psychologists, school workers? Can you
18 provide us a list of schools, and the amount each
19 school stands to lose in each of those areas?

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Yes. We don't have
21 that here, but we can provide that. We have it
22 broken down by school.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I think that's it for me.
24 If there is anything else, I'll send it over. Thank
25 you for your--

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: One thing,
3 Chair. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But just on East
4 River-- East River Academy, you asked how many
5 students they serve.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We were able
8 to get that. It's 262.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 262. When did the screening
10 start?

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So, screening
12 started this year. I don't have the exact date, but
13 the teachers are all trained in the screener. The
14 students who are identified as being at risk, so
15 they're scoring the lowest on the initial screener,
16 or getting the specific dyslexia screen. Two of the
17 teachers have been trained specifically in an Orton-
18 Gillingham method to make sure they can provide
19 support. So, training has happened. We do have two
20 teachers who can do the interventions that are
21 necessary for the students who are identified. And
22 we've identified over 100 of those 262, Chair, who
23 are at least at risk. So, we-- But we're happy to
24 have Superintendent Esperance in D 79 come in and do

2 a full briefing. But those-- that work is in motion,
3 and it's benefiting kids already.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there a plan to expand
5 the-- dyslexia to reach more students? Is there a
6 plan to expand dyslexia?

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Are you
8 talking about system-wide--

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: System wide.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Certainly,
11 yeah. I mean, we are doing the initial screen for
12 all students. I think you heard from Christina Foti
13 before. We've got academic intervention specialists
14 in each district, so it's not just identifying kids
15 who are at risk, obviously, but being able to provide
16 effective interventions.

17 So, as we are learning from that, as we're
18 looking at that data from that, absolutely. We want
19 to not just expand but deepen that work. So, every
20 child who is at risk, or has a print-based disability
21 is getting the specific evidence-based interventions
22 they need.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Does any of that funding
24 overlap with NYC Reads?

25 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes.

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: I thought you said you were
3 done already.

4 [LAUGHTER]

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No, you came back.

6 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: That was my
7 fault.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You have to answer my
9 questions that you didn't answer.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Mea maxima
11 culpa. I wanted to--

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes. Do they overlap?
13 Dyslexia and NYC Read? Do they overlap? I know
14 that's your baby, Chancellor Banks.

15 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We want to make sure that
17 your NYC Read priorities also reach our students with
18 disabilities.

19 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They cannot be left.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: One hundred
22 percent.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And our multi-language
24 learners, they must have these screenings as well.
25 We can't leave anyone out.

2 CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right. Absolutely.

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We've done that now, and
4 we're going to try to do better with our aid and make
5 sure our 600 students find a seat. We promised them
6 a seat, and we have to deliver.

7 CHANCELLOR BANKS: We agree with you.
8 Absolutely.

9 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes chair.

10 CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you for-- for this
11 inquiry today, and thank you to Councilmember Lewis
12 for hanging in to the end as well. I appreciate you
13 too. We're good. Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So we want to go straight to
16 SCA, do you want to take a break? What do you want
17 to do.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Let's take a break.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: 5 minutes?

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That's fine.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to take a five-
22 minute break before we continue with testimony from
23 the School Construction Authority, SCA.

24 [19.5 MINUTES OF SILENCE]

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon ladies and
3 gentlemen, we ask you please find your seats. Please
4 find your seats, and make sure all cell phones and
5 electronic devices are placed on silent or vibrate.
6 Once again, please find your seats. We are getting
7 ready to resume. Thank you for your kind
8 cooperation.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Good afternoon
10 and welcome to the Education Committee hearing on
11 School Construction Authority's fiscal 2025 to 2029
12 Capital Plan, and fiscal 2025 Preliminary Capital
13 Budget and Commitment Plan for the Department of
14 Education. Today's hearing will primarily focus on
15 the \$17 billion proposed February amendment to this
16 fiscal 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan.

17 I want to begin today-- today's hearing by
18 welcoming Nina Kubota, the President and CEO of the
19 New York City School Construction Authority, as well
20 as Cora Liu, the Vice President for Capital Plan
21 Management. I also want to welcome back First Deputy
22 Chancellor Dan Weisberg, and Chief Operating Officer,
23 Deputy Chancellor for Operations and Finance, Emma
24 Vadehra, who each testified earlier in regards to New

2 York City Public Schools' education fiscal 2025
3 Preliminary Budget.

4 SCA's proposed \$17 billion fiscal 2025 to 2029
5 Capital Plan includes important funding in a number
6 of key areas, but still falls short of what is needed
7 to come-- at this time. Crucial programs like class
8 size reduction and accessibility compliance remains
9 below the funding level needed to carry out legally
10 required and mandated work.

11 For class size, SCA has testified previously that
12 they would need \$22 to \$25 billion to fund 85,000 new
13 seats in order to be in compliance with the state
14 Class Size Law. The plan currently includes \$4.1
15 billion that funds roughly 23,000 new seats, both
16 well short of SCA's stated targets. Furthermore,
17 many of the new seats in the plan are not designated
18 by district, and currently lacks the detail necessary
19 to analyze SCA's fiscal 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan
20 capacity planning, both for demographic needs and
21 class-size-reduction compliance.

22 For accessibility, we understand that the city is
23 still 20 years away from reaching full ADA compliance
24 at every public school. And although funding is up
25 slightly from the fiscal 2020 to 2024 plan, it is

2 still below what is needed to more quick-- to move
3 quickly to bring our school to full-- to be fully
4 accessible.

5 We look forward to hearing about SCA's work with
6 New York City Public Schools and City Hall on these
7 important issues, as we want to confirm that they are
8 getting the necessary resources they need to do this
9 important work. We also look forward to getting
10 updates on important capital improvement projects
11 like internet speed upgrades, facility enhancement,
12 and the status of removal of temporary classroom
13 units, and the status of new construction on many new
14 school-- schools across the city.

15 All of this work will require significant
16 increase to the funding levels in current SCA fiscal
17 2025 to 2029 Capital Plan, and we would like to
18 explore the outlook for funding from both City and
19 State today, as we continue the budgeting process.

20 We will cover these issues and others and hope to
21 get some additional transparency and guidance on how
22 to best support SCA in their work.

23 I would like to thank and recognize my colleagues
24 who have joined us, Councilmember Lewis.

25 Councilmember Lewis. I would love to once again

2 thank Nina Kobudo, Koren Lu, Dan Weisberg and Emma
3 Vadehra for coming to testify before the Committee
4 today. We will hear that testimony after The Council
5 swears them in. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hello again to some of you.

7 Panelists, please raise your right hand. I will
8 read the affirmation ones and then call on each of
9 you individually to respond. And those here for a
10 Q&A, if you could please raise your right hand as
11 well.

12 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
13 and nothing but the truth before this committee and
14 to respond honestly to Councilmember questions?

15 Dan Weisberg?

16 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thomas _____?

18 MR. _____: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Cora Liu?

20 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nina Kubota?

22 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Kevin Moran?

24 CHIEF MORAN: I do.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Scott Strickland?

2 MR. STRICKLAND: I do.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: John Shea?

4 MR. SHEA: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Emma Vadehra?

6 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. You may
8 begin your testimony.

9 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Good afternoon Chair Joseph
10 and members of the city council Education Committee.
11 My name is Nina Kubota, and I am President and CEO of
12 the New York City School Construction Authority. I'm
13 joined by First Deputy Chancellor Daniel Weisberg and
14 Emma Vadhra, COO and Deputy Chancellor of Operations
15 and finance from the New York City Public Schools,
16 and by Cora Liu, Vice President of Capital Plan
17 Management for the SCA.

18 We are pleased to be here today to discuss the
19 proposed New York City Public Schools and SCA's FY 25
20 to 29 five-year Capital Plan which currently totals
21 \$17 billion.

22 Starting on July 1, we will be entering our
23 eighth Capital Plan. Each plan that has been
24 developed, adopted, and implemented has contained key
25

2 focal programs in order to best respond to the needs
3 of our students, as well as our building portfolio.

4 We are so proud of the advancements we made
5 through our current Capital Plan, increasing our
6 building accessibility, making our buildings
7 watertight, addressing overcrowding across the city,
8 and funding important school amenities--

9 Next slide.

10 --such as the state of the art athletic field at
11 August Martin High School, which we were honored to
12 have Speaker Adams join us for the groundbreaking
13 earlier this month. But that's not all. The prior
14 plan saw the signature initiatives that built 21
15 standalone gym annexes, provided the necessary
16 electrical infrastructure at 750 buildings to allow
17 for the installation of 15,000 air conditioning
18 units, and created over 6000 Early Education seats
19 citywide.

20 Huge investments were also made in the removal of
21 transportable classroom units. We are incredibly
22 proud of the work we have done to remove these
23 outdated facilities from our school grounds. And we
24 currently only have 24 TCUs remaining at six sites.

2 This September will be an historic year for us.
3 We will be opening 24 new school buildings in 2024,
4 one of the biggest in our history.

5 I would like to take a moment to share a preview
6 of what some of our beautiful new buildings will look
7 like.

8 Next slide.

9 In Manhattan, we will be opening PSIS at 3761
10 10th Avenue.

11 Next slide.

12 In the Bronx, we will be opening eight schools in
13 total, including a PS at 639 St. Anne's Avenue,--

14 Next slide.

15 --a PS at 1302 Edward L. Grant Highway, a PS at
16 2075 Webster Avenue, a PS at 2347 Morris Avenue, and
17 an addition at PS 87.

18 In Brooklyn, we're opening nine schools which
19 include a PS HS at 485 State Street, a PS at 280
20 Senator Street, an intermediate school at 650 86th
21 street, a PS at 6312 13th Avenue.

22 And in Queens we're opening six new schools
23 including in addition at 32, an addition at PS 169,
24 an addition at PS 41, an addition at PS 96, an
25 addition at PS 174, and an annex at PS 85.

2 In the past, our Capital Plans had been broken
3 out into three sections: Capacity, capital
4 investments, and mandated. This proposed FY 25 to 29
5 Capital Plan continues the work we have done to
6 provide new facilities, improve our existing
7 infrastructure, and meet code-required mandates, but
8 now contains an added Healthy Schools category, which
9 highlights our focus on creating sustainable teaching
10 and learning environments.

11 We're making significant investments in greening
12 our schools as part of The Mayor's leading-the-charge
13 commitment, and the funding in this category supports
14 our ongoing sustainability efforts.

15 I will now briefly discuss each of the categories
16 in the proposed plan.

17 In prior Capital Plans, we focused primarily on
18 building new seats where we had identified a need for
19 new capacity. Since that time, several things have
20 changed which necessitated a shift in the way we
21 address seat need. First, the city has experienced a
22 multi-year decline in enrollment along with a
23 declining birth rate for over a decade. Secondly,
24 the passing of the Class Size Law now requires us to
25 examine space needs at an individual school level.

2 These two occurrences led us to think strategically
3 and restructure the plan to address the need for
4 capacity in different and creative ways in order to
5 solve for these complex challenges. In this proposed
6 plan, we have combined the successful new Capacity
7 Program, with the Class Size Reduction Program from
8 prior plans, to create a re-envisioned new Capacity
9 Program. This reimagined new Capacity Program will
10 equip us with more flexibility to promptly respond
11 and provide support tailored to the specific needs of
12 school communities throughout the city.

13 Additionally, we will continue expanding
14 successful key programs such as facility replacement,
15 capacities to support the removal of temporary
16 structures, as well as the Early Learner Program. By
17 generating new capacity through all four programs, we
18 will further increase equity throughout the system.

19 The proposed FY 25 to 29 plan contains the
20 following funding to support capacity, totaling
21 almost \$5 billion: \$4.13 billion in new capacity,
22 \$250 million to remove temporary structures, \$400
23 million for facility replacement, \$200 million for
24 early education.

2 The \$4.13 billion allocated for new capacity is
3 the funding that will be used to continued compliance
4 with the Class Size Law. As I testified at the class
5 size hearing on February 29, we have four capital
6 strategies that will be implemented to assist with
7 compliance, one of which, thanks to the investment
8 made through the FY 20 to 24 plan, is already
9 underway, as we are in process of bringing roughly
10 27,000 seats online to help with school overcrowding.

11 We fully recognize that the current funding level
12 of new capacity is short of our current \$22 to \$27
13 billion capital estimate for class size compliance.
14 But we cannot nor do we intend to rely solely on new
15 construction. Capital construction is just one piece
16 in solving for class size compliance. It must be
17 coupled with other strategies to maximize its effect.

18 The health and well-being of New Yorkers has been
19 front and center in the Adams administration, and
20 that extends to our younger New Yorkers as well. In
21 the FY 25 to 29 Capital Plan, we created the new
22 Healthy Schools category that reflects the priorities
23 of this administration with dedicated funding to work
24 towards the goals of sustainable schools and an
25 increased focus on the health and well-being of our

2 students. A majority of this funding, \$1.4 billion,
3 will go towards our efforts to electrify our existing
4 building portfolio. Additionally, there's \$350
5 million allocated to upgrade our heating plants.
6 Both efforts will make huge strides in eliminating
7 our reliance on polluting fossil fuels and reducing
8 greenhouse gas emissions.

9 \$325 million is allocated to projects that will
10 upgrade physical education facilities, including
11 athletic fields, pools, and playgrounds. The
12 National Institute of Health as well as many other
13 notable health institutions assert that there is
14 strong evidence supporting the link between physical
15 activity and fitness levels and cognitive performance
16 and overall academic performance. We recognize that
17 these facilities are critical components to our
18 students and their instruction, and we remain
19 dedicated to providing state-of-the-art facilities to
20 encourage active participation in sports and physical
21 activities.

22 The Administration recognizes these spaces as
23 vital resources to the school community, and thanks
24 to Mayor Adams, we have been able to increase the
25 investment in improving physical education spaces.

2 The last program in this category provides \$180
3 million for health and nutrition projects. \$150 of
4 the \$180 million of this funding will continue the
5 successful implementation of the Cafeteria
6 Enhancement Experience Initiative started in the
7 prior plan that transforms cafeterias into
8 comfortable and attractive dining environments. \$30
9 million is set aside for the creation of unique
10 educational spaces such as learning gardens and
11 hydroponic labs that have a unique emphasis on health
12 and nutrition teaching and learning.

13 Next slide.

14 This builds upon the unique opportunity we had in
15 Bergen Beach in District 22, where we were able to
16 take a 2.2 acre abandoned lot and turn it into a
17 garden, complete with a learning kitchen, composting
18 area, greenhouse with a weather station, pollinator
19 garden, and a fruit orchard.

20 Thanks to the overwhelming support by The
21 Council, and in particular Councilmember Narcisse,
22 and former Councilmember myself, we will be opening
23 this incredible project in September, along with the
24 other 24 buildings I previously mentioned.

2 The capital investment portion of the plan
3 includes two main categories: The Capital
4 Improvement Program, or CIP, which totals \$3.33
5 billion, and the school enhancements projects
6 totaling \$2.88 billion.

7 In many ways we've been able to increase
8 investments in enhancing and modernizing school
9 facilities such as bathrooms, science labs,
10 libraries, and room conversions to advance equity and
11 excellence throughout the city.

12 CIP includes exterior and interior building
13 upgrades, and other necessary capital repairs to our
14 buildings. These include the life safety and
15 security systems as well as critical components of
16 the building's infrastructure, such as roof parapets
17 and windows. This work is vital so that we maintain
18 the highest standards of safety at our school
19 facilities for all students. In the current plan to
20 date, we have awarded over 300 exterior modernization
21 projects totaling \$2.9 billion.

22 School enhancement projects strengthen
23 educational opportunities for our students. This
24 category funds technology enhancements, realignment
25 of existing facilities to better suit instructional

2 needs, bathroom upgrades, science labs,
3 accessibility, the innovative diverse, equitable,
4 accessible spaces program, and the career and
5 technical education program and other necessary
6 improvements. A very popular program, the bathroom
7 upgrade program, falls under school enhancement and
8 it has funded over 400 bathroom renovations in our
9 current plan.

10 We know how important these upgrades are to our
11 school communities. And we are happy to continue
12 this program in the next plan with allocated funding
13 of \$60 million.

14 In this plan, there is an increase in funding for
15 accessibility which demonstrates The Administration's
16 continued commitment to expand the accessibility of
17 our school facilities. This plan allocates \$800
18 million towards making our buildings accessible to
19 school communities, an increase of \$50 million from
20 the FY 20 to 24 Capital Plan.

21 The current five-year Capital Plan funded 56
22 accessibility projects in historically underserved
23 districts. I am happy to report that we have
24 achieved our goal, and a third of all school
25 buildings are fully programmatically accessible, and

2 50% of all elementary school buildings are partially
3 or fully programmatically accessible.

4 In the proposed FY 25 to 29 plan, we will build
5 upon the successes with a continued focus on citywide
6 equity. Working with our advocate partners and other
7 stakeholders, we will target buildings offering
8 specialized programming, D 75, Career Pathways,
9 bilingual, and gifted and talented programming will
10 be considered in our project selection criteria.

11 We are extremely grateful for the support and
12 advocacy we have received to facilitate this
13 important work for the benefit of all students.

14 We are grateful for The Council's longstanding
15 and continuous investment in technology for our
16 schools. The FY 20 to 24 Five Year Plan funded a
17 wide range of programs to increase the technology
18 capacity of New York City Public Schools, including
19 bandwidth increases in all schools, procurement of
20 student mobile devices, the creation of a disaster
21 recovery data center, and the replacement of several
22 legacy application systems. This proposed 25 to 29
23 Capital Plan builds on the technology capacity
24 created in the previous plan, \$with 1.25 billion, an
25 increase in technology funding from our current plan

2 dedicated to ensuring our infrastructure is keeping
3 pace with modern technology development. This plan
4 funds continued data network improvement and
5 bandwidth capacity increases in our schools. It
6 includes funding to replace outdated phone systems in
7 schools. It also funds upgrading New York City
8 Public Schools' data security tools, the replacement
9 of additional legacy application systems, and funding
10 for a small number of student mobile devices for high
11 priority needs.

12 In the upcoming plan, \$3.4 billion has been
13 allocated to allow us to meet code agency remediation
14 and insurance requirements. Also, through the
15 mandated program is the funding that allows us to
16 complete projects that began in the current FY 20 to
17 24 Capital Plan.

18 The SCA is dedicated to increasing the
19 participation of MWBEs on SCA projects. In the
20 current five year plan through January 2024, we
21 obligated over \$3.2 billion which is over 30% of our
22 total to prime contracts to MWBEs, with over \$485
23 million through our mentor programs. In the same
24 period, MWBEs have been awarded roughly \$1.4 billion
25 or 35% in subcontracts on SCA work, of which over

2 \$400 million, 32%, has been for emergency work. In
3 FY 24 alone, 2,540 jobs were created through mentor
4 projects, and 46.2% of the jobs created went to black
5 and Hispanic workers.

6 But we do not plan to stop there, or even stop
7 with our focus on construction firms. While the SCA
8 is known for our nationally-recognized construction
9 mentor program, we are now expanding opportunities to
10 MWBE design consultants wishing to pursue business
11 with the SCA, and have launched a mentor program for
12 our A&E consultants to mimic the one we have for our
13 construction firms.

14 This program will help minority and women owned
15 businesses grow their companies by working on SCA
16 projects, while providing them with the necessary
17 training, technical assistance, support, and business
18 guidance to navigate the SCA design standards,
19 submission guidelines, and contractual requirements.
20 program participants will have access to a team of
21 seasoned SCA technical and business employees
22 dedicated to the oversight and training of their
23 firms. The SCA team will help create opportunities
24 for participating firms by providing them with

2 selected contracting opportunities that best reflect
3 their experience and training.

4 The investment we're talking about today, our
5 downpayment on our children's future, we're making
6 sure our schools have the infrastructure they need
7 for our scholars to learn and grow in. As has
8 happened in our current plan, and as our economic
9 climate improves, we continue to update this plan and
10 our investment in our schools. We understand how
11 important our schools are to The Council, and we
12 appreciate your steadfast advocacy, and look forward
13 to our continued partnership to ensure a strong
14 foundation as we build toward the successful
15 implementation of our eighth Capital Plan.

16 I thank you again for allowing me to testify
17 before you today. And I would be happy to answer any
18 questions you may have.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
20 testimony.

21 Our first question is going to be the largest
22 issue in terms of both costs and important currently
23 facing SCA's class size, all right?

24 The class size hearing on February 29, The New
25 York City Public School testified that it would cost

2 between \$22 to \$25 billion to build enough school to
3 comply with the state law. Previous class size
4 reduction plan quoted SCA's estimate from \$30 to \$35
5 billion what led to the decrease in your cost
6 estimate, and can you share how you arrived that new
7 figure, including the calculations that-- what is it
8 based on?

9 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So our initial estimate of \$30
10 to \$35 billion was very preliminary and developed at
11 the beginning of our joint effort in developing a
12 comprehensive class size implementation plan. At the
13 time, the Class Size Working Group was still meeting
14 and working on their final proposal, conversations
15 with other stakeholders were still ongoing, and the
16 estimate represented the most conservative assumption
17 when it came to capital. Essentially, the analysis
18 assumed predominant reliance on constructing new
19 facilities, like big facilities, for compliance with
20 class size mandates.

21 Since then, working with our partners at the New
22 York City Public Schools, we've been able to refine
23 our assumptions and update our estimate.

24 The SCA and New York City Public Schools have put
25 together a cross-departmental team to develop a range

2 of capital strategies that target schools based on
3 each school's level of need. This team includes
4 representatives from-- the Deputy Chancellor of
5 Operations, Office of District Planning, Office of
6 Space Planning, Office of Student Enrollment, and the
7 Capacity and Real Estate Units at the SCA. We meet
8 regularly to review data, discuss potential options,
9 and identify appropriate strategies for individual
10 schools.

11 So, this includes evaluating prospective sites
12 for new construction. And through this team and the
13 work over many months, we've developed four main
14 strategies which I talked about at the class size
15 hearing, and I'm happy to go through those again if
16 you wish. But essentially, there is-- there are four
17 strategies, one of which we've already started
18 working on, and that is on room conversions.

19 So, where there's an agreement, and as you may
20 remember at that hearing, a survey was sent out to
21 all the principals, so when there was an agreement
22 on, "Is there room in your school to accommodate the
23 additional classrooms?" Meaning, "Is there
24 potentially an unused office that could be
25 converted?" Where there was agreement from the

2 central data and from the principal, we've started
3 looking for those couple dozen or so schools that we
4 can do a quicker, cheaper room conversion project
5 that will accommodate the-- the necessary classrooms.

6 The second one, the second strategy which has
7 been underway for some time, because it includes
8 funding from the current Capital Plan. We have
9 27,000 seats that are coming online in the next few
10 years that we are working with this cross-
11 departmental team to see how those 27,000 seats could
12 accommodate schools that have-- that are projected
13 not to be in compliance.

14 And the fourth strategy, which we-- really is the
15 biggest cost here is creating either annexes or new
16 schools to accommodate class size compliance. That
17 is the biggest part of the cost associated with class
18 size compliance.

19 So, those are the four. The third strategy is
20 also investing in our existing facilities.

21 But those four strategies together, I think, we
22 were then able to refine our estimate. And it's
23 still an estimate, to the \$22 to \$27, rather than \$30
24 to \$35.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When-- When I looked over
3 the proposed five year Capital Plan, about \$4 billion
4 is invested in new capacity, which is only about half
5 of the amount that was originally included in the
6 2020 to 2024 Capital Plan. Why is that?

7 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We do recognize that there--
8 there was a decrease to new capacity. I'm not sure
9 of the exact figures, but again, we have \$17 billion
10 in this Capital Plan. We know that we are going to
11 be short for new capacity. And as we refine our plan
12 to address it, we have we have already been in
13 communication with OMB, that we will come back to
14 them for additional funding. But right now, the
15 amount that's been allocated, the total of \$17
16 billion, as you would imagine, with competing
17 priorities, we've allocated as much as we can towards
18 new capacity.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If we were to add funding
20 to-- funding for new seats is added to the SCA 2025
21 and 2029 Capital Plan, would those seats be ready by
22 September of 2028 to meet the deadline?

23 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So I think we do have some
24 sites that are already underway. We have 20-- as I
25 mentioned before, we have 27,000 seats that are in

2 process right now. But if we were given funding for--
3 -- additional funding above that, if we started right
4 now, it would be very close to 2028.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, we will not be in
6 compliance. So, the most recent estimate of number
7 of new seats for class size compliance is 85,000 at
8 540 schools. Can you explain how this number was
9 determined? How did you determine that was the
10 number we needed?

11 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So I think 540 schools (again,
12 all of this to be verified, but--) needed over 3400
13 classrooms in total. So, we took the-- we took the
14 highest number of seats. Because if we do 23 or 25--
15 So, we did 3400 classrooms times 25 seats, and that
16 came to 85,000 total seats.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Earlier you-- you talked
18 about exploring the possibility of under-- under
19 utilization of spaces and existing schools. Is that
20 still...?

21 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: That is correct. We-- That's
22 the sort of-- I think I justified it as the low
23 hanging fruit. So, we have already started that,
24 that work.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many seats do you
3 see you can produce with after you serve the spaces?

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Well, we're still in the
5 middle of surveying them. And I think right now,
6 it's probably only about 25 to 30 school buildings,
7 maybe a classroom or so in each building. So, it's
8 not a lot of that. And that's only-- Those are the
9 really sort of low hanging fruit because that's ones
10 where we need maybe once two classrooms, there are
11 schools that we believe we could-- we can accommodate
12 multiple, 8 or 10 classrooms. So, that's sort of the
13 second part of that first strategy. So, not a lot of
14 schools but the easiest, I think to accomplish.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you believe you're in
16 compliance with Local Law 167 of 2018, given that
17 there's less information about where the seats are
18 placed in the new plan?

19 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So according--

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That was the biggest
21 mystery: Where's the seats going to be?

22 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Thank you Chair Joseph. We
23 do believe we're in compliance with Local Law 167.
24 All the information that is required by the
25 legislation are currently posted and updated on our

2 website. We have to readjust our methodology in
3 terms of implementing the new Capacity Program in
4 response to the class size. That's why we're no
5 longer identifying seat need by district and
6 subdistrict.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How would the school
8 districts know what you're building, if you have no
9 information.

10 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We do. We perform the same
11 analysis. As Nina explained in her testimony, the
12 York City public school system has experienced-- or
13 New York City has experienced over 15 years of
14 declining birth and many years of declining
15 enrollment. So, as a result of that, we no longer
16 see-- see a need, essentially in the city. But our
17 challenge now is to help the public school system to
18 achieve class size compliance.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'll come back,
20 Councilmember Stevens.

21 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Well, hello. How are you
22 guys doing? I just have a-- I have two quick
23 questions. One is just around, like, processes and
24 things that I just sometimes don't feel, like, make
25 sense. And we are in a budget season. And this is

2 my third budget cycle. And one of the things that
3 are probably the bane of-- has been the bane of my
4 existence is: School requests reso funding. I'll
5 allocate it, then you come back to me and say you
6 need more money. I don't like this. Why is this
7 process still here? How do we fix it. And this is
8 like a redundant of time, especially when I know that
9 a lot of times that you guys don't get real estimates
10 in the first round, it's a guesstimate. And no one
11 goes out until after and then it's this weird thing
12 that I keep hearing is like, "We don't have the
13 manpower to go out to do estimates at the start of
14 it." But that makes no sense. Because you are
15 literally costing us money. Because at the end of
16 the budget cycle, it's the end of the school year.
17 So, now we have to wait a whole full year, and you
18 come back to me for money.

19 And so I do not want to get to a place where I'm
20 not funding my schools, because I'm annoyed that this
21 keeps happening. And this keeps happening. And so
22 until we fix it-- Like I need it to be fixed. Like
23 this does not make sense. So, can we talk about how
24 we need to change it, and then talk about how you're
25 going to change it, because I can't do this anymore.

2 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So thank you, Councilmember, I
3 actually very much share your frustration. I
4 actually think that the timeline is also very long.
5 For example, you're looking at-- at allocating
6 funding, call it, January through March.

7 It does-- We actually don't get-- we don't get
8 the lists until later. And then also we don't get
9 out to the schools until November or December. So,
10 it's not the funding--

11 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: None of the issues that
12 my schools are asking for funding for are new issues.
13 So, I don't understand why, one, you don't have
14 people already doing these estimates, and so by the
15 time they come to us, we don't have guesstimates. So
16 I hear you if this was like, new, right? But it's
17 not. So, none of these schools have new issues.
18 These are things that we know that are happening.
19 So, why are you not consistently having people out to
20 have these estimates ready so that when you guys come
21 to us, we can fund it, and fully fundit, and it
22 doesn't take us 10 years, or my whole goddamn time
23 I'm here to form one project. I can't do it anymore.
24 I cannot do it anymore. It is so frustrating because
25 our schools are hemorrhaging. And this is a clog in

2 the system. So, I need to know what are the steps
3 you guys are taking to fix this? Because this is not
4 okay. Like I can't do it anymore. And I've only
5 been here three years, so I can't do it.

6 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Again, I-- I do recognize your
7 frustration. We too are frustrated, but we cannot
8 create estimates for a school-specific project
9 without having the capital funding already there.

10 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Exactly. So, you already
11 have a policy that says if it's not fully funded, you
12 can't start. It's y'all. It's not me. Because that
13 ain't my policy, because it was crazy. Because you
14 already have a policy saying that it has to be fully
15 funded, so you can't start, right? And so, I want to
16 fully fund the project. I want to make sure it's
17 fully funded so we can get it done. But you give me
18 a guesstimate at the start of it. So, my principals
19 are literally giving me guesstimates. And every year
20 they're like, "Well, it's \$150,000 short." I'm like,
21 "Well, why don't you ask for that? I'd have got
22 that. I'd have it allocated. It would have been
23 done." This does not make sense. This has to
24 change. Like this-- this doesn't feel like a
25 partnership.

2 I saw somebody just gave y'all a note. So, do
3 you want to read the note?

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I just want to be quick--

5 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I thought they were
6 giving answers.

7 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Uh-- So again, it's-- it's
8 not our policy. Unfortunately, this the scoping is
9 not capitally eligible. So, we cannot start a
10 project without having that, and there are school-
11 specific-- We come to you and say an auditorium
12 upgrade will cost, I don't know, \$1.2 to \$2 million.
13 Then we get out there, and we find that there are
14 either things that were unforeseen, whether it's
15 asbestos or things like that, that would drive up the
16 costs. But unfortunately we--

17 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: But if you went out there
18 before--

19 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yes. I agree, but we--

20 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: --we wouldn't be there.

21 So, you got to figure it out. Because that's what

22 I'm telling you. That-- Like you're literally

23 explaining the process that I know, and I'm telling

24 you that is the problem. It does not work. It does

25 not make sense. I do not like things that don't make

2 sense. And this is something that does not make
3 sense. And I do not want to be forced to be at a
4 place where I'm not funding my schools, because you
5 guys are doing something that does not work. And
6 that's not fair. It's not fair to any of us up here
7 who are literally putting money into these schools,
8 but like, every year-- I've been here three years,
9 not one of my projects have been able to be
10 completed, because you come back to me and say, you
11 need-- "I need 250 more dollars, I need a million
12 more dollars," when I could have funded at the
13 offset, and the project could have gotten started.
14 So, it's taking four or five years for projects to
15 get started, because you can't start until you get
16 all the money.

17 So, we are in a cycle. So, it does not work.
18 So, I need you guys to come back with some solutions,
19 because it's not working. Like it's not. Like it
20 can't just be like, "Well, we know and we don't like
21 it either." I need solutions. And that's what we
22 should be-- Look at us as stock partners. We will--
23 I'm happy to meet with you guys, happy to sit down,
24 do roundtables. Whatever we need to get done. But
25 it is not working. And I don't understand like, how

2 can we just let this just continue? So, that's--
3 I'll get off my high horse because I'm just very
4 frustrated about that, as you guys can see. I turned
5 into Lincoln there.

6 [BELL RINGS]

7 I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I turned into Lincoln.
8 Dammit. I'm always yelling at him for like not
9 behaving.

10 Chair. I just have--

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We will
12 certainly-- just to close that off, Councilmember--
13 hear your frustration, and make-- you know, this is
14 not something we've had a chance to discuss. But we
15 absolutely will sit down with you and any other
16 councilmembers would who are interested to figure out
17 if there's something we could do to short circuit the
18 process.

19 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: All right. Call me out.
20 We've got to have a meeting, because this-- I can't.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We will
22 schedule that right away.

23 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Yeah. I can't, I can't,
24 I can't.

2 And then I have a school in my district, PS 11.
3 They have an annex. And they don't have a PA system.
4 And is this not a safety issue?

5 And I was told that, that they brought in a box,
6 and it was it worked for a couple of days. Now it
7 doesn't. And it's been like-- it's been a number of
8 years. I tried to allocate money to it. But then I
9 realized, like, why am I paying for this? This is a
10 safety thing. You all need to pay for this.

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I'm going to
12 ask Kevin Moran to come up. I believe he's familiar
13 with that situation.

14 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Mm-hmm. Great.

15 CHIEF MORAN: Hello

16 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Hello.

17 CHIEF MORAN: How are you?

18 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I'm doing well.

19 CHIEF MORAN: I was sworn in. So, Kevin Moran
20 Chief of School Based Operations. If PS 11 has a
21 malfunctioning PA system, we'll see to it.

22 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Oh, it doesn't work. It
23 doesn't-- So they didn't have-- It never existed, and
24 so I was going to allocate money. And then I was
25 like, "This is a safety issue. I don't think this is

2 me." Then you guys said, "You're right. We're
3 supposed to make sure this happens." And then they
4 came in. They put-- They-- She literally said,
5 "Well, it's a new principal." And so, she didn't
6 even realize that this has happened before. They had
7 gave them like a box that was supposed to work. But
8 she's, like, "Yeah, it doesn't work." And so, it
9 does not exist. They don't have a PA system between
10 the two schools. And I see this as a safety issue,
11 and a safety concern. So, please note it. It has to
12 be addressed.

13 CHIEF MORAN: Absolutely.

14 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: I think that, like-- And
15 it's not close. So, it's a couple of blocks down.
16 So, that is a real safety issue that the principal
17 cannot communicate between the two schools.

18 CHIEF MORAN: Absolutely. We'll be there
19 tomorrow and share a report with you soon after.

20 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Absolutely, thank you so
21 much.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Madam Chair.
23 Good to see you, Madam President and the whole team.
24 DOE is back with you. Alright. And thank you for
25 the update on the 2.2 acre greenhouse at Bergen

2 Beach. I love that project. It is opening in
3 September, as you stated. I would love to see if we
4 could identify other areas where we could replicate
5 this project, particularly in Brooklyn, but anywhere
6 else.

7 Two quick questions: The first one is on the
8 bathroom upgrade program. So, I wanted to know how
9 do you determine and identify the bathrooms, that--
10 that need the most priorities for upgrades? Reason
11 being, I did a walkthrough of all the schools in my
12 district and 2022 and 2023. A lot of those bathrooms
13 have not been upgraded. Sometimes teachers have to
14 go use the restroom outside of the schools because
15 the schools are so old, that they don't have
16 restrooms that were fit for-- for an adult. So,
17 that's question number one regarding the bathroom
18 upgrades.

19 And the second question is in regard to MWBEs.
20 Thank you for the highlight on the MWBE Design
21 Consultant Program. But I wanted to know what's the
22 criteria for SCA to put in place for-- for
23 participants to qualify? And if they don't qualify
24 for the MWBE mentor program under the MWBE design
25 consultant option, what are the provisions that are

2 put in place to motivate them and encourage them to
3 continue to engage with SCA?

4 Those two questions. Thank you.

5 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Thank you for that. Um, so,
6 just regarding the bathrooms for a moment: We do an
7 annual building condition assessment survey through
8 DCAS, where we have architects and engineers walk the
9 building once a year.

10 Unfortunately, it doesn't identify-- If things
11 are broken, obviously it identifies it. But if it's
12 just kind of old, things of that nature, it doesn't
13 highlight it as a deficiency. So, we, a number of
14 years ago, worked with our DSF partners to help us
15 kind of rate our-- our bathrooms, and help us to get
16 projects into the pipeline. The best way that we've
17 been able to identify bathrooms coming into the
18 program is through our City Council and Community
19 Education Council requests, which I know we have a
20 spreadsheet sent out. So that we need to hear from
21 the schools, from you all, to say, "Hey, take a look
22 at this bathroom, it works technically," but it's
23 just old, and it could use a sprucing up, which is
24 really what this program is designed to do.

2 The 400 bathrooms that we mentioned, I have to
3 say a majority of them are student bathrooms. The
4 funding is still limited in this category. And we
5 have been prioritizing student bathrooms. But if
6 there is a situation where there's an adult bathroom
7 that-- They should not be going outside of the
8 school to use a facility. So, please let us know
9 that-- that particular school. It's more than one
10 but I will--

11 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yeah, please. Please.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: I will send it over. And
13 some-- some of even the-- the students bathrooms are
14 down in the district. So, they have to pivot.

15 And regarding the MWBE, if you guys can answer
16 that question. And I also wanted to know the MWBE
17 design consultants: Will they be utilized in order
18 to deal with the complex challenges of creating class
19 size?

20 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: They will be used. Our goal,
21 similar to our Mentor Construction Program, is-- is
22 to grow them, to grow any firm, whether it's
23 construction or in the architecture and engineering
24 world to compete in sort of the open market. So,
25 right now, in the construction mentor program, we

2 have them bidding against other MWBE firms. With the
3 A&E Mentor Program, though we have project set aside
4 so that they can start to learn the process of both
5 sort of SCA specific, but this will benefit the city
6 as a whole.

7 You know, one of the important things for-- for
8 me is that we didn't have many-- we only had two
9 black architecture firms on-- available to us when we
10 started a very important project. And I said that
11 this can't be. So, we have extended our reach so
12 that we are-- we have just-- we are executing
13 contracts with I believe 17 MWBE firms, they're
14 mostly black and Hispanic firms, women owned firms as
15 well, so, that we can start this process.

16 They-- Most-- They have not done business with
17 the SCA. So, we want to get them used to doing
18 business with SCA and with the City as a whole. So,
19 that similar to our-- our Construction Mentor Program
20 that they can bid-- or they can get work in, sort of,
21 the open market.

22 So, that's a very long answer to say "yes", I
23 expect them to be part of the class size compliance.
24 In fact, the smaller room conversions are perfect for
25 these smaller A&E mentor firms.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: We would love to see them
3 participate in the class size.

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Us too.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. Thank you,
6 Madam Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're welcome.
8 Councilmember Restler?

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much, Chair
10 Joseph. I want to commend deputy Chancellor Weisberg
11 and Deputy Chancellor Vadehra for their endurance. I
12 hope you have energy bars or something. We
13 appreciate you. And I will continue my earlier
14 practice of starting with a compliment.

15 Whenever we reach out to DSF, they are incredibly
16 responsive. And I just especially want to shout out
17 Kevin, John. The whole team are-- They do a
18 tremendous job. I don't know how they're as
19 responsive as they are to everyone. But everyone
20 says the same thing. And that means you must be
21 working all the time. We just really appreciate it.
22 So, thank you for your hard work. Thank you for
23 making such a difference, and stepping up whenever
24 there are issues.

2 I really want to-- I like literally had planned
3 to say almost exactly what Councilmember Stevens said
4 a couple minutes ago. I am similarly at my wit's
5 end.

6 Do you know how much funding The Council
7 allocated to SCA projects in FY 24?

8 You can ballpark it if-- or I can help you.
9 Whatever you prefer.

10 [15 seconds silence]

11 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We're checking. I mean, I
12 think typically it's been about \$180 to \$200 million.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Last year was \$238.7.

14 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Okay.

15 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Almost a quarter billion
16 dollars across 813 different projects that we all,
17 councilmembers, put in the in the budget to fund our
18 schools this current year. After we fund those
19 projects in June, we get radio silence from the SCA
20 for a six-month period. That's right. There's no--
21 Because you don't have-- The funding hasn't shown up
22 in your budget yet? That's correct.

23 I don't-- you know, I appreciate that you're
24 waiting for the capital funding to show up. But
25 every other entity that the City funds-- Think about

2 the thousands of nonprofits-- of nonprofit
3 organizations. They don't have contracts from any
4 agency, and yet they're expected to start work
5 immediately get-- and work at risk and expect that
6 they're going to get reimbursed and paid back for the
7 essential work that they do. But the SCA, the
8 message is, "No, we're going to wait from OMB to get
9 a message." There's no in-house capacity to get
10 these projects moving. There's no movement
11 whatsoever at all. So, we lose six months right off
12 the bat. It's three more months later, we just were
13 able to get our first updates on some of the projects
14 that we funded over previous years, and they were
15 limited updates with major gaps in information. So,
16 we're nine months now after funding these projects,
17 and we have no updates of-- limited updates of any
18 consequence.

19 And I'll give an example. Just like
20 Councilmember Stevens was sharing, we get back-of-
21 the-envelope estimates on the projects we need to
22 fund. We wanted to fund the new school yard at PS
23 307, across the street from Farragut Houses. Huge
24 holes in the pavement. It's honestly scary for kids
25 to run out there.

2 So, SCA tells us, it's going to cost \$750,000
3 Okay, that's fine. I put \$750,000 in the budget,
4 ready to go, bring a big check, celebrate with the
5 families. Everyone's thrilled. Do you know what SCA
6 comes back to me in March, nine months later, after
7 we adopt the-- after we've adopted the budget for how
8 much it's going to cost?

9 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: \$1.35.

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: For half of the school
11 yard, \$2.5 million for the whole school yard. So,
12 two and a half million dollars to actually repair the
13 school yard that they thought was going to get
14 repaired. We have \$750,000 in the budget. I don't
15 have another \$1.75 million under my-- in my couch
16 cushion pockets, right? So, we've now set up a huge
17 mismatch of expectations. I'm the bad guy. I'm the
18 jerk, because I said we were going to fix the school
19 yard. But now how are we going to fix the school
20 yard because SCA gave me an estimate that was wildly
21 disconnected from reality.

22 So, no-- Horrible timelines, wildly inaccurate
23 estimates. It is deeply frustrating. And like
24 Councilmember Stevens, I'm getting to the point of,
25 "Should I just stop funding my schools," because I

2 have other agencies that are willing to put this
3 money to work, and that actually are going to make
4 the improvements that I allocate in the budget in
5 real time.

6 Are there any process improvements that you all
7 are considering that can make any difference in what
8 is an incredibly frustrating situation?

9 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We are-- And again, I think my
10 answer to Councilmember Stevens was not well
11 received, because we are bound by capital eligibility
12 rules. The comptroller, directive 10, states that we
13 can't do any capital work without the capital
14 funding.

15 I will say two things: One is that we will-- I
16 think we can talk to OMB a little bit, too and maybe
17 the controller's office, to figure out a way to get
18 scoping money, which is really what you're talking
19 about. In order for us to give you a more accurate
20 estimate, we need to be able to scope it. It's been
21 this chicken-and-egg thing, right? And that's--
22 that's the problem that we're seeing.

23 So, let us talk to OMB and the comptroller's
24 office to see if we can get funding for scoping,

2 which will allow us to provide more accurate
3 estimates.

4 And second, the-- the \$750 again, should be for
5 one-- I know that there are-- it's two separate
6 school yards. And that was the problem. I think
7 that we did not look thoroughly to see that it was
8 sort of two different yards, specifically for 307.
9 So--

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I appreciate you taking
11 responsibility there. But like, you know, when we
12 talk about getting inadequate estimates from SCA, the
13 idea that you all didn't even look at the school yard
14 to give an estimate when giving me a figure. I know
15 the school yard. I know how big it is. It's one
16 contiguous school yard. So, it's not like it's two
17 separate school yards. It's one space. So, when I
18 get an estimate of "this is what it's going to cost
19 to fix the school yard" I take it seriously. I fund
20 it. I celebrated with the families and the students,
21 and say "We're going to get this done. This is
22 important. This is something that you deserve
23 better." And really what I'm saying to them is we
24 got a made-up number from SCA that has no bearing in
25 reality. It may or may not be enough. It probably

2 isn't, because you come back to us on most of our
3 projects. And then it's going to take years more of
4 allocations, because we can only do them once a year,
5 and that's a huge gap.

6 So, it's probably five years away before we'll
7 actually see an improvement in your school yard. But
8 maybe. Because I'll need to come up with another
9 \$1.75 million. That's really what's happening. So,
10 it's-- Yes, it's scoping money. I'm happy to talk
11 to Comptroller Lander about Directive 10. We'd
12 welcome having those conversations together. But the
13 funding is in the budget. You all see exactly what
14 is printed and what is allocated. And you should be
15 able to take action and move. And if there is a need
16 for greater in-house capacity to be able to do more
17 scoping work, if there's a need to be able to start a
18 procurement process, whatever the things are that we
19 are waiting for, for dead months at a time that are
20 delaying and delaying and delaying projects-- because
21 I think that the delays and the inaccurate
22 assessments are two separate but both critical
23 issues-- I really think they both need to be
24 addressed.

2 I just wanted to ask about one other thing, Madam
3 Chair, if you'd give me the-- the latitude, two other
4 things very briefly--

5 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Just, if I
6 could respond--

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Oh, you want to--

8 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --
9 Councilmember, just-- just to say, from our point of
10 view, we-- I-- this is a new issue to me. I know
11 it's not to you know, but--

12 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: No.

13 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: --we very much
14 appreciate, very much appreciate the projects that
15 you all allocated--

16 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: No. I know you want the
17 money.

18 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And so--

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: But the message we get is
20 not, is different.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I say that to
22 say: We want to create, actually, every incentive
23 for you to continue to do that.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I-- I just--

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: So we will
3 work with you--

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I'm with Councilmember
5 Stevens. If there isn't improvement, then I'm not
6 going to keep wasting my time. Because I'm not
7 wasting five years to fund a project at varying
8 different estimates, having to come up with more
9 money every year. It's just it's more agita and more
10 angry parents and families than not. So...

11 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We hear you
12 Councilmember. I'm just saying we will absolutely
13 sit down with you to try to figure out whatever the
14 solution is. I don't-- You know, Nina is working
15 under constraints. We'll try to figure out what we
16 can do to reverse that.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: You know, I just-- I
18 contrast it with: When I call DSF, and there's an
19 issue, there's solutions. I get that its capital
20 process is different. I'm not naive. But, like, the
21 difference in attitude and orientation, and solution-
22 oriented approach is night and day.

23 Deep breath, two more things.

24 One: In the DCAS Capital Plan, there was \$399
25 million in cuts to their five-year Capital Plan for

2 electrification projects of schools. Is that funding
3 separate and apart from the SCA Capital Plan? So,
4 just so we know all of the different cuts that are
5 happening to our schools that we should be concerned
6 about?

7 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Correct. The \$1.4 billion for
8 electrification is separate from the DCAS budget.

9 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So, we saw an additional
10 \$400 million cut to school electrification, like PS
11 286 Q, in Councilmember Lee's district, just off Bay
12 Terrace, where that \$166 million electrification
13 project has been cut and is indefinitely on hold, as
14 an example.

15 I'm pointing to her empty chair, because that's
16 where she was sitting before.

17 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: So, the funding that DCAS
18 had for-- set aside for electrification, that was
19 push to outer years. Projects were not identified
20 for those funding. Those are the funding in the
21 upcoming projects.

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. I just want to
23 make sure that all of us-- because sometimes things
24 get siloed. So, those of us on the Education
25 Committee understand that there were separate cuts to

2 the SCA budget that don't show up in the SCA's
3 budget, but that happened at DCAS that are very
4 harmful, and that we're very concerned about, and
5 that we're working to restore.

6 Last question: On Atlantic Avenue, many, many
7 years ago, there was a plan announced for an Early
8 Childhood Education Center. I was told, I think 15
9 months ago, 18 months ago, that SCA completed the
10 work. I keep asking to go on a tour, and I get the
11 runaround from the Intergov folks who tell me that
12 they-- it's not-- they can't, and it's hasn't opened.
13 And I don't understand. The work was done 18 months
14 ago, from what I recall. We still don't have any
15 kids there. I can't go in the building. I'm just--
16 it's a little maddening. I would love a straight
17 answer.

18 This is Atlantic and Boerum place. There's like
19 a Michaels on the ground floor. No? You know.
20 Deputy Chancellor knows the area.

21 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I know the
22 building. It sounds like we'll have to get back to
23 you, and we will get back to you shortly.

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I really hope you will,
3 because I've been asking for answers for 18 months,
4 and I'm not very patient. So, I appreciate it.

5 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: I understand.

6 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I am sorry to get so
7 worked up, but this is-- we really have to do better
8 on this, and we'd be happy to help in any ways we can
9 to advocate with the comptroller for any additional
10 flexibility, any support we can provide. Thank you
11 for your latitude, Madam Chair.

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Councilmember.
14 What's the timeline when is when a councilmember
15 funds a project? I know, but just for the record,
16 how long does it take? What's the estimated
17 timeline, when I-- when, for example, Councilmember
18 Restler puts in money for a project, how long does it
19 take?

20 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, I think the allocation
21 comes in around March. It's not approved until July.
22 It goes through OMB. They take a little time to send
23 us the list. We vet the list. We apply for a CPE,
24 which we typically get in the December timeframe.
25 Then we start to go out to the schools.

2 And I think what Councilmember Restler is talking
3 about is from July 1 until we got some-- we got out
4 to some of the schools, and we're able to provide an
5 estimate. For example, at 307, it was close to nine
6 months from July 1 to essentially March 1.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, what's the difference
8 from that timeline to the time you had allocated the
9 funds, that there was such a huge difference, that's
10 what he's referencing. There was a huge difference?
11 Right, Councilmember?

12 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: That's right.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: He calls it a guesstimate.
14 It wasn't an estimate. He said it was a
15 guesstimation.

16 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I think that was Althea.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh.

18 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Correct. The scope, which is
19 what I was alluding to earlier, allows us to refine
20 that estimate and come up with a real estimate rather
21 than a-- playgrounds usually cost \$750,000, or an
22 auditorium costs, whatever, a million dollars,
23 whatever the figures are. Until we get to a site and
24 can assess the site to figure out, for example, if we
25 need to do any underground drainage at a playground

2 or things of that nature, that will change the cost.
3 So, it is site specific. And until we're authorized
4 to go-- to get that once we get the CPE and we're
5 authorized to go to the site, it's only until then
6 that we can come up with a real estimate.

7 And in the meantime, are you in communications
8 with The Councilmember's office to let them know
9 this-- this is happening? Because it seems like he
10 was surprised that the price went up.

11 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: He was surprised. I don't
12 want to speak for you. You were surprised that it
13 went up. And I think the frustration was again, July
14 was allocated. We didn't have an estimate, or give
15 him-- was able to give him an update to that estimate
16 until nine months later. So, I think that is the
17 frustration. And again, I think we need to-- we will
18 look at the process. We have to talk to the
19 Comptroller's Office and OMB to figure out a way to
20 get additional funding so that we can scope these
21 projects earlier, to be able to provide an estimate
22 that is true. And then... yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And then fast track the
24 projects so the kids are not leaving the school and

2 never seen the project come to fruition. And that's
3 happened a lot.

4 You talked about TCUs earlier. And I have one of
5 my colleagues who's very interestingly-- What is the
6 process for SCA in terms of getting community input
7 from the schools for TCU removals.

8 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, before we initiate a
9 project, obviously, we work with several-- several
10 departments at the at the New York City Public
11 Schools, because they are in constant contact also
12 with the principals themselves. So, to make sure
13 that we can remove those TCUs, we rely on the
14 communication to-- with the principal and the
15 superintendent to make sure that whatever community
16 engagement is possible is-- is actually deployed for
17 the project.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And when the TCUs are
19 removed, what's-- what's usually the next plan? I
20 know there's a school in the Bronx that I visited.
21 You removed the TCU. What's the plan for that
22 school?

23 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I'm not sure of the specific
24 school, but in many cases--

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Junior High School 118, in
3 the Bronx, in District 10. You know I know my
4 schools.

5 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yes, you do. Of course you
6 do.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That school.

8 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So in-- So, two things. When
9 we remove a TCU is we either replace-- Well, we
10 either replace it with a building structure as in 96
11 in Queens. We have to-- we actually are building the
12 annex first and then removing the TCU. But in all
13 cases, we restore it to a playground. So, in that
14 case, I believe, in 118, we are restoring it to a
15 playground use.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: From what I understood, that
17 wasn't the case. They were thinking of building a
18 charter school.

19 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I hope that's not the case.
21 I hope this-- after suffering for so long, especially
22 the Bronx under TCUs, when they remove, a charter
23 school is not placed there, but a playground is
24 placed. We've had TCUs that were supposed to be in
25 for 20 years. They've been in there for 50 years.

2 For me it becomes a racial and equity issue when this
3 happened, in economics, because I'm sure other places
4 it's not happening.

5 How many did we remove in the Bronx, and how many
6 do we still have in the Bronx?

7 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Let's see. Thank you. We had
8 a total of 86 in the Bronx, 73 were removed, and 11
9 are in process. So, there are two that we're still
10 working on developing the plans for. So, there are
11 two left.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And Brooklyn. You have them
13 in Brooklyn. How many do you have? And...

14 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: In Brooklyn, there were a
15 total of 80. 74 have been removed. Three are in
16 process. Three remain.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And in Manhattan?

18 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: A total of 21, six have been
19 removed, 15 still remain.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the conversation
21 does SCA have before the TCU? We talked about that.
22 What conversation does SCA have about permanent
23 spaces that replace TCUs before spaces are designed
24 and determined? Are you talking to the community
25 schools, the superintendent, administrator, and the

2 community at large? Is community engagement done
3 when there's-- there's a chance to redesign the space
4 that was occupied by TCU?

5 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We engage with the principal
6 and the superintendent if it's being with replaced
7 with a playground.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of the 24 TCUs you have
9 left, what are the timelines for those to be removed?

10 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We do not have a timeline for
11 those. We-- they are at six sites and we're working
12 hard to remove those six remaining-- or the 24 TCUs
13 at those six sites. But we don't have a timeline yet
14 for that.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You don't have a timeline?

16 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We do not.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Let's talk about
18 accessibility for our New York City schools. SCA
19 said it'll take about 20 years for us to meet-- to
20 meet accessibility requirements by law, by federal
21 law. Not even by the councilmembers. This is a
22 federal law. Why is it going to take so long for our
23 schools to be accessible? So that means our students
24 with disabilities have to travel so far, and I've
25 said that so many times, that they don't get to stay

2 in their neighborhoods because their school is not
3 accessible. Even my child's school is not
4 accessible, and it has five floors. So, I can
5 imagine if something happened to him, what-- where
6 does he learn? In the cafeteria? Unacceptable.

7 MR. TARATKO: Good afternoon. My name is Tom
8 Taratko. I'm the chief executive for space
9 management and charged with accessibility for New
10 York City Schools planning and compliance.

11 The Four Capital Plan \$4 billion estimate was
12 given as we'd been asked to give in prior testimony,
13 guesstimates, because with 436 buildings, I believe
14 it is, remaining that are not accessible, not all of
15 them have been scoped out to see. As-- As I've said
16 in previous testimony, some of those buildings
17 because of their age, their design or their location
18 will not be able to be compliant.

19 So, that Four Capital Plan estimate was based on
20 finally having a good baseline with this last \$750
21 million. If we progressed, if costs stayed the same,
22 if funding stayed the same, and we were able to
23 accomplish what we did in this last Capital Plan,
24 that's where that four year estimate was-- and we
25 figured we'd be able to do at least 300 of those 400,

2 and I think I do have the exact number that are not
3 accessible. But...

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It was previously stated
5 that it would need about \$4 billion to make all
6 schools accessible.

7 MR. TARATKO: Based on current costs and
8 conditions. Yeah. That's how we-- we looked at
9 that. So, 453 are not accessible currently.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what is the timeline to
11 get them in your Capital Plan? Your 2029-- It says
12 "planning to enable all schools to be compliant."
13 What do you estimate the new timeline for reaching
14 full ADA compliance, and I think it was supposed to
15 be \$1.9 billion I notice we're, what?, \$800 million.
16 So we're short in even making the schools accessible.

17 MR. TARATKO: Uh, well, with the \$800 million and
18 a slightly different approach to our projects this
19 year, as we're going to highlight-- well,
20 conversations with our advocate partners and see the
21 Special Education-- City Education Council. We've
22 been discussing really targeting our students with
23 special needs. And some of those are in partially-
24 accessible buildings. So, we'll be doing slightly
25 different types of projects to bring full

2 accessibility to those schools. But we feel we can
3 positively affect about 70 to 75 of those buildings
4 with \$800 million. If we were to get the original
5 \$1.25 billion (I think they were asking for, we were
6 asking for in the original ask) that would add
7 another 30 to 45 of that. Now you're talking about
8 100 buildings affected in a Capital Plan. Now you're
9 really taking chunks of those percentages away.

10 So, you know, it's all relevant. I mean, you
11 know. There's a lot of challenges with this program.
12 But we're very proud of the work that the SCA and DOE
13 have done together on this.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said if the funding
15 would-- would be added, we would get an additional...
16 how many schools?

17 MR. TARATKO: Well, we could do 30 non-accessible
18 buildings to full accessibility, or we could do
19 somewhere up to 50, if we were taking partially
20 accessible buildings and looking at-- We're also
21 going to be looking at the District 75 sites that
22 might be non-accessible buildings, but in the lower
23 floors, where we could do a partial project to get
24 them accessible.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is it possible that you
3 could submit a list of schools that are currently not
4 ADA compliant to this committee? I need them.

5 MR. TARATKO: Uh, yes. We have-- We have a
6 list.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much state funding do
8 you-- did you receive in fiscal 2023? And how much
9 do you plan to receive in 2024 and 2025?

10 MR. TARATKO: Uh, I'm not the money guy. So...

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Please include building
12 funding sources like building aid that does not
13 directly come to SCA.

14 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yes, thank you, Councilmember.
15 And thank you for stating that, because you're
16 correct: The building aid does not come to the SCA.
17 It comes into the, sort of, general fund.

18 So, we don't get any direct state funding. As
19 you mentioned, the building aid from the State comes
20 into the general fund of the City.

21 For this fiscal year, the SGA is expected to
22 receive about \$1.4 billion. But that is amortized
23 over 30 years.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much of this building
25 aid versus other sources of funding do you get?

2 Other than the State, do you get any other type of
3 funding?

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Uh, we get very little federal
5 funding. That's been mostly Sandy projects, Ida,
6 things like that. So, that-- So the vast majority
7 is City funding.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, what conversations are
9 you having with OMB about providing additional
10 funding in the upcoming financial plan, particularly
11 in regards to new capacity and accessibility?

12 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We are in constant contact
13 with them. And we do-- we have said we will be
14 coming back to them for additional funding. I will
15 say that the current Capital Plan, the FY 20 to 24
16 Capital Plan, started with \$17 billion. It ended
17 with \$19.4 billion. So, we are hopeful that we will
18 receive additional funding, especially if the debt
19 limit is raised.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how does SCA advocate
21 for more state funding or a change to the building
22 aid formula, given that the class size was driving a
23 lot of the needs for funding and is it state
24 mandated? If not, do you plan on advocating for
25 changes at the state level?

2 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We would love to have you as--
3 as advocates to help us get that state formula
4 changed. It has not changed over time. So, we would
5 love to have you as partners with that, with us.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Um, can you walk us through
7 the reasons for why this funding has not been
8 utilized more by SCA or DOE, the Educational
9 Construction Fund.

10 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you for
11 raising that Chair. The Education Construction Fund,
12 as you know, is really an innovative approach to work
13 with private developers to have them fund the
14 building of new schools. An example of that, in
15 Brooklyn, Khalil Gibran is getting a brand new
16 building in downtown Brooklyn as a result of an ECF
17 project.

18 It does depend. I mean, we would love, Chair, to
19 do dozens of ECF projects. They're all-- They're
20 all big wins, because our kids get brand new
21 facilities. And we don't need to tap the capital
22 funding in order to-- for the most part, in order to
23 build them. It's dependent on finding a particular
24 location that a developer wants, you know, some sort
25 of rights to, and-- and is willing to, and can make

2 the dollars and cents work to fund a facility that
3 we're looking for, up to our standards. So, Jennifer
4 Maldonado, who is the head of ECF, is-- I can tell
5 you, works tirelessly and she has a number of--
6 always, but certainly right now, a number of
7 potential projects in the hopper. So, she's
8 constantly having these conversations, trying to
9 create more projects, always for students who are in
10 facilities that are older facilities, not, you know,
11 don't have the same amenities that we want all our
12 kids to have.

13 So, that's really the reason why they are not
14 more ECF projects at any particular time is they're
15 really situational. They're dependent on finding the
16 right location with the right partner.

17 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: And I think also Swing Space
18 plays a, you know, great deal into this. In the-- In
19 the case of Khalil Gibran, they're-- the building is
20 going up next to their current location. So, they--
21 We didn't have to find swing space for that
22 particular school. So, I think that plays a big part
23 of it as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If the TFA debt limit was
25 raised, what would set priorities for additional

2 funding? What would your priorities be for
3 additional funding?

4 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I'm sorry, I--

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If we raise the debt limit,
6 if the debt limit was raised, what would be your
7 priorities with this additional funding?

8 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So I-- I think I've been
9 pretty clear certainly: new capacity, accessibility,
10 and electrification are the three areas where we need
11 additional funding.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But at the same time, we
13 noticed that the 23,035 new seats that you funded in
14 your Capital Plan, right?, the 2029, the placement of
15 16,334 remains undetermined. Why is that?

16 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: So, as we mentioned earlier,
17 we had to readjust how we implement the new Capacity
18 Program. So, out of the 23,000 seats that were found
19 in the DOE'S plan, we sited about 6,700 of them. The
20 rest of seats are found currently citywide. As we
21 work continued to work identify, plan to help
22 individual schools for class size compliance, we will
23 continue to site those projects, and we'll work with
24 you to-- to secure as many sides as possible
25 throughout our processes.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When you plan on this,
3 designating these seats to particular districts, this
4 16,000? When will you know to assign them to
5 particular districts?

6 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We are not assigning them to
7 a particular district or subdistrict. All we can
8 share is based on the list of schools that will be in
9 need of classroom space for compliance. Most of the
10 schools are located in districts that historically
11 have a large number of seat needs. So we'll continue
12 to look in those areas, but if we do receive site
13 recommendations in other areas, we'll also look at
14 them in relationship with schools that might be in
15 need of space, and then we'll evaluate them equally.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Does this plan include our
17 students in D 75?

18 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I don't believe D 75 classes
19 are subject to class size mandates.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: SCA has indicated that
21 between 10% to 15% of school buildings cannot be made
22 ADA compliant because of age, configuration,
23 location, historic designation, and other variables.
24 What is the plan for these schools?

2 MR. TARATKO: Each one of those locations would
3 have to be evaluated for what the major plan would
4 be. Some would be actually having to knock them down
5 and rebuild them. I mean, that's how drastic that
6 type of planning goes.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Um, would you be able to
8 provide the Committee with a list of those schools
9 that cannot be updated to meet the ADA?

10 MR. TARATKO: We have not-- Up to date, we have
11 not been able to survey the remaining-- all the
12 remaining buildings as we've been focused on what we
13 can-- can fix. But we will get to them. I don't
14 know if I can get glued down to an exact timeline at
15 this point.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But how do you know they
17 can't be updated if you haven't surveyed them?

18 MR. TARATKO: To get-- To get to the exact
19 number? Well, we're going at what we can do. We're
20 surveying the buildings that we know we can do. That
21 just kind of whittles it down from the 453 number we
22 mentioned. And then it will become apparent what
23 can't be done later on.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are there accessibility
3 projects funded under the fiscal 2024? That that
4 will be completed in the next few years?

5 MR. TARATKO: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many?

7 MR. TARATKO: 56 from what I heard, but then
8 there's another-- another group of buildings that
9 have been designed, and they're ready to go when the
10 next Capital Plan is ready. So, you know, we're
11 going to be just rocking and rolling.

12 This is the first time we've ever seen a pipeline
13 this robust since I've been doing this work for plus
14 15 years. So, I'm very excited about it. Because
15 not only do we have them in construction, in design,
16 in scope, bid and award. We have-- Every single
17 category has jobs in it, and we have quite a few in
18 construction right now.

19 So, you're going to start seeing some big results
20 out there right now. We're excited about it.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I would love to see the
22 list, so I can visit.

23 MR. TARATKO: We do have that list for you.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: On your updated projects, on
25 your greenhouse in Bergen Beach, how much the funding

2 is in plan for the door lock security? How much is
3 the plan? How much does that cost?

4 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: Currently, we have
5 \$88 million, I believe, put towards the door lock
6 security between this and the next plan.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the timeline for all
8 schools to have these door locks installed?

9 CHIEF MORAN: So, at current, we have 252
10 projects completed in phase one. There's 114
11 currently underway. The plan is to finish the
12 remaining intermediate K to five, if you will, K to
13 five, by June, July, and the entire city, the entire
14 program, by January.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what's the update on the
16 proposed redevelopment of the former St. John Villa
17 Campus in Staten Island? Can you give me an update
18 on that?

19 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We're currently in the phase
20 of doing master campus planning. As of now, we hope
21 we will be able to start the design of the school
22 buildings in the latter part of the--

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you speak a little
24 louder, please?

2 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: Sure. Sorry. We're
3 currently in design of the master campus, the entire
4 St. John Villa master campus. As of now, we have to
5 start designing the school-- individual school
6 buildings in the later part of this year.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: By next year?

8 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: We will start the later part
9 of this year. The design process will take
10 approximately a year.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Eight years?

12 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: One year. Sorry.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One year. Okay. There are
14 accessibility issues at PS 54, Hillside in Richmond
15 Hill. Are they-- are there any planned accessibility
16 projects at that school?

17 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: I think we'll have to get back
18 to you on that particular school.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what about the two
20 Harbor High School annex projects on Governors
21 Island?

22 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Those are both currently in
23 design and to be awarded this fiscal year.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's the timeline to bring
25 those on-- to get that done as well?

2 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Okay. So the leased annex,
3 which is currently in front of the current Harbor
4 School: that will be complete by 2026, and the
5 athletic annex on the other side of the building-- of
6 the current building across the street is 2027. So,
7 the following year.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: An update on the new school
9 being constructed on Edward L. Grant highway in the
10 Bronx.

11 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yeah. This year. 2024.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: None of my Brooklyn folks
13 will enjoy this. Can you provide an update on the
14 new high-- the new schools being constructed on Fort
15 Hamilton Parkway in Brooklyn?

16 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Thank you. So the one at 48-02
17 Fort Hamilton Parkway is slated to open 2026, with
18 487 seats.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And John Brown High School
20 annex in Queens?

21 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: That's in design. 2027.
22 That's going out to bid soon.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And in terms of technology
24 and internet service for school speed is one gig.
25 What is the timeline to get every school to one gig?

2 And how do you-- how do you prioritize schools you
3 want to bring up to speed?

4 MR. STRICKLAND: Thank you Chair. Scott
5 Strickland from DIIT. So, we currently have all of
6 our schools at 300 gig. And that's a result of the
7 investments made in the last Capital Plan. Two years
8 ago, only about half of the schools were 300 Gig so
9 everybody's a 300 gig. The goal in this plan is to
10 get everybody to one gig. They'll have that
11 capacity-- Now that's the bandwidth that goes into
12 the school. When we do a school, and we call it a
13 bandwidth upgrade, we also do the interior wiring,
14 the MDF closet where the fiber comes in, and that
15 allows the access points to be strengthened and be
16 more reliable, and have more coverage. And so that's
17 where we are. By the end of this year, the school
18 year, half of our schools will be at 300 gig. The
19 other half will be at 500 or more.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many schools you have
21 that already at one gig connectivity?

22 MR. STRICKLAND: Yep. One gig is 116.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do any other schools require
24 greater internet speed?

2 MR. STRICKLAND: Yes, some of our larger high
3 schools require more than that. We have 27 schools
4 at two gig or more.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So how many? And is there
6 funding in this plan to get those schools to fast
7 speed?

8 MR. STRICKLAND: Yes. So, we've already done
9 that with the prior funding. This is a full
10 refresher of all of our DOE-owned buildings that will
11 provide the hardware, and wiring, and access points
12 that will allow the speeds to come in and be
13 distributed across the buildings and accessible to
14 our students and teachers.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Out of the 27 schools, how
16 many more do you have to go to increase the speed?
17 You said 27. Is there any more?

18 MR. STRICKLAND: As we see the need for
19 allocations to be made based on historical usage, and
20 they have the capacity to go higher, we can do that
21 today. That's how we've gotten some of our schools
22 to over one gig. There aren't any that we need to do
23 at the moment, but there may be some that come up by
24 the end of the year, and will have the capacity to do
25 that.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. Um, SCA
3 currently projects that enrollment in New York City
4 public school will keep shrinking, decreasing by more
5 than 200,000 students in the next decade, according
6 to the most recent enrollment projection. Can you
7 provide detail on specific assumption made in this
8 projection, and the reason for such a downward trend
9 in student population?

10 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So I think in my testimony, I
11 talked about birth rate declining, and in fact, over
12 the past 15 years we've been seeing birth rates
13 declining. So-- And actually, enrollment has
14 reflected that birth rate decline since 2016. COVID
15 exacerbated that decline. And-- But we still see
16 the-- The enrollment projections are a reflection of
17 a trend. So, we still continue to see this downward
18 trend. But again, we do this annually, so we make
19 sure that our projections reflect the most up-to-date
20 trends.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you already did your
22 projection for this year.

23 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: We did.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that's how you saw the
25 answer.

2 Earlier, I spoke about Junior High School 118,
3 and I said the TCU was not removed. The TCU is still
4 there. However, there's a charter school that is
5 interested in moving in junior high school 118 in the
6 Bronx, District 10.

7 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: So, sorry. It was on a
8 different list. It's technical, but it's a
9 transportable classroom building. But we do have it
10 as "in process". I am unaware of a charter school
11 wanting to be there.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: They've waited so long for
13 this space. So, get the answers back to me. I will
14 write to make sure I get the answers to this
15 question, because you seem like you don't know what
16 they're telling me that's exactly what's happening.

17 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: [TO OTHERS:] [inaudible]
18 [TO COUNCIL:] Yeah, we will get back to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Um, the
20 projections that you talked about earlier in the
21 decline factor. In recent-- Are new New Yorkers and
22 other immigrants in the city, did you factor in those
23 numbers when you did your math?

24 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Yes. Last year, and this
25 year. I believe this year 19,000 asylum seekers.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: In which school district you
3 saw the-- the most decrease in?

4 VICE PRESIDENT LIU: I don't have the numbers
5 right in front of me. But--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We will email you so we can
7 get the answers on the record. I want to-- I want to
8 see the numbers per district, per school district.

9 I want to talk about the preliminary Mayor's
10 Management Report. The average construction (and I
11 think that's what my colleagues were talking about)
12 bid price for school capacity jumped from \$710 per
13 square feet, fiscal 2021 to \$905 per square feet in
14 fiscal 22 and remain at roughly the same level in
15 2023. What's the reason for the increase? And do
16 you believe that we're seeing a level off of costs,
17 or do we expect to continue to see this type of
18 inflation?

19 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Thank you for that question.
20 That's-- That's actually good. In fiscal year 21,
21 there actually weren't that many projects bid because
22 we were still coming-- It was still sort of shut
23 down for COVID. So, it is a decreased number of
24 projects that were actually awarded in-- in that
25 fiscal year.

2 But I will say: Yes, I think inflation is a part
3 of it. Supply chain issues continue to be a factor,
4 as well as other legislation, such as you know, bird-
5 friendly glass. Things like that do start to
6 increase the cost per square foot. So, we don't see
7 a decline happening in the near future. But we
8 always value engineer our projects and our Capacity
9 Program, or our entire program as a whole to try to
10 keep our costs down.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So the percentage of capital
12 improvement projects construct-- constructed on time
13 and early have been decreasing down to 14% through
14 the first four months of fiscal 2024. Can you
15 explain why such a small percentage of projects have
16 been finished on time this year?

17 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Unfortunately, I think we're
18 still seeing delays due to COVID and other issues,
19 such as supply chain issues, continuing to keep our
20 projects from completing.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And on the record, how much-
22 - how much is it going to cost for us to meet the
23 laws of the class size?

24 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Our latest estimate is \$22 to
25 \$27 billion. \$2 billion is already accounted for in

2 the current Capital Plan. So, I believe your
3 question earlier was correct at \$20 to \$25 billion
4 additional funding. We do have \$4 billion in this
5 plan, but it still falls short.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It still falls short, to
7 meet the--

8 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: It does.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What is the plan--
10 Chancellor Emma, what is the plan to-- to fund the
11 law?

12 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR VADEHRA: I'm not sure I can
13 speak to the capital side of it. I think I would
14 say, as we discussed earlier, there are substantial
15 financial needs on both the expense side, and the
16 capital side, and the expense side to ensure we can
17 hire the 10,000 to 12,000 teachers we discussed
18 earlier, including our 3000 Special Ed teachers, we
19 put that at \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion on top of the
20 additional dollars we've already received from the
21 State. The IBO puts it a bit higher, \$1.6 to \$1.9
22 billion. We will, as we also discussed earlier, will
23 be looking for next year to ensure we stay in
24 compliance. We'll be looking at where schools can
25 repurpose dollars for-- to hire teachers. And we are

2 also eagerly awaiting whether we will get additional
3 dollars from the State to support us as well.

4 On the capital side, I think Nina touched on this
5 earlier, which is that the goal is to continue to get
6 additional dollars in the Capital Plan, not just for
7 class size but for accessibility. And for some of
8 these other key pieces, I would argue technology as
9 well. And we'll continue to work with OMB on that--
10 with that together.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

12 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And this is,
13 Chair, you know another example. This is a mandate
14 from State. There's no funding. There's no
15 additional capital funding, as you heard from
16 President Kubota. The vast, vast majority of the
17 capital funding is City funding. It comes from, you
18 know, you and City Hall. So, you know, we-- to
19 answer your question, you know, "What's the plan?"
20 We would hope that our state partners would provide
21 at least some of that capital funding to comply with
22 the law that they passed and enacted.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Then we've got to take a
24 trip to Albany.

2 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: We will buy
3 that train ticket tomorrow if it--

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because we have to bring the
5 money, because we have to be in compliance. Thank
6 you all.

7 FIRST DEPUTY CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you,
8 Chair.

9 PRESIDENT KUBOTA: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
11 testimony.

12 We will now open the hearing for public
13 testimony.

14 As a reminder to members of the public this is a
15 formal government proceeding and decorum shall be
16 observed at all times. As such, members of the
17 public shall remain silent at all times.

18 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
19 to testify. No video recording or photography is
20 allowed from the witness table. Further members of
21 the public may not present audio or video recording
22 as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such
23 recordings to the sergeant at arms for inclusion in
24 the hearing record.

2 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
3 fill out an appearance card with the sergeant at arms
4 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
5 have three minutes to speak on today's hearing topic:
6 Preliminary Budget Hearing, Education. For virtual
7 panelists, once your name is called a member of our
8 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant At Arms will
9 set the time and give you the go ahead to begin.

10 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you
11 may begin before delivering your testimony.

12 And finally, if you have a written statement or
13 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
14 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
15 to the Sergeant At Arms. You may also email written
16 testimony to testimony@counsel.nyc.gov within 72
17 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
18 will not be accepted.

19 Our first panel: Michael Mulgrew, Lordes Cholden
20 Brown, Donald Nesbit, Henri Rubio, Shirley Aidebol,
21 and Donovan Swanson.

22 Michael Mulgrew, you may begin your testimony.

23 PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.
24 I appreciate you having this hearing today. I'm
25 going to start and make this very simple. New York

2 City has the money to invest in its school system.
3 But this administration right now is choosing not to
4 invest at the appropriate level. Last Monday, a
5 thousand people got up between 4 and 5 a.m. to get on
6 buses, over a hundred of those were parents and
7 advocates, and went up to Albany knowing they were
8 going to spend six hours that day on that bus and
9 went to Albany. And what did they advocate lobby
10 for? They advocated for the Early Childhood Program
11 that just a few short years ago was looked at
12 nationally, and is no longer looked that way. But we
13 know how important it is.

14 We had advocated on behalf of students with
15 special needs, our English language learners, our
16 community schools, and of course, class size.

17 And class size: It was because of the widespread
18 belief of all of those who were doing the lobbying,
19 they were thanking the state electeds for passing the
20 law, but they were sounding the bell, that the-- the
21 belief is that this administration is scheming to
22 fabricate an economic crisis so they do not have to
23 comply with the law.

24 And when you think about what goes on when we do
25 this lobbying. You know, the teachers and the

2 parents have continued to go up, year after year, and
3 the last two years alone they have secured increases
4 in education funding, as well as secured an
5 additional \$1.6 billion from the state of New York
6 for our school system. And that will continue
7 annually.

8 But I am here to sound a warning bell to all of
9 you. Because this is the first time we have ever
10 lobbied where we had to continually answer one
11 question: "Why should we, the lawmakers of New York
12 State continue to give additional support to the City
13 of New York when it is clear, your administration is
14 using that as an excuse to reduce their support for
15 their own school system?"

16 So, as we move forward we have to really take a
17 bigger look at this entire process of budgeting,
18 because this just turned into some surrealistic
19 nightmare. We argue about numbers that aren't real.
20 We hear an administration go out and claim all these
21 additional costs, and that the sky is falling. We
22 went for a period of time over a couple of months
23 this year, we went for the cost of migrants from \$400
24 million to \$1 billion to \$1.6, up to \$4 billion. And

2 then a few short weeks later, through phenomenal
3 fiscal stewardship they found \$7 billion.

4 The process is broken. And in the last two
5 years, when the parents and everyone have done this
6 lobbying and secured this additional funding, these
7 last two years, when they cut our schools both years,
8 they claimed all these-- that they were again, an
9 economic crisis. Yet in those two years, it's over a
10 \$6 billion surplus in operating.

11 This-- You know, when you go to Albany, as I just
12 heard this panel, say, "Oh, we need to go to Albany."
13 We go to Albany and say we need additional funding
14 for class size there is no credibility coming from
15 this-- for this administration.

16 So they are putting in danger, one of the most
17 important things to the parents of our city, which is
18 class size. So, I'm asking if there is anything we
19 can do together with you, because you've been great
20 partners of ours on this budgeting process.

21 Enough is enough. The public knows its lies.
22 They hear it all the time. They laugh about it. And
23 it's just not a political football, because real
24 people are being hurt and our children are suffering
25 because of it. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next panelists.

3 PRESIDENT RUBIO: Good afternoon, Chair Joseph
4 and distinguished members of City Council. Thank you
5 for conducting today's hearing. I am Henry Rubio,
6 President of the Council for School Supervisors and
7 Administrators, and on behalf of the 17,000 in
8 service and retired school leaders, thank you for the
9 opportunity to be here today and provide our Union's
10 input in the fiscal year 2025 budget, and share some
11 of our key five priorities.

12 We believe that spending cuts should never ever
13 directly impact students. Our city must find ways to
14 replace the expiring federal aid so that our schools
15 do not lose valuable programs. Cuts must never take
16 away the critical resources that our children need
17 every single day. I don't have to tell you: Our
18 children are our future.

19 As the DOE tries to, sort of, right-size school
20 budgets, we must ensure an adequate budget pool of
21 funds to effectively support schools through that
22 transition, and the upcoming budget process. It can
23 be brutal.

24 The City must also continue to fund the purchase
25 and repair of student devices. Our systems'

2 dependence on these tools escalated during the
3 pandemic and highlighted the digital divide. And now
4 the State also requires their use for testing
5 (something many people are not aware of). We must
6 not allow the expense of these tools to become an
7 unfunded mandate for our local schools.

8 Regarding class size, let me be clear as the CSA
9 president: We believe in smaller class size.
10 However, since the inception, we've been steadfast in
11 our position that the City and State must implement
12 this in a manner that is responsible, and we must be
13 fully transparent with the public. Many school
14 leaders have shared substantial concerns regarding
15 either the space, the staff, or the funding necessary
16 to comply with the law. And we want to fully comply
17 with the law.

18 We can't reduce class size at a faster rate than
19 the teachers we can hire. We talked about that
20 today, the need for more teachers. We can't reduce
21 class size at a faster rate than we can build the
22 space for them. We've also talked about that already
23 today.

24 I heard conversations today with respect to pay
25 parity. In our CBO base members, our directors and

2 assistant directors had been without a contract since
3 2020. You heard that: 2020. We thank the City
4 Council for securing substantial funding for the
5 labor reserve. Unfortunately, the city has yet to
6 sit down with CSA to negotiate a new contract for
7 these important and essential educators. The pay
8 scale, inequity not only smacks in the face of
9 injustice, and unfairness, but also threatens to
10 compromise the stability and quality of Early
11 Childhood.

12 And what many of you don't know is that our
13 members are 90% women, black and brown women, and
14 right now their city-funded salary is less than what
15 the teachers they supervise earn.

16 Fourthly, there is no entity that has done more
17 to recruit, train, and retain New York City School
18 Principals than the Executive Leadership Institute.
19 As our system faces increasing challenges to both
20 recruit and retain principals--

21 [BELL RINGS]

22 --we ask that you please increase your investment
23 in the Executive Leadership Institute and our
24 flagship programs.

2 And lastly, to teach and learn, students, and
3 teachers, and other staff must feel valued, respected
4 and safe. CSA has shared our members' growing
5 concerns around school safety for years now,
6 advocating for resources and warning about the
7 erosion of school leader discretion over the
8 decisions that affect the well-being of their school
9 communities. And so, in these in this area, we must
10 have an adequate number of safety agents for one.
11 Secondly, we must have an assistant principal in
12 every school. And three, we must have enough cameras
13 to monitor buildings inside, outside, and panic
14 buttons in areas where they're necessary.

15 And lastly, we believe in early voting. But the
16 challenges of early voting should not be displacing
17 our students impacting academics, or putting staff
18 and students at any sort of safety risk. Thank you
19 so much for your time, Chair. And thank you for the
20 invitation.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
22 And just to note to our panelists: We will complete
23 all in person testimony before turning to virtual
24 testimony.

25 Next panelist: Donald Nesbitt.

2 MR. NESBITT: Good afternoon Chair Joseph and
3 distinguished members of The Council. I am Donald
4 Nesbitt, Executive Vice President for Local 372 DC 37
5 AFSCME. On behalf of the 24,000 members that we
6 represent in schools, and under the leadership of
7 Shaun D Francois I, we are here-- I am here to
8 testify on a mayor's proposed budget.

9 Our members, such as school lunch workers,
10 performance into support services to help the 957,000
11 public school children of New York City to be
12 learning ready.

13 School lunch workers unload, prepare, and serve
14 food each day, including during the summer. Not only
15 is school lunch critical to students' health and
16 well-be being, especially for low income students, it
17 also ensures students have the nutrition that they
18 need to learn.

19 We would like to thank The Council for fighting
20 to restore the \$25 million towards school food
21 programs and restoration of some of the popular
22 school food items back onto the menu that our
23 students love. Now that the city has restored
24 funding towards the school lunch program, it is
25

2 important that they have sufficient staff levels to
3 serve these newly-restored menus.

4 Local 372 respectfully requested the city
5 allocate \$10 million towards hiring an additional
6 1000 school lunch workers, which would bring the
7 total up to 9000. This will help reduce the strain
8 on the current workforce, continuing to fulfill the
9 breakfast and lunch activities set by the previous
10 and current administrations, including implementing
11 more cooking from scratch, continuing to feed
12 children of our city.

13 In addition, this will allow the city to work
14 quickly in replacing members who are retiring and
15 leaving their jobs.

16 According to Kate MacKenzie, Executive Director
17 of The Mayor's Office of Food Policy, school food
18 consumption has increased 9% this year alone, a total
19 of 66,000 more meals each day. With children
20 consuming more food, school lunch workers need more
21 hands on deck to meet the demand. The Department of
22 Education Office of School Food even acknowledges
23 that there's a shortage to the hiring of additional
24 cafeteria workers. However, current levels are not
25 enough, due to an increase in retirements and a

2 difficulty retaining. Therefore the need to fix tier
3 6 as well.

4 School lunch workers must also be able to
5 accommodate dietary restrictions, including medical
6 and religious restrictions. With that being said,
7 several enhanced school lunch programs to accommodate
8 such restrictions as well. School lunch workers must
9 follow multiple sets of strict guidelines to ensure
10 school safety, and that the children are also eating
11 safety.

12 Additionally, we must also serve breakfast in the
13 classroom programs, and we are extremely supportive
14 of this as well as universal feeding--

15 [BELL RINGS]

16 --and each child deserves. But each child
17 deserves to go to class with a full stomach.
18 However, in order for school lunch programs to be
19 successful and sufficient, we need these 1000
20 additional school lunch workers to make this possible
21 and alleviate some of the strain that the workers are
22 experiencing. With inadequate staffing levels it
23 makes it extremely difficult for school lunch workers
24 to meet these requirements within the necessary
25 hours.

2 Another struggle faced by our school lunch
3 employees, which has a direct impact on sanitation
4 and hygiene in the school cafeterias and kitchens, is
5 inadequate air conditioning and ventilation.

6 Updating our non-existent and inadequate cooling
7 and air exchange systems in public in the public
8 school system have been a persistent struggle faced
9 by school lunch workers for decades. The vast
10 majorities of schools that have been built in the
11 1930s to the 1990s lack the proper design and
12 operation for acceptable indoor air circulation. Due
13 to the age and condition of these buildings, many
14 lack the necessary electrical capabilities to supply
15 cool units in kitchen spaces. Many of these kitchens
16 Local 372 workers in every day have little to no
17 cooling or ventilation and can reach over 130
18 degrees.

19 A 2017 report called "Too Hot To Learn", which
20 detailed this significant lack of air conditioning,
21 outlined the need for air conditioning in these
22 spaces.

23 This is-- The workers are in dire need of cooling
24 in these areas. And the Office of School Food has
25 taken money from their budget to put some cooling

2 system in some schools. But for the 1600 schools
3 throughout the city, and a majority being built
4 within that time, it's just not enough.

5 So, in closing Local 372 extends their gratitude
6 as to the City Council always for their support. We
7 hope that this request for \$10 million to support
8 school lunch staffing and additional resources to
9 remediate these working conditions. On behalf of the
10 of Local 372 and its 24,000 members, we thank you for
11 the opportunity to testify today.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
13 Shirley Aidebol? Lewis Cholden Brown? Donovan
14 Swanson?

15 MR. SWANSON: Hi. Good afternoon Chair Joseph,
16 and thank you for holding this important hearing
17 today. My name is Donovan Swanson. I represent the
18 Brooklyn Borough President, Antonio Reynoso, who's
19 here to fight for critical and important programs
20 across Brooklyn in New York City Public Schools.
21 Fiscal year 25 Preliminary Budget for both DOE and
22 SCA are concerning for a number of reasons, many of
23 which you and your councilmembers here today have all
24 echoed, and we are in agreeance. Crucial long-term
25 initiatives such as 3K and pre-K, community schools,

2 Restorative Justice programming, post-secondary
3 readiness programs, and so much more are threatened
4 with cuts. With the expiration of federal COVID
5 relief funding, our schools' financial situation is
6 dire. Yet new projections from the IBO expect
7 billions more in available funding for this fiscal
8 year 25 than previously predicted.

9 So, while some cuts may be necessary, we should
10 be using data and evidence to ensure that our
11 education budget is serving the roughly 900,000
12 students and families with the priority of those most
13 in need.

14 You have our testimony here today with a number
15 of things outlined. I'm going to try to do my best
16 and run through but the Brooklyn Borough President is
17 particularly concerned on a couple of initiatives.

18 One: Early Childhood Education. Parents across
19 Brooklyn are calling for expansion, not reduction of
20 early childcare programs, especially pre-K and 3K.
21 In fact, the number of New York City families
22 utilizing 3K more than doubled between school year
23 2019 and school year 2020.

24 The federal standard for affordable childcare 7%
25 of household income. Yet, according to the Citizens

2 Committee for Children, childcare costs in Brooklyn
3 could represent up to 63% of a family's income.
4 According to that same study, more than 80% of New
5 York City families with children under five are
6 unable to afford childcare. This is unsustainable
7 and underscores the access to free and low-cost
8 childcare care, how it can make a difference in
9 family staying in New York City are being forced to
10 leave.

11 It is essential that these programs remain
12 available to every family regardless of special needs
13 or immigration status. Yet more than 150 Brooklyn 3K
14 classes could be on the chopping block, including
15 many in our borough's highest poverty districts, as
16 well as 19 integrated classes for students with
17 special needs, and 24 preschool special education
18 programs.

19 Borough President Reynoso is ready to fight
20 alongside the Council to address these funding gaps.
21 I think it's also important to note that while we're
22 happy to see the increase in 94 full-time staff for
23 processing Special Education claims and expediting
24 hearings, and that's a sign in the right direction,
25 as you highlighted, what we need to do are major

2 investments in special education, and in specifically
3 our preschool special education to address this
4 exploding backlog of Carter cases now estimated at
5 \$200 million in fiscal year 25.

6 Our testimony also includes concerns with school
7 climate and culture, cuts to community schools,
8 Restorative Justice programming, sensory exploration
9 and education and discovery programs like SEED--

10 [BELL RINGS]

11 --bilingual programs, translation interpretation
12 services. The list goes on. And I mean, we'd be
13 remiss to not to discuss sustaining critical staff.
14 There is projected over 625 staff on the chopping
15 block. This is people's livelihoods. This is entire
16 industries. These are our students on mental health.
17 These are the valuable supports that we know are
18 necessary for schools.

19 And lastly, and because again, we cannot minimize
20 the mention of class size: \$4 billion, we're happy
21 to see, but it is not enough to even begin to
22 address. And so, we stand here as partners, and we
23 thank you for the opportunity to testify today. And
24 the Borough President will continue to stand with

2 Council to demand investments in our youth. And
3 again, we're partners as always.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much. I have a
5 quick question for President Mulgrew: What are the
6 ways the city's budget process could be revamped to
7 make it more factual, so arguments would be over
8 policy instead of politics?

9 PRESIDENT MULGREW: I would have three separate
10 entities having to look over all of the City books
11 and coming up with what is believed to be the real
12 number. Right now, you get a number put out by OMB.
13 That is clearly a problem. And we've always played
14 games with our budget. We get that. But it's now
15 getting to levels where there is no credibility in
16 these numbers whatsoever. And it's hurting us in our
17 own-- in our lobbying efforts in Albany.

18 And so, if you have three separate entities who
19 get a complete look at all the books, and they all
20 say, "Well, for this fiscal year, this is a number we
21 should start to work off of, and start the budget
22 process." That does not happen. It is all done in
23 one agency. And they just come out with a magic
24 number. And then during the year they come out with
25 other numbers, and then they say this is why we have

2 to cut. Nobody-- There is no check on that. They
3 just come out. You guys have done phenomenally with
4 your hearings. You've had one person here more than
5 anybody else as far as I can tell, and you still
6 can't get your questions answered.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And that was one of the sad
8 part about this.

9 What is your understanding for the wide swing and
10 city's financial estimate? Because The Council had
11 called it. We were calling it from way before our
12 Chair of Finance was saying, "There's money there.
13 There's money there." He called it. And then
14 finally they were like, "No, no, no." And then one
15 day we woke up, we found it.

16 PRESIDENT MULGREW: Arrogance. It's sheer
17 arrogance that-- to think that, "Okay, we're going to
18 go out and lie to everyone." When the numbers--
19 Some of those numbers are there. The-- The \$8
20 billion in reserves is there. The clear-- You look
21 at the quarterly reports, and the operating surplus
22 is exploding. You see all of this, and-- but there
23 is billions more that still has not seen. So, you
24 know-- And I love this whole idea that, "Oh, five
25 years out deficit is going to make us fall into the

2 pit of Hell." That's been that way forever. Five
3 years from now was always the pit of hell. And yet
4 we'll get there, and it's not. This year, the fiscal
5 year we're in right now originally was a \$4 billion
6 deficit. And I remember fighting with an
7 administration over that. Yet here we are in this
8 year, and it's going to-- it's going to be close to a
9 \$4 billion surplus. How did you get-- If these
10 people are the experts on numbers and money, how did
11 they-- how are they won by \$8 billion? They would
12 not pass math class. I'm just saying it. It's a
13 game, and that's the problem. This game is hurting
14 our city.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: According to my
16 Councilmember Shekar, he said, "The math is not
17 mathing."

18 PRESIDENT MULGREW: Yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So how do we-- we talked
20 about class size, and you said the-- the funds are
21 there, and they're-- but New York City Public Schools
22 said it's an unfunded mandate. Can you elaborate on
23 that?

24 PRESIDENT MULGREW: The additional \$1.6 billion
25 was what the State is sending. And that is based off

2 of the city's estimates what they needed. So, now
3 that it is here, they're saying that that has nothing
4 to do with it.

5 Let's just start with what some of I heard
6 sitting here today: You asked them a question about
7 the \$35 billion projection that they needed for-- for
8 classrooms, and they said we, "We've worked closely.
9 We've done this." No, there was a massive fight
10 inside of their committee. Because what happened
11 was, literally, and it's -- you can't make this up,
12 it sounds absurd -- if they looked, if they got a
13 survey from a principal (which they shouldn't be
14 surveying the principals at this point in time, they
15 have enough to do) but they got a survey from a
16 principal, and three students didn't fit in the
17 school, they would charge-- they were accounting for
18 a whole new school for three students. And they did
19 that every time that happened.

20 That's how they got from \$35 to \$25. They have
21 not shown us the formula that they're using. And
22 they-- and we're not going to sign on to the document
23 that is due to the State. The minute the State's
24 budget is done, we have a period of time. It's not
25 long. We're not signing on to any document, claiming

2 \$25 billion is what it is unless we see the numbers.
3 We don't believe them. Don't believe them at all.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Hmph. That's not good.

5 President Rubio, you talked about pay parity.
6 How do we sustain that workforce which consists
7 mostly of black and brown women? How do we sustain
8 that pay parity for them? It's important, or else
9 we're going to lose that sector, and we'll have a
10 generation of preschool students with nowhere to go.

11 PRESIDENT RUBIO: Right.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We already have that with
13 the preschoolers with special disabilities. Same
14 thing would happen to that workforce.

15 PRESIDENT RUBIO: Thank you, Chair Joseph. I'll
16 make one comment about my colleague here.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course.

18 PRESIDENT RUBIO: And yes, we don't want our
19 principals to do more work than they had to. But we
20 did do a survey. And Michael's right, we haven't
21 gotten that data back yet. Principals know their
22 building best. And too often, if you're looking at a
23 report, without getting too far into the weeds, and
24 they see two special ed classrooms, they can be far
25 apart. They think they're close together, they can

2 knock down a wall and create a class. That's not the
3 way that works. And so, we need to see the details
4 of those reports, and work very closely with the
5 school leader and their leadership teams--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Right.

7 PRESIDENT RUBIO: --at their level to really make
8 sure that this works, right? We all want this.
9 We've got-- we've got to get it done right.

10 With regard to pay parity: Again, I want to
11 thank The Council. I want to thank the speaker. You
12 guys came through and put money into the reserves so
13 that we can close the gap on pay parity for both our
14 teachers, and our directors, and assistant directors.
15 The City has yet to sit down with us and have one
16 single conversation in true earnest about closing
17 that gap. And it is threatening the system.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely.

19 PRESIDENT RUBIO: Right now we have black and
20 brown women that are earning less than the teachers
21 they supervise. And the only reason why they're
22 still doing that work is because they love their
23 communities, and because they're believing in you,
24 Joseph-- Chair Joseph, our Speaker, and in our

2 leadership team here to keep fighting for them and
3 making sure that we sustain this system.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. Or else we'll
5 destabilize that sector and completely lose them, and
6 they all go to New York City Public Schools, and we
7 won't have CBO people. So, that's important. How
8 are you-- Where are you guys on the 4410 Pay Parity
9 as well.

10 PRESIDENT RUBIO: We have-- Again, we haven't
11 been engaged.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. So, as to The
13 Administration, we need some engagement, right?

14 Mr. Donald, how are you? A thousand-- Tell me
15 about the program for your air conditioning. How
16 many so far, do you know, of your kitchens?

17 MR. NESBITT: We believe there's about a hundred
18 kitchens that the school food budget has paid for.
19 But that's-- that doesn't even-- that's not even the
20 tip of the iceberg.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Right. And how was your
22 staffers feeling about the cut to school food? The
23 last thing on their mind was the school food budget,
24 right?

2 MR. NESBITT: Yeah. The cuts the school food, to
3 the food itself-- Are you referring to, Chair Joseph,
4 to the food items that were cut?

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm. The ones my kids
6 were calling me about.

7 MR. NESBITT: Yeah. So, the staffers as well, we
8 were getting phone calls from them as well. And
9 those items became popular. So, of course the
10 students are eating. And our staff, most of them
11 live in the communities they work in, right? They
12 have a sense of attachment to the students. And so
13 it's not just about feeding the students where items
14 are actually removed, and the students no longer want
15 to come up and say, "Hello, miss. Hello, mister.
16 Hallo auntie," right? The students are no longer
17 coming up to their lines. They feel a sense of
18 responsibility in some way, even though they're not
19 responsible, but they feel a sense of responsibility.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And we called it unnecessary
21 here. Even my statement, I called it unnecessary, as
22 we see more and more students facing food insecurity,
23 and here we are cutting the basic food.

24 So, the cafeteria enhancement also allows
25 students-- because it looks good, the cafeterias are

2 a space for students to socialize. So, I thought
3 touching school food was a little bit too much for
4 me. So, we made sure we got some of them, but not
5 all of them, but knowing me I will continue to fight
6 on New York City-- on behalf of New York City kids.
7 They know that.

8 So, I thank you all.

9 PANELISTS: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And thank you for your
11 continued partnership. Tell the-- give the Borough
12 President my best, and tell him he has a partner.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to everyone
14 on the panel. Our next panel (and apologies in
15 advance for any name mispronunciations), are

16 Arie Schaer, Olivia Mok, Harpreet Singh, Maixin
17 Wu, Kulsoom Tapal, Julianne Huang. Please make your
18 way to the front table.

19 Ari Schaer, you may begin your testimony.

20 Ari?

21 MR. SCHAER: Good afternoon. First, I want to
22 thank Chair Joseph and the rest of The Council for
23 allowing this conversation. My name is Ari Schaer,
24 and I'm a Junior at the High School of American
25 Studies at Lehman College in the Bronx. I'm a youth

2 advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy
3 Projects Mental Health Campaign team.

4 First, I want us to understand that mental health
5 is more than the absence of clinically diagnosed
6 mental illnesses. Mental health is also the presence
7 of well being. School should not just be a place for
8 children to learn. It should also be a place to
9 cultivate and create who we will be in this world.

10 But for me, and for most students, it is a place
11 that causes constant headaches and riddles us with
12 anxiety. As a student, I'm told that I have to do a
13 lot of extracurriculars and study all the time,
14 endlessly crying over work and anxiously checking for
15 test results. The competitive environment that our
16 education system has created has led me to tie my
17 self worth to a number.

18 I know I'm not the only one that feels this way.
19 But why is this the system we continue to uphold?
20 Why are schools like this? And when do I get to
21 enjoy being a kid?

22 Having a strong school based system of support
23 would help relieve some of this pressure. But how
24 can we feel supported when in a school of about 400

2 students, we have only two guidance counselors, and
3 I'm not even sure we have a social worker.

4 Who are we supposed to turn to for help? I know
5 I'm not alone in voicing this concern. Last year, we
6 collected survey responses from over 150 AAPI
7 students from 40 high schools throughout New York
8 City, and one of the top barriers to seeking mental
9 health support is the presence and availability of
10 their school social workers and guidance counselors.
11 No one should have to feel that their mental health
12 needs are an inconvenience.

13 Student wellbeing should always be a top
14 priority. Because if students are not well then the
15 school system is failing them.

16 We need our schools to be places where we are
17 cared for, where teachers and students don't assume
18 AAPI students are doing well, and where school
19 leadership can center their actions and decisions
20 around students' needs and experiences.

21 Schools should include targeted questions and
22 mental health for students, parents and educators in
23 the New York City School survey and disaggregate
24 survey results by race and ethnicity to better
25 understand the diverse needs in our communities.

2 Schools should be more intentional and thoughtful
3 about creating spaces where students can share their
4 stories and needs. To do that, we not need only to
5 keep the 450 school social workers who were hired
6 with the funding we were about to run dry, but also
7 more culturally responsive therapists or counselors
8 who care about students' mental health from a
9 holistic perspective.

10 We deserve to feel heard and supported. Thank
11 you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Olivia?

13 MS. MOK: Good afternoon. First, I want to thank
14 Chair Joseph and the rest of The Council for having
15 me in allowing this conversation. My name is Olivia
16 Mach, and I'm a Senior at Eleanor Roosevelt High
17 School. I'm a youthe advocate on the Asian American
18 Student Advocacy Project's Mental Health Campaign
19 Team.

20 As someone who's dealt with symptoms of
21 depression and anxiety, and is overall had several
22 bumps in the road regarding my mental health, this is
23 a topic that I hold very dearly. And with that said,
24 I'm glad to be here to share a bit about my
25 experiences and insight.

2 For many AAPI students, including myself, a
3 prevalent issue is a lack of comfort in discussing
4 feelings about school with our families. This is
5 often because of fear and stigma surrounding mental
6 health. The Model Minority Myth perpetuates the idea
7 that AAPI students do not face mental health
8 challenges, which further results in the assumption
9 that AAPI students who perform well academically do
10 not have mental health needs.

11 The harsh reality is that many students
12 experience a great deal of performance anxiety, and
13 link their self-worth to their productivity or
14 grades.

15 I know what it is like to feel inferior,
16 specifically to my peers at school. For me, the
17 feeling of never ever been good enough has been
18 inescapable because of the extremely competitive
19 nature of my school. I'm forced to suppress these
20 thoughts out of fear of embarrassment and judgment.
21 I thought schools are supposed to be places where
22 students can thrive socially and emotionally. But
23 due to systemic challenges and barriers, the sense of
24 insecurity and urgency schools have created has led

2 AAPI students to believe that our grades are the only
3 things that matter, and that we are just a number.

4 We all deserve to be seen and cared for. We need
5 better support systems in schools to help students
6 cope, heal, and thrive. And that starts with school
7 social workers.

8 The COVID-19 Relief Fund allowed 450 new social
9 workers to be hired across all NYC schools, which is
10 certainly progress, but still not enough. That
11 brings us to approximately 400 to 500 students per
12 social worker, and this ratio is just not building
13 the close support that students need. Ensuring that
14 safe spaces are provided is something that should be
15 made a top priority in order to make schools a more
16 welcoming and comfortable setting.

17 To clarify, we don't expect teachers to take care
18 of our mental wellness on top of their already
19 extensive workload. A school with total burnout is
20 not at all a healthy school. All we ask is that more
21 attention be directed to supporting mental health.

22 While I'm a senior entering college in the fall, I do
23 have a younger brother who's still in the NYC public
24 school system, as I'm sure many people in this room
25 have children or siblings in the same position.

2 So, I would like to advocate for our youth to
3 have what I did not have in my early education years:
4 a true sense of support. We need the city to listen
5 and care not listen and cut. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Harpreet
7 Singh?

8 MR. SINGH: Good afternoon. First, I want to
9 thank Chair Joseph and the rest of The Council for
10 allowing this conversation. My name is Harpreet
11 Singh, and I'm a senior at Stuyvesant High School.
12 I'm a youth advocate for the Asian American Student
13 Advocacy Project, ASAP. ASAP is CACF's new
14 leadership program, and I am part of ASAP's language
15 access campaign.

16 Although I'm not an English language learner
17 myself, I've had similar experiences. Coming from an
18 Indian background, specifically as a Sikh, I know how
19 alienation feels. When I was younger, some of my
20 peers said I looked ridiculous and constantly asked
21 what my turban represented. Questions like, "What is
22 that on your head?" Or, "Why do you have a metal
23 bracelet on?" forced me to ponder about my worth
24 among the students in my school. Why can't I stand
25 alongside my classmates and feel comfortable?

2 My father told me how lost he also felt when he
3 came here 33 years ago, he struggled for nearly a
4 decade alone in learning English and tirelessly to
5 had find solutions to his problems without any
6 guidance or support. It is frustrating and upsetting
7 that things have not changed much in the world we
8 live in today.

9 The struggles of AAPI immigrant students often go
10 unnoticed. From our research and learning from the
11 surveys, we hear from AAPI English language learners,
12 that they're unable to converse in daily
13 conversations, they feel left out by peers who are
14 native English speakers, they don't feel supported by
15 teachers because the teachers expect them to just
16 know the content, they're not being offered certain
17 classes or opportunities because guidance counselors
18 think it is more important to focus on learning
19 English, and they don't feel comfortable and
20 confident to ask for help.

21 Furthermore, they cannot go home and communicate
22 any of these struggles with their parents because
23 their parents also don't understand, and they're left
24 alone to find their own resources.

2 The cuts on bilingual programs, translation, and
3 interpretation services will only further diminish
4 the potential for every student to be successful.
5 Our schools should be the place for inclusivity,
6 warmth, and potential. We should be proud and
7 celebrate every part of our identity. But our
8 current education system, and this funding formula do
9 not allow that.

10 Lastly, I want to point out that translation and
11 interpretation services are just a start. Because
12 learning English and being able to speak English is
13 only one of the many challenges that immigrant
14 students and families face, schools must continue to
15 provide support for Indian students throughout their
16 educational journey.

17 There are issues beyond translation such as
18 supporting me students so their identities are not
19 discriminated against and they can engage in
20 meaningful spaces to practice their communication
21 skills.

22 We ask The Council to ensure the funding for
23 immigrant students and families does not get cut.
24 Our ultimate goal is to ensure that every student
25 including immigrant students, regardless of their

2 background, feels proud of their identity and fully
3 sees themselves in the school setting. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
5 Haixin Wu?

6 MR. WU: Good afternoon. First, I want to thank
7 Chair Joseph and the rest of The Council for allowing
8 this conversation. My name is Haixin Wu. I'm a
9 junior at Manhattan Hunter Science High School, and a
10 youth advocate at the American Asian Students
11 Advocacy Projects Language Access Campaign.

12 I moved here seven years ago with my family.
13 Having no knowledge of English, it has been an
14 overwhelming uphill battle ever since. In school, I
15 felt lost and isolated. I was unable to fully engage
16 with the lesson, had trouble making friends, and felt
17 awkward walking in the hallways. Every day was a
18 relentless effort to learn and adapt with frustration
19 overriding progress.

20 I don't think my story surprised anyone. We all
21 know the challenge immigrant students and families
22 face. Yet the budget cut will negatively impact
23 translation and interpretation services in schools.

24

25

2 I also want to point out that supporting
3 immigrant students has to go beyond translation and
4 academics.

5 Some challenges and leads that my team had
6 discovered through our research are that many AAPI
7 ELLs aren't able to gain the language skills that
8 will help them success in society. Last year, my
9 team collected survey responses from students from 18
10 high schools across the city. A common challenge we
11 saw among AAPI ELLs is that they were too often being
12 judged for their accent, for the speed of learning
13 English, and for the ability to fit in.

14 There is no single official language in this
15 country. Why is the school system placing so much
16 shame on ELLs, when we really should be creating an
17 environment where everyone, regardless of their
18 language background, is seen and heard.

19 In a diverse city like NYC, we must celebrate the
20 ability to speak more than one language. ELL
21 students should never be discriminated against simply
22 because they don't speak fluent English. We want
23 schools to be intentionally about creating space for
24 English language learners to actively learn and
25 practice English language skills that will actually

2 prepare them for success. Being able to read and
3 complete assignments is not enough if we are unable
4 to have casual conversation.

5 As an English learner, we need a space where we
6 can truly engage in meaningful conversations, where
7 we are not charged. We want our students to be able
8 to make friends, navigate through their education and
9 career journey without language barrier, and be proud
10 of themselves for being bilingual or multilingual
11 speakers.

12 We want all students regardless of their
13 background to be welcomed, valued, and supported in
14 school. Thank you for listening.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Julianne
16 Huang?

17 MS. HUANG: Good afternoon. First, I want to
18 thank Chair Joseph and the rest of this Council for
19 allowing this conversation. My name is Julianne
20 Huang and I'm a senior at Staten Island Tech. I'm a
21 youth advocate at the Asian American Student Advocacy
22 Projects Anti-Bullying and Harassment Campaign.

23 For many of us AAPI's, we have not always felt
24 heard. Our identities and needs have often been
25 misconstrued or blatantly ignored in schools that can

2 manifest as microaggressions, vulgar language, or
3 even physical violence.

4 I vividly remember hearing of the cruelty that
5 transpired in my middle school building. A Chinese
6 boy and another non-AAPI student had an intense
7 argument that led that student to drag that Chinese
8 boy into the bathroom. He then threw him onto the
9 floor, stepped on him and yelled out an ethnic slur.

10 When I heard that tears and embarrassment follow
11 that young boy, I was both sorry and angry. The
12 action the school took was suspension. Did that
13 solve any problem? No. How come no care and support
14 was provided for a boy who was in pain and why was
15 nothing done to heal the whole school community?
16 Accidents and incidents happened due to a lack of
17 empathy for each other and a lack of understanding
18 about our community, but punishment is not the
19 solution. We must address it with healing-based
20 approaches.

21 In our campaign group and ASAP, we address race-
22 based bullying and harassment by advocating for
23 Restorative Justice, a practice that prevents and
24 repairs harm with understanding, cultural
25 sensitivity, and healing for the broader community.

2 Here in ASAP we believe safety is not policing
3 students, or punishing them for their wrongdoings,
4 but by the presence of student wellness. Last year,
5 my team collected stories from over 55 AAPI students
6 across 22 New York City High Schools on their
7 experience with bullying and harassment in their
8 schools. AAPI students were asked to move to a
9 different lunch table because of their foods. Their
10 accents were made fun of, and they were asked if they
11 were terrorists.

12 Councilmembers, it is beyond disheartening that
13 this is still happening in our schools. Yet our
14 schools are not able to address any of these from a
15 healing approach due to a lack of funding. We see
16 from school communications that there are plans for
17 teachers and staff to receive more trainings. But as
18 you leaders and students, we have questions. What
19 exactly do these trainings teach? We should know the
20 specific topics that our teachers had training on. A
21 broad concept like diversity training is not helpful
22 to know. And who are attending these meetings? By
23 that I mean, how many teachers on staff from these
24 from each school attended them? And finally, how
25 does the DOE measure or assess the effectiveness of

2 these trainings? Just a simple exit survey at the
3 end of the workshop does not show whether the staff
4 are bringing changes into the schools.

5 We're asking the City and the DOE to provide more
6 transparency and accountability in these training
7 sessions.

8 Finally, to improve our school cultures and
9 climate, each school must have a Restorative Justice
10 coordinator who can properly address conflicts with
11 an emphasis on care and growth instead of punishment.

12 [BELL RINGS]

13 We urge the city to understand and acknowledge
14 that any meaningful change to our school climates
15 takes time to implement and happen. Therefore, the
16 funding should also be sustainable and not at risk of
17 being cut. Thank you so much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Kulsoom?

19 MS. TAPAL: Hi, everyone. My name is Kulsoom
20 Tapal, and I lead the education policy work and I
21 will also be testifying on behalf of the Coalition
22 for Asian American Children and Families. You just
23 heard from our ASAPers, our youth leaders.

24 CACF is an advocacy organization fighting for
25 equity for Asian American and Pacific Islanders. New

2 York City students, regardless of income or
3 background deserve well-resourced, safe, and
4 accessible schools. As CACF advocates for
5 marginalized AAPI students, and all New York
6 students, this includes English language learners,
7 immigrant and refugee students, low-income students,
8 and students with disabilities, we demand a budget
9 that prioritizes care services and resources.

10 We are a part of the Emergency Coalition to Save
11 Education Programs, and we are witnessing firsthand
12 the detrimental effects of impending funding cuts on
13 essential educational programming. The drying up of
14 COVID-19 funding threatens to cut more than \$700
15 million from New York City Public Schools fiscal year
16 2025 budget.

17 While existing programming is not enough to
18 support the needs of our students, we need these cuts
19 restored to maintain the existing programming.
20 Specifically, to maintain the existing course of
21 programming, which is not enough we need \$113 million
22 to support students with disabilities, \$7 million for
23 immigrant and English language learner families,
24 \$12.3 million to support students experiencing
25 homelessness, \$161 million for mental health and

2 social emotional support, \$399 million for 3K and
3 pre-K support, and \$36.3 million to support students
4 with post-secondary efforts.

5 So, let's be clear: The decision to defund
6 education is a deliberate one made by our city
7 leaders. Immigrants and asylum seekers are being
8 scapegoated as a consequence, painted as drains of
9 resources, but the reality and the truth is far
10 simpler: New York City has the resources to continue
11 funding these vital services. It's simply a matter
12 of allocation of priorities. I implore The Council
13 to fight for a budget where schools are fully funded.
14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you all for your
16 advocacy. Continue to fight for what you need in
17 your school. I started at 19. So, you continue
18 doing your advocacy?

19 What support do you find most helpful that your
20 schools? You could go down the line.

21 If any.

22 MS. HUANG: For me personally, I want to feel
23 heard from my-- I want to feel heard and represented
24 by the people who are supposedly supposed to help me
25 such as my councilmembers-- sorry, not

2 councilmembers-- guidance counselors. I want to feel
3 represented by them, and that they can really
4 understand my own issues. You know, if they're
5 there, they should be there for a reason. We
6 shouldn't have to feel a sense of fear if we're
7 talking to them about our issues, or, like, they
8 won't understand us. So, just having that option of
9 someone to go to is really important.

10 MR. SCHAER: I was luckily able to go to middle
11 school where I was able to have a guidance counselor
12 that was always there to be able to support me. And
13 I think that is really what's needed in schools. And
14 I think that's what is best to support me, which is
15 what I kind of outlined in what I said. It is just
16 that now in schools I'm not really-- we don't really
17 have the access. I know how busy my guidance
18 counselors are. And so it's not their fault, but I
19 know if I had that resource that I would definitely
20 utilize it, and so would so many other students, and
21 I know it could really help curb the problem of
22 mental health in schools.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take you to
24 see your guidance counselor social worker at school?
25 How long?

2 MR. SCHAER: I mean, it really depends. Right
3 now they're all doing college meetings for-- about--
4 They each have 200 students, and they have scheduled
5 meetings for, I think, most of the day. So-- And
6 they also have to do mandated therapy for certain
7 students.

8 So, that really leaves a good 20 minutes in their
9 schedule for me to even visit them.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Got it.

11 MS. MOK: I'd like to have social workers and
12 counselors that are available. A lot of the time
13 when I walk into their offices, they'll be talking to
14 someone else already, and it's just very, like,
15 disheartening because I have to leave, and not get
16 the support that I wanted originally. So, just
17 having more avail-- availability for them would be
18 really great.

19 MR. WU: In my school, I would like more support
20 for like language supporting, because, due to the
21 fact that like I was an ELL student beforehand, where
22 we were not able to have enough support from, like,
23 staff, and teachers in helping with, like,
24 communications. Which it really helped-- it really
25 created a struggle for me in, like, speaking English,

2 but as I move into high school, there will-- there is
3 less helping from, like, such stuff. So, I'm hoping
4 for more of those staff that helps other ELL students
5 in, like, assisting them in, like, learning English.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And I always believe that
7 speaking another language is a superpower, it's not a
8 deficit. So you celebrate that other language you
9 speak.

10 [APPLAUSE]

11 Go ahead.

12 MR. SINGH: Well, my school has 3000 students.
13 So, the guidance counselors have so many students to
14 attend to, that it really is difficult for them.
15 And, like Arie mentioned, college-- there's college
16 applications and college meetings. And so, it's the
17 same for me, is that they'll most likely push it at
18 the end of the day, or maybe even after school where
19 students have other responsibilities to attend to.

20 And so there's a lack of mental health services.
21 And the issue is that the guidance counselors,
22 because there's so many students, they can't approach
23 one-on-one, and they can't make that initiation. And
24 students are also fearful of making that initiation,
25 because they don't want to get in trouble. They

2 don't want their parents to-- like, they don't have
3 the confidence to engage with their parents or their
4 teachers.

5 Alongside that, in terms of language access,
6 students still feel, like, unnoticed. They don't
7 feel seen. Even though my school is very diverse,
8 and has a very diverse population, there are some
9 students that speak multiple languages. Like,
10 there's no active services present for them to be
11 able to talk. And like parents can't communicate
12 because there's no one present. And it makes it very
13 difficult for them to be able to communicate. So, in
14 terms of mental health and language access, they're
15 both-- they're both a requirement in my school,
16 because of [inaudible].

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the language. You feel
18 that the language is a barrier?

19 MR. SINGH: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Which makes you access
21 resources. If I-- If you could have mental health
22 funding, right?, what would you-- what would you like
23 to see? Tell me what would you like to see?

24 I'm giving you mental health funding. What would
25 you guys like to see? This is your chance. Tell me,

2 what would you like to see? You spoke about mental
3 health.

4 MR. SCHAER: We definitely would like to see more
5 school social workers. I think also most more
6 culturally responsive social workers based on, like,
7 different diverse communities in schooling.

8 I know we talked to a school social worker who
9 works at Dual Language, which is mostly East Asian
10 school, and she herself is East Asian. And she's
11 talking about, like, how helpful and how, like, more
12 responsive, and more people feel welcome coming to
13 her, and sharing that these personal details about
14 their life with her because of the similar-- similar
15 background. So, that's something that I would really
16 like to see reflected in schools.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Anyone else?

18 MS. MOK: To add on to Arie, it's really
19 important that students feel a real connection with
20 their social workers. So, just to reiterate what you
21 said: just having a certain level of diversity with
22 their social workers is really important, so that we
23 can reinforce certain connections among students and
24 the social workers.

25 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Go ahead.

2 MS. HUANG: This goes back to Restorative
3 Justice, which I was talking about earlier, but I
4 think it's easy to like point to external things
5 like, "Oh, more social workers, more guidance
6 counselors," but what's internal is very important as
7 well. Like, we need to make sure that we're building
8 community and all these other values, such as
9 respect, internally within the school, so that, you
10 know, these places where the students are spending
11 hours of their days in is a safe and supporting space
12 to be in, and that really affects their mental
13 health.

14 So, I think prevention is also a really important
15 process of, you know, the-- the mental health.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you. I'm
17 really proud of you. Keep doing your advocacy and I
18 will keep listening.

19 [APPLAUSE]

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to everyone
21 on this panel.

22 Our next panel: Sandra Mitchell, Tina Zheng,
23 Angel Ramirez, Adonte Dacosta, Eman Gad, and Lexi
24 Greenberg. Please make your way to the front table.

25 [3 MINUTES SILENCE]

2 CHAPLAIN MITCHELL: Blessings to Chair Joseph,
3 and all The Councilmembers here, and everyone in the
4 room. It is an honor to be in your presence. My
5 name is Chaplain Sandra Mitchell, and I'm a parent
6 leader with the New Settlement Parent Action
7 Committee, also known as PAC and also is a member
8 organization with the New York Dignity In Schools
9 Coalition, and a Healing Center Schools Working
10 Group.

11 As a Bronx parent and a mental health advocate,
12 it is clear that the city of New York needs to invest
13 in our schools and our families, and invest in
14 social, emotional support for students and families,
15 not increasing funding in policing.

16 A student in crisis doesn't need policing, they
17 need counseling. And as a counselor, I know this is
18 true. Our students and families need trauma-
19 responsive care and culturally responsive healing-
20 centered practices, not pepper spray and restraints.
21 Our school staff needs to be provided with the
22 support and guidance to develop trauma-responsive
23 healing-centered schools. It is time for New York
24 City to reinvest in the highest quality education
25 that respects the dignity of all students and pursues

2 restorative approaches to conflict resolution, to
3 conflict and harm, reinvestment in supportive staff
4 positions, and continuous professional development.

5 We're calling for funding to hire black and brown
6 New Yorkers for jobs that support young people's
7 social, emotional, and mental health. We need to
8 hire necessary personnel such as Restorative Justice
9 coordinators, paraprofessionals, community outreach
10 staff, nurses, social workers and guidance
11 counselors. Reinvesting in our public schools is the
12 right thing to do. We must protect, empower,
13 inspire, and nurture the genius in our New York City
14 students. This is how we should be investing in our
15 children in our city's future, and the City and the
16 City Council should no longer be investing in metal
17 detectors and the policing of our youth.

18 We should be investing in our future not in
19 furthering the cradle-to-prison pipeline. A city
20 budget is a moral document. It shows our city's and
21 our leaders' priorities.

22 We hope you decide to invest in the future of our
23 children and make New York strong again. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next.

2 MS. GREENBERG: Hi, my name is Lexi Greenberg and
3 I'm a founding member of my public high school's
4 Restorative Justice Action Team, and I'm here to
5 demand that New York City invest \$75 million to
6 expand Restorative Justice in schools. I started
7 high school in 2020, making it close to impossible to
8 make friends. Then one day my advisor was having a
9 lesson on the history of Black Lives Matter and at
10 the time was the only black student. During the
11 lesson two boys in my class made some jokes and
12 comments I was extremely uncomfortable with, and I
13 left the lesson feeling angry and attacked.

14 Having experienced many racial microaggressions
15 in the past, I felt I had to do something. So, I
16 reported them to my guidance counselor, asking for a
17 suspension for the racist behavior. But the guidance
18 counselor asked me to have a meeting with them
19 instead. I felt the authority figures at my school
20 were downplaying my experience and refusing to
21 protect me, even when a vital part of my identity was
22 under attack. I felt unseen, unheard, and silenced.

23 So, I went to my principal so that he could
24 execute full disciplinary action, but he also

2 encouraged me to have a meeting with the boys with
3 members of the garden staff present.

4 So, I reluctantly agreed. But in that meeting, I
5 realized that these guys didn't mean any real harm
6 and just spoke from a place of ignorance. These guys
7 want to mostly white middle schools that never
8 broached the topic of Black Lives Matter and never
9 talked about it in their home lives. They were
10 confused, because they didn't understand why and how
11 their actions hurt me. Once they understood they
12 were extremely apologetic and regretful, so I left
13 that meeting with two sincere apologies and didn't
14 seek disciplinary action.

15 Those two boys became my first friends, and they
16 helped me find my people. I made a choice to listen
17 and see the people on the other side of the problem
18 instead of burying myself in resentment and hate.
19 And that opened me up to a whole new universe of joy
20 and acceptance. This is why Restorative Justice
21 matters.

22 It is because of this incident that I ended up
23 helping my school establish our own Restorative
24 Justice Action Team, where we have been working hard
25 to implement programs into our schools such as peer

2 mediation counseling, and Restorative Justice
3 training for students. These programs that have been
4 extremely helpful in improving the school community
5 and decreasing incidents are the same ones that would
6 suffer under these currently planned budget cuts.

7 We need to not define people by their flaws and
8 not hold their worst moments over their head as their
9 defining feature. Traditional disciplinary actions
10 just create educational spaces of alienation, but
11 Restorative Justice to just forgiveness,
12 acknowledgement, and acceptance, and this is why it
13 needs to be protected in our schools. Thank you.

14 [APPLAUSE]

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
16 Next.

17 MR. RAMIREZ: Hi, my name is Angel Ramirez, and
18 I'm representing YA-YA and Dignity in Schools
19 Campaign. First of all, I want to say thank you for
20 hearing us out, and actually being able to have a
21 conversation with us. And I'm here to not ask but
22 demand to expand Restorative Justice in schools by
23 \$75 million.

24

25

2 I'm making this statement, this demand, because
3 we need to fight that school-to-prison pipeline
4 that's affecting the youth, the younger generations.

5 I remember when I used to go to a public high
6 school, my public high school had metal detectors
7 every day, we used to get on the line, we used to
8 take everything out of our pockets, go through the
9 metal detectors, and sometimes the metal detectors
10 wouldn't work. So, it will beep, and we will have to
11 get patted down as swatted down like if we were
12 prisoners, if we were criminals. Mind you were 14,
13 15, 16, 17. This is the age where we're starting to
14 put our perspective in the world, where we have a
15 certain view of the world. So, these ages are very
16 important. Because not only that, that is going to
17 affect the way we think in society, which means it's
18 going to affect the way we act later on when we get
19 older.

20 If you want the youth to think that they're
21 criminals, they're going to act like their criminals.
22 The youth, as like everyone has said before, is the
23 future, and making them think that they're criminals,
24 and this is okay, and having them get accustomed to
25 that police presence in school and to the daily life

2 is going to be counterintuitive for us. No matter
3 what, this is either going to affect our world in a
4 good way or in a bad way. So, let's try to make it
5 in a good way.

6 So that's why I'm here to demand that school
7 school Restorative Justice is funded by the \$75
8 million and at least 500 schools.

9 And yeah, that's it. So...

10 [APPLAUSE]

11 Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
13 Next, please.

14 MS. ZHENG: Oh, okay. Hey. Hi, Education
15 Committee, and dear Councilwoman Rita Joseph. You
16 know, my name is Tina Zheng, and I'm a high school
17 senior from Brooklyn, and I'm here with the YA-YA
18 network to amplify the Dignity In Schools Campaign.

19 To start I was just beginning to read this book
20 called The Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein, and I'm
21 learning about disaster capitalism, where in crises
22 we become blinded to the exploitive, corporate, and
23 privatization agendas. So, I'm just thinking about
24 what are the parallels of our current situation in
25 education? A manufactured budget crisis by the

2 mayoral Administration each year, since I since I
3 first began advocating and organizing in 2022.

4 A more discreet form of disaster capitalism that
5 I've come to notice is the Teen Space Initiative
6 released last fall through Talkspace, which is a
7 mental health Telehealth company. So, I was digging
8 into what this initiative is, and I found out that
9 they offer 30 minutes FaceTime with a counselor each
10 month, but you know, unlimited texts, so-- But,
11 just, this is just extremely inadequate to meet the
12 mental health crisis of our students that-- what does
13 this say about it being the only solution, being for-
14 profit, mental health, Telehealth companies, which
15 has a pending law class action lawsuit against its
16 deceptive marketing (just noting that).

17 While any investment in our youth's mental health
18 is a step forward, don't be misled. We-- What we
19 need our counselors, social workers, mental health
20 professionals in our schools. So, we are demanding,
21 the coalition is demanding \$77 million to school-
22 based mental health staff, and \$5 million to the
23 Mental Health Continuum that expands beyond the
24 current 50 schools.

2 In a previous panel, they asked for \$88 million
3 for auto-locking doors, when our schools don't even
4 have enough support staff like the previous panel has
5 shares, those youth panelists, that's crazy in my
6 mind, that it's even more than the \$77 million our
7 coalition is asking for towards social workers and
8 counselors.

9 It's really frustrating to always be on this
10 offensive to keep the programs we students benefit
11 from, like Restorative Justice, just like Lexi has
12 shared, and it really keeps us from realizing real
13 transformation in our education system.

14 In a funny way, what the New York Working
15 Families Party statement recently about how this
16 current administration is setting the house on fire
17 then putting it out. It doesn't make them a hero.
18 We New Yorkers will not forget the fire that Mayor
19 Adams is causing and wreaking havoc in our schools.

20 And just this-- earlier this year, I became
21 eligible to vote. So, definitely remembering that.
22 And so will many of the New York City students who
23 came of age in this austerity and budget cuts, which
24 all of it exacerbate all these terrible inequalities
25 in our schools.

2 [BELL RINGS]

3 So, to all The Councilmembers outside of this
4 chamber: Negotiate and vote on a budget that
5 supports our well-being as students, because we
6 remember who our education champions are, just like
7 Councilwoman Rita Joseph. So thank you.

8 [APPLAUSE]

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
10 Next please.

11 MS. GAD: Good afternoon Chair Joseph and the
12 members and staff of the Committee on Education. My
13 name is Eman Gad, and I'm the Policy Coordinator at
14 Girls For Gender Equity. GGE is a Brooklyn-based
15 organization that works intergenerationally through a
16 black feminist lens to center the leadership of black
17 girls and gender-expansive young people of color.

18 Today we are offering testimony to urge New York
19 City's elected officials to adopt a fiscal year 25
20 budget that allocates funding towards the resources
21 and restorative practices that support every young
22 person to learn and grow away from the police
23 presence and culture that directly disrupts learning,
24 and violates the dignity and safety of students who
25

2 are black, brown, immigrant, low income, trans, and
3 gender nonconforming.

4 Being that schools are a space where young people
5 spend most of their time, schools should foster a
6 safe environment that allows young people to grow and
7 learn, and teaches them how to manage everyday
8 conflict and challenges. Creating a safe environment
9 requires that New York City invest in schools-based
10 Restorative Justice, and social emotional supports,
11 and divest from policing in schools.

12 As a past student of the New York City public
13 school system, I never knew that schools even had
14 counselors that were available to me. Meanwhile,
15 school safety agents were the first adults I
16 encountered when I walked into school every day.
17 This meant that at a time in my life when I needed
18 support the most, I had nowhere to turn. But hey, at
19 least I was being greeted by police officers every
20 morning, right? Something that probably deteriorated
21 my mental health even more and made me feel even more
22 unsafe.

23 Simply put, the punitive practices of policing do
24 nothing to enrich the lives of young people. The
25 \$400 million that the city chooses to spend on the

2 NYPD school policing division communicates that this
3 system only cares to punish young people and not
4 target the root issues that cause disturbances in
5 their lives in the first place. We also know that
6 our black, brown, trans, and gender nonconforming
7 students do not even need to act out to be
8 disproportionately targeted by police. Black girls,
9 and trans, and gender-expansive young people are
10 continuously and uniquely criminalized and pushed out
11 of schools for their gender and self-expression.

12 And let us sit with the remembrance that just
13 nine days ago, police in California fatally shot 15-
14 year-old Ryan Gainer for being black and autistic.

15 Our entire country is failing our most
16 marginalized young people. And as a city that sets
17 itself apart from the rest and truly has the funding
18 to back that up, New York City must stay accountable
19 to its young people. We demand that the over \$400
20 million that the city currently chooses to spend on
21 the NYPD school policing division be redirected to
22 the resources, staff, and restorative practices that
23 make schools safe and that support young people to
24 thrive.

2 This looks like seizing all NYPD recruitment,
3 stopping NYPD programming and schools, and halting
4 The Mayor's plan to give \$78 million to a
5 surveillance contractor to install video surveillance
6 technologies in school. And in place of these
7 police-centered initiatives, we call for initiatives
8 that invest in young people instead, such as
9 investing \$75 million in 500 high schools to hire
10 school-based Restorative Justice coordinators,
11 sustaining the \$1 billion fund of the critical
12 programs currently funded by federal COVID Relief
13 dollars, and investing \$10 million directly to
14 schools to broaden the reach of Restorative Justice
15 training and programming.

16 I hope the Council stands by its values of
17 creating a more equitable city where all New Yorkers
18 can realize their full potential and make the
19 necessary move of investing in young people instead
20 of policing.

21 Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

22 [APPLAUSE]

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
24 Next, please.

2 MR. RAMIREZ: Don't be shushing us. We were
3 showing love. If [inaudible] always civilized, we
4 won't stop, and we want everyone to speak, but don't
5 shush us. Show some respect.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm sorry. Can you repeat
7 yourself?

8 MR. RAMIREZ: No, I was saying that he was
9 shushing us while we were just showing some love and
10 clapping, and we're all going to stop clapping for a
11 moment. But I feel like he didn't have to shush us
12 like that.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Understood. There's the
14 rules of the chamber.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: There's the rule of the
16 chamber. If you want to clap you have to do this.

17 MR. RAMIREZ: Okay. I'm sorry. My fault but--
18 My fault.

19 MR. DACOSTA: My name is Adonte Dacosta. I'm a
20 junior at Manhattan Early College--

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Speak a little louder and
22 into to the mic so I can hear you.

23 MR. DACOSTA: My name is Adonte Dacosta. I'm a
24 junior at Manhattan Early College School for
25 Advertising, and I'm a member of Brotherhood Sister

2 Sol Liberation Program. I'm here today to testify
3 with Dignity In Schools Campaign, New York, because
4 my school isn't a safe place to learn.

5 To me safety means compassion and empathy, where
6 learning environments are nurtured and comfortable.
7 I believe in staff who are dedicated to guide
8 teenagers towards the fullest potential of fostering
9 an environment where they can thrive.

10 The issue in my school lies in the overwhelming
11 pressure on our teachers. They lack the support they
12 need to effectively educate us. Instead they endure
13 disrespect from students daily and work tirelessly
14 with their support are getting taken away from them.

15 I want to stop the continuous cuts to the
16 education budget, and to stop the hiring school
17 safety agents. I urge the protection on crucial
18 programs funded with \$1 billion federal COVID release
19 funds, including protecting and baselining in the
20 current \$21 million allocation for Restorative
21 Justice, \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum,
22 and \$77 million for school counselors, and social
23 workers and mental health professionals.

24 Expanding school-based Restorative Justice,
25 social and emotional support is essential. I propose

2 investing \$75 million to hire school-based
3 Restorative Justice coordinators in 500 schools. We
4 can relocate this funds fund the unnecessary hiring
5 of school safety agents. And that is it.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
7 testimony. Thank you for each and every one of you
8 here today.

9 So, I have a few questions. What experiences do
10 you have with the Restorative Justice program? Does
11 this program exist in each of your schools right now?

12 We'll start with you.

13 MS. GREENBERG: The program that's in my school,
14 our Restorative Justice Action Team is, for all I
15 know, unique to our school. But we have been working
16 in trying to encourage other schools in our district
17 to adapt their own Restorative Justice Action Team.
18 And the way our program works (we are very new, we've
19 only been around for a year), but we are a coalition
20 of both students and teachers and members of the
21 guidance staff and admin who work together to figure
22 out ways to implement the ideals of social justice--
23 Restorative Justice into our school, which is why we
24 have peer-mediation training in the case of
25 incidents, so students can feel like when they have a

2 fight, they can talk to an ally and not an adult who
3 wants to punish them, but another student who will
4 hear them out and respect them.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Good job thank you. Go
6 ahead.

7 MR. RAMIREZ: Um, no. Not yet. But we're going
8 to be working on that soon.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, no. No Restorative
10 Justice program in your school?

11 MR. RAMIREZ: No.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students do you
13 have in your school currently?

14 MR. RAMIREZ: There's probably like-- In school,
15 there's probably, like, 500 students. It's not a big
16 school.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

18 MS. ZHENG: I actually go to the same school as
19 Lexie. But I guess I can supplement that-- Like,
20 it's also great that, like, the DOE is also, like,
21 compensating the young people for their time to be
22 trained, or just all of these different things that--
23 It's a skill to be able to collaborate and resolve
24 conflicts. So, this is the stuff that we need to be
25 investing in.

2 I also know that our school had, like, a kind of
3 training day with the Morningside. So, like outside
4 programs that already implement Restorative Justice,
5 we should also model after them, but also have it in
6 the context of our schools, because we students know
7 what are the things that's going on. So, I think
8 that's what I would add.

9 MS. GAD: I graduated from schools from New York
10 City public school system in 2016. And during my
11 time, Restorative Justice was not even a concept that
12 any of us that were really introduced to. So, it's
13 amazing to see today that things are very different.

14 MR. DACOSTA: In my school, we do not have any
15 Restorative Justice, anything in here.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Any of your schools have
17 Project PIVOT? And if it does... No? No support?
18 Hmm. Interesting.

19 So no Project PIVOT, no Restorative Justice. You
20 guys have basically created it with-- because of an
21 incident that happened to you, and now you expanded
22 it.

23 MS. ZHENG: Oh, sorry. I just want to add that,
24 like, I think our school was it's called the
25 Restorative Justice Action Team, which is, like, a

2 different budget item in the DOE then like Project
3 PIVOT. My brother's school, he had, like, Project
4 PIVOT. But when I was looking into it, because I'm
5 just comparing, like, what is the benefit of each
6 program? I guess I just didn't really, like-- at
7 least in my own research, I don't know his he didn't
8 really interact with the program as much. But, like,
9 it's just not, like-- What I remember on the website
10 was something about, like, kind of like a hobby group
11 or something. Like how-- I think it's important to
12 build community and, like, do fun things together.
13 But I don't get the sense that it was what, like,
14 Restorative Justice at our school might also look
15 like. So, that's why I would also pose that question
16 to, like, the DOE and the Chancellor's office. Like,
17 why are we going forward with Project PIVOT as
18 opposed to Restorative Justice? Like, I think we
19 should be more critical about, like, what each
20 program does and-- at least like if the goal is to
21 improve the school community, and, like, build that
22 stronger bond, I think that's something to think
23 about.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Got it. Thank you. Thank
3 you for your advocacy. Thank you. Keep fighting.
4 Don't stop. I'll always be here.

5 [APPLAUSE]

6 MS. ZHENG: We know you're always here. We
7 really appreciate it. It's just we come here year
8 after year, and I'm just-- I'm excited to see what's
9 new for New York public schools in the in the near
10 future once we have more people like you championing
11 the stuff that we all deserve as students.

12 Thank you.

13 MR. RAMIREZ: Yeah. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. I always told
15 you I was your ally and champion. I'm here to
16 support my young people.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel.
18 Next panel. Apologies in advance if I mispronounce
19 anyone's name, we have Khin Mai Aung, Christine
20 Montera, Emily Garcia, Maira Chugui Tenezara, Richie
21 Morales, Mously Thiam, Ambreen Qureshi. You may make
22 your way down to the dais, and you may begin when the
23 sergeant gives you the time.

24 [BACKGROUND VOICES]

2 MS. AUNT: Great, Hello, I'm Khin Mai Aung. I'm
3 the mid-Atlantic Executive Director for Generation
4 Citizen. First of all, I would like to thank the
5 City Council education hearing, and you, Chair
6 Joseph, for your leadership in preserving and
7 maintaining the Education Department's budget, to
8 ensure that all of the services that we've been
9 hearing about today are preserved and maintained.

10 I'm actually not going to talk very long today
11 because you hear from me all the time, and I really
12 want to make the focus on our partners at the East
13 Bronx Academy for the Future. But I did want to
14 thank the City Council for its continuing funding to
15 Generation Citizen through the Civic Education in New
16 York City Schools Initiative. Since 2017, we've
17 received \$500,000 a year to support initially 125
18 classrooms. We've more than doubled our footprint in
19 New York City since then to over 250 classrooms. And
20 I know that this is a tough budget year, but we're
21 hoping to get an additional \$100,000 per year so that
22 we can preserve and continue our trajectory of
23 growth.

24 So, today, we have a teacher and a group of
25 students from East Bronx Academy for the Future,

2 where-- which has been doing our Generation Citizen
3 curriculum for a few years, through Generation
4 Citizens' action civics curriculum, students in
5 middle and high school learn social studies by
6 studying and advocating for a real-world issue in
7 their community.

8 So, today, we're pleased to have this invitation
9 to present some of our work at East Bronx Academy, so
10 that you can learn about the priorities that we've
11 identified through our curriculum.

12 So, today with me, I have Christine Montera, who
13 is a US history teacher and social studies chair, as
14 well as students, Richie Morales, Maira Chugui
15 Tenezara, and Emily Garcia, all of whom are 12th
16 grade students.

17 So, with that, I will turn it over to Christine
18 and we're hoping that they can go in that order.

19 MS MONTERA: Thank you so much, and thank you.
20 Good afternoon. Thank you for maintaining this
21 meeting and allowing us to speak today. My name is
22 Christine Montera. I'm a teacher and a social
23 studies department leader at East Bronx Academy for
24 the Future.

2 I've been a teacher at EBA for 12 years, since I
3 started my teaching career, but I spent my entire K
4 through 12 education in district 20 schools in
5 Brooklyn.

6 Today, I want to advocate not for teachers, but
7 for my students, and maintaining-- maintaining our
8 school budget or increasing it. But more than that,
9 to ensure that there is a student voice in our school
10 budget decisions.

11 Before COVID-19 schools were expected to be
12 community hubs, addressing the problems of society
13 outside of our educational purview. After the
14 pandemic, schools have been asked to do all of that,
15 and more, addressing issues including the migrant
16 crisis, poverty and its impacts, youth mental health
17 crisis and disinformation, on top of helping students
18 catch up on lost academic skills, and our original
19 mission of preparing college and career-ready, well-
20 informed citizens.

21 We have a lot of work to do. And in order to do
22 that we need funding, and further funding to be used
23 properly. The people on the ground in schools are up
24 for the challenge. But-- I'm sorry. However, when
25 schools are uncertain of their budget from year to

2 year, and in some cases like this school year, month
3 to month, we can't do anything because we're worried
4 that we're going to lose funding for programming, so
5 we don't start it.

6 When the opportunity to work with Generation
7 Citizen came up to do civic action projects with my
8 classes, I was excited to help my students own their
9 voices and advocate for what they wanted to see in
10 their school, instead of feeling hopeless when they
11 made the same requests for a gym space or a water
12 fountain.

13 In the process, I gained so much insight into how
14 funding and budgets for our schools can be
15 frustrating at best, as Councilmember Stevens and
16 Restler expressed in their questioning of SCA
17 earlier.

18 In their civic action projects, my students
19 researched a variety of issues they saw on our
20 community from student mental health concerns, to
21 getting cafeteria upgrades like the one Chancellor
22 Banks and Mayor Adams touted on ABC-7 New York news
23 in October. They argued for better, creative--
24 better and creative solutions to get more space for
25 PE because the small room that we use for a gym for

2 700 students is falling apart, and half is used as
3 storage space for desks and chairs. They wanted to
4 create and implement preventative clubs and programs
5 for students to address the mental health concerns
6 many students in our city and country are facing.
7 And some of them simply set out to get toilet paper
8 hand soap, paper towels, and sanitary products in our
9 bathrooms.

10 They advocated for a variety of solutions, all of
11 which we quickly realized would require someone to
12 pay for it. As they advocated for their solutions
13 and redrafted proposals to show, they hit the same
14 dollar-shaped wall over and over.

15 [BELL RINGS]

16 As the wealthiest cities in the world, our young
17 people deserve better. Our schools have no right
18 being this underfunded, mismanaged, and unprepared to
19 support our youth and prepare them for the world that
20 they will enter upon graduating in today's world. We
21 need to allow our students to have ample voice in the
22 budgeting processes, and listen to them for the
23 solutions because they know what is best needed to
24 support them. Thank you.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, please.

2 MR. MORALES: Thank you for the opportunity to
3 testify at today's hearing. My name is Richie
4 Morales. I am currently a 12th grade-- I'm currently
5 in 12th grade at East Bronx Academy where I
6 participated in a semester-long action civics program
7 through Generation Citizen earlier this school year.

8 For this project, my class discuss issues that
9 impact us within our community and build consensus
10 around one topic to address collectively. After much
11 debate, we decided to focus on students' mental
12 health and set a goal to bring more awareness and
13 hopefully convince you all to open up more
14 opportunities and programs for students to get the
15 help they need by thinking of them when budgeting.

16 Thank you once again for the opportunity to
17 submit this testimony.

18 My classmates and I chose to focus on the issue
19 of teenage mental health, because it is important to
20 bring more awareness to this issue, as it does not
21 just affect one person or one school, but rather it
22 affects many students and schools all across the
23 country.

24 I have been working on a project with my
25 classmates for Generation Citizen, which gave us more

2 insight into just how important students' mental
3 health is, and how it can affect their school life.

4 After doing our projects, we determined that
5 expanding upon the awareness of mental health by
6 opening up more opportunities for students to speak
7 about their mental state would be very beneficial to
8 both them and their future. Our project relates to
9 this committee because you all decide what the budget
10 is, and what is important to consider when budgeting,
11 and I believe that students mental health is the most
12 important thing to consider when it comes to
13 budgeting.

14 The New York City Council needs to hear about
15 this issue because it affects everyone. Mental
16 health is a large reason for some students not trying
17 as hard as they should or sometimes even not showing
18 up to school. And some even leave their education
19 early because their mental health problems are just
20 too much. Without a proper way to support students
21 and help them with their issues that can end up like
22 many already do and resort to drugs or violence.

23 I personally can share that I had a point in my
24 life where my mental state wasn't the best. But I
25 got better afterwards. I found myself enjoying

2 school more and more, which leads to the present day
3 where I'm here advocating for the youth to get more
4 programs. As I feel if you are in the right state of
5 mind, you're more willing to do more in school and in
6 the community.

7 If we want a brighter, safer city in the future
8 that will prosper, we start by helping the youth with
9 their mental health problems that most ignore. Thank
10 you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
12 Next.

13 MS. CHUGUI: Thank you for the opportunity to
14 testify at today's hearing. My name is Maira Chugui,
15 and I'm currently in 12th grade at East Bronx Academy
16 for the Future, where I participated in a semester-
17 long action civics project through Generation Citizen
18 earlier this school year.

19 For this project, my class discussed issues that
20 impact us within our community and builds consensus
21 around one topic to address collectively.

22 After much debate, we decided to focus on mental
23 health issues among our classmates and set a goal to
24 create mental health awareness and to start a
25 difficult conversation of self-awareness and drug

2 use. I am testifying today on behalf of our goal
3 because as a student in a Title 1 school, I have seen
4 the impact of mental health in my classmates,
5 especially after COVID. For example, some students
6 feel overwhelmed with studies, family duties,
7 extracurricular activities, and social pressure that
8 feels so unmanageable and scary, that they will do
9 anything to make the world stop spinning so quickly.
10 Some of these feelings start from middle school, and
11 there's this expectation to fit in, to have friends
12 or a community to belong to, especially in
13 marginalized communities.

14 Our community is built around stereotypes of gang
15 violence, drug dealing, and robbery, which don't
16 accurately represent what we are capable of doing.
17 The pressure to do illegal substances, marijuana,
18 vapes, et cetera, so that somehow the feelings they
19 are facing disappear and they can be happy and elated
20 is concerning. Plus the ridiculously easy access to
21 smoke shops (there's a smoke shop about 100 feet from
22 our school) makes it impossible for students from 6th
23 to 12th grade to avoid the temptation.

24 The reason I, and two of my friends, plus our
25 mentor have decided to make our voices heard was

2 because of budget cuts that The Council is
3 considering for next year. Even though we are not
4 going to be in a DOE school next year, you still have
5 to consider the next generation of students. Both my
6 cousins have started middle school, and I want them
7 to have easy access to resources for mental health.
8 Studies have shown that when people feel a part of a
9 supportive community, their mental health improves.
10 This is why after-school programs and other resources
11 in schools are so essential, and it won't be possible
12 if there's a budget cut.

13 We need to do more, not just for today but for
14 tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.
15 Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
17 Next please.

18 MS. GARCIA: I thank you for the chance to speak
19 at today's hearing and for the chance to testify.
20 Hi, my name is Emily, I am a senior at East Bronx
21 Academy. This school year I engaged in a semester
22 long action civics project facilitated by Generation
23 Citizen. My class explored different local issues,
24 eventually agreeing to concentrate on mental health,
25 since we saw it affected us the most. Our goal was

2 to increase awareness and improve access to mental
3 health resources for youth in our community,
4 specifically students.

5 I am testifying today on behalf of our goal,
6 because this goal requires extensive knowledge and
7 budget allocations to ensure that we can achieve it.

8 My class chose the issue of mental health because
9 it's a critical component of the well-being of
10 students, and how well they are able to perform at
11 school.

12 For the youth in my Bronx Community, it is
13 important because it will allow us to break down
14 barriers and walls to allow youth to talk about their
15 mental health without feeling ashamed or embarrassed.

16 Mental health impacts several things such as
17 educational outcomes, social dynamics, and future
18 opportunities, making it the most important thing to
19 discuss when it comes to youth in schools. In light
20 of our goal, we've taken steps to help students, such
21 as advocating for increased funding for mental health
22 services in schools, organizing events to raise
23 awareness about available resources, and speaking
24 with elected representatives about the issue.

2 Although there has been some improvements on
3 mental health services in schools, we know it is not
4 yet enough. We need more advocacy and support from
5 our schools' representatives. Our project directly
6 intersects with this hearing today because it
7 involves the need for more of a budget towards mental
8 health resources and services for youth in schools.
9 By presenting my knowledge on this issue, and that I
10 know, as a student who is able to see this firsthand,
11 I aim to help inform how this budget decision can
12 impact mental health initiatives.

13 It's important for the New York City Council to
14 hear about our issue during this budget hearing,
15 because mental health services are important to the
16 well-being of youth and overall community health. By
17 highlighting the importance of funding mental health
18 programs, we can ensure that resources are granted
19 successfully to address the needs of our community's
20 youth.

21 Thank you for the opportunity to submit this
22 testimony about an issue that is important to me and
23 my classmates.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
25 Next please.

2 Thank you to Chair Joseph and the honorable city
3 councilmembers for your steadfast support of Arts
4 Education across New York City.

5 MS. QURESHI: I'm testifying to support the It
6 Starts With Arts Coalition, calling on all of our
7 City Council electeds to prioritize funding for Arts
8 Education. My name is Ambreen Qureshi. I'm
9 Executive Director of EVC, the Educational Video
10 Center. EVC's media arts education, programming, and
11 broader initiatives help young people heal, grow, and
12 thrive as learners, leaders, and artists, build
13 capacity of teachers in public schools to create
14 transformative learning environments, and use
15 original media to disrupt systems and narratives
16 harming BIPOC youth and their communities.

17 We work to ensure that New York City's youth
18 remain in, and emerge from high school prepared to
19 succeed in college and career pathways during a time
20 when education has been profoundly disrupted,
21 Especially for youth of color and newcomer students,
22 who are disproportionately impacted by systemic
23 inequities and structural oppression.

24 For the last 40 years, EVC has supported positive
25 life and career pathways for over 30,000 BIPOC and

2 working class young people, trained over 1100
3 teachers, and created 230-plus highly acclaimed youth
4 produced documentaries that have gone on to win over
5 180 awards, including two White House honors and an
6 Emmy.

7 Alumni from our programs have gone on to work at
8 the Urban World Film Festival, CNN, and become
9 members of the International Cinematographers Guild.

10 Annually, over 15,000 global viewers see EVC
11 videos and hear the voices of youth speak out on
12 critical issues that also matter to you and your
13 constituents: Issues like workplace exploitation of
14 migrants in the 2024 EVC youthproduced film, *The*
15 *Grass Isn't Always Greener*, divestment in under-
16 resourced communities in the 2021 film, *Unjust and*
17 *Unequal: Education In Black and White*, and rampant
18 gentrification in the 2016 film, *Stealing Home:*
19 *Gentrification in Washington Heights*.

20 As the economy tightens and more budget cuts
21 loom, financial constraints are already impacting the
22 EVC community and everyone here today. Some of our
23 partner schools simply do not have funds for art
24 teachers, yet their students already facing barriers
25 to graduation require arts credits to graduate.

2 These schools increasingly rely on EVC as a
3 provider of credit-bearing programs to ensure that
4 their students stay on track to graduate, whilst also
5 exploring possible careers in the media arts. Yet we
6 often have to waitlist schools and students because
7 the demand is so high and funds are scarce.

8 Over the last three years alone, EVC has served
9 almost 1700 students who have secured over 2500
10 credits towards high school graduation and earned
11 over half a million dollars in paid internships.
12 Students use the EVC films and portfolios to apply to
13 colleges, including recent youth like Alexis from
14 East New York, who had never made a film before EVC.

15 [BELL RINGS]

16 She received a full scholarship to Ithaca
17 College, graduated from a top film school in New
18 York, and kick started her career as a filmmaker who
19 centers black people and other marginalized groups in
20 her work.

21 Alexis is an inspiration for our current
22 students, including Mously, who's going to testify
23 shortly. We are here to testify to urge the city
24 Councilmembers to increase the overall allocation to
25 the Citywide Afterschool Enrichment Initiative, so

2 that many more young people can benefit from programs
3 like EVC.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin.

5 MS. THIAM: Good afternoon everyone. First, I
6 would like to apologize. I'm not very comfortable of
7 public speaking, and my English is not so well. But
8 I'll try my best.

9 My name is Mously Thiam. I'm from Senegal. I've
10 been in New York City for two years. I'm an 11th
11 grader at Ellis Prep High School.

12 This is my second semester at EVC. The first
13 semester I made a documentary called *The Grass Isn't*
14 *Always Greener: Migrants in the Workplace*. This
15 documentary was so joyful. Everyone enjoyed it, and
16 they were proud of it. I was also proud of myself,
17 because I saw the new a new version of me that I
18 wouldn't see if EVC wasn't around.

19 So I decided to come back not just to learn about
20 filmmaking, but also to be a professional, find
21 people that I can connect with, and build the
22 community. What I enjoyed the most, is that at EVC
23 we're not just learning, but we are we're family. We
24 are all connected and have that same vibes.

2 EVC contributes to my personal growth a lot,
3 because as an African, I didn't learn how to be
4 confident, professional, and collaboration.

5 So now if I have confidence to be here, it is
6 EVC. Not family or school. It's EVC.

7 I returned to EVC because I need to grow more,
8 and only EVC can help with that. And I also need to
9 progress in filmmaking.

10 I think it is very important to fund EVC and or
11 organizations like them, because in order to go to
12 college or get a job, we need a resume.

13 What will be in those resumes is the experience
14 that we get from the afterschool programs. What
15 happens if those programs don't get funds? Then we
16 won't have experience, and we won't have jobs to make
17 money, and the economy will be low. And that's not
18 what we wish for.

19 So it would be so nice if you get more
20 opportunity to students are New York City, especially
21 the immigrants, and the way that you can do that--

22 [BELL RINGS]

23 --is to give them more funds in the school, and
24 the afterschool programs. And I know it's not easy.
25 Like, it's true what they say in Wolof: [SPEAKS

2 WOLOF]. A child led to money grows in heart. So
3 it's so difficult to give it away, but you won't
4 regret it, because the more funds you give to the
5 schools is the better education, the easier way to
6 get a job and make money and a better economy. Thank
7 you for listening.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you told me you were
9 shy? Look at all that talking. You're here
10 advocating for yourself. We're really proud of you,
11 and as I said to the previous panel, you speak Wolof,
12 and so you speak French. Those are your powers.
13 Those are your strength. You can tell your stories
14 through any of those languages.

15 I can't wait to see you when your first Oscar and
16 your documentary. I'm putting it out there. They
17 all know I believe in my young people. So, you got
18 this. You're good. You have grace. Give yourself
19 grace. Don't be so hard on yourself. The English
20 will come after. It's okay. We got you.

21 MS. THIAM: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're very welcome. I have
23 a couple questions for you guys: What mental health
24 support do you currently have at your schools?

2 MR. MORALES: Currently, we have counselors and
3 we have a social worker, I believe. And not only
4 that, the teachers at our school are very friendly.
5 People, such as Miss Montera. She-- She is my
6 teacher, but I feel as though she is someone I can
7 confide and go to if I have something negative going
8 on in my life. So, from what I've seen, although we
9 might not have a lot to go towards mental health,
10 what we do have is a community that cares about each
11 other, and that have connections that run deep within
12 each other. That's all.

13 Ms. CHUGUI: Um, as Richie said, we do not have
14 much mental health services. What we do have is
15 social workers and a counselor who has a group of 200
16 high schoolers. She is constantly-- constantly
17 supporting them through college, high school,
18 personal lives, so she doesn't have enough time to
19 allocate to each student. So, that's something that
20 we really struggle with. But we have a community
21 that is very tight knit. We know each other from
22 sixth-- some from sixth grade, some from ninth grade.
23 So, I feel like that really helps with our mental
24 health, because we don't have to struggle with
25 talking to people, they-- the conversations just flow

2 very naturally. So, I feel like that's a big
3 positive in our community.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many guidance counselors
5 do you currently have at your school?

6 MR. MORALES: I think we have about two or three
7 guidance counselors. I--

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's your student
9 population?

10 MS. MONTERA: 630. 630 students, and we have--

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So the ratios are high.

12 MS. MONTERA: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, the chances of you
14 seeing a mental health person, it takes a long time.

15 What's the wait? What's approximately the wait
16 time?

17 MS. MONTERA: [TO MR. MORALES:] How long would
18 it take you to see Ms. [inaudible]?

19 MR. MORALES: It all really depends. Because
20 oftentimes, when you do go to see the counselor, they
21 already have someone waiting there. So, you'd have
22 to email ahead and let her know when do you plan on
23 going to see her. But the counselors do try their
24 best to make time, but it's just a struggle for them

2 considering how high the student-to-counselor
3 population is.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm. And their caseload
5 is high. So, the student ratio is very high. So,
6 access to mental health0-- I'm noting that.

7 Go ahead.

8 MS. GARCIA: To see a counselor can be very
9 difficult, because sometimes I will go for college
10 help, or anything, and her office will already be
11 packed, or there'll already be students waiting. Or
12 like last year during regents week, I was trying to
13 ask her some questions, and she had like a long line
14 already there. So, it was, like, really difficult to
15 talk to her.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are there other counselors
17 bilingual, culturally responsive? Is it--

18 MS. MONTERA: One of them.

19 MR. MORALES: One of our counselors is bilingual.
20 Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One. Okay.

22 So Mously, thank you. And I saw all the shyness
23 went out for your advocacy. I hear you. I see you.
24 Thank you.

2 Thank you for each and every one of you.

3 Continue to advocate for yourself. Don't stop.

4 Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. I'm
6 going to call the next panel, and I apologize for any
7 names that I mispronounce.

8 First, we will have Alexis Kirkman Palmer, Ilona
9 Nanay, Calvin Zhou, Juleka Mamhmoun, Wellington
10 Ballzuenena, Chassidy Lucas.

11 You may make your way up to the dais.

12 [90 SECONDS SILENCE]

13 All right, you may begin when you're ready.

14 MS. NANAY: Press this? All right. Hey folks,
15 Ilona Nanay, a teacher and a member of Teachers
16 Unite. Really honored to be in community with you
17 all tonight, and really honored to be following the
18 youth who really spoke truth to power.

19 So, I taught humanities for over a decade at a 6
20 to 12 in the Soundview neighborhood of the Bronx, and
21 this past-- two these past two years, I've served as
22 a literacy coach with the New York Public Schools
23 Literacy Collaborative. And so, I've had both
24 personal experiences in school, but I've also had the
25 opportunity and the privilege to travel around the

2 city and be in community at a lot of schools, and
3 I've seen the disparities in funding. So some
4 schools can supplement the budget cuts with the
5 parent associations and parent teacher associations
6 that raise hundreds of thousands of dollars. Other
7 schools cannot, like my very own home school.

8 So, I'm here today to urge you to move money away
9 from the policing of young people towards staff,
10 resources, and restorative practices that make our
11 schools safe and support our community's ability to
12 thrive.

13 There's always money for things that The Mayor
14 prioritizes. There seems to be money for police
15 officers. There's money for canned curriculum, like
16 HMH. And now, according to the Chancellor from this
17 morning, there's money for new metal detectors.

18 But all of these are just band aids. They don't
19 actually get at the root causes of community.
20 They're literally trying to stop the bleeding. And
21 they're really ineffective. We're living amidst a
22 pandemic, a genocide, an ongoing assault on our BIPOC
23 and LGBTQIA+ communities, and we need resources in
24 order to be able to support our communities and
25 healing from trauma. We need spaces where we can

2 heal ourselves so we can create a more healed world.
3 And so, as you negotiate the budget, I ask that you
4 do everything in your power to get \$75 million
5 directly to 500 schools to hire Restorative Justice
6 coordinators, another \$75 million to hire community
7 members into positions that build safety and support
8 for young people to learn and grow.

9 I implore you to reject The Mayor's plan to
10 recruit and train 492 new school cops. More police
11 will only serve to cause more harm and undermine
12 restorative practices that we know make schools safer
13 and keeps our students learning. Having come from a
14 school that through its own self-study started to
15 employ restorative practices, I've seen firsthand the
16 incredible power it can have to transform a
17 community.

18 [BELL RINGS]

19 And so again, I'm really urging you to put more
20 resources into that. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
22 Next please?

23 MS. KIRKMAN: Hi, my name is Alexis Kirkman. I'm
24 a Youth Leader of the Circle Keepers. I'm a Senior
25 at Harvest Collegiate High School.

2 I am here with the Dignity In Schools campaign to
3 demand that the city invest \$75 million to expand
4 access to Restorative Justice in New York City
5 schools. We want more counselors, social workers,
6 and less police. New York City needs to use the
7 money currently used for school police in a more
8 useful way that would actually help young kids in
9 schools. This is especially important for low-income
10 schools, and students who face punitive discipline at
11 home, since there always get the short end of the
12 stick. Restorative Justice practices support
13 students and helps us thrive. It urges students to
14 build a stronger, more powerful community with each
15 other by listening to what they have to say. A big
16 part of restorative practices involves teaching the
17 youth how to learn from their mistakes. RJ empowers
18 youth instead of breaking the youth down.

19 My experience of past schools was not the best.
20 My old schools would practice punitive punishments.
21 They would give out harsh and harmful punishments for
22 bad behavior. This led students on more difficult
23 roads in their life. Using punitive practices
24 disturbs not only their learning, but it also meant
25 minor problems will stay with them and follow them

2 for the rest of their lives. These types of students
3 who face nonstop punitive practices are more likely
4 to end up not coming to school, or worse, go down a
5 long path of negative behavior.

6 The problems most students face can be prevented
7 if they just have someone to talk to, like a
8 counselor, instead of being punished for a minor
9 mistake they did or said.

10 When students go to school they are in a
11 different environment, they would come and expect to
12 arrive to a welcoming and safe community, but instead
13 they are faced with schools that use punitive
14 practices, and the first thing they see are cops.
15 Even when individual cops are nicer to so the first
16 thing they see, rather than a counselor, or
17 Restorative Justice leader, or even a family member.

18 Coming into a community like this is harmful and
19 it creates an unbalanced and unsafe environment,
20 especially for certain students whose homes also
21 might use punitive practices.

22 I want Mayor Eric Adams to pass a budget that
23 moves money away from policing young people and
24 towards the Restorative Justice practice. That's
25 what we deserve. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
3 Next please.

4 TRANSLATOR: He will be reading his testimony in
5 Spanish and then I will repeat it in English for the
6 record.

7 MR. BALLZUENA: [SPEAKS SPANISH] Hola. Buenas
8 tardes a todos. Mi nombre es Wellington. Soy
9 estudiante del Colegio Gregorio Luperón y miembro del
10 Programa de Liberación de Brotherhood Sister Soul.
11 Estoy aquí testificando con la campaña Dignidad en
12 las Escuelas en Nueva York, porque creo que todos los
13 estudiantes necesitan y tienen derecho de salud
14 mental. Queremos que la ciudad financie
15 completamente programas para apoyar la salud mental
16 de los estudiantes, y deshacerse de la dañina cultura
17 policial escolar.

18 Hacer de este país mi hogar ha sido una
19 experiencia difícil. Como era nueva en los Estados
20 Unidos, no tenía un amigo para hablar o jugar.
21 También fue difícil hacer nuevos amigos porque no
22 hablaba inglés. Además, dejar a mi madre y a mi
23 hermano de dos meses en República Dominicana es algo
24 en lo que pienso mucho.

2 Mi experiencia en la escuela ha sido buena, pero
3 ha habido momentos en los que creo que no puedo más.
4 Mi profesores me ayudaron mucho en mis estudios.
5 También hay veces que mi consejera no puede ayudarme
6 porque está hablando con otros jóvenes, ya que en la
7 escuela solo hay una consejera para tantos
8 estudiantes. Hay días que llego al colegio y me digo
9 que he llegado a la cárcel, porque a veces así se
10 siente, policía en las puertas principales, policía
11 en los pasillos, los oficiales de policía en todas
12 partes me hacen sentir incómodo. Todo esto me hace
13 sentir prisionero. Estoy no hablo sólo por mí, sino
14 también por todos de las escuelas, e de todos otros
15 jóvenes de la ciudad de Nueva York que han pasado por
16 detectores de metales y siempre están en presencia de
17 agentes de policía.

18 También hablo por aquellos otros estudiantes que
19 han sido expulsados o suspendidos como lo fui yo en
20 la República Dominicana. En lugar de que consejeros y
21 trabajadores sociales abordaran las causas de nuestro
22 comportamiento, fuimos castigados.

23 Las escuelas de la ciudad de Nueva York, mis
24 compañeros de clase y yo necesitamos más trabajadores
25 sociales y consejeros porque son ellos quienes nos

2 ayudan en momentos difíciles. Necesitamos proteger
3 los programas críticos y la base de los actuales \$21
4 millones para Justicia Restaurativa, \$5 millones para
5 Salud Mental Continuum y los \$77 millones para
6 consejeros, trabajadores sociales y profesionales de
7 salud mental. Puede financiar esto no contratando
8 nuevos oficiales de seguridad escolar. Gracias.

9 TRANSLATOR: My name is Wellington, and I am a
10 student at Gregorio Luperon School and a member of
11 the Liberation Program of the Brotherhood Sister
12 Soul. I'm here testifying with the Dignity in
13 Schools campaign of New York, because I believe that
14 all students need and have the right to mental health
15 support. We want the city to fully fund programs to
16 support student mental health and get rid of the
17 harmful school policing culture.

18 Making this country my home has been a difficult
19 experience. Being new to the United States, I did
20 not have a friend to talk to or play with. Making
21 new friends was also difficult because I didn't speak
22 English. Furthermore, leaving my mother and two-
23 month-old brother behind in the Dominican Republic is
24 something that I think about a lot.

2 My experience at school has been good, but there
3 have been moments where I think I can't take it
4 anymore. My teachers helped me a lot in my studies.

5 [BELL RINGS]

6 There are also times when my counselor cannot
7 help me because she is talking to other young people,
8 since at the school there's only one counselor for
9 almost 600 students. There are days where I arrive
10 at school and tell myself I've arrived in jail,
11 because it feels like that sometimes. Even though I
12 love my school, police at the doors, police in the
13 hallways, police officers everywhere I turn makes me
14 uncomfortable. All this makes me feel like a
15 prisoner.

16 I'm not speaking only for myself but on behalf of
17 other students in New York City schools who have gone
18 through metal detectors, and are always in the
19 presence of police officers.

20 I'm also speaking for those other students who
21 have been expelled or suspended like I was in the
22 Dominican Republic. Instead of having counselors and
23 social workers address the causes for our behavior,
24 we were punished.

2 New York City schools, my classmates, and myself
3 need more social workers and counselors because they
4 are the ones to help us in times of difficulty. We
5 need to protect critical programs and the foundation
6 of the current \$21 million for Restorative Justice,
7 \$5 million for Mental Health Continuum and the \$77
8 million for counselors, social workers, and mental
9 health professionals. You can fund this by not
10 hiring new school safety officers. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next please.

12 MS. MAMHMOUN: My name is Juleka Mamhmoun. I'm a
13 10th grade student at High School for Environmental
14 Studies, and an organizer at Teens Take Charge, a
15 teen-led advocacy group. After experiencing the
16 effects of budget cuts to education firsthand, I urge
17 your city councilmembers to ensure schools are
18 adequately funded, particularly in counseling and
19 after school programs. Especially for those who come
20 from troubled households, schools should be places
21 where students feel safe as they grow into somewhere
22 where we expect it to be for long hours almost every
23 day.

24

25

2 However, these safe spaces are almost impossible
3 to keep up with the presence of police who
4 criminalize students and treat them with suspicion.

5 A government should stop hiring police for
6 schools, and instead put those millions of dollars
7 towards things they'll actually keep schools safe for
8 their students.

9 Extracurriculars, which have been a major target
10 of budget cutting in schools play a significant role
11 in maintaining the safety of students. By taking
12 place in the hours following school, and typically
13 before students' parents are home, extracurriculars
14 prevent students from partaking in denture
15 detrimental behaviors, like drug and alcohol use,
16 gang involvement and criminal activities.

17 In my school's robotics team, our loss of
18 sponsors combined with education cuts left with a
19 smaller budget than ever before, making it difficult
20 to have all the necessary parts to build our robot or
21 to even enter competitions.

22 It seems as though schools have become dependent
23 on fundraisers and student money to stay afloat.
24 This is concerning because not only our
25 extracurricular activities important ways for

2 students to explore future career options and engage
3 with their school community, but they also need to be
4 productive because they're often pathways to college
5 acceptances along with job opportunities, plus
6 extracurricular activities are a large motivator to
7 me and many other students to even attend school.
8 So, them being cut are undoubtedly causing increased
9 absenteeism.

10 If The Mayor really wants schools to stay safe,
11 he should listen to the needs of current students
12 instead of installing higher security measures that
13 don't help us. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
15 Next, please.

16 MS. LUCAS: Hi, my name is Chassidy Lucas. I'm a
17 student at Community Health Academy of the Heights,
18 and a member of the Brotherhood Sister Soul
19 Liberation Program. I'm here testifying with the
20 Dignity In Schools Campaign, New York, because I
21 believe that every New York City student deserves to
22 have the appropriate level of mental health support
23 staff and all schools. We as a collective not only
24 want, but need the city to provide New York City
25 students the funding for mental health support staff,

2 along with the funding for wellness centers within
3 our schools. It is imperative that we move forward
4 to a better future. As students we need our city to
5 divest from harmful practices, such as policing in
6 schools and suspensions. My younger sister has been
7 suspended multiple times. One particular time stands
8 out to me. Words between classmates led my sister to
9 punching someone starting the fight. While my sister
10 shouldn't have hit someone, being removed from school
11 did not help her. She didn't go to the alternative
12 school assigned. She just stopped having class and
13 fell into a crowd that encouraged her behavior.
14 Additionally, the girl she punched ended up being
15 suspended despite being the victim of bullying.

16 I'm here to do my best today to ensure more
17 people get the support that they need rather than
18 suspicions.

19 That same sister today told a trusted teacher she
20 was experiencing suicidal thoughts. The result was
21 to send her to New York City Presbyterian Mental
22 Hospital, taking her freedom away and removing her
23 from her family, rather than supporting her where she
24 was at. This is not the first time she has been

2 institutionalized, and each time she describes it as
3 prison and punishment.

4 We need to seriously examine the response that
5 the DOE has to youth in need. Cutting that funding
6 is the exact opposite of what we need. The DOE has
7 contributed to the schools-to-prison pipeline by
8 disproportionately punishing students of color and
9 students with disabilities for being kids.

10 Our school system is failing us continuing to
11 direct funding to policing in schools rather than
12 supporting us while we work towards our future is
13 repeating the cycle rather than breaking it. We
14 deserve to be taught how to work through our issues
15 with Restorative Justice practices and proper care
16 and guidance.

17 We are calling on our City Council to protect and
18 baseline the current \$21 million for Restorative
19 Justice, \$5 million for Mental Health Continuum, and
20 \$77 million for mental health professions. We are
21 calling on our council to effectively represent the
22 communities you are leaders of, by not only passing a
23 budget to better our futures as young people, but to
24 show us and stand up with us in the fight for the
25 mental health services we deserve.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
3 Next, please.

4 MR. ZHOU: Hello, everyone. My name is Calvin.
5 I'm a Sophomore at Brooklyn Technical High School,
6 and an Organizer at Teens Take Charge.

7 When I heard that The Mayor is planning on
8 cutting back monetary support for schools, I felt
9 that the issues we students face aren't being
10 addressed. My school has around 6,000 Students, yet
11 we only have around 20 guidance counselors. That's
12 about 300 students per guidance counselor. And this
13 issue is experienced by other students across NYC.

14 A study presented by Education Trust found that
15 there's an average of 370 students per guidance
16 counselor, whereas the recommended amount is 250
17 students per guidance counselor according to the
18 American School Counselor Association.

19 However, at the end of the day, these are only
20 just stats. So let me talk about my personal
21 experience.

22 In the beginning of my sophomore year, I
23 scheduled a meeting for my guidance counselor just to
24 talk about my feelings, but it didn't turn out well.
25 She seemed uninterested in what I had to say and I

2 felt like my words were unimportant to her. This
3 discouraged me from scheduling further meetings with
4 her, because they felt like I was a burden. However,
5 I couldn't blame her for her feeling tired and
6 overwhelmed, especially with the number of students
7 she was assigned to. This is the universal
8 experience of students who have overworked guidance
9 counselors.

10 A study presented by Education Advance found that
11 students achieve higher grades and feel safer
12 attending schools if they have a counselor who is
13 actively listening to them and actually cares about
14 what they have to say. When people bring up, "What
15 does your school need?" For me, it's never we need
16 more police officers or metal detectors, but rather
17 more support staff so I feel safe to talk about
18 myself. We don't need more police stations at our
19 schools to feel safe. We need more support staff.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : Thank you. Um, quick
22 question for you guys. During the last PEGs, were
23 any of your programming impacted because of budget
24 cuts?

25 Turn on your mic. Turn on your mic.

2 MS. LUCAS: So at Community Health Academy the
3 heights, as a Senior, we are experiencing heavy
4 budget cuts to where a lot of our activities such as
5 our senior trip cost more than it should. My senior
6 dues personally are \$750, with only a discount
7 available of \$250, which still isn't enough to
8 provide seniors the-- my gratitude and experience,
9 senior experience that they deserve for our 12 years
10 of high school.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Go ahead.

12 MS. NANAY: Um, due to our principal's budget
13 savvy, he was able to save the positions of our
14 staff, so no one was excessed, but all
15 extracurriculars, all field trips, anything--
16 anything outside of the quote/unquote "core" was cut.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Okay.

18 MS. KIRKMAN: Due to the cuts, I actually had a
19 meeting with my principal, and it turns out we had to
20 cut some of the funding for some of our college
21 trips. We are no longer-- we can no longer go to-- I
22 forgot the name of the hotel, but this hotel that we
23 have brought previously at the beginning of the year,
24 now our only option is to go to Six Flags.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. What mental health
3 support do you guys have at your schools?

4 MS. KIRKMAN: We only have two counselors for
5 about 300 to 400 students.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So a heavy caseload. Next
7 person?

8 MR. BALLZUENA: Tenemos sólo un consejero y un
9 trabajador social para 500 estudiantes.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Who's going to translate for
11 me? I don't speak-- un poquito Espanol.

12 [BACKGROUND VOICES]

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For how many students?
14 Thank you. 500? Okay. Gracias.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Contamos con traducción del
16 español al inglés para aquellos que no hablan inglés.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. You spoke about
18 a wellness program. Is that in a budget, or that's
19 something you created on your own? Yes.

20 MS. KIRKMAN: [INAUDIBLE]

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Your wellness circle? Your
22 health-- is that something you created on your own,
23 or that's budgeted in your school?

24 MS. KIRKMAN: Um, it was previously for, I think
25 it started in ninth grade. It was budgeted by the

2 school, but the founder, which was-- which is my
3 current boss, was kicked out of the school. So we
4 had to go to-- we had to find like a different person
5 to get the money from. So, we're not getting paid by
6 the school anymore.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So the person left. So the
8 program kind of left, but you brought it back to life
9 because you wanted it, right? Okay, got it. Thank
10 you so much. Thank you. Keep fighting for
11 yourselves, young people. Keep fighting.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. I'm
13 going to call the next panel. Apologies in advance
14 if I mispronounce your name. First, have Abbie
15 Watts, Faith Catherine Jones, Assafaou Illassou,
16 Jared Alford, Shirley Huang, Uaniv Felipe, Lakeisha
17 Felipe, Ameera Sajjad, Kamora Salmon, and Joshua Fan.
18 You may make your way up

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, if
20 your name was called please come down. If you have
21 copies of your statements please have them ready when
22 you come down. Oh, look at this. All right.
23 Fantastic.

24

25

2 While we're waiting if there's anybody that needs
3 interpretation in Spanish, we have people here but we
4 need to identify you.

5 Si tenemos personas aquí que necesitan
6 interpretación en español, tenemos una persona aquí
7 que puede ayudarlos, pero deben identificar
8 levantando la mano si necesitan interpretación en
9 español.

10 Okay. Gracias.

11 [60 SECONDS SILENCE]

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. You may begin
13 when you're ready.

14 MS. WATTS: Thank you, Chair Joseph and members
15 of the Education--

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm sorry. We're going to
17 try to grab a couple more chairs--

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So everyone could sit
19 together. Thank you.

20 MS. WATTS: Sure.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Are we missing anybody?

22 MS. WATTS: I think we're all here.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. All right, you
24 may begin. Thank you.

25

2 MS. WATTS: Thank you Chair Joseph and members of
3 the Education Committee for this opportunity to
4 testify today. My name is Abbie Watts, and I am
5 Director of School Food Advocacy at Community Food
6 Advocates. I am testifying today on behalf of CFA
7 and our Lunch For Learning Coalition. You will also
8 hear today from some of the coalition's Youth Food
9 Advocates, who will speak directly to their
10 experiences.

11 There are two items I'd like to talk about.
12 First is the New York City Public Schools Office of
13 Food and Nutrition Services cafeteria enhancement.
14 We are thrilled to see the Chancellor's five-year
15 Capital Plan includes \$150 million to enhance all
16 remaining middle and high school school cafeterias
17 which, as you know, has been a Lunch for Learning
18 priority.

19 This is a highly impactful and cost-effective
20 initiative that completely transforms the cafeteria
21 environment. There's a food court style selection on
22 the serving line, giving students more variety, and
23 the seating area becomes a much more welcoming
24 environment.

2 We see an increase in school meal participation
3 in schools that got the enhancement with lasting
4 impacts. This is especially powerful because we know
5 overall participation declines abruptly during middle
6 school, and is even lower among high school students.

7 Over the past few years in partnership with the
8 Chancellor and The Council, \$125 million has been
9 dedicated to reach about half of middle and high
10 schools by the end of this school year. Securing the
11 \$150 million in the five-year Capital Plan will
12 ensure this is an equitable initiative, rolling out
13 this model to the remaining 250 cafeterias.

14 Chair Joseph, we so appreciate you being a
15 champion of this initiative, and thank you and The
16 Council for making school food a priority.

17 Our other ask today is that you ensure the Office
18 of Food and Nutrition Services is fully funded in the
19 fiscal year 2025 executive budget. We have seen very
20 publicly over the past month or so that New York City
21 school communities care deeply about school food and
22 the menu options. We appreciate that The
23 Administration heard the pleas to bring back menu
24 items that were cut unnecessarily in February.
25 Students and their families rely on school breakfast

2 and lunch and we know that a variety of appealing
3 menu items ensures students participate in the
4 program.

5 OFNS has made incredible strides, expanding halal
6 and kosher, plant-based options, and culturally
7 relevant meals, and the innovations such as cafeteria
8 enhancement that have collectively indirectly led to
9 a 9% increase in participation citywide. This
10 success must not be threatened by city budget cuts.
11 The City must continue to invest in the policies and
12 initiatives that strengthen the program. We hope The
13 Council will continue to be champions for the
14 Cafeteria Enhancement Initiative and the school meals
15 program. Thank you.

16 [BELL RINGS]

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next.

18 MR. LIU: Good afternoon Chair Rita Joseph and
19 councilmembers. My name is Yusen Liu. I'm currently
20 a Senior at East-West School of International Studies
21 of District 5 in Queens, and a second-year Youth Food
22 Advocate since my sophomore year. I am grateful for
23 the \$150 million in the Chancellor's Capital Plan for
24 enhanced cafeterias. We appreciate the work and
25 investment that you have already done for us.

2 Being a student in the New York City public
3 school system, I will say I've eaten the majority of
4 school meals, and I clearly understand the importance
5 of school meals. Personally, my family is a low-
6 income family, and my energy for the day greatly
7 relies on school meals.

8 After taking numerous classes without eating
9 breakfast for the whole morning, I feel exhausted. I
10 know I need to eat lunch, or I will be starving for
11 the rest of the day, which would affect my grades.

12 I'm sure I'm not the only one who is experiencing
13 the exhaustion of taking classes, and school meals
14 are our only opportunity to fuel up and replenish
15 power to support us for the rest of the day.

16 However, most students, including me, are not having
17 a great experience with the school meals and
18 cafeteria environment. I see how other schools have
19 received their own remodeled cafeteria and the
20 reflection from students is positive. I realized
21 that this is the solution. This is the reason why
22 I'm here to support the budget for the enhancement of
23 all the middle school and high school cafeterias.
24 However, the recent budget cuts led to less daily
25 options, and disappointed-- sorry, disappointed

2 students. If this continues for next year, it might
3 lead to participation rate decreasing, which means
4 more hungry students.

5 Fully funding the Department of Education, which
6 includes school food will be constructive and
7 supportive to the redesigned cafeteria. This way all
8 future generations of students can learn with full
9 stomachs and better support.

10 In summation, with your support students can have
11 better learning. With the energy school meals
12 provided every day, we can learn more efficiently and
13 concentrate more. This also provides a better chance
14 of achieving higher academic goals for myself and all
15 others. Thank you for your time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
17 Next please.

18 MS. SAJJAD: Good afternoon Chair Joseph and the
19 Committee on Education. My name is Ameera Sajjad,
20 and I'm a Sophomore at Francis Lewis High School in
21 District 26. I am a first-year Youth Food Advocate
22 intern summer 2023, and today, I'm here to testify in
23 support of the proposed \$150 million for cafeteria
24 redesigns in the Capital Plan with my fellow
25 advocates.

2 A healthy and fulfilling lunch is imperative to
3 the education of every single one of the one million
4 public school students in NYC, and the cafeteria
5 redesign will be a major benefit, increasing student
6 participation and interest towards school lunch.

7 Currently, there are 162 completed cafeteria
8 redesigns, serving more than 210,000 students and
9 another 75 that are scheduled to be completed this
10 year. We found that they've had up to a 35% increase
11 in student participation in updated cafeterias, a
12 significant number. My school had a partial
13 redesign, where we have an enhanced serving line.
14 And the difference I've noticed is phenomenal. My
15 school can serve hundreds of students each lunch
16 period. But with the enhanced serving, I've noticed
17 more people eating lunch, the line moving faster, and
18 an overall greater appreciation of the food and the
19 aesthetics of the improved serving area.

20 With the inclusion of the \$150 million in the
21 Chancellor's five-year Capital Plan. We can ensure
22 that every middle and high school student can have a
23 superior experience that will enrich them not just
24 physically but mentally, as the importance of

2 nutrition and cognitive function cannot be
3 overlooked.

4 We are extremely thankful to the progress that
5 has already been made across New York City, and we
6 hope that you can make it continue for the sake of
7 equal opportunities for health and education for any
8 student, no matter their background.

9 To that end, we also want to note that the
10 drastic cuts earlier this year affected many of us
11 immediately. Many of the students' favorite items
12 were removed from the school menu. And while these
13 are slowly returning, thankfully, it is imperative to
14 the success-- for the success of cafeteria redesign
15 that the education budget be fully restored for 2025.

16 Thank you for listening to us.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
18 Next please.

19 MR. FELIPE: Hi, my name is Uaniv Felipe. I'm a
20 fifth grader at PS 153. I'm happy to be the next
21 generation to be able to enjoy the--

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Could you lower the mic,
23 please, so we can hear you?

24 MR. FELIPE: Hi, my name is Uaniv Felipe. I'm a
25 fifth grader at PS 153. I'm happy to be the next

2 generation to be able to enjoy the cafeteria
3 redesign.

4 Hi my name is Felipe therapist's office three.
5 I'm happy to listen next innovation to be able to
6 enjoy the cafeteria design. I enjoy eating cafeteria
7 food. Although I believe it could use some
8 improvements. Speaking on behalf of all the
9 students, we appreciate the support you have done
10 with the \$150 million proposal on the Capital Plan.
11 With this support, this means when I get to middle
12 school and high school meal, me and all my friends
13 will be able to enjoy the improvements. I look
14 forward to being able to enjoy the cafeteria
15 redesign, especially when in my school lines are
16 really crowded, sometimes not all students get to
17 enjoy the food.

18 I think that the updates will be a great place
19 for my classmates and friends, since it has really
20 colorful designs, encouraging to me to sit and enjoy
21 my food. Thank you for your time.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
23 Next place.

24 MS. FELIPE: [SPEAKING SPANISH:] Buenas tardes a
25 todos, espero que estén teniendo un buen día. Mi

2 nombre es Lakeisha Felipe, estoy en mi segundo año en
3 Community Health Academy of the Heights en Manhattan.
4 Yo he tenido el placer de participar en YFA y estar
5 aquí con ustedes.

6

7 Estoy orgullosa de decir que puedo tener voz para
8 mi comunidad y los estudiantes en mi escuela. Este
9 programa da la oportunidad de generaciones detrás de
10 nosotros tener un mejor lugar donde comer. Los
11 beneficios para los estudiantes son muchos.

12

13 Por ejemplo, puedan tener más opciones de comida
14 saludables. Un ambiente más seguro y no solo eso,
15 pero nos asegura que todos puedan tener tiempo de
16 almorzar. Gracias por estar aquí ayudando con la
17 propuesta de diseños escolar para los estudiantes.

18

19 Queremos agradecer a este consulado por el apoyo
20 de la inclusión de los 150 millones ya propuestos en
21 el plan de capital. Estamos muy agresivos de tener el
22 propuesto en el plan de capital y esperamos que
23 finalizando este propuesto se puedan transformar
24 todas las escuelas en la ciudad.

25

2 Esperamos ver el diseño de todas las cafeterías a
3 través de todas las escuelas ciudad. Gracias por su
4 tiempo.

5 [TRANSLATION PROVIDED BY TRANSCRIPTION SERVICE:]

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Gracias por tu testimonio.

7 Do we have translation?

8 TRANSLATOR: She was supposed to stop every two
9 or three sentences.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do we have written testimony
11 for this student?

12 [INAUDIBLE]

13 TRANSLATOR: You've got-- I was told that you
14 guys would come get me and tell me when someone was
15 here, and I'd come, and then she would stop every
16 three sentences, and then I'd translate.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm sorry. Okay. Gracias.
18 Okay. Next please.

19 MS. ILLASSOU: Hello Chair Joseph and
20 Councilmembers. My name is Assafaou Illassou. I am
21 a sophomore at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can you put the mic closer,
23 and speak a little louder?

24 MS. ILLASSOU: Okay. My name is Assafaou
25 Illassou. I am a sophomore at Clara Barton High

2 School in Brooklyn. This is my first year of being a
3 YFA Intern. Today I come to you to speak to you
4 about enhance cafeteria. It is a big thing for-- It
5 is a big thing for youth food advocacy because so
6 many students want to have a nice place to eat, and
7 they get to choose a meal they want. The \$150
8 million is a good investment across the whole city.
9 We all deserve to have a beautiful cafeteria that
10 students feel happy to eat there and feel
11 comfortable.

12 With your support we can achieve equality across
13 all cafeterias for students to enjoy. Many students
14 do not eat lunch because of the food and how the
15 cafeteria looks, and students need to go that area,
16 because food makes you learn better.

17 Being on a hungry stomach can make students less
18 focused on their schoolwork, which can hinder their
19 grades. This is why all schools need cafeteria
20 enhancement, because it can better students' lives
21 and help them throughout the day.

22 Thank you everyone and councilmembers for
23 listening. We appreciate your support of the \$150
24 million into proposed Capital Plan to fully commit
25 this year to better students' lives in schools.

2 Thank you for your time.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I believe we're
4 going to receive a translation of--

5 TRANSLATOR: This is the translation of the
6 testimony of Lakeisha Felipe from Youth Food
7 Advocates and Community Food Advocates.

8 Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so happy to be
9 here. And I hope you're having a nice day. My name
10 is Lakeisha Felipe, and I am in my second year at
11 Community Health Academy of the heights in Manhattan.

12 I have the pleasure to participate in YFA, and to
13 be here today to speak for them. I am proud to be
14 able to give voice to my community and to speak for
15 the students on behalf of the students in my school.
16 This program is giving the opportunity to many
17 generations that will come after us as well to have a
18 better life.

19 The advantages to students are many. For
20 example, they have more options for healthy food,
21 they have a safer environment, and more than that,
22 they will know that they will never go hungry. Thank
23 you for helping us with this proposal to redesign
24 things to make it better for students. We would like
25 to thank you for your support, and especially for

2 including \$150 million in your proposal for the
3 Capital Plan. We're very grateful for your support,
4 and we hope that this money will remain in the final
5 draft of the budget, because our schools need your
6 help, and we hope that the redesign of these
7 cafeterias will happen without further delay.

8 Thank you for your attention.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your service.
10 Before I call the next witness, I'd like to ask
11 Sandra Mitchell to join this panel, and now we can
12 turn to the next witness. Thank you.

13 Good afternoon Chair Rita Joseph and members of
14 The Council. My name is Jared Alford, and I'm a
15 Freshman at Brooklyn College Academy with an interest
16 in school food and its needs for improvement.

17 I have been a member of new food advocates for
18 the last nine months. This has opened my eyes to the
19 importance of not only school lunch, but the
20 environment in general. I am dedicated to the cause
21 of a healthy school environment. I am happy to be
22 here to support the proposed \$150 million for
23 cafeteria enhancement in the Chancellor's five year
24 Capital Plan.

2 Food appeal may be underestimated in importance,
3 but I have seen the effects firsthand. In my middle
4 school, the cafeteria was not very modern, and that
5 was reflected by the short lines for lunch. These
6 short lines and the cafeteria often made me feel
7 different, if I were to go up and eat the school
8 food, unlike the rest of the students. So I often
9 did not eat not knowing this was a part of the reason
10 I was often tired and lacked energy in school.

11 In my current high school, Brooklyn College
12 Academy, that has a more modern cafeteria and where
13 there are long lines of eager students waiting to get
14 school lunch.

15 A cafeteria redesign makes sure healthy food
16 options are displayed in a better way. To explain
17 further on what I mean: Something like a display
18 case on healthy food options would increase appeal
19 for these foods. The appeal of these healthy foods
20 will benefit a student's health, then ultimately help
21 a student's grade.

22 One of the benefits of an enhanced cafeteria is
23 the variety and options available. Unfortunately,
24 these options were eliminated in the middle of the
25 year due to unforeseen budget cuts made by the City.

2 In order to prevent the loss of our beloved school
3 lunches options, full funding for the Department of
4 Education and OFNS must be restored by 2025.

5 Thank you for listening, and as a member of Youth
6 Food Advocates, thank you for your longtime support.
7 And thank you for the support of the proposed \$150
8 million in the Capital Plan.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
10 Next please.

11 Good afternoon members of the NYC Council. My
12 name is Faith Catherine Jones, and I'm a junior at
13 Brooklyn Technical High School located in District
14 13. I've been a Youth Food Advocate for three years.
15 I started in the summer before my freshman year at
16 high school.

17 When I started in the summer 2021, approximately
18 80 of the 575 middle and high schools had enhanced
19 cafeterias that were serving around 55,000 students.
20 This translates to roughly the majority of students
21 in the NYC public school setting missing out on the
22 academic benefits of school lunch, such as better
23 attendance rates, and better test scores as stated by
24 the CDC, due to the circumstance where outdated
25 cafeterias with inefficient lunch lines, lack of

2 seating and lack of variety, turned students away
3 from eating school meals.

4 Furthermore, there are the added health
5 implications with inaccessible cafeterias, as
6 students are more likely more likely to have nutrient
7 inadequacies, worsened diet quality of low income
8 students, and discourage healthier foods selection
9 and their daily lives.

10 Now in March 2024, almost three years later, with
11 a greatly appreciative funding from the City Council
12 of \$125 million. In the last few years, he has
13 secured the funding for over 250 schools to get
14 enhanced cafeteria. Already in these past few years,
15 we're able to see the positive changes in school
16 environment, as Hillcrest students in Queens speak on
17 the reduction of a 20-minutes-long cafeteria line,
18 and their newfound ability to concentrate in class
19 with the with the new variety and lunches.

20 Moreover, you will later hear from a former
21 Midwood student in Brooklyn, Leslie Gomez who shared
22 their experience of the comfort and the intimate
23 cafeteria environment, and how it encouraged her to
24 utilize the lunchroom more often and to eat the
25 school lunch.

2 While we have made many powerful changes in the
3 current cafeteria system, there are half of middle
4 and high schools, schools and another 250 schools
5 struggling with their previous poor experiences that
6 I discussed of inadequate cafeterias that led to
7 problems concerning schools, students well-being, and
8 academic performance in school.

9 This is why I appreciate your continued support
10 as city councilmembers to secure \$150 million in the
11 fiscal year of 2025 to fund the rest of the middle
12 and high schools in NYCs cafeteria enhancements.
13 That is the only equitable solution. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
15 Next please.

16 Good afternoon, Chair Rita Joseph and
17 councilmembers. My name is Shirley Huang, and I am a
18 Senior and Midwood High School, located in District
19 22. With two years of advocating for a cafeteria
20 enhancement experience initiative, I am confident
21 that enhanced cafeteria is a transparent and
22 equitable system to sustain wellness for this diverse
23 student population and its environment.

24 Today I am here to express my strong support for
25 the Chancellor's commitment to expand cafeteria

2 enhancements to all high school and middle schools by
3 including \$150 million in his five-year Capital Plan.
4 We know this is a priority for The Council and thank
5 you for your support.

6 The cafeteria enhancements experience has four
7 pillars: These are student choice, fast service,
8 modern style, and new furniture which has brought
9 great advantage to students, including the
10 encouragement of healthy eating habits. In 2023, the
11 USDA proposed updates to school nutrition standards,
12 which will take effect in Fall 2024. Utilizing the
13 enhanced cafeteria would help enhance this
14 requirement, as consuming whole foods, vegetables,
15 and produce from salad bar is made easier, and in
16 general prioritize whole foods for students to have
17 easier access to.

18 The enhanced cafeteria is a proven intervention
19 to increase lunch participation and therefore reduce
20 hunger among the city's youth. Enhanced cafeteria,
21 as proudly stated, aims to develop modern style. The
22 modernization of tables and chairs provides a more
23 welcoming space for students, prompting them to go
24 into cafeteria and more often to grab a meal.

2 While some school food meals may still lack the
3 taste that students enjoy, we are working on outside
4 the Office of Food and Nutrition Service to share
5 students' feedback and develop more pleasant
6 palpability. Building more enhanced cafeterias is
7 the first step to improve the food tastes desired by
8 students. We want to thank this Council and their
9 continued support to advance the school nutrition
10 environment, for it to be inclusive of the next
11 generation and as a matter of equity. We appreciate
12 the Chancellor and Council's commitment to fully
13 expand cafeteria enhancements by committing \$150
14 million in the five-year Capital Plan. Thank you for
15 consideration.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
17 Next please.

18 MS. TAHIA[SP]: Good afternoon, Chair Rita
19 Joseph, and city councilmembers. My name is
20 FARIA[SP] TAHIA[SP], and I'm a Junior at Long Island
21 City High School located in District 30. I'm a
22 second-year intern with Youth Food Advocates. On
23 behalf of all New York City students, we thank
24 Chancellor Banks and The Council for your support in
25 the allocation of \$150 million in the five-year

2 proposed Capital Plan for enhancing cafeterias across
3 New York City, public, middle and high schools.

4 This investment not only signifies a commitment
5 to enhancing the physical infrastructure, but also
6 speaks volumes about prioritizing the well-being and
7 nutrition of the next generation.

8 Prioritizing school food now will have a lasting
9 impact on student lives, affecting their academic
10 performance as well as their personal health. Going
11 six hours a day without eating is pretty absurd.
12 Still, some kids would rather go hungry than draw
13 attention to themselves in the cafeteria. This is
14 devastating to the future of our community, the
15 students, and the schools.

16 I advocate for the encouragement of good eating
17 habits among students and meeting their needs,
18 including the supply of upgraded cafeteria tables for
19 increased privacy.

20 Implementing complete cafeteria renovations in
21 all middle and high schools in New York City will
22 result in several benefits, including improved
23 student mental and physical health, academic
24 performance, and a variety of other beneficial
25 outcomes that will emerge over time. This

2 improvement not only restores the cafeteria, but also
3 lays the groundwork for a healthy future for our
4 youngsters.

5 By modernizing cafeterias, we're doing more than
6 just changing the space. We're also promoting better
7 eating practices and a positive interaction between
8 students and food. This action also attempts to
9 address differences in school engagement, especially
10 in lower participation schools. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Oh. You didn't
12 testify yet.

13 MS. SALMON: Is it on? Is it? Okay. Good
14 afternoon, Chair Rita Joseph, and members of The
15 Council. My name is Kamora Salmon, and I'm here to
16 represent YFA. I'm a Sophomore at United Charter
17 High Schools. My reason for coming here today and
18 delivering this testimony is to talk about the
19 benefits of the proposed budget of \$150 million for
20 expanding enhance cafeterias to all middle and high
21 schools.

22 The recent development of the school's cafeterias
23 has increased the appeal of school food. As someone
24 who has an enhanced cafeteria in my school, I can say
25 is a phenomenal addition to the cafeteria. Not only

2 is the new look more aesthetic, participation has
3 skyrocketed.

4 My cafeteria was updated in April 2023, and in
5 May 2023, the participation increased by 12.3%. I've
6 seen people who wouldn't even look at school food,
7 who now actually join the line and get food. This
8 enhancement caused my school's participation in
9 breakfast and lunch to go higher. Just think about
10 how many more fascinating upgrades we can bring in
11 the lunch room with \$150 million.

12 As a student and a YFA intern, I understand how
13 important meals are food fuels our bodies and give us
14 strength in order to get through the day and excel in
15 school. For example, one time I missed out on school
16 lunch, and I could see how I wasn't able to focus on
17 the lessons. Lack of nutrients weakens the body and
18 makes it hard to function.

19 This is why I believe the budget can help create
20 more options to grasp the attention of students.
21 Students often complain about the lack of diversity
22 in food options, causing many to stray away from
23 school lunch. Students want more options to choose
24 from. We can dip into different cultures and
25

2 incorporate them into school food while keeping the
3 health regulations.

4 The schools that have the enhanced cafeterias
5 have given a positive reaction in student
6 participation. We are grateful for the current
7 modifications of the lunchrooms, and we hope you can
8 take our feedback into consideration. Let's turn the
9 plan into an action. Thank you for listening.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
11 Next please.

12 MS. RIVERA: Good afternoon Chairwoman Rita
13 Joseph and city councilmembers. My name is Leslie
14 Gomez Rivera. I'm a former Youth Food Advocate
15 intern, and I'm currently a Sophomore at Hunter
16 College and now work at Food Justice. Here I am
17 filling in for Joshua Fan who could not be here
18 today. So this is what he said.

19 Good afternoon Chairwoman Rita Joseph and city
20 councilmembers. My name is Joshua Fan and I'm a
21 Senior at Flushing High School in Queens and a second
22 year YFA intern.

23 First of all, I would like to thank you all on
24 behalf of my joint campus school community which has
25 already received cafeteria enhancements and I've seen

2 vast improvements in food quality, variety, and lunch
3 participation.

4 The cafeteria enhancement that my campus received
5 in January of 2023 has vastly transformed the
6 lunchroom experience and environment at my school.
7 Not only has the look of our school cafeteria created
8 a much more welcoming environment for students, but
9 the food is also what we received notably more
10 variety and appeal compared to before. I'm extremely
11 grateful for the action that has already been taken,
12 as these changes do not go unnoticed and create
13 massive benefits throughout the school community that
14 extend beyond a single lunch period.

15 Enhanced cafeterias ensure a greater variety of
16 food that all students, regardless of religion, or
17 dietary restrictions, can enjoy, which is a benefit
18 that must be prioritized. Food insecurity is still a
19 large issue within the sprawling community of New
20 York City. When that serves as a limiting factor for
21 children of low-income families to be able to receive
22 the nutrition necessary to power their developing
23 bodies and minds throughout the day.

24 As someone attending a school community with the
25 majority of student body considered economically

2 disadvantaged, I see firsthand how these students can
3 receive enough nutrients that they previously could
4 not attain through school meals, and can receive the
5 nutrients and energy they need to help them succeed
6 throughout the rest of the school day.

7 Please continue to take actions and
8 implementation of the Enhance cafeterias throughout
9 the schools in the city. Improving the future of the
10 city starts with the younger generation. To improve
11 the health and minds of the youth so that they can
12 focus on their education hunger-free is an invaluable
13 investment that must happen.

14 Thank you for your time. Joshua Fan.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much. By a
16 show of hands, how many people has a cafeteria
17 enhancement at their schools?

18 [FOUR OF TWELVE PANELISTS RAISE HANDS]

19 And the rest of you don't, right? So, you make--
20 you want to make sure you get one, right?

21 We noticed there were food menus taken away.
22 When did you guys notice that there was food missing
23 on the-- on the menu? When did you notice? Don't be
24 shy.

2 MS. JONES: I think I started like just the day
3 after I think Mayor Eric Adams had announced that
4 there would be cuts to the school lunch menus, we
5 started to realize-- we started to actually see it in
6 our cafeterias, where my friends would come up to me
7 and they'd be like, "Oh, there's no more--" Like,
8 "They're running out of cookies, no more, they're not
9 going to give it to us anymore. They're just like
10 giving away the rest of the of the stock and we're
11 not going to order these cookies anymore." And they
12 were just so concerned about it. They're talking
13 about how the possibility of the burrito being
14 removed. I know a lot of my friends eat that. And
15 so they're like what-- what is the cafeteria here
16 for, if we're not getting the food that we actually
17 want to eat? If there's-- there's no food that we
18 want to eat, how are we going to get the nutrient--
19 nutrients for, like, the rest of the day. Especially
20 at Brooklyn Technical High School, we are expected to
21 do extracurriculars after school, where we do sports
22 programs or maybe academic programs. So, sometimes
23 students stay after school until 7pm. So, without
24 the needed nutrients from these meals that-- they
25 that they expect at to school, because the variety

2 they allow these students to eat something that-- in
3 which they want to eat. So, without that, a lot of
4 students are starting to experience like hunger
5 sometimes, because they no longer feel encouraged eat
6 the school lunch menu. They eat less now because
7 they know, like, they don't have the option that they
8 really want. So, we really do see the effects of the
9 lack of variety at our schools.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What's your favorite day
11 school lunch? Was your favorite day? Tell me what
12 you ate that special day. You could go down the
13 line.

14 MS. LIU: Well, when I was in high school, it was
15 the chicken popcorn with the fries. Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Chicken popcorn.

17 MS. SAJJAD: Um, well, this was mostly-- this was
18 mostly last semester when I still had lunch on
19 Monday, but I really enjoyed the mozzarella sticks
20 that day.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's the mozzarella sticks?
22 Okay.

23 MS. SALMON: Um, I think I enjoy the chicken
24 tenders a lot.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are they back at-- on your
3 menu now?

4 MS. SALMON: Yeah, they're a common occurrence on
5 the menu. It's mostly mozzarella sticks and chicken
6 tenders that I see. Yeah, that's it basically.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

8 MR. FELIPE: Pizza.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Pizza? What day was that?
10 What day did you get pizza?

11 MR. FELIPE: Friday.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Fridays?

13 MR. FELIPE: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : That's your favorite day?

15 MR. FELIPE: Yeah.

16 MS. FELIPE: Um, I could speak on behalf of my
17 classmates too, that I'm pretty sure a lot of
18 students like mozzarella sticks, French fries, and
19 stuff like that.

20 MS. ILLASSOU: I really don't eat the school
21 food, but when I do is the fries, or, like, the
22 cookies. But they don't have the cookies no more.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You-- You don't have a
24 cafeteria enhancement yet, right?

25 MS. ILLASSOU: No.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When you get one, you will
3 eat, because I attended a couple of ribbon cutting.
4 They look beautiful.

5 That's the goal to make sure while you're in
6 school you eat, and the space that you're socializing
7 in is welcoming. That's the point.

8 MR. ALFORD: For me, it's most likely chicken
9 tenders.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What day is chicken tenders
11 at your school?

12 MR. ALFORD: Normally Thursdays.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thursdays. Thursday is a
14 good day, huh?

15 MR. ALFORD: Yeah. You can tell. Like, normally
16 the lines are the longest on Thursdays if there's
17 chicken tenders.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I have to stop by on a
19 Thursday. Chair Joseph is going to come by on a
20 Thursday.

21 MS. JONES: I'm really basic. So, just everyday
22 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What day?

24 MS. JONES: Just everyday, like--

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Everyday? Because you have
3 a cafeteria enhancement.

4 MS. JONES: Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Ahh. I like that. Every
6 day. Go ahead.

7 MS. HUANG: For me, it's the chicken tenders with
8 those salad produce in a plastic-- like, a round
9 bowl.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh. Okay.

11 MS. TAHIA[SP]: For me, it's potato wedges and
12 chicken tenders.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Potato wedges. And what day
14 is that?

15 MS. TAHIA[SP]: Usually Thursdays.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thursdays? Do you have a
17 cafeteria enhancement?

18 MS. TAHIA[SP]: No.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No. So, we need to make
20 sure you're getting one. They're amazing.

21 Thank you so much. And keep fighting for what
22 you believe in. And I'm super proud of you guys.
23 Keep raising your voice, and we'll keep championing
24 those voices for you. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. I'm
3 going to call the next panel. Apologies in advance
4 for any names that I mispronounce. First, we have
5 Dhalilim Alban, Ava Harris, Kwasi Melendez, Aylin
6 Frias, Nina Gregorio, Julieti Dela Cruz, Nicolas
7 Rosario, and Malik Mattison. You may make your way
8 to the front.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Do any of these witnesses need
10 translation services? Okay. So no.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, you may begin when
12 you're ready.

13 MS. ALBAN: Buenas tardes. Mi nombre es
14 Dhalilim, y soy estudiante de penúltimo año en una
15 escuela comunitaria en Queens, y soy líder de Urban
16 Youth Collaborative. Llegué a la ciudad de New York
17 hace aproximadamente un año y medio desde Ecuador, y
18 los maestros me ayudaron con la nueva escuela, y
19 idioma y estructura escolar, y también me dieron
20 apoyo emocional por grandes cambios que estaba
21 atravesando mi vida.

22 Cuando yo llegué a las instalaciones me sorprendí
23 mucho cuando vi a los policías escolares, ya que en
24 la institución educativa que yo asistía en Ecuador no

2 habían policías, y la seguridad seguía siendo
3 demasiado buena.

4 Me siento increíblemente frustrada que el alcalde
5 quiera recortar fondos para escuelas comunitarias
6 como la mía. Cuando el presupuesto para los 4 mil
7 policías escolares de la ciudad de New York es de
8 \$400 millones.

9 En mi escuela, hay muchos inmigrantes como yo, y
10 no nos sentimos seguros con la presencia de los
11 policías escolares. Al final del día los policías de
12 la escuela se ponen muy ruidosos y agresivos con los
13 estudiantes porque quieren que salgamos
14 inmediatamente de los establecimientos.

15 A mis compañeros y a mí nos aterraoriza
16 interactuar con ellos es por eso que nos tratamos de
17 mantenerlos más alejados posible. La presencia de
18 policías escolares intensifica cualquier interacción,
19 y es más probable que nos veamos empujados al camino
20 de la escuela, a la prisión, y la deportación.

21 La ciudad de New York tiene la mayor proporción
22 de policías escolares por estudiantes del país. En
23 la ciudad de New York, hay un policía escolar por
24 cada 200 estudiantes, mientras que en Los Angeles el

2 segundo distrito escolar más grande del país tiene un
3 policía escolar por cada 3 mil estudiantes.

4 Aunque los estudiantes negros y latinos
5 representan el 66% de la población escolar de la
6 ciudad de New York. Los estudiantes recientes
7 muestran que los estudiantes negros y latinos
8 representan el 90% de los de todos los incidentes
9 policiales escolares.

10 Estoy aquí hoy para pedir que den un paso
11 adelante para eliminar los policías de las escuelas.
12 Dejen de reclutar, contratar, y capacitar policías
13 escolares. La ciudad de New York debería recortar
14 los puestos vacantes de policías escolares y en
15 cambio invertir todo ese dinero en más trabajadores
16 sociales, consejeros escolares y prácticas de
17 justicia restaurativa que realmente haría a nuestra
18 institución educativa un lugar más seguro.

19 Yo tengo primos que considero como hermanos y me
20 gustaría que ellos no se vean limitados de sus
21 recursos escolares por darle esos recursos a los
22 policías.

23 Muchas gracias.

24 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon, my name is Dhalilim.
25 I'm a junior at a high school in Queens, and I'm a

2 leader with the Urban Youth Collaborative. I came to
3 New York City about a year and a half ago from
4 Ecuador. When I arrived, my teachers helped orient
5 me to the new school, the new language, and the
6 school structure. They also supported me emotionally
7 because there were so many changes happening in my
8 life. I was very surprised when I saw all the school
9 cops, because in my old school in Ecuador there were
10 no police and the school was a safe environment.

11 It is incredibly frustrating to me that The Mayor
12 is proposing to cut funds from community schools like
13 mine, when the budget for the 4000 school cops in New
14 York City is \$400 million.

15 In my school, there are a lot of immigrants like
16 myself, and we do not feel safe with the presence of
17 school cops. At the end of the day, the school cops
18 get very loud and aggressive with students because
19 they want us all to immediately leave the property.

20 My classmates and I are terrified of interacting
21 with the school cops, so we do everything we can to
22 stay away from them. The presence of school cops
23 intensifies any interaction, and it is more likely
24 for us to get pushed into the school-to-prison and
25 deportation pipeline.

2 New York City has the largest school cop to
3 student ratio in the country. In New York City,
4 there's one school cop for every 200 students. In
5 Los Angeles, the second largest school district in
6 the country, they have one school cop for every 3,000
7 students.

8 Even though Black and Latinx students only make
9 up 66% of the school population in New York City.
10 The recent data shows that black and Latinx students
11 account for 90% of all school policing incidents.

12 I'm here today to call on you to take a step
13 forward to eliminate cops in schools. Stop
14 recruiting, hiring, and training school cops. New
15 York City should cut the vacant positions of school
16 cops, and instead invest it in more social workers,
17 guidance counselors, and Restorative Justice
18 practices that would actually make our schools safer.

19 I have cousins, who I consider like brothers, who
20 attended elementary school, and I don't want their
21 school resources to be limited because New York City
22 continues to fund school cops over education.

23 Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

25 Next, please.

2 MS. DELA CRUZ: Hello, good afternoon. My name
3 is Julieti Dela Cruz, and I use she/her pronouns. I
4 am in the eighth grade from Staten Island, and I am a
5 youth leader and Make The Road New York and Urban
6 Youth Collaborative.

7 I am here today to call on all councilmembers not
8 just to protect the education budget, but to fight
9 for a budget that reflects what you need in schools
10 and in our communities.

11 Back in December, I was here testifying for the
12 first time in my life as The Mayor was threatening us
13 with budget cuts to our schools. Now I'm not sure
14 how many times I will be fighting for each investment
15 in my education. I'm frustrated that every morning I
16 go to school and I am welcomed by school cops. My
17 school is pre-K through eighth grade. And we only
18 have two guidance counselors and one social worker
19 for a close estimate to 1000 students. If I need to
20 talk to someone or go to someone for support, I can
21 only go during my free periods, which means missing
22 art, music, and even my lunch. Even then both of my
23 guidance counselors are usually booked.

24 Last time I was here I mentioned that my school
25 cannot afford simple resources like clean water and

2 our drinking fountains or fixing broken items and in
3 classrooms and bathrooms. It's unacceptable that
4 these things are taking too long to fix. We always
5 hear there's not enough money. And we're in a
6 crisis. We need to do budget cuts to education but
7 what it never mentions is that New York City spends
8 about \$400 million on school police and employs more
9 school policemen than guidance counselors and social
10 workers combined.

11 It is a slap to our face that Mayor Adams spent
12 \$3 million on bulletproof vests for all school police
13 this year. I want that money to fund and expand
14 Restorative Justice practices, counselors, mental
15 health support that our school needs and to fix our
16 school buildings. I'm graduating from eighth grade
17 and we'll be heading into high school next fall. It
18 will be a whole new school. I'm excited and nervous
19 at the same time. I don't know what it would feel
20 like. But what I do know is that when I walk through
21 those doors, I would see the same thing: School
22 Police. And I will have to go to random scannings
23 which will make me feel frustrated.

24 I've got four years left of high school. And if
25 I have to I will come every year until the city

2 listens to the youth about what real safety looks
3 like.

4 The safest and most welcoming schools have the
5 most resources, not the most cops. It's past time to
6 take action and listen to the youth. Look at Chicago
7 and Oakland. They did it. Why can't we? New York
8 needs to step up and lead the way.

9 I strongly believe that it is a time for the city
10 to look at the Black, Latino, migrant, and working-
11 class youth and are following demands to prioritize
12 our care, not criminalization, by our following
13 budget demands: First to secure hiring freeze on
14 school cops that does not allow to fill positions to
15 the ones that leave, second to cut funding for the
16 remaining 492 vacant school cop positions. And
17 lastly, three, to use the money from both divestments
18 to baseline funding for school support staff.

19 Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
21 Next please.

22 MR. MELENDEZ: Hello, my name is Kwasi Melendez,
23 And my pronouns are he/him. I am a proud member of
24 Make the Road New York and UYC. I am a junior at a
25 community school in Brooklyn. I'm here today because

2 I need you to listen to the youth. We need you all
3 to invest in our future, not criminalize it. I live
4 with my mom and my three younger brothers. Every
5 morning I help my mom make sure my younger brothers
6 are ready to go to school and arrive safely.

7 My younger brothers and I have something in
8 common. Instead of being welcomed by supportive
9 staff in our schools. We are met with metal
10 detectors and school police officers. This isn't the
11 type of such settings students should be exposed to.
12 That's why I am asking myself: Why is this
13 necessary? Why must we as students pass through
14 metal detectors while others don't, like teachers and
15 other staff. I'm told it's for our safety, but this
16 doesn't make me or my peers feel safer. Instead it
17 creates a tone of distrust and fear in our school.

18 New York City spent over \$200 million on its
19 safety and security programs, which funds metal
20 detectors and video surveillance in additions to the
21 \$4 million spent on the school police. The city may
22 spend \$300 million on both bulletproof vest for
23 school police this year. Instead of investing in
24 equipment and school cops to criminalize black,
25 Latin, migrants, and LGBTQI youth, we should invest

2 in our futures and staff that can help students
3 thrive.

4 Instead of investing in metal detectors and
5 police, imagine if that money went towards staff and
6 truly supported students. Imagine having more
7 students and staff like Miss Dixon, my English
8 teacher, and Mr. Rosario, my history teacher, who can
9 make us feel safe and support us daily. Miss Dixon
10 takes the time to ensure all students feel
11 comfortable and ready to learn in their classes. At
12 the same time, Mr Rosario goes above and beyond to
13 help students succeed academically, when they have a
14 hard time and don't know who to ask for help.

15 We need trained professionals who can ease tones,
16 situations, and teach us how to resolve conflicts
17 peacefully. We need more social workers, nurses,
18 guidance counselors, and RJ staff. These are the
19 people who can truly make a difference in our world,
20 not police officers who respond after the damage has
21 been done. Officers don't prevent problems. They
22 only react to them. Things could have been different
23 if our schools had more research resources dedicated
24 to prevention and support. We deserve safe and
25 supportive schools that focus on our well-being and

2 success. Cops shouldn't be in our schools. Let's
3 invest in our futures by investing in the resources
4 and support systems that truly empower us.

5 Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
7 Next please.

8 MR. MATTISON: Good afternoon everyone. My name
9 is Malik Mattison. My pronouns are he him. I attend
10 the Brooklyn School for Math and Research and I am in
11 the 12th grade. I'm a youth leader with Make the
12 Road New York and I attend a community school.

13 As I'm about to graduate from high school, I am
14 excited and anxious about the next stage in my life
15 in college. I've worked very hard these last four
16 years on my education, but wouldn't be where I am
17 without the support and guidance from the staff in my
18 community school and Student Success Center. That is
19 why I'm here today: To call on the city to continue
20 investing in students by supporting and fighting for
21 community schools and Students Success Centers. The
22 city must continue to fund our education. We cannot
23 let what was built by the youth before us get taken
24 away.

2 Our Student Success Center was the first very
3 first to open in the city in 2007. This was after
4 black and brown students fought for it, and since the
5 city was not providing their schools with the
6 resources and support needed to go to college. There
7 are there are now SSC's in 41 high schools across the
8 city in four boroughs reaching more than 16,000
9 students. Young people did this.

10 Student Success Centers encourage students to
11 take roles in their schools and communities. Being a
12 part of a community is really important to me because
13 it allows for me and everyone around me to feel
14 included and safe. This doesn't just mean academic
15 wise, but looked out for overall in all aspects. It
16 allows for my peers and myself to have a place where
17 our well-being can be taken into consideration at all
18 times.

19 Without the support of the SSC, I would not have
20 achieved many of my accomplishments, like becoming
21 the president of my school's National Honor Society,
22 and becoming a youth leader. My role as a youth
23 leader in the SSC has also allowed me to help other
24 students in their academics, encouraging them to
25 believe in themselves, learn, to spread post-

2 secondary awareness, and to ask for support when it
3 is needed. My SSC makes me feel like I am being
4 seen, and I matter in my community.

5 If the Chancellor says that career pathways are
6 so important, then look at me and other 130 youth
7 leaders across the city. We're getting really
8 meaningful training and career development, and it's
9 a paid job allowing us a sense of independence.
10 Things have changed since the pandemic about how
11 students are looking at college and careers, planning
12 their futures.

13 As youth who are navigating through this we
14 provide support to others along with counselor staff.
15 Schools are being asked to do even more with no more
16 resources, so the work we're doing is especially
17 important in this time.

18 The City is using \$3.3 million this year of
19 federal COVID relief funds to support SSCs. It is
20 the only funding supporting this critical work. Our
21 schools and communities especially the ones that are
22 in predominantly black and brown need more care and
23 real investment is in order for students and families
24 to thrive. The \$3 million the City spent on
25 bulletproof vests for school police this year could

2 have gone to continued supporting SSCs and having
3 1000s of students have real support, figuring out
4 their future and following their dreams.

5 To be clear, that is the kind of choices the City
6 is making, and it makes me feel upset because these
7 programs are getting funding don't make any
8 difference in a student's academic life. If we no
9 longer have funding, my peers will likely no longer
10 have a drive to pursue post-secondary options. They
11 will not have the space to come and express
12 themselves after their stressful day of school,
13 whatever might have happened to them during your day.
14 The SSC gives me a space where I can express myself
15 and support the people around me. We need city
16 councilmembers to secure a budget that includes
17 sustainable funding of our SSCs for the future years
18 to come. By investing in the centers, we are
19 investing in the future of our youth and city.

20 Together let us ensure that every student has
21 opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve
22 success.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
24 Next please.

2 MR. ROSARIO: Hi, I'm Nicolas Rosario, pronouns
3 he/him, and I am a youth leader at Sisters and
4 Brothers United and Urban Youth Collaborative. I am
5 here because I want more counselors and social
6 workers in schools rather than school policing. I
7 believe that having cops in schools creates an
8 overall unfriendly environment, making students
9 uncomfortable and raising tensions.

10 School officers don't help resolve the issues but
11 instead police the students for having them.

12 I go to Discovery High School and Walton campus
13 where we have eight school police officers to one
14 social worker and one IEP counselor, which a majority
15 of the time they're in meetings or seeing other
16 students, having little to no available they as they
17 are in high demand. This leaves students like me
18 going without the support they need until they end up
19 releasing their emotions in unhealthy ways, starting
20 fights, breaking down, self-harming, and even lashing
21 out at others.

22 I have had more times than I can count where I
23 was unable to function in school due to a counselor
24 not being available. During these times, it makes me
25 feel so isolated and I wonder why am I not important

2 enough to be invested in? Why is it okay for Mayor
3 Eric Adams to continue to fund hundreds of vacant
4 school cop positions while cutting the education
5 budget by millions? Why does New York City still
6 have the largest police force in the country with
7 4,000 Cops and a budget of over \$400 million?
8 Because not once has a school police officer made me
9 feel safer in school. Not once have I seen a school
10 police officer help educate our youth. And not once
11 have I seen a school police officer help maintain our
12 schools.

13 So, it brings the question: Why are they really
14 there? They're there to police, our students, my
15 peers, on problems that could have been solved if
16 there was an adequate number of counselors in our
17 schools. So, that's why we are calling for Mayor
18 Eric Adams and the City Council to purchase to
19 prioritize our care, not criminalization, with the
20 following budget demands. One: Secure a hiring
21 freeze on school cops that does not allow to fill for
22 attrition. Two: Cut funding for the remaining
23 vacant school cop positions. And three: Use the
24 funding from both of these divestments to protect and
25 expand Restorative Justice, mental health, and other

2 staff and practices that help students learn and
3 thrive.

4 Students like me deserve real investment and it
5 starts with the City Council standing up for young
6 people like us and passing a budget that reflects our
7 values.

8 Thank you for the time.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
10 Next please.

11 MS. HARRIS: Good afternoon, elected officials,
12 peers and community members. My name is Ava, my
13 pronouns are she/her, and I'm a youth leader for
14 Sisters and Brothers United at the Northwest Bronx
15 Community and Clergy Coalition and the Urban Youth
16 Collaborative.

17 Before entering high school, I imagined being at
18 a school that would support me, make me feel safe,
19 give me opportunities to express myself freely. But
20 that has not been my experience these past three
21 years. On several occasions, I've witnessed school
22 police target darker students during security checks.
23 I've witnessed them pull over darker students for an
24 additional hand wand check despite the metal detector
25 not going off when they walk through.

2 On a weekly basis, I myself experience this. I'm
3 constantly checked as if I was suspected to have
4 something on me despite not having anything. When I
5 walk through my school doors, I feel like I'm viewed
6 as a criminal and not a student. I know I'm not the
7 only one who feels this.

8 School policing data consistently shows that
9 nearly 90% of all school policing incidents in NYC
10 target black and Latinx students, despite them being
11 only 66% of the population. It hurts seeing other
12 students who are lighter skin color than me and
13 teachers be able to pass through without question,
14 but when it comes to me passing through, I'm
15 automatically considered guilty of something.

16 This intense policing has been happening to me
17 while they still have not repaired the broken doors
18 in the bathrooms, neglected a broken window within a
19 girl's bathroom stall for over a year, and have made
20 students tolerate water fountains with bad piping.
21 All this while having significantly more police than
22 guidance counselors at my school, and having a
23 teacher serve as a part time college advisor. What
24 message does that send to young people like me?

2 Why is so much money and focus being put towards
3 policing when basic human needs aren't being met?
4 So, there's enough money to harass me using the
5 threat of police, but not enough to offer privacy and
6 other support systems to students. If the government
7 is so worried about safety and preventing violence,
8 then I find it odd that we choose policing, which has
9 caused more violence and makes students feel more
10 threatened.

11 On the rare occasions where there are conflicts
12 I've seen police officers come at it with more brute
13 force, escalating the issue and tensions, neglecting
14 what the student would actually need in order to help
15 them. Instead, we want there to be more money
16 invested into counselors, conflict mediators, and
17 other resources that students need.

18 At schools like mine, you could start with
19 funding full-time college advisors, fixing doors and
20 windows in bathrooms, instead of constant policing,
21 and unnecessary suspicions targeted at youth.

22 We call for the City Council to fight for a
23 budget that secures a hiring freeze on school cops.
24 This hiring freeze would not allow the city to fill
25 for attrition, cut funding for the vacant school cop

2 positions, use the money from both these divestments
3 to baseline funding for school support staff that
4 schools like mine desperately need.

5 It's time that the City Council stand with
6 students and fight for a budget that funds our
7 futures, not our criminalization.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
9 Next please.

10 MS. GREGORIO: Good afternoon. My name is
11 Nigella Gregorio, and I go by any pronouns. I'm a
12 youth leader with the Future of Tomorrow and the
13 Urban Youth Collaborative. I'm a current Junior in
14 Thomas Jefferson High School, which is a
15 predominantly black and Hispanic school. I am here
16 to ask the City Council to prioritize our care and
17 defund discriminatory practices within our education.

18 School policing is racist. They never fail to
19 make us feel unsafe. Every time I enter my school
20 building, I see police in every corner. Seeing this
21 makes me feel extremely disappointed, stressed, and
22 unsafe. The police often abuse their power, using it
23 to intimidate and to gain what they think is respect,
24 but I call fear.

2 During my time in school, I walked through the
3 scanners thinking that it was a one-time deal. But
4 soon the specific moment became something that soon
5 became a habit. One day when the scanning machine
6 didn't make a noise, meaning I was free to pass into
7 the school fine, I was forced to be patted down,
8 being told that without it, I would not enter the
9 school. Why was this extra measure necessary if I
10 was good without it and didn't ring any bell. I felt
11 like a criminal entering a prison and I didn't-- and
12 I know other NYC students share this feeling.

13 Our elected officials should listen to us,
14 students who are often going through these
15 experiences every day. Our struggle is real. We're
16 asking you to invest in practices that can create
17 long term safety such as mental health support,
18 school counselors, and Restorative Justice
19 coordinators who will actually listen to our problems
20 and give us actual solutions.

21 Today, we are calling for the city to prioritize
22 our care by securing a hiring freeze on school cops
23 that did not allow to fill for attrition, cutting the
24 funding for the remaining vacant school cop
25 positions, and using the funding from both

2 disinvestments to protect and expand Restorative
3 Justice, mental health, and other practices that help
4 students thrive in their environment.

5 Today, I'm urging you to put an end to school
6 policing, and to allow students of color to finally
7 give us, and allow them to get the education that
8 they deserve and to listen to our demands.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight
10 and the ability to speak for these who could not sit
11 up here.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
13 Next please.

14 MS. FRIAS: Good afternoon. My name is Aylin
15 Frias, my pronouns are she/he and I'm a youth leader
16 with Future of Tomorrow and the Urban Youth
17 Collaborative. And I am a student of Franklin K.
18 Lane High School.

19 I'm here to ask the City Council to focus more on
20 our care without criminalizing our education. Money
21 is being taken out of our resources we need and
22 depend on, giving millions to the police and leaving
23 us with unfunded education.

24 I go to school with many police officers who
25 often stop students with even a little hair clip or

2 bracelet on them. It makes me feel very anxious and
3 stressed out thinking about what I could have
4 forgotten in my backpack that could turn me into a
5 target for the school cops.

6 Schools should be a place where no one should be
7 afraid or threatened to enter. It should be a place
8 where you learn and grow from mistakes, where
9 education is top priority, and where students are
10 treated like the future leaders, not future
11 criminals.

12 There is no proof that school police prevents
13 conflicts in our schools. They actually often
14 escalate the problem to an extent of causing us
15 constant trauma and a feeling of being unsafe.

16 I urge you today to quit investing money in
17 criminalizing and discriminating against us.
18 Instead, you should invest more in trained
19 counselors, school therapists, and other non-violent
20 and more effective ways to solve problems, like the
21 use of Restorative Justice and peer mediation, not
22 the police.

23 We need the resources and advantages to be
24 successful and thrive. We do not need you to keep
25 policing us and targeting us because of the way we

2 look. Today I'm here to demand you to secure a
3 hiring freeze on school cops that does not allow us
4 for alteration, cut the funding for the remaining
5 vacant school cop positions, and use the funding from
6 both discriminative divestments to protect and expand
7 Restorative Justice, mental health, and the other
8 practices that can help students thrive. While we
9 are getting these unjust budget cuts in essential
10 resources like community schools and Success Centers,
11 the police are getting more and more money and
12 resources.

13 Our schools are struggling to keep up with the
14 students' needs like mental health support, and
15 essential teaching supplies like books and computers.
16 We students of color have often used broken or worn
17 out materials, making our education unfair and very
18 poor.

19 A school isn't a prison. It's where the future
20 of NYC goes to learn and prosper. Say no to The
21 Mayor's cuts to education and start prioritizing the
22 students, because we are the future of a much
23 brighter tomorrow. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many of you have
25 Restorative Justice programs at your school? You

2 could just raise your hand. Just one? Two. Okay.
3 Do you find it helpful?

4 MR. MATTISON: I haven't really been involved.
5 But in my SSC, we have Restorative Justice programs,
6 and I hear that they're very helpful at resolving
7 conflict.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Have you used the practice?
9 Young man?

10 MR. MELENDEZ: I would say so far in my school,
11 we have this club, Brother's Keeper, and we do
12 everything we can to, like, protect everyone as one,
13 like brothers.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How is that working out for
15 you and your classmates in My Brother's Keepers?

16 MR. MELENDEZ: Pretty good, so far. Everyone is
17 working together, and we're all being one.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. How many counselors
19 does each of you have in your school. We can start
20 down here.

21 MS. FRIAS: I don't really know the number of
22 counselors that we have. I'm guessing that we have
23 at least two.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students attend
25 your school?

2 MS. FRIAS: I do not know.

3 MS. GREGORIO: Currently, during this year, we
4 don't have a counselor because last year our
5 counselor left to teach in Bushwick. And we had--

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: What school is this?

7 MS. GREGORIO: Uh, Thomas Jefferson FDNY. We had
8 a math teacher who was promoted to become a guidance
9 counselor. But within one month, she decided to
10 quit, and now we don't have a counselor. But we do
11 have Restorative Justice and an SSC. And I am a
12 current youth leader helping students with their
13 guide through the college process, and along with
14 mental health.

15 MS. HARRIS: We only have one school counselor
16 for mental health, and then one college adviser. And
17 we have 500 students in our school.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you have one counselor,
19 one advisor, 500 students. So, what's the wait time
20 to see either one of them?

21 MS. HARRIS: Um, usually, it's a long time unless
22 it's like you're literally on the brink of something
23 serious.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Right.

25 MS. HARRIS: Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : Do any of you use
3 TalkSpace?

4 [ALL PANEL MEMBERS SHAKE HEADS NEGATIVELY]
5 No?

6 MS. HARRIS: Wait. Can you repeat the question?

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : Do any of you use
8 TalkSpace? It's a mental health app for support that
9 they launched last year. No?

10 Go ahead.

11 MR. ROSARIO: We have one social worker, and one
12 IEP counselor, and then one advisor, but he's also a
13 part-time teacher, so...

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So he's playing dual roles?

15 MR. ROSARIO: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : What normally we do as
17 educators. We carry the burden. So, how many
18 students attend your school?

19 MR. ROSARIO: We have 500 students.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 500?

21 MR. ROSARIO: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: One counselor?

23 MR. ROSARIO: Uh, yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No social worker?

25 MR. ROSARIO: We have one social worker.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For 500 students?

3 MR. ROSARIO: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, how long do you wait to
5 see her-- him or her?

6 MR. ROSARIO: Um, If you're making an appointment
7 with them, it takes around two weeks to be seen.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Two weeks? So, if you're
9 having a moment...?

10 MR. ROSARIO: Unless you are currently having a
11 panic attack or, like, at the break of something
12 serious, you're not going to be able to see them
13 anytime soon, very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

15 MR. MATTISON: My school currently has three
16 counselors, and our population is a little bit over
17 400.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

19 MR. MELENDEZ: In my school, we only have two
20 counselors, and there's only 200 students.

21 MS. DELA CRUZ: In my school, I have one social
22 worker and two guidance counselors, and it is a close
23 estimate to 1000 students.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have Restorative
25 Justice?

2 MS. DELA CRUZ: No. No.

3 MS. ALBAN: En mi escuela tenemos dos consejeros
4 y dos trabajadores sociales.

5 TRANLATOR: In her school, they have two
6 counselors and two social workers.

7 MS. ALBAN: Y somos alrededor de 500.

8 TRANSLATOR: And we're about 500 students.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: 500 students? Two
10 counselors?

11 TRANSLATOR: Two counselors and two social
12 workers.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is Restorative Justice
14 practiced?

15 MS. ALBAN: No.

16 TRANSLATOR: No.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No?

18 Um, Ava and Nya you shared you being picked on
19 unfairly doing metal detectors. Walk me through that
20 a little bit.

21 MS. GREGORIO: My first experience with the metal
22 detectors, I was forced to be patted down, and I had
23 a conversation with one of the cops. And I explained
24 to them, "Why is this happening? My scanner beeped,
25 meaning that I was able to go." And they rudely came

2 to me, and they told me, "You're doing this on
3 purpose. You want attention. You want to be patted
4 down and seen by other students." And this made me
5 feel extremely uncomfortable, because not only did I
6 not ask for it, but I did not want it.

7 And then I had to speak with one of my parent
8 coordinators in the school and I told them, "I don't
9 like being pat down." And they told me that, without
10 it, I would not be able to enter the school. And if
11 I keep refusing, they would have nothing to do but to
12 call the cops or to suspend me.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Have you reported that to
14 anyone?

15 MS. GREGORIO: I have not. No, ma'am.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you for each of
17 your testimonies today. Oh, you wanted to share one
18 more thing? Go ahead.

19 MS. HARRIS: I remember my first experience with
20 being pulled over unfairly. I remember it was me and
21 two other of my friends. One was lighter skinned,
22 and another was a little bit lighter than me but
23 still dark-skinned. I remember the darker skinned
24 friend going first and being pulled over despite the
25 machine not going off. And at first I was confused

2 because I thought it was like a glitch. Like maybe
3 the light did something weird. But then-- But then
4 after I passed through, and I was able to see the
5 light, I saw that it was acting normal, and I saw
6 that nothing happened. And I was still pulled over
7 to be patted down, and, like, hand wanted to see--
8 to, like, further check me. But then when my lighter
9 friend passed through, they weren't patted down at
10 all. And, like, after turning in my phone to the
11 school, because they don't let us have our phones, I
12 also saw, like, other darker students beat pat down
13 and like checked more, and other lighter students
14 being able to pass through. And that's when I
15 realized that it was just because I was darker
16 skinned.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So you feel that you're
18 being racially profiled?

19 MS. HARRIS: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I'm sorry that happened to
21 you.

22 MS. HARRIS: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said you didn't
24 share that with your principal?

25 MS. HARRIS: No.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I think you should.

3 All right. Thank you guys. Thank you so much.

4 You have one-- You want to add one more thing? Hold
5 on guys.

6 MR. MATTISON: Going through scanning in the
7 mornings, I've been stopped multiple times for having
8 a calculator-- a calculator in my bookbag. I also
9 carry a portable charger, because I stay after school
10 and I work. So, I want to make sure my phone is
11 charged, and I've been stopped multiple times because
12 of things like that. And I feel like it's really
13 unnecessary, you know? I feel like you can see,
14 like, I don't have any sharp objects in my bag or
15 anything like that. So, I don't see why they
16 continuously stop me. If it was like-- It hasn't
17 happened that much recently. But it was like a--
18 like a weekly thing, like at least once a week. And
19 I don't know. These-- These school safety agents,
20 they're not very polite. They're not-- They're not--
21 - I don't know. They just seem to take their anger
22 out on us, and I don't-- I don't understand.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Does that raise your anxiety
24 level as you walk through the building?

2 MR. MATTISON: Yeah, because it makes me, like,
3 worry that I'm going to get stopped or, you know,
4 something's going to get escalated over nothing, like
5 a calculator or a charger.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I hear you. Thank you.
7 Thank you for sharing that.

8 MR. MATTISON: You're welcome.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you guys.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. We
11 are going to take a five-minute break but I will call
12 the names on the next panel.

13 First we'll have Randi Levine, Nickesha Francis,
14 Kadisha Davis, Maggie Moroff, Caitlyn Passaretti,
15 Gregory Brender, Kimberly Olsen. You may make your
16 way down to the front, and we will resume the hearing
17 in five minutes. Thank you.

18 [90 SECONDS SILENCE]

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good evening. Just a quick
20 announcement if your name was called prior to the
21 Chair stepping out, please make your way up to the
22 witness table.

23 Also if you are exiting please exit quietly.
24 Thank you.

25 [6 MINUTES SILENCE]

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: All right. If everyone could
3 please find seats we are going to resume with the
4 hearing.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hello our first panelist,
6 Randy Levine

7 MS. LEVINE: Thank you for the opportunity to
8 speak with you. My name is Randy Levine, I'm Policy
9 Director at Advocates for Children of New York.

10 Numerous education programs, services, and staff
11 positions are currently at risk of deep cuts as a
12 result of the expiration of federal stimulus funding,
13 the expiration of one-year city funding, and the
14 preliminary budget cut of more than \$700 million from
15 New York City Public Schools' fiscal year 2025
16 budget.

17 As an organization that works every day with
18 families of students who face some of the biggest
19 barriers to educational success, we are extremely
20 concerned. Here are just a few examples of ways that
21 the students we serve could be impacted: In less
22 than four months from today, unless funding is
23 restored, young children with autism and other
24 disabilities could lose access to preschool, special
25 education programs, and services in violation of

2 their legal rights, as their teachers are asked to
3 take a \$10,000 pay cut and other positions are
4 eliminated entirely, undoing the progress The Council
5 helped to achieve at a time when 600 children are
6 already waiting for seats in their legally-mandated
7 preschool special education classes. Thousands of
8 students living in shelter could lose access to 100
9 shelter-based coordinators who have played a critical
10 role in helping students get school placements and
11 other support at a time of record student
12 homelessness.

13 The Immigrant Family Communication and Outreach
14 Initiative could end, and bilingual supports and
15 translation services could be rolled back at a time
16 when thousands of newly arrived immigrant students
17 have enrolled in our schools.

18 Students with disabilities could lose access to
19 60 school psychologists exacerbating delays in the
20 delivery of mandated services, and students could
21 lose access to programs designed to support students
22 with dyslexia.

23 190,000 students could lose access to a full-time
24 social worker in their school, 40,000 students could
25 lose access to the wraparound supports provided by

2 community schools, the majority of Restorative
3 Justice programming could end, and students at 50
4 high-needs schools could lose access to the Mental
5 Health Continuum at a time when there is a youth
6 mental health crisis.

7 Students will lose these programs and more unless
8 the city restores funding a longer list of programs
9 along with the minimum dollar amounts that must be
10 restored merely to sustain funding for these existing
11 programs and staff in fiscal year 25 at their current
12 levels is in our written testimony, along with our
13 Capital Plan recommendation of increased funding
14 needed to continue to address the city's huge
15 deficits in school accessibility.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.
17 I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
19 Next please.

20 MS. FRANCIS: Thank you, Chair Joseph and the
21 committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is
22 Nickesha Francis, and I'm a Policy and Advocacy
23 Manager with Good Shepherd Services. And I'm
24 testifying today on behalf of the Emergency Coalition
25 to Save Education Programs. I am a co-chair of the

2 Youth Advocacy Work Group in this coalition that has
3 come together to urge our elected officials to
4 identify funding to sustain essential education
5 programs supported with funding set to run dry in
6 June.

7 Unless our elected leaders step up and save these
8 programs, here are some examples of what our students
9 stand to lose in less than four months, less than
10 four months.

11 We are on the verge of losing 3K slots for
12 thousands of young children; preschool special
13 education classes and services for young children
14 with autism and disabilities; more than 100 community
15 schools providing after school programs, mental
16 health care, food pantries, and more at schools
17 serving more than 40,000 students; 450 school social
18 workers at schools serving nearly 200 students;
19 learning-to-work programs for students who are
20 working hard to get back on track so they can
21 graduate from high school; 100 DOE coordinators,
22 working on the ground in shelters to help students
23 experiencing homelessness get to school; 60 school
24 psychologists helping to evaluate children with
25 disabilities so they can get needed services;

2 Restorative Justice programs -- we heard all the
3 young people talk about this -- Restorative Justice
4 programs to help students stay in school, instead of
5 being subjected to exclusionary discipline; and
6 mental health supports in the South Bronx and Central
7 Brooklyn; support for immigrant students, including
8 bilingual programs and communication and outreach to
9 help their families in a language and mode they can
10 access; programs for students with dyslexia; Students
11 Success Centers to help students at 34 high schools
12 prepare for college.

13 Each of these programs and others will be
14 significantly rolled back or eliminated unless the
15 City restores this funding.

16 Please note: Some of these initiatives such as
17 hiring school social workers and psychologists, as
18 multiple schools districts did, are investments the
19 State and the school districts should have been
20 making all along and have been historically
21 underfunded, and will certainly continue to be
22 needed.

23 Our call to action, signed by more than 160
24 organizations and more than one thousand parents,

2 students, educators, and individuals has more
3 information. We will submit that with the testimony.

4 We are calling on the City to restore funding for
5 all of these important programs. We should not have
6 to pick and ,choose and avoid a massive setback for
7 our students and school communities. I am sure we
8 can all agree our students deserve more, not less.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you,
10 and I'm happy to answer any questions.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

12 Next.

13 Your mic isn't on.

14 MS. MOROFF: Good evening, Chair Joseph. I'm
15 Maggie Moroff. I am here tonight on behalf of the
16 Arise Coalition with parents, professionals, and
17 organizational members, Arise members advocate for
18 improvements to support the city's approximately
19 200,000 students with disabilities. You'll hear from
20 several other Arise members today.

21 As you know, I also work at Advocates for
22 Children of New York, but today I'm here on behalf of
23 Arise. I've submitted longer written testimony and
24 I'd like to very briefly highlight-- share some
25 highlights from that.

2 The proposed Capital Plan includes \$800 million
3 for school accessibility to be spread out over the
4 next five years. Three decades after the ADA was
5 passed, the majority of our schools aren't yet fully
6 accessible. Students with accessibility needs often
7 must travel significant distances to school. Family
8 members, educators, and others from the community
9 with accessibility needs get closed out of activities
10 in those same schools.

11 With the help of the City Council, the last
12 Capital Plan included \$750 million to make schools
13 more accessible. With that the city brought school
14 programs up from 18% to 31% full accessibility. That
15 is real progress, and it still leaves us with almost
16 70% of our schools not fully accessible.

17 The proposed plan this time around includes \$800
18 million for accessibility work. With inflation,
19 that's actually a decreased commitment. To keep
20 momentum going and bring schools to an estimated 50%
21 full accessibility, we ask for your help to make sure
22 that this next Capital Plan invests a total of \$1.25
23 billion for school accessibility projects.

24 On the FY 25 Preliminary Budget, we share with
25 others here today, several critical concerns about

2 programs supporting students with disabilities in
3 danger, as those federal COVID relief funds used to
4 support them expire. Funding for preschool special
5 education, for literacy instruction and dyslexia
6 program, and the danger that many school
7 psychologists and family workers in our schools might
8 be lost.

9 The City is already failing to meet the needs of
10 students with disabilities. Too many times for too
11 many years, youth with disabilities have been left
12 behind. We need to come together to support them by
13 investing in high-quality programs, services and
14 staff to help meet students' needs rather than
15 rollback existing support.

16 Thank you for all of the work that you do to
17 support New York City students. I'm always available
18 to answer questions.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
20 Next, please.

21 MS. DAVIS: Hello, good afternoon. My name is
22 Kadisha Davis. I'm a parent of a New York City kid.
23 I'm also an advocate for Family Homeless Coalition,
24 and I'm on the behalf of families in shelter.

2 I was once a person in shelter with my child.
3 And I know it can be very difficult to go to the
4 shelter system when you don't have certain helps.

5 I'm here for people who are the family-based
6 coordinators, saying that they need to keep their
7 jobs also, and to help families in shelter who's
8 navigating through the educational system.

9 The shelter is getting larger and larger and
10 larger as the weeks go by, especially for families.
11 I think we need to hire, honestly, more people to
12 this position, because we have over 300 shelters, but
13 only 100 coordinators. That doesn't make sense. As
14 you said before, the math is not matching.

15 So, because of that, we need to make sure we can
16 have people with more jobs in this position to help
17 out more families, and also have people with
18 bilingual, with different languages. As you know,
19 people are coming here, people are here from before,
20 who need to speak to a certain language to be able to
21 go through the cause of everything.

22 When families in shelters don't have the help to
23 get through educational system, it's the kids who
24 suffer, our future suffers. And we do not want any
25 child to be left behind because we're not doing the

2 right thing for them to make sure that they have a
3 better future. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
5 Next please.

6 MS. PASSARETTI: Hello, and thank you Chair
7 Joseph and the Education Committee for being here so
8 late. My name is Caitlyn Passaretti. I'm a Policy
9 and Advocacy Associate at Citizens Committee for
10 Children of New York. I'm here to uplift the
11 priorities of the Emergency Coalition to Save
12 Education Programs, as well as additional ones.

13 The scope of education cuts facing New York City
14 is staggering, and it is urgent that our city leaders
15 protect educational services and supports that are
16 critical to the immediate and long-term well-being of
17 New York City's children and families.

18 In our written testimony, we provide
19 recommendations on a range of urgent investments
20 needed to support students in our city, as well as a
21 map of where we're losing ECE seats.

22 However, in the time today, I want to focus on
23 the crisis facing the early care and education
24 system. 15,000 seats. We are at risk of losing
25 15,000 seats for early care and education due to the

2 \$170 million cut to the ECE system. And as this has
3 been raised over and over today, these cuts are in
4 addition to the enormous budget reductions that have
5 occurred over the past year and a half. These cuts
6 are being proposed while New York City is facing a
7 severe affordability crisis: 80% of families
8 citywide cannot afford childcare, and in many
9 communities, families pay up to 63% of their annual
10 income on these services with the Bronx and Brooklyn
11 being the most impacted boroughs.

12 In fact, the inability to secure childcare
13 resulted in the loss of \$23 billion in economic
14 activity in New York City in 2022, and is forcing New
15 Yorkers to leave the city. Those departing the city
16 at the fastest rate in 2023 were families making
17 between \$32,000 and \$65,000 annually.

18 The Administration has promised repeatedly that
19 every parent who wants a pre-K or 3K seat for their
20 child will receive one, yet it is impossible to
21 reconcile this promise with The Administration's
22 actions in cutting ECE funding year after year. It
23 is the responsibility of our city's leaders to
24 fulfill this promise, not just by restoring the
25 funding cut from the system, but also by paying

2 providers on time and addressing the severe
3 operational challenges needed to fill seats.

4 Today, the DOE said repeatedly during their
5 testimony that they are going to move seats to where
6 they are needed. But we know from talking to parents
7 all over the city, is that the seats are needed where
8 they are, they just need to have much better outreach
9 to better match parents' work schedules, and parents
10 need help learning about and accessing the services.
11 Moving the seats around will not solve this problem.

12 We need the city to reverse the cuts and address
13 the operational barriers preventing families from
14 accessing the seats there. These cuts to the ECE
15 system are inequitable and unconscionable, and we
16 urge the City Council and The Administration to
17 restore this funding so families can afford to live
18 here and children can thrive.

19 Thank you so much for this opportunity.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
21 You may begin.

22 MR. BRENDER: Good evening. My name is Gregory
23 Brender. I'm here on behalf of the Daycare Council
24 of New York. Thank you so much for the opportunity
25 to testify, and also for your really tough, really

2 important questions about what's happening in Early
3 Childhood in this administration.

4 I was, I guess, a little surprised to hear the
5 good Chancellor saying there would be good news
6 around pre-K and 3K. However, we want to be assured
7 that this includes keeping the 3K Programs we have
8 and continuing the expansion so that all children in
9 New York City, regardless of zip code, regardless of
10 their parents wealth, have access to high-quality,
11 Early Childhood Education.

12 The Administration has, in the past, justified
13 the cuts that it's already made, as well as the cuts
14 that may still be happening by citing under-
15 enrollment. But it's crucial to note that that
16 under-enrollment is the result of policy choices that
17 The Administration has made. And we continue to
18 support things that we know you and your colleagues
19 in the City Council have supported, including
20 investing in a robust multicultural, multilingual
21 enrollment campaign, allowing community based
22 organizations to directly enrolled families so that
23 they can leverage the deep connections and trust
24 they've built in the communities they serve, and
25 ensuring that providers are paid on time.

2 We also wanted to talk about the importance of
3 salary parity for the Early Childhood workforce.

4 The teachers, directors and staff in community-
5 based organizations, the workforce who really make
6 all other work forces possible, because they make it
7 possible for parents to go to work. They are
8 drastically underpaid. They receive salaries and
9 benefits much lower than their counterparts in the
10 public schools. And we need in this budget to ensure
11 that the city funds a labor contract that brings the
12 community-based Early Childhood workforce to parity
13 with their counterparts in public schools, including
14 baselining salary increases for the workforce with a-
15 - including baseline salary increases for the
16 workforce with a \$25 an hour minimum wage for support
17 staff, restoration of longevity differentials, and
18 per diem for the staff in extended-day/extended-year
19 programs who have longer hours and longer years,
20 because they are serving the needs of working
21 families.

22 Thank you so much for being part of this fight,
23 and for staying late and hearing us testify. And
24 we're of course always happy to answer questions.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Maggie?

2 MS. MOROFF: I went already.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Kimberly?

4 MS. OLSEN: That's me. Thank you so much Chair
5 Joseph, fellow committee members and council staff
6 for your passion, leadership, and support of Arts
7 Education in New York City. Also, a special shout
8 out to you, Chair Joseph, for holding a space with
9 such care and intention. It's true that you come to
10 this space as an educator, and is greatly appreciated
11 as another educator.

12 So, my name is Kim Olsen. I'm the Executive
13 Director of the New York City Arts in Education
14 roundtable. We are a service organization that works
15 with thousands of arts educators, artists, and
16 cultural organizations each year to improve and
17 advance Arts Education in New York City.

18 I'm testifying as part of the It Starts With The
19 Arts Coalition, calling on our City to prioritize
20 funding for Arts Education in New York City schools
21 in the FY 25 budget. Transforming our schools starts
22 with the arts. Yet these opportunities are only
23 available to some of New York City's 1 million
24 students. In New York City, Arts Education has been
25 historically underfunded, inconsistent, and

2 inequitable. According to the city's most recent
3 Annual Arts And Schools Report 67% of eighth graders
4 did not make New York State Education requirements in
5 Arts Education. That number has remained largely
6 unchanged since 2015, while the number of certified
7 arts teachers citywide has dramatically declined.
8 Since the 2019-2020 school year, New York City Public
9 Schools have lost 425 full-time certified arts
10 teachers, representing a 14.8% decrease from the
11 2019-2020 and through the 2022-2023 school years.
12 This leaves thousands More students without a
13 dedicated arts teacher in their school.

14 Today we learned that 307 schools lack a
15 certified arts teacher (thank you for giving us that
16 transparency) but we don't know what schools, what
17 districts have been impacted. The combined impact of
18 proposed budget cuts, the loss of federal stimulus
19 money set to expire on June 30, and the lack of
20 transparency stands to only widen the access gap for
21 years to come. Let us not take it out on our
22 students are their futures. Programs that foster
23 student engagement, creativity, mental health, and
24 community rejuvenation must be prioritized. New York
25 City must ensure that our schools offer students the

2 rigor, encouragement, and inspiration they need to
3 learn and thrive in today's classroom and beyond.

4 So, to lay the groundwork for universal access to
5 Arts Education, we believe that the city must require
6 funding intended for Arts Education to be spent on
7 Arts Education, to hire more certified arts teachers,
8 closing that equity gap for the 307 schools, to
9 replace expiring federal COVID-era funds for the Arts
10 (which again, thank you so much for the
11 transparency). We learned that \$41 million in
12 stimulus money has been earmarked to Arts Education,
13 which includes funding for arts initiatives, programs
14 to support students social emotional well, being an
15 academic recovery through the arts, and in the past
16 has also included Summer Rising as well, and also to
17 restore and enhance the support for Arts Instruction
18 Initiative funding and improved data transparency.

19 Our city's young people represent the vitality of
20 our city. Thank you again for your attention and
21 consideration.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For the-- for Advocates For
23 Children, can you expand on the need for replacing
24 the \$96 million in preschool and special education
25 students?

2 MS. LEVINE: Thank you for the question. It's
3 hard to express how much of this investment is
4 needed. So, I will talk in a moment about what this
5 investment has been used for. But even before that,
6 let me say thank you for asking the Department of
7 Education today about preschool special education.
8 We learned through your questioning that there are
9 600 preschoolers with disabilities waiting today for
10 seats in their legally-mandated preschool special
11 education classes in violation of their federal legal
12 rights, and after The Mayor promised in December
13 2022, that every child who needed one would have a
14 seat by the spring of 2023.

15 This situation, however, would be far worse
16 without the investment of \$96 million in federal
17 stimulus funding made by this administration. And
18 there's been no commitment to continuing that
19 commitment starting in July. So, the bulk of that
20 funding went to what is called a preschool special
21 education program contract enhancement. It gave a
22 boost to community-based organizations running
23 preschool special education classes to do a few
24 things, a very important one of which was bringing
25 those teachers into the same salary parity agreement

2 that general education pre-K teachers at community-
3 based organizations had already had.

4 So, in the original salary parity agreement,
5 which as we know, is inadequate. As my colleague
6 Gregory Brender testified, preschool special
7 education class teachers were left out. This
8 contract enhancement has brought them into that same
9 agreement, they will be back out of it in July, if we
10 don't reach an agreement to continue that investment.

11 The contract enhancement also allowed preschool
12 special education classes to operate for the same
13 hours as regular day (we're not talking about
14 extended-day, but regular day) pre-K classes. Before
15 that preschool special education classes had been
16 shorter school day than pre-K general education
17 classes, which was unfair and inequitable.

18 And to make a number of other changes, and the
19 most important thing to us is that the purpose of
20 this funding was to allow preschool special education
21 programs to continue operating, because so many of
22 them were closing down, so many of them could not
23 recruit and retain teachers, and this allowed them to
24 have teachers open classes -- not enough classes. We

2 need more today, but it would be far worse without
3 it.

4 I will just say quickly, the rest of that
5 investment went to a few additional things, including
6 hiring service providers like speech therapists to go
7 to pre-K programs, because there is a huge shortage
8 of service providers to go to pre-K programs, hiring
9 preschool special education administrators and
10 community coordinators to help with the evaluation
11 process and the process of developing preschool
12 special education service plans so that children
13 couldn't get the services they need in the first
14 place, and several other key investments.

15 So, it is critical to continue this investment
16 and do more.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. There are 600
18 students waiting for preschool special education
19 seats, which means DOE cut out-- The Coalition?
20 Okay.

21 Can you elaborate on the need for the covering
22 the gap on the Restorative Justice funding and the
23 benefits you see in schools that have Restorative
24 Justice programming?

25 MS. FRANCIS: Sorry, can you repeat the question?

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Turn it around. No. The
3 need for Restorative Justice programming, and the
4 benefits you see in schools that have Restorative
5 Justice programming.

6 MS. FRANCIS: Oh, I think-- I think the students,
7 like, spoke to that, right? And they-- And the
8 Chancellor said that, like, he listens to the
9 students. I wish she was here to hear how important
10 Restorative Justice is.

11 But I think one of-- the most powerful testimony
12 and I'm going to go back to what that-- one of the
13 young person said. She spoke about the conflict that
14 she had, and wanted the student to be suspended. And
15 then after being encouraged to have that dialogue,
16 accepted an apology, and was able to understand.
17 That is a key example of the importance of
18 Restorative Justice, and also preventing this kind of
19 punitive approach, right? Where we're-- we're
20 talking about solutions, not suspension, and we're
21 not suspending children, when they have conflict, but
22 working with them in order to address those
23 conflicts, right? And also that peer, you know, the
24 piece where peers are working together to really
25 influence and impact that change process.

2 So, I would just kind of like I said, piggyback
3 to the young people. They spoke very well about the
4 importance of Restorative Justice. And I learned so
5 much just being here today listening to them.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I told you: Young people
7 have the answers. That's why I want them at the
8 table.

9 MS. FRANCIS: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All right, Arise. What
11 programs for preschool, special education, dyslexia
12 programs, school psychologists, are at risk being cut
13 because of expiring stimulus dollars? We are funding
14 increasing-- We see funding increasing in Carter
15 cases, which mean a byproduct of not providing
16 adequate special education services. What are your
17 views on the New York City public school addressing
18 these issues before they turn into Carter cases?

19 MS. MOROFF: Yeah.

20 Which is what I told them too.

21 MS. MOROFF: Right. So, actually, right back at
22 you. And you know, the preschool piece, Randi just
23 spoke really, really coherently about.

24 The literacy instruction, the dyslexia
25 programming loss of-- Our students are already not

2 reading, right? We are already so far behind, and
3 those students are going to come up behind. Without
4 the additional support that they have gotten as a
5 result of this, we are going to make, you know,
6 negative-negative progress. Let's not even use the
7 word progress.

8 Sorry-- It just-- You know, I am so-- I think
9 all of our members are so concerned about going
10 backwards at a time when the students are already
11 struggling, right?

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Mm-hmm.

13 MS. MOROFF: All of these are really, really key
14 programs. And the students with disabilities start
15 needing more, sure. And that is the job of-- of the
16 New York City Department of Education.

17 To roll that back at this point would be not just
18 sort of frightening looking forward, but absolutely
19 detrimental looking backwards.

20 And so, you know, we stand with everybody at this
21 table on each of these issues.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When I spoke to SCA today,
23 they said that it will take 20 years to make schools
24 ADA. Where are you on that?

2 MS. MOROFF: Yeah. Actually longer. So, what
3 they are talking about is, with appropriate funding,
4 without inflation, without changes in the building
5 industries, and taking into consideration those
6 buildings that may not be able to be made fully
7 accessible at all. And the DOE uses a sort of a
8 three-part thing: They look at buildings as
9 inaccessible, and partially accessible, and fully
10 accessible.

11 We are advocating for full accessibility.
12 Partial accessibility can mean a whole lot of things.
13 And some of the work that they're talking about, I
14 think in that 20-year period is to just bring partial
15 accessibility up. So, you know, every year matters,
16 every dollar matters. And 20 years isn't even going
17 to be enough certainly at this pace.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Daycare Counsel,
19 what outreach would you-- would you suggest New York
20 City public school take on 3K that would reach
21 families and communities versus them cutting seats
22 without having the data, right?

23 MR. BRENDER: Yeah, I think-- I believe the
24 model-- When-- When pre-K launched in 2014, there was
25 an incredibly aggressive and effective model, where

2 there was a dedicated outreach team who were in
3 playgrounds, schools, churches, mosques, any house of
4 worship you could think of, finding community groups,
5 and it was multilingual and multicultural.

6 So, I think something that really focuses on the
7 diversity of our city and has individual outreach.

8 So, parents know what's available to them, which
9 includes both pre-K programs, but also extended-day
10 programs, which is what a lot of parents need. And
11 that is specific to Early Childhood, because Early
12 Childhood enrollment is different. It's not
13 mandatory, it requires a different enrollment
14 procedures. There are separate enrollment
15 requirements for families who need extended-day. So,
16 that kind of targeted and specialized outreach would
17 be incredibly effective.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes.

19 MS. PASSARETTI: Just to add to that the city had
20 a pretty effective vaccine rollout with folks going
21 into communities with iPads and making sure that
22 families knew exactly what they needed, and if they
23 qualified. I'm not saying we need to recreate the
24 wheel in every situation, but it's pretty dire. So,
25 like, if that is like one of the things we could do,

2 by just like getting boots on the ground in the way
3 of making sure families know these opportunities
4 exist, that would be majorly helpful.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I told them 3K felt like The
6 Hunger Games. I asked-- Today I asked The
7 Administration for a number to bring up pay parity.
8 I said \$41.6 billion, I think annually, and they said
9 they weren't-- they didn't know. Do you have a
10 number?

11 MR. BRENDER: We're working on some numbers. We
12 should get them out pretty soon.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Earlier you testified
14 where we lost 425 art teachers. Where did they go?
15 Was that due to budget cuts?

16 MS. OLSEN: It's something that we've asked the
17 DOE about several times, but not-- have not yet
18 gotten a straight answer on what has happened.
19 Although it's been relayed to us, it could be a mix
20 of retirement, those positions haven't been filled,
21 teacher accessing. But that information has not been
22 shared publicly.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, today, when we asked
24 administration, when they testified that if every
25 school has a full-time arts teacher, they said every

2 school does have some art program through CBOs or
3 other ways.

4 What is the difference in programming when you
5 have a full-time art teacher versus having an after
6 school or some other arts programming?

7 MS. OLSEN: Yeah, well, I think it's helpful to
8 qualify what that means. That they said 99% 100% of
9 schools have at least one art subject in their
10 school. But they don't define what that actually
11 means. It could mean that they have a sequential
12 Arts Education, it could mean that they have access
13 to an arts teacher, it could mean that their students
14 sang the Star Spangled Banner in the morning, or that
15 maybe they have a five minute like move and groove at
16 the beginning of the day.

17 So I think for us more clarification is needed on
18 like, what does that actually mean when you say you
19 have a subject-- an art subject at your school? How
20 are you defining that? But when it comes to a
21 certified arts teacher versus an arts and cultural
22 partnership, the way I and the Roundtable talk about
23 it is that it's a partnership between the two.
24 However, certified arts teachers are the cornerstone
25 of Arts Education and their school. Arts partners

2 are typically going into the schools anywhere from 1
3 to 25 plus workshops. There's no way that they can
4 have the high touchpoint with all of the students in
5 a way that a certified arts teacher can. However, it
6 is a relationship in which they are able to bring in
7 services that maybe students don't have exposure to,
8 and are able to bring in community resources.

9 We know 36% of schools reported that arts and
10 cultural organizations provided funding to support
11 arts in their schools.

12 So, again, it's a marriage between the two, but
13 really we need to have those certified arts teachers
14 as anchors within our school.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you all.

16 MS. OLSEN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you for
18 hanging in there.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to everybody on the
20 panel. Our next panel: Annie Minguéz, Rachel
21 Forsyth, Elsie McCabe Thompson, Sonayi Beckles-
22 Canton, Dawn Yuster, Melinda Andra, Nancy Bedard, and
23 Sandra Mitchell. Please make your way to the front
24 table.

2 Annie, you may begin your testimony when you're
3 ready.

4 MS. MINGUEZ: Good evening Chair Joseph and
5 members of the committee. My name is Annie Miguez,
6 and I am the Vice President of Government and
7 Community Relations for Good Shepherd services. I
8 Co-Chair the Learning to Work Coalition, the Student
9 Success Center, and the Government Relations
10 Workgroup of the Coalition for Community Schools
11 excellence. I also sit on the Emergency Coalition to
12 Save Education Programs. For the last four years I
13 have come before this committee, along with my
14 colleagues, to testify about the critical support
15 that schools and youth will lose when federal funds
16 expire in June. With only three months to go, today
17 I want to focus on Student Success Centers. My
18 colleague, Rachel Forsyth is here, who will talk
19 about learning to work as well as Elsie with Mission
20 Society.

21 Good Shepherd Services supports three Student
22 Success Centers located at Longwood and DeWitt
23 Clinton High School in the Bronx, and Randolph in
24 Manhattan, where we support over 500 students. The
25 centers are helping create a college-going culture in

2 schools. This model was born from a need that youth
3 identify, and currently DOE is using \$3.3 million
4 annually to support SSCs. This is the only funding
5 to support SSCs. When these funds expire there will
6 no longer be funding to sustain this work that has
7 been in existence since 2007.

8 Youth Leaders are at the core of SSCs. Students
9 themselves are trained by the CARA Institute to
10 support youth applying for college, and then sign up
11 for the SATs, research which college has the major
12 that aligned to their interests, help young people
13 who qualify for application waivers, and support them
14 with writing a successful college essay. Some of our
15 youth leaders are college students who return to help
16 their peers.

17 We look forward to working with The Council to
18 ensure we can support SSCs so every student in New
19 York City can have access to these supports.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Rachel.

22 MS. FORSYTH: Hi. Thank you for this hearing.

23 My name is Rachel Forsyth, and I'm here, as Annie
24 said, to talk about Learning To Work, which are
25 critical funds for our students. I've been working

2 with transfer schools and Young Adult Borough Centers
3 for the past 20 years. I remember back in 2004, when
4 New York City studied the students who were falling
5 off track, and we found that we were losing almost
6 140,000 students every year. New York City created
7 Learning To Work to address this giant need which
8 embedded community based organizations in transfer
9 schools and Young Adult Borough Centers. This allows
10 our teachers to focus on instruction, to move
11 students who have had gaps in learning and who come
12 with a huge variety of learning needs and abilities.
13 We partner those teachers with counselors who know
14 how to connect with students and families and move
15 barriers to engagement in school out of the way. We
16 combine all of that with an internship program that
17 allows yet another caring adult in the life of our
18 students, a worksite mentor who provides real-world
19 work experience that teaches our students that school
20 has tangible value in the real world, and allows our
21 students to earn a minimum wage while in school,
22 which is sometimes the only income coming into our
23 students' families.

24 Our students rely on the relationships they make
25 in our schools to advance academically, socially,

2 emotionally, and in ways that prepare them for their
3 future.

4 I have some statistics. The six-year dropout
5 rate fell to 10% in school year 2018-2019 from more
6 than 30% before Learning To Work started. Among
7 students who didn't graduate within four years,
8 students in transfer schools doubled the graduation
9 rate of that of traditional schools.

10 During COVID 70% of the \$40 million Learning To
11 Work dollars were moved from tax levy funds to
12 stimulus dollars, and now we face a fiscal cliff that
13 will completely dismantle our school communities.
14 This cut will devastate our schools and leave our
15 students and families behind once again.

16 What we learned back in 2005 is that students who
17 are two or more years off track rarely get back on
18 track. Only 19% of them graduated. They slipped and
19 there was no system to recuperate them back into
20 school. New York City created that system, Learning
21 To Work, transfer schools, and YABCs. Recent DOE
22 data shows that 97% of students in LTW transfer
23 schools who had an internship, graduate.

24 We've done an incredible amount of work in this
25 city which needs to be celebrated and sustained. We

2 can't turn the clock back on the gains we've made in
3 reducing the dropout rate and growing the graduation
4 rate. Please don't dismantle the system we've
5 created for the students who so desperately need it.
6 Please restore our Learning To Work funds.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Elsie.

8 MS. MCCABE THOMPSON: Hi, since I'm now a senior
9 citizen. I will tell you a little bit about, you
10 know, New York-- some New York City history. Back in
11 '75, when Mayor Beame was told by the President to
12 drop dead, New York City was going bankrupt. The--
13 The mushrooming of outsourcing to community-based
14 organizations cynically began as a practice that was
15 so embedded, you know, in years to come, that it only
16 grew and mushroomed. And part of the practice was,
17 you know, you don't have to-- because you don't want
18 to be criticized by voters for allowing the city
19 workforce to, you know, mushroom as well.

20 So, instead, what they decided was that it was
21 easier to hire community-based organizations to do
22 work that city employees might have done. But they
23 knew that community-based organizations could be paid
24 less than city employees, had fewer benefits, and
25 frankly, you know, community-based organizations,

2 because we are so mission driven, that no one ever
3 says, "I'm-- you know, that's not my job that's out-
4 of-title work," because we will work tirelessly as we
5 have. You know, when the pandemic began, I had staff
6 members-- we have seven transfer, transfer schools.

7 And they were picking up diapers for students
8 that had infants. Whatever students needed to get
9 by, you know, and delivering it to homes, because
10 that's what our staff will do. The Mission Society
11 is 212 years old. So, for centuries, literally,
12 we've fought poverty.

13 And, you know, Rachel just mentioned about the--
14 what happens to kids who fall out of track, because
15 many of the kids are disconnected, you know, and they
16 feel-- feel as though School's out for them. No
17 one's listening at school.

18 Our staff members look like our students, and in
19 many cases, have been our students. You know,
20 everybody at Mission Society, you knows what is
21 euphemistically, known as Elsie's Seventh Grade
22 Story, where, you know, I share with all of our
23 students, you know, that having an IEP, you know,
24 being neurodivergent, in whatever way is not
25

2 something that you'd be embarrassed by, you know.

3 I'm proud of it.

4 [BELL RINGS]

5 And, you know, so our staff, we listen. You
6 know, our students speak some 37 languages. And, you
7 know, we have-- we pay extra to our staff members who
8 speak foreign languages, because that's a resource
9 that our staff brings to the school. In many
10 instances, the only one. Usually, the only social
11 worker at the school is one of our staff members.

12 You know, we help students with, you know,
13 getting motivated to come to school. So we, you
14 know, aggressively, you know, support student
15 outreach, and superintendents. We help students with
16 everything from filling out FAFSA forms to, you know,
17 their college applications. We provide some 9,000
18 different internships, you know, collectively. So,
19 many of our students received their first paid job
20 from anybody, for the Mission Society, because we're
21 as a group, we're clinically insane, and we will do
22 ridiculous things. Like we put our students on
23 Mission Society payroll, so that they can not only
24 have paid work opportunity, but we pay into the
25 Social Security system for our students, because we

2 see that as a full responsibility. And all of our
3 LTW community-based organizations are surprisingly
4 similar to this, to us.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
6 Sonayi.

7 DR. BECKLES-CANTON: Good evening, Chair Joseph
8 and distinguished members of The Council. My name is
9 Dr. Sonayi Beckles-Canton. I am a member of the
10 Citywide Council for Special Education. I also sit
11 here as a director of a CBO for pre-K3, and a pre-K3
12 program in Harlem, New York, and I am also the parent
13 and grandparent of children with dyslexia in the New
14 York City public school system.

15 I want to speak a little bit about the looming
16 cuts in 3K in pre-K special education services, and
17 the literacy programs that The Mayor ran on to
18 support children with dyslexia, but come June will be
19 cut.

20 The DOE has invested \$7 million in expiring
21 federal stimulus funds for literacy-based programs
22 across the city. My son Dylan, and my granddaughter
23 Nova, have been recipients of that program.

24

25

2 For a moment, I just want to share my story to
3 help you understand how important these programs have
4 made a difference in my child's life.

5 In 2005, I have a 27-year-old son who was
6 diagnosed with dyslexia, who attend a local public
7 school in Harlem. But because the school did not
8 have resources to support my son's need, I had to
9 take two jobs to pay for private services, along with
10 applying for an impartial hearing, which became a
11 Carter Case where the Department of Education spent
12 over \$200,000 to educate him in high school.

13 As a result of that I had to move him out of his
14 local community school to a predominantly white
15 school where he experienced many racial aggressions,
16 and other things just to get an education.

17 Fast forward to today, 2024, my now 10-year-old
18 was blessed to be able to participate in a school
19 that had a pilot program for these literacy-based
20 programs. At the time when my 27-year-old had to get
21 services outside, I had to pay. So, it took him four
22 years to learn how to read proficiently, when the
23 program that is currently funded in the Department of
24 Education has allowed my son, who's 10, to do it and
25 half the time.

2 So, my son will be graduating in June from fifth
3 grade and he is reading on a fifth grade level. But
4 that is due to all of the resources. So, while the
5 program was rolled out a few years ago, and my son
6 was in third grade and did not necessarily benefit
7 from it, because his teachers were training Orton-
8 Gillingham, and his service coordinators for his IEP,
9 he got the services in the building. Because the
10 Department of Education allowed him to have a trained
11 tutor come into the building that they paid for, for
12 him to get the Orton-Gillingham services. My son was
13 able to catch up and be able to read, and not have
14 the emotional trauma that my oldest son experienced.

15 And because of those assessments that they do, my
16 now-granddaughter who is in first grade has been able
17 to be diagnosed with dyslexia soon and get the
18 resources.

19 [BELL RINGS]

20 So, I share that because this program is much
21 needed, and the fact that the funds will run out
22 attributes to the systematic problem we have in the
23 DOE of have having programs start with good
24 intentions, but are not completely funded to see
25 children through to the other side.

2 As a Director of a 3K/Pre-K program, who has
3 children, over half of my students with special needs
4 are not receiving mandated services. I've had to
5 train my teaching staff in ABA services and other
6 things just to support children, because there's just
7 not enough funding. So, if we lose the few providers
8 we have, it is going to be more-- a bigger tremendous
9 struggle for our programs to survive with a lack of
10 resources and support for children with special
11 needs.

12 I implore you to push that those services remain,
13 because so many two- and three- and four-year-olds
14 need the services.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
16 testimony. Dawn?

17 MS. YUSTER: Hi, my name is Dawn Yuster, and I'm
18 a Staff Attorney on the Education Advocacy Project at
19 the Legal Aid Society. Thank you so much, Chair
20 Joseph, and the education committee for the
21 opportunity to speak today.

22 Legal Aid Society represents tens of thousands of
23 students in New York City Public Schools including
24 30,000 who are clients in our-- who are court-
25 involved, who-- because of Child Protective or

2 Juvenile Court matters, who are living in poverty,
3 who are black, brown and students with disabilities.

4 I'm going to focus my testimony on the critical
5 need for continued funding in the fiscal year 25
6 budget for mental health supports and the Mental
7 Health Continuum in our public schools.

8 New York faces an enduring youth mental health
9 crisis that predated and was exacerbated by the COVID
10 19 pandemic. The number of children and youth
11 struggling with severe mental health needs has risen
12 sharply, while wait times before accessing treatment
13 have remained lengthy, taking weeks, months, or even
14 a year or more. The consequences of untreated mental
15 health challenges in children and adolescents are
16 long term and profound. They correlate with poor
17 academic achievement, teenage pregnancy, unstable
18 employment, substance use, behavioral challenges, and
19 poor medical outcomes. As one of the most
20 devastating consequences of untreated mental health
21 conditions, suicide is the second leading cause of
22 death in youth between 10 and 24 years old, and
23 multiple medical associations, The Center for Disease
24 Control and Prevention, the US Surgeon General have

2 raised the alarm about what is been happening in
3 terms of these dire situations.

4 And the consequences are disproportionately dire
5 for our clients at the Legal Aid Society who are low
6 income, and predominantly come from underserved
7 communities. We frequently see children and youth
8 who are unable to get help and treatment until there
9 is a significant crisis that places them or their
10 families in the city's court system, an expensive and
11 often traumatizing system that is ill-equipped to
12 address the mental health needs of our children. Our
13 young people end up receiving care in emergency
14 rooms, hospitals, foster care, and juvenile justice
15 facilities, rather than through delivery of continual
16 high-quality outpatient mental health services needed
17 to be and remain healthy.

18 Far too many of our schools are inadequately
19 resourced and unnecessarily routing our children
20 experiencing mental health crisis to emergency
21 services, suspending students from school, and
22 invoking law enforcement on student behavior.

23 But there are promising school-based solutions to
24 address the mental health crises that we have seen.

25 [BELL RINGS]

2 Schools can play a pivotal role in connecting
3 young people with mental health challenges with the
4 services they urgently need, and studies have shown
5 that children and youth are much more likely to
6 receive the behavioral and mental health support when
7 these services are accessible in school.

8 We know what works. There have been proposed
9 investments on the state and the city level.
10 However, many schools need a continuum of school-
11 based behavioral and mental health services ranging
12 from school wide prevention to individualized
13 intervention and expedited services by clinically
14 trained mental health workers for students with more
15 significant needs.

16 The city is launching such a model right now
17 called the Mental Health Continuum in 50 high-need
18 schools. It's reaching more than 21,000 students in
19 3K to 12th grade in the South Bronx and Central
20 Brooklyn. And it is an innovative model, the first
21 ever cross agency partnership between the New York
22 City Public Schools, the New York City
23 Health+Hospitals, and the New York City Department of
24 Health and Mental Hygiene to help students struggling
25

2 with mental health challenges receive expanded
3 appropriate and timely care.

4 This initiative has been recommended by over 200
5 organizations to the City Council. We so appreciate
6 you, and the City Comptroller, and it's also been
7 highlighted in The Mayor's mental health plan, the
8 Council's Mental Health Roadmap and New York City
9 Speaks action plan. However, funding has not been
10 put in the Preliminary Budget. So, we call on the
11 City Council yet again, we love you, and The Mayor to
12 renew and baseline \$5 million in the fiscal year 25
13 budget to continue the wonderful work of this Mental
14 Health Continuum for students in schools. There is
15 more detail in our written testimony.

16 Thank you so much for letting me go over.
17 You're-- You're really a saint to be here this late
18 and continue going with such passion.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
20 Melinda?

21 MS. ANDRA: Hi, my name is Melinda Andhra. I'm
22 the Director of the Education Advocacy Project at the
23 Legal Aid Society. I'm also a representative of the
24 Education Law Task Force on the Citywide Council for
25 Special Education. I also want to thank the

2 Committee for being here so late, and for allowing us
3 the opportunity to testify.

4 As my colleague Dawn pointed out, the vast
5 majority of Legal Aid clients, who are approximately
6 200,000 each year, are people who are low income and
7 living in poverty. And education is the single
8 factor that has the greatest potential for lifting
9 entire families out of that trap. We are therefore
10 very concerned about the consequences of decreased
11 funding for the Department of Education. Of all the
12 things that are to be cut in the city education
13 should be the last thing to be cut.

14 As Councilmember Krishnan pointed out earlier,
15 the cuts that are proposed harm working families and
16 low-income families the most. So, while we believe
17 there should be no cuts to public education, I do
18 want to focus on a couple of areas, the first being
19 Early Childhood Education.

20 We all know the value of Early Childhood
21 Education and school readiness and the lasting effect
22 that that has on young people success. As the child
23 of an immigrant I know personally that the reason
24 that I am not living in the circumstances that many
25 of my clients have to live in, is because I received

2 an education which then led me to become a teacher
3 and then a lawyer.

4 The average cost per family for a private
5 preschool education program in New York City is
6 \$19,000 per year. Without city support, these
7 services are out of reach for low-income families and
8 their children, and that exacerbates the educational
9 gaps between poor and wealthy in the city.

10 In addition, it prevents many low-income families
11 from being able to work because they cannot afford
12 that on lower salaries. A substantial investment in
13 Early Childhood Education more than pays for itself
14 in the long run in terms of student success and
15 families being able to support themselves rather than
16 rely on public assistance.

17 We heard so many young people today speaking
18 about the importance that community has on them, and
19 that those schools can have on them. We've heard
20 them say over and over again that police do not make
21 them feel safe in their schools, suspensions do not
22 make them feel safe in their schools. Nevertheless,
23 our schools regularly use punitive and exclusionary
24 school discipline against our clients.

2 The New York public school system currently
3 employs about 20 Restorative Justice coordinators to
4 serve 1800 schools, and these positions were funded
5 with federal COVID relief funds, which will end in
6 June.

7 [BELL RINGS]

8 If instead of hiring 492 police officers, we
9 hired 492 Restorative Justice coordinators, every
10 high school in the city could have a full time
11 Restorative Justice coordinator to assist our
12 students to learn positive social interactive actions
13 and learn to have better communities.

14 The last thing I want to talk about is literacy
15 and dyslexia programs. Literally every day, we meet
16 young people 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 years old, who are
17 reading on first and second grade reading levels.
18 Those young people are forever locked in to cycles of
19 poverty. They will never be able to access higher
20 education. They will never be able to fill out a job
21 application. They will not be able to access
22 vocational programs.

23 We all heard Chancellor Banks speak earlier today
24 about NYC Reads, and the need for kids to have a
25 bright start, and we applaud those efforts. Now is

2 not the time to roll them back. And in fact, this is
3 the time we need to expand those efforts, because all
4 of the attention right now is going to young children
5 who need it, right? But I see these young people
6 every single day that are being thrown away by our
7 school system, who has decided that "You can't learn
8 to read at 14 years old, so, why bother trying to
9 teach you?"

10 And so we implore The Mayor and city council not
11 to forget about those young people who are older than
12 seven, and to expand literacy programs. Not only to
13 support the literacy programs we have, but expand
14 them so that all young people in our city can have an
15 opportunity for the future. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
17 Nancy?

18 MS. BEDARD: Good evening, Chair Joseph, City
19 Council, and everyone here tonight. My name is Nancy
20 Bedard, and I'm an attorney at Legal Services of New
21 York City, and Legal Services New York City's mission
22 is to fight poverty and seek racial, social, and
23 economic justice for low-income New York residents
24 through litigation advocacy.

2 We are deeply appreciative to the City Council
3 for many years of support. The Education Rights
4 Project assists New York City students and families
5 to access education throughout the five boroughs.

6 As an advocate representing children in New York
7 City, we see and hear about the positive impact on
8 the clients, the students, and the families. When
9 there's meaningful funding-- meaningful funding for
10 literacy supports, Restorative Justice programs,
11 healing-centered schools, and art and sports
12 programs.

13 We also hear and see the adverse impact of school
14 police and policing infrastructure on the community
15 we represent.

16 As the students said earlier today, New York City
17 Department of Education spends over \$400 million on
18 school policing. Police target and arrest black
19 people and children of color at higher rates than
20 non-black and brown individuals. The DOES could save
21 up to \$90 million in one fiscal year by not hiring
22 any additional school police, and pay for the
23 expansion of literacy programs, school-based
24 Restorative Justice, social emotional supports that
25 include the arts and sports.

2 Moving money away from school policing, including
3 ceasing NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of
4 social-- of school police, and funding for
5 surveillance technology. The DOE could have well-
6 resourced schools that support students to thrive and
7 pursue their dreams academically and go on to higher
8 education, and pursue their dreams and passions
9 through careers in visual arts, fashion, design,
10 literature, music, dance, theater, sports.

11 Students face harsh punishment for minor
12 misbehaviors. This happens disproportionately to
13 students of color. The students themselves talked
14 about that today. Also for students with
15 disabilities and economically demand disadvantaged
16 students. In 2022, 90% of students arrested across
17 New York City Public Schools were black or Hispanic.

18 Students of color should not be subjected to
19 racial policing and police intimidation while
20 attending schools. The students spoke very well,
21 unfortunately, of the experiences in which they were
22 intimidated and subjected to racist policing.

23 [BELL RINGS]

24 City council, we're asking if you could protect
25 critical programs currently funded by the money from

2 federal COVID relief funds to include Restorative
3 Justice, mental health, to support and hire
4 counselors, social workers, mental health
5 professionals, and provide arts education and sports
6 instruction and equipment.

7 Having these supports make students more likely
8 to attend and enjoy school. And these funds, instead
9 of divesting them to the police, would actually be
10 direct services to the students.

11 The DOE budget could support the sports and arts
12 and every student in general and special education.
13 And students would enjoy school and have fewer
14 disciplinary issues when they have an opportunity to
15 learn and engage in arts and sports. Legal Services
16 represent students at suspension hearings as well as
17 many special education hearings. As a former New
18 York City public school students a very long time
19 ago, I remember the DOE invested in music, dance,
20 visual arts, cooking, sewing, ceramics, wood work,
21 not just for a few students in selected and
22 specialized schools, that honestly are predominantly
23 white, but for all students, including the black and
24 brown students in low-income neighborhoods.

2 I grew up in the Bronx near John Philip Sousa
3 middle school, across the street from the New York
4 City public housing, where black and brown low-income
5 students had the opportunity to play in band and
6 orchestra at the local school where my sister
7 attended, where they were provided instruments and
8 music instruction as their core curriculum.

9 Many of these students went on to careers in
10 music, and theater, and higher education. All the
11 students benefited, as music has proven to support
12 self-regulation, cognitive and intellectual
13 development, literacy, and language.

14 In closing, I'd like to say that LSNY represents
15 low-income students and families who want well-
16 resourced schools and provide direct educational
17 services to their children. New York City Council
18 and the DOE have the power to shift limited resources
19 away from school policing and use the funds to be
20 proactive in eliminating illiteracy, supporting
21 students to read on grade level, supporting Special
22 Ed students with dyslexia, and reducing the incidence
23 of mental health crises and disciplinary issues among
24 children using restorative practices, not
25 exclusionary discipline and suspension.

2 Students have fewer mental health issues when
3 they have the opportunity to engage in the arts and
4 sports in healing-centered schools that build school
5 community and build the student's self esteem.

6 Thank you so much for allowing me to testify.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We have one more. Sandra?

9 No Sandra? Okay. Never mind.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. This question is
11 for Good Shepherd. Is it your understanding that
12 SSCs were funded with city funds prior to the
13 stimulus funding? Can you walk us through that?

14 MS. MINGUEZ: Thank you for the question, Chair.
15 Yes, they were funded prior through SAM funds, city
16 tax-levy dollars.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And prior to the rescue--
18 the American rescue dollars coming in. So, it is all
19 fully funded? Do you know if they are wanting to go
20 back to the tax levy funds, or is that something we
21 need to negotiate?

22 MS. MINGUEZ: I think that's something we need to
23 negotiate, along with learning to work, which was
24 city tax levy dollars as well.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, learning-- transfer
3 school and Learning To Work stimulus funds covered
4 70% of the program. What is your understanding of
5 what would be left of the program if that funding was
6 not restored?

7 MS. FORSYTH: I mean, there would be like, there
8 would be \$13 million left of the \$40 million, but we
9 don't know how that would be decided, if the stimulus
10 dollars aren't replaced.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students do you
12 serve?

13 MS. FORSYTH: I think 16,000 across the city in
14 transfer schools and YABCs. I might have that number
15 a little bit wrong. Somewhere around there.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: For Legal Aid: Mental
17 Health Continuum, as you mentioned, as funded is not
18 included in the budget. Do you expect your caseload
19 to increase as a result? What do you expect the
20 impact to be on students?

21 MS. YUSTER: Well, right now, the Mental Health
22 Continuum is really getting off the ground. And what
23 we are seeing is unbelievable, I have to say. I
24 mean, both in the schools, we-- there-- very
25 recently, they were literally 60 expedited referrals

2 within about a month. And they're seeing the numbers
3 grow each month.

4 So-- And we have schools that are getting
5 clinics, satellite clinics that are-- are being
6 approved, at 13 clinics right now. And we have
7 dedicated clinicians in five different child and
8 adolescent mental health clinics in the South Bronx
9 and in Central Brooklyn.

10 So, we would essentially be firing clinicians, we
11 would be telling students who have now been coming to
12 rely on licensed clinical social workers and
13 psychiatrists, some of them. You'd have to stop the
14 care. And we are also-- We have 50 schools, where
15 we're telling the school staff, and we're training
16 the school staff in collaborative problem solving,
17 which is an amazing approach, which really teaches
18 school staff how to engage with students differently,
19 so that they know how to be able to best support
20 them, and that they literally engage them in a way
21 that helps them manage and solve problems with the
22 students, instead of using a punitive, exclusionary
23 model.

24 So, it would be absolutely devastating. I--
25 Without a doubt if we were not to fund this in the

2 future. And yes, we're bold, we're asking for
3 baseline funding, because the three agencies working
4 together-- I have the privilege, and a few other
5 advocates, including our friends and colleagues at
6 LSNY to be at the table every other week, with the
7 three agencies, and they are extraordinary. I mean,
8 the-- I can't even say enough about the way that
9 they're working together to make things happen at
10 every level. I am just unbelievably impressed with
11 how-- the implementation, the way this has been
12 rolling out. It's been a labor of love for people at
13 these agencies. And it's been an-- it's a Herculean
14 effort. And to have this rolling out, frankly,
15 within a couple of years, some of them were really
16 impressed, because they were saying it would take a
17 lot longer.

18 So, we've really pushed the envelope. And you
19 know, we just are really hoping for-- I mean, we
20 would really be hurting: Hurting schools, hurting
21 students, hurting school staff.

22 I just really can't imagine if the funding
23 doesn't go through. It would be really be
24 devastating.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for that. Um,
3 legal services, can you highlight the difference in
4 your work with students that go to schools with
5 Restorative Justice programming, compared to those
6 that doesn't?

7 MS. BEDARD: Yes, students who do not go to
8 schools with Restorative Justice programs,
9 unfortunately, are the students most likely to come
10 to our office, who need our representation for
11 suspension. And when we do go to the suspension
12 hearings, we always bring it up and-- and try to get
13 the, you know, the suspension hearing to understand
14 the hearing officer, that these students were not
15 given any opportunity for Restorative Justice. And
16 in all honesty, it's just always ignored, and-- and
17 the students are told that they cannot attend school,
18 which we know-- you know, punishing a student by
19 telling them that they are not allowed to learn as a
20 way to improve their behavior is horrifying.

21 And I have to honestly say we lose most of the
22 suspension hearings. But you know what? We know
23 that when we show up at a suspension of a student,
24 that we know that they're heard and seen, and that
25 they are not wrong, and they are not bad for what

2 they're doing. That is child's behavior that needs
3 to be taught, so that they could be, you know, adults
4 who understand the difference.

5 And many times, you know, the charges are
6 honestly exaggerated. I'm sorry. I mean, it's just
7 reality and-- or there's bullying involved. And
8 these are things that we aren't really allowed to
9 bring up at suspension hearings.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many students see
11 usually represent that are criminally justice
12 involved, and how many of them are in foster care?

13 MS. ANDRA: Sure. So of our clients, about one
14 quarter are involved in the juvenile legal system.
15 And the others are involved in the child welfare
16 system. But we see many of the same issues.

17 And frankly, my project started working with
18 children in foster care. And what happened is, we
19 saw that over time, though, that eight-year-old who
20 didn't get what they needed in the eighth grade-- I'm
21 sorry, in the third grade, they got to the eighth
22 grade and they're getting arrested. Because those
23 same children that are not-- if they're not getting
24 what they need when they're young, then when they
25 become teenagers, their behavior-- you know, they've

2 become disengaged in school, for many of them. They
3 may then act out, and they're not getting the social
4 and emotional training that they need in how to
5 resolve conflict. And that's leading to so many
6 problems in our city. The over-policing of our youth
7 is a huge issue. And I always tell the story: The
8 first delinquency case I ever did was a graffiti
9 case. And when I was a student, right, many, many
10 years ago, but-- you would have gotten detention.
11 You would have been forced to scrub the wall at the
12 school. But you would not have been arrested. You
13 would not have been arrested in front of your peers.
14 You would not have been hauled in front of a judge.

15 And so many of our young people are either
16 emotionally overwhelmed, highlighting the need for
17 mental health services in our schools, and then when
18 they crack, we're ready to punish them and to impose
19 penalties that have lifelong consequences.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We put cuffs on them. Yes.
21 Thank you all. You've got a lot of work to keep
22 doing. Thank you so much.

23 MS. MCCABE THOMPSON: We have a lot of gang
24 activities in our schools.

25 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Right.

2 MS. MCCABE THOMPSON: As for, LTW providers, like
3 Mission. We are often the only-- the only school
4 social worker in the school is us.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for that. Thank
6 you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to everybody on the
8 panel. Our next panel: Kesie Gordan, Mae Lee, Molly
9 Senack, Dennis De Guzman Caindec, Lauren Melodia,
10 Natasha Quiroga. Please make your way to the front
11 table.

12 Kesie, you may begin your testimony. Mae-- Left?
13 Molly?

14 MS. SENACK: Hi, good evening. Thank you so much
15 for still being with us. My name is Molly Senack,
16 and I am testifying today on behalf of Center for
17 Independence of the Disabled New York as their
18 Education and Employment Community Organizer.

19 New York City is currently experiencing an
20 education crisis that disproportionately affects
21 students with disabilities. Between the expiring of
22 \$7 billion dollars in COVID stimulus funds, \$1
23 billion of which per year has been used to fund non-
24 temporary, non-COVID-related issues, and the proposed
25 budget which involves \$700 million in cuts so far,

2 new York City students with disabilities are going to
3 be forced to navigate a school system that is
4 actively reducing support for (as we all know at this
5 point) preschool special education, dyslexia and
6 literacy initiatives, learning to work programs,
7 Restorative Justice, school social workers, school
8 nurses, school psychologists, coordinators working in
9 homeless shelters, and bilingual staff, at a time
10 when enrollment is up for almost all of the
11 populations that those programs most impact.

12 Meanwhile, a backlog in the IEP programs has cost
13 the city over \$25 million in audits alone. And I
14 know that you know how much Carter Cases cost. Every
15 year we keep hearing that we are have spending over a
16 billion dollars in Carter cases. If we do not start
17 investing more money in (as you said) things that
18 will prevent the need for Carter cases, things like
19 literacy initiatives, and mental health services, and
20 recruitment and retainment incentives for special
21 education teachers, we are going to keep spending
22 money on treatment that could be spent on providing
23 supports in the first place.

24 Meanwhile, a vast majority of New York City
25 schools also remain physically inaccessible for

2 students with disabilities. According to a report
3 published by Advocates For Children, less than one
4 third of the public schools in New York City are
5 considered fully accessible. That means that roughly
6 69% of New York City Public Schools are exclusionary
7 to students with certain disabilities, who are then
8 as a consequence severely limited in their school
9 choice and can be denied access to programs that are
10 not offered in the schools they are able to attend.

11 Meanwhile, that is happening at a time when class
12 size mandates make it imperative that every classroom
13 is available.

14 This lack of accessibility does not just impact
15 students. It also impacts their families. If their
16 family members are disabled and cannot participate in
17 their student's education. It also impacts the
18 teachers who can staff those schools, at a time when
19 staffing shortages are essentially running rampant.

20 [BELL RINGS]

21 The proposed Capital Plan allocates \$800 million
22 to address this issue. We know that it will take
23 \$1.25 billion just to make 50% of schools fully
24 accessible by 2030.

2 There is need for action. It does not involve
3 budget cuts. It involves addressing all three of
4 these converging problems. Thank you for your time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Dennis?

6 MR. DE GUZMAN CAINDEC: Good evening, Chair
7 Joseph and esteemed members of The Council. My name
8 is Dr. Dennis De Guzman Caindec, and I'm here to
9 share my testimony to highlight the importance of
10 providing the continued support for multilingual
11 immigrant learners and the educators who teach them.

12 I stand before you as a proud first-generation
13 immigrant from the Philippines who came to this
14 country during my middle school years. And since
15 then, I've earned a high school diploma, a
16 bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees from
17 prestigious public research universities.

18 It took one generation in my family to witness a
19 first-generation child achieved the promise of a
20 quality public education and reach the pinnacle of
21 academia. Just imagine the possibilities.

22 Through my body of work as a classroom teacher,
23 program administrators, school district leader,
24 education researcher, and now as Director of School
25 support for the Internationals Network, I've always

2 found that my work at the intersection of education
3 and immigration, and providing attention to this
4 nexus, is most important.

5 Now as supports for multilingual learners and our
6 most vulnerable students within our schools citywide
7 must be prioritized in the New York City budget.

8 Internationals Network is a national educational
9 support and school design nonprofit organization
10 whose mission is to transform education for immigrant
11 and multilingual learners by partnering with school
12 districts to better serve them. And it remains the
13 only school development and support organization
14 specifically addressing the educational needs of
15 multilingual immigrant and refugee population.

16 In addition to supporting over 900 educators, the
17 work of 15 International High Schools serves over
18 6000 students in New York City alone.

19 Now more than ever recently arrived, immigrant
20 communities need our support. There have been over
21 120,000 newly arrived immigrants adding almost 30,000
22 students to our schools with 22,000 students overall
23 in shelters and growing. Many of our recently
24 arrived students are being served beyond the network
25 of international schools. However, many schools that

2 do receive newcomer adolescent students have
3 expressed a lack of support, knowledge, and/or
4 experience in working with new arrivals in their
5 classroom.

6 To address this need for support across schools
7 Internationals Network has stepped up to the
8 challenge and broaden our support to schools outside
9 our network core, serving an influx of recently
10 arrived multilingual learners. With some substantive
11 philanthropic support coupled with public school
12 contributions, our network created a community of
13 practice among 10 of these schools in New York City
14 entitled Project Soaring. Project Soaring is a
15 whole-school, multi-pronged approach to supporting
16 school district leaders, principals, coaches,
17 teachers, and even social workers and guidance
18 counselors. The project's goal is to prepare New
19 York City school leaders and their school staff
20 serving a surge of recently arrived multilingual
21 learners to enroll, welcome, and learn to build on
22 students' and schools' assets, to provide academic
23 and social emotional services to recently arrived
24 multilingual learners, students, and families.

25 [BELL RINGS]

2 The ultimate goal is to ensure that these
3 students and families can thrive in this city.
4 Here's what some of them had to say: "This program
5 made me feel more optimistic about staying in
6 education as a career. I was planning to leave
7 before this and now I am not." End quote. Another
8 quote: "I used to think PD was dull, but this was
9 really exciting." End quote. Another quote: "I
10 used to think I had no idea how to support English
11 learners, and this PD has reaffirmed my practices and
12 has shown me new ones. When we saw the Socratic
13 seminar last time, which I do, I never would have
14 done that for multilingual learners. But now I can
15 see can work for them as well." Another quote: "I
16 used to think it was overwhelming. Now I have a new
17 mindset after these PDs and I'm excited to look
18 forward to making these strategies and simple
19 strategies can be effective."

20 So, we've raised money for this support for 10
21 schools and we ask that you support this as well.
22 So, we need your support in creating and building the
23 second cohort of Project Soaring it is a cost-
24 effective, proven approach to effectively help
25

2 schools meet the needs of their students and
3 families.

4 Thank you for your time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Lauren?

6 MS. QUIROGA: Good evening, and thank you, Chair
7 Joseph for the opportunity to testify tonight. My
8 name is Natasha Quiroga. I'm Director of Education
9 Policy at Inside Schools, at the New School Center
10 for New York City Affairs. For 20 years Inside
11 Schools has served as a vital resource for millions
12 of families throughout their children's public school
13 education, serving as the one-stop shop where
14 families can better understand New York City Public
15 Schools.

16 And I want to highlight the need for 3K Programs
17 this evening, especially amongst the families served
18 by Inside Schools who struggled to find childcare or
19 Early Childhood opportunities.

20 Our video explaining early childhood options has
21 been viewed over 1300 times and it's one of our top
22 videos. 16% of questions that families ask us
23 through our platforms are about 3K. 17% of newly
24 arrived migrant children whose parents attended our
25

2 workshops in shelters are three years old, and 12%
3 are younger than three.

4 Most families either had no idea 3K existed, they
5 didn't know that their children born in 2021 had to
6 apply for a 3K spot, or where to find 3K options. We
7 help families apply for 3K and get on waitlists,
8 since there were limited available slots.

9 One child was placed in the closest available 3K
10 slot leading to her mother waking her up two hours
11 early for the 40-minute subway ride to get there by
12 8am. Another father resorted to walking around his
13 neighborhood looking for 3K Programs and waiting
14 hours before someone could show him how to sign up
15 for their program.

16 Families are desperate for 3K and several mothers
17 have lost their jobs or employment offers because
18 they couldn't afford child care or find a 3K program.

19 We ask that the City Council ensure that there is
20 sufficient funding and education budget to fully
21 restore funding to 3K and pre-K programs, invest in
22 outreach and enrollment to families especially to
23 limited English proficient and digitally disconnected
24 families through funding organizations with this
25 expertise to support those efforts, and expand the

2 Promise NYC childcare voucher program to at least \$20
3 million to continue providing childcare to the
4 youngest immigrant children who are not eligible for
5 other forms of childcare vouchers.

6 As confirmed by my colleague and city budget
7 expert George Sweeting, the city has enough tax
8 revenue to avoid the planned \$170 million 3K cuts.
9 The city's fiscal condition has improved thanks to
10 higher-than-expected tax revenue, lower-than-
11 anticipated migrant costs, and a temporary hiring
12 freeze.

13 Research shows, and you know, that Early
14 Childhood programs positively impact a child's
15 development and academic performance. The stories
16 that I shared are just a snapshot of the many New
17 York City families who are in need of these programs
18 and will not have access to these positive impacts if
19 there are cuts to 3K. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Natasha?

21 MS. MELODIA: Hi. Thank you so much for sticking
22 with us. My name is Lauren Melodia and I'm an
23 economist at the New School's Center for New York
24 City Affairs.

2 We've already heard a lot today about the
3 importance of the 3K Program to New York City
4 families, and those testimonies point to a lack of
5 information, not lack of demand for underutilized
6 seats.

7 So, I wanted to focus my testimony on the
8 funding. Natasha already mentioned that our
9 colleague George Sweeting, formerly of the
10 Independent Budget Office is confident that the city
11 has enough tax revenue to avoid the planned \$170
12 million 3K cuts included in the Preliminary Budget.

13 OMB's forecast for the city's fiscal outlook has
14 improved since last November, thanks to higher-than-
15 expected tax revenue, lower-than-anticipated migrant
16 costs, and previously imposed budget cuts. Most
17 fiscal monitors point to even stronger revenue than
18 OMB has projected for FY 25 and beyond.

19 Only \$92 million of the \$170 million cut was
20 covered by federal funds in FY 24. And so keeping 3K
21 running at current levels will only require filling
22 that funding gap which the city can reallocate from
23 elsewhere in the budget, or take revenue actions to
24 raise that amount if necessary.

2 It's also time for the City to move away from
3 talking about budget cuts necessitated by federal
4 funds expiring and back to planning and funding
5 universal early care and education. There are gaps
6 with the existing program that require additional
7 funding, such as early care, educators' wages, and
8 benefits.

9 My research at the Center shows that the median
10 family childcare provider in New York City made
11 \$10.61 per hour. That's \$4 less than the minimum
12 wage in 2021. Some of these providers have DOE
13 contracts to provide 3K Programming. Also, a recent
14 audit by Comptroller Landers pointed to continued pay
15 disparities between center-bases and DOE pre-K
16 teachers, despite the 2019 agreement. We already
17 heard about the ongoing contract negotiations that
18 need to be funded.

19 These examples demonstrate that the city should
20 anticipate permanently investing more in early care
21 and education. Former Mayor de Blasio initially
22 proposed funding pre-K with a city income tax
23 increase, and City Comptroller Lander has suggested
24 raising taxes on high income residents, which our
25

2 center of supports in the face of major fiscal
3 shortfalls.

4 The city's income tax is currently not very
5 progressive, with the top bracket beginning at
6 \$90,000. For a married couple, the city could add
7 two new high income tax brackets for earners of \$1
8 million to \$5 million, and \$5 million and above with
9 rates of 4.2% and 4.4% respectively. This would
10 raise \$1 billion in new revenue.

11 [BELL RINGS]

12 We know that the nation is facing a child care
13 affordability crisis. Parents can't afford child
14 care, early care and education workers can't afford
15 to work in the industry. The city has been a leader
16 in early care and education across the nation, and we
17 need to continue that by making sure that there
18 aren't any more cuts to this program. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much. Center
20 for Independence of Disabled: SCA testified that not
21 every child-- not every school will reach ADA
22 compliance without being completely rebuilt. Do you
23 agree? If not, do you have any recommendations for
24 SCA on how to make this-- make those schools
25 compliant?

2 MS. SENACK: Well, I think first of all, when we
3 talk about full accessibility, we're not even talking
4 about the ADA. We're talking about BAP and building
5 accessibility policy. I lost the word. It's been a
6 long day. But we're not talking about ADA
7 compliance.

8 And so, I think that as we go forward with making
9 sure these buildings are fully accessible, we take
10 this opportunity to examine what full accessibility
11 actually means. Because we tend to think of it in
12 terms of physical accessibility. We tend to think of
13 it in terms of staircases. We tend to think of it in
14 terms of ramps and the width of doorways.

15 But when we actually also need to be thinking
16 about it in terms of: What's the noise pollution in
17 this area like? Can students who have learning
18 disabilities, and who are neurodivergent: Are they
19 going to be profoundly affected by the presence of
20 construction, or a subway or things like that. We
21 need to be thinking about it in terms of cleanliness.
22 We need to be thinking of it in terms of: are there
23 places where children who maybe need a little bit
24 more, like, supervision can run and hide, because
25 they like to wander? Is there outdoor space where

2 they can run around and play and be physical,
3 regardless of what their disability is.

4 And, so I think that, as we talk about whether
5 these buildings are ADA compliant, I think we first
6 of all have to acknowledge that we are not talking
7 about them being fully ADA compliant right now. And
8 I think that we also need to look at that as a
9 potential opportunity, and to expand our definition
10 of what true accessibility is, especially when it
11 comes to students who are dealing with, like--
12 they're dealing with enough being boxed in. We can't
13 box them into just saying essentially "pick a
14 disability", which I have heard unfortunately, some
15 students have been essentially told to do, as they
16 seek help.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. International
18 Schools: What's your assessment of New York City's
19 public schools current multilingual services program?
20 What would improve those services and those programs?
21 What would you do to improve those programs?

22 MS. SENACK: Thank you for the question.

23 And I would say a lot more supports regarding,
24 you know, direct service to, to students as well as
25 really developing the capacity of the school staff.

2 So, whether it's the principal, or it's the
3 teachers, the support staff, even the
4 superintendents: Really providing them the tools and
5 understanding and all the skill sets you need in
6 order to actually provide holistic supports for newly
7 arrived immigrants students. I think it's really
8 important to think of it that way.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : Thank you, um, New School
10 Center, what outreach do you find most effective and
11 making sure parents know where 3K seats are? What--
12 What did you find that worked for you?

13 MS. MELODIA: It's that direct engagements. You
14 know, we went into some of the shelters with no
15 service providers, the DHS shelters with no service
16 providers. So they had nobody really to ask any
17 questions. And so, we were able to, you know,
18 broadcast and provide our flyers, and advertise that
19 we were helping people apply to the 3K Program, which
20 was helpful. And we found, actually, that a few
21 families had been helped by either the shelter-based
22 coordinator, or by the school where their older child
23 attended. But they still had questions, right? And
24 they didn't realize what they were signing up for.

2 They didn't realize the differences between the types
3 of 3K Programs, the hours of the program as well.

4 So, it's really that one-to-one engagement, being
5 where the families are. We've been also going to
6 resource fairs and different locations where a lot of
7 the families are receiving food or clothing to be
8 able to provide the services and to reach the
9 families.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you all.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to all our
12 panelists. Our next panel: Dr. Jennifer Cadenhead,
13 Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum, Safiya Raheem, Turner
14 Johnson, Janani Venkataraman, Anthony Spino, Allison
15 Marino, David Bartolomi, Lauren Puzelakis, Jonathan
16 Saturay. Please make your way to the front table,
17 and apologies for any mispronunciations.

18 Jennifer, you may begin your testimony.

19 DR. CADENHEAD: Chair Joseph, members of the City
20 Council, and especially those on the Education
21 Committee and your dedicated staff: First and
22 foremost, I want to thank you for your clearly
23 tireless and thoughtful dedication to the well-being
24 and future of New York City's children.

2 It's with a sense of urgency and hope that I
3 stand before you today representing the voices of
4 countless educators, women, black, and small business
5 owners and community members, including the 300 plus
6 food nutrition organizations, interested individuals
7 of the Food Ed Hub Coalition, and all of them are
8 really invested in the health and prosperity of our
9 youth.

10 I'm Dr. Jen Cadenhead. I'm an Assistant Research
11 Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University.
12 You know me. And I'm joined here with my colleague
13 from the Tisch Food Center, and a number of my
14 colleagues who are teaching food and nutrition
15 education in the schools and our part of the Food Ed
16 Hub.

17 I bear witness to the pressing needs for
18 comprehensive food and nutrition education in our
19 city. As Speaker Adams mentioned in her State of the
20 City address, even our children know that the issue
21 of childhood obesity is only a symptom of our broken
22 food and health system that we're living in today,
23 and it should not be the primary focus. We recognize
24 the critical importance of fostering overall health
25 and mental well-being among our children through

2 culturally inclusive food, nutrition, education and
3 support. Children in New York City get little to no
4 food and nutrition education, and that which is
5 provided is outdated and culture not culturally
6 inclusive at all, at least that coming from the
7 schools.

8 And to that end, I'm here to advocate for three
9 things under the expense discretionary and capital
10 funding budgets.

11 From the expense budget, I urge New York City
12 Public Schools to provide adequate funding for the
13 Office of Food and Nutrition Services, \$60 million
14 for the full restoration of the food items \$3 million
15 for 60 additional food managers, and \$1.5 million
16 towards good from purchasing for fiscal year 25, and
17 for New York City Public Schools to continue the
18 pilot program for food and nutrition education in New
19 York City. That's \$2 million in fiscal year 25.

20 For the discretionary budget, I urge The Council
21 to renew the Food Ed Hub funding through the support
22 for Educator Initiative for \$375,000, and from the
23 capital funding budget (which the children talked
24 about) I urge The Council to expand the cafeteria
25

2 enhancement experience on \$150 million over five
3 years.

4 As the children testified, they respond to
5 respectful and appropriate interactions. And this
6 includes experiences with food. As you've seen
7 firsthand, with more than one of our providers, it's
8 essential to understand that healthy eating isn't
9 just about eating more salads. Rather, it means
10 providing children with a diversity of array of
11 options, to ones like our partners here strive to
12 expose children, including offerings for children
13 with special needs, like differing food textures.

14 [BELL RINGS]

15 Far too many our children are consuming an excess
16 of unhealthy junk food and it's perpetuating poor
17 dietary habits. And these healthy options can be
18 challenging for New York City families who may be
19 combating homelessness, or struggling just to pay the
20 rent, or get the basics on the table. And
21 heartbreakingly, I've encountered children who
22 express shame regarding their cultural food, shame
23 over body size, a sentiment that speaks to a deeper
24 need for self acceptance and empowerment.

2 We have the opportunity to guide them towards
3 embracing themselves and their cultural heritage to
4 the joy of real food, instilling them in a sense of
5 pride and connection to their roots.

6 I could go on but I'll have that in my written
7 testimony and I trust that you'll read it. But I
8 just want to say, thank you for your support. Truly.
9 And it's needed.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Oliver?

11 MR. GONZALEZ-YOAKUM: Good evening, Joseph. I'm
12 Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum. I'm a research associate at
13 the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education and
14 Policy.

15 At the Laurie M. Tisch center, we collaborate
16 with numerous food and nutrition education providers
17 throughout New York City as a part of the Food Ed
18 Coalition. This coalition is comprised of over 300
19 organizations and individuals, and plays a pivotal
20 role in promoting inclusivity, equity, and access to
21 food and nutrition education.

22 This year, the center supported the
23 implementation of nutrition education programs in
24 over 60 schools, benefiting approximately 30,000
25 children through our food and nutrition education

2 partner fair. Partnering with food ed organizations
3 and the DOE, we've conducted four professional
4 development workshops, engaged in more than 350 NYC
5 public school educators.

6 In response to the needs of our Food Ed Hub
7 members, we organized the inaugural food and
8 nutrition education community gathering, bringing
9 together over 30 nutrition education providers, and
10 welcoming nearly 300 community members, including
11 esteemed Councilmembers Rita Joseph and Gale Brewer,
12 for a night of networking, cooking demonstrations and
13 interactive nutrition learning.

14 Our monthly meetings have provided support for
15 our members on diverse topics from navigating city
16 contracts to uplifting the work of school food
17 heroes. Our weekly and monthly digests on food and
18 nutrition education have reached nearly 3000 members
19 of the public, facilitating widespread awareness and
20 engagement on critical issues in our community.

21 Through this work, the Food Ed Hub supports
22 families at a pivotal time in a young person's
23 development. Time and time again, research
24 demonstrates that dietary habits established during
25 childhood translate into adulthood, influencing both

2 long-term health outcomes and the risk of non-
3 communicable diseases.

4 Early food ed ensures that young learners are set
5 up for success within and outside of the classroom,
6 as overall adequate nutrition is closely linked to
7 cognitive development, academic performance, and
8 overall mental wellbeing.

9 Like the students the Speaker mentioned in her
10 State of the City address, we know that this work
11 needs to be culturally aware to suit the diverse
12 needs of NYC students. Food means more than just
13 nutrition and health it's more than just BMI.

14 Last week, I observed a wonderful after-school
15 lesson led by Allergic to Salad during which second
16 graders made their own vegetarian Vietnamese spring
17 rolls and learned about Vietnamese culture. The
18 utter joy in the classroom as these young chefs
19 prepared tasted and chatted about their creations,
20 namely how novel the rice paper felt, was palatable.
21 This lesson exemplifies the vital work championed by
22 our Food Ed Hub providers that we at the Tisch Food
23 Center are graced to facilitate.

24 Last year, funding for the Food Ed Hub was
25 significantly reduced from \$500,000 to \$250,000.

2 This cut has jeopardized our ability to support our
3 schools and educators effectively. Therefore, we
4 urge the city council to partially restore funding
5 for the Food Ed Hub to \$375,000. By doing so we can
6 ensure that our children have access to the education
7 and resources they need to make healthy food choices
8 and lead fulfilling lives.

9 [BELL RINGS]

10 In closing, I implore you to consider the long-
11 term implications of this funding decision.

12 Investing in the Food Ed Hub is not just an
13 investment in education, it's an investment in the
14 health and well-being of our future generations.

15 Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Safiya?

17 MS. RAHEEM: Good evening, I am Safiya Raheem,
18 and I'm the Director of Advocacy and Communications
19 for Harlem Grown. I would like to thank Chair Joseph
20 and the members of the Education Committee for
21 holding today's hearing on the FY 25 Preliminary
22 Budget proposal.

23 Harlem Grown is a nonprofit organization whose
24 mission is to inspire youth to lead healthy and
25 ambitious lives through mentorship and hands-on

2 education and urban farming, sustainability, and
3 nutrition.

4 Since 2011, Harlem Grown has operated local urban
5 farms, through which we provide experiential learning
6 opportunities for youth to understand the food
7 systems process and the impact they have on their
8 health and on their community. We offer in-school,
9 after school, and summer camp programs in addition to
10 community programs and celebrations that amplify
11 health, wellness, nutrition, and sustainability.

12 All fruit and vegetables, eggs, mushrooms and
13 honey our farms produce provide Upper Manhattan
14 residents with access to free healthy and nutritious
15 food. Additionally, we provide cooking
16 demonstrations and workshops to provide families with
17 practical and culturally relevant recipes to help
18 them incorporate fresh produce into their daily
19 meals.

20 As we have heard previously, access to affordable
21 healthy food disproportionately impacts communities
22 of color and low-income communities. In Central
23 Harlem, 25.7% of residents are food insecure compared
24 to the citywide average of 15.4%. Obesity rates in
25 Harlem stand at 34%, compared to 24% citywide.

2 Central Harlem residents are also disproportionately
3 impacted by higher rates of diabetes and
4 hypertension.

5 We are here today because we are concerned about
6 the Mayor's FY 25 Preliminary Budget. The Food Ed
7 Coalition has identified actions the City Council
8 must take to ensure stronger, safer, and healthier
9 communities.

10 The actions we believe the City Council should
11 take are as follows: So, we mentioned adequate
12 funding for school meals. Often meals our children
13 consume in school are the most reliable and healthy
14 sources of food to which they have access. To limit
15 that access is denying our children with their most
16 basic needs. Harlem Grown fully supports the
17 continuation of \$60 million for the OFNS program in
18 the FY 2005 budget.

19 Also renew funding for food and nutrition
20 education in New York City pilot to provide equitable
21 funding for schools. Harlem Grown knows firsthand
22 the transformative power of food and nutrition
23 education. Children who participate in our programs
24 form overall healthier eating habits and share
25 healthy habits with their families. 90% of youth

2 participants report they learned ways to keep
3 themselves healthy, like spending time outdoors,
4 eating fresh and eating fresh foods.

5 [BELL RINGS]

6 85% of their parents and caregivers report that
7 their child talked to them about the things that they
8 learned.

9 I will leave it to the rest of my colleagues to
10 echo the budget proposals that the Food Ed Coalition
11 has put together. And I thank you so much for your
12 time.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
14 Turner?

15 MR. JOHNSON: Good evening, Chair Joseph. Thank
16 you so much for your time tonight. You're a trooper
17 for spending this evening with us. I want to also
18 thank the rest of The Council. My name is Turner
19 Johnson. I'm here as a chef with Wellness In The
20 Schools. We're a nonprofit organization specializing
21 in training public school cafeteria staff on scratch-
22 cooked, plant-based, culturally-relevant recipes.
23 And I want to talk a little bit about the impact of
24 the work today.

2 So, to begin Wellness In The Schools has created
3 a benchmark standard for school cooking, something
4 other countries have perfected, and I believe our
5 impact provides a strong emphasis on foods serving as
6 fuel to not just the body but also the mind and soul.

7 I mean, just think of how fast our little ones
8 get excited at the sight of a yummy snack when
9 hungry. Now to piggyback off this point, I ask:
10 When did adults stop telling kids to eat their
11 veggies? This is not the future of our country. Not
12 to mention and practice these new recipes can in fact
13 be successfully produced when the proper training,
14 staffing, and equipment is available, a plug-and-play
15 model, if you will.

16 However, hoisting unaware and unprepared cooks
17 into the system is plainly unfair. As a chef, I get
18 it. But knowledge is power and you can't fix what
19 you can't understand. The same goes for the
20 children. Without the proper introduction, veggies
21 may remain yucky in their minds and long into
22 adulthood.

23 In the long term, wholesome food can save lives
24 and bridge communities. We must acknowledge our
25 responsibilities as community members to guide our

2 youth to healthy lifestyle choices. A simple "don't
3 forget your salad" could ignite a chain reaction of
4 positive choices in the future. That strawberry
5 cucumber salad just might inspire the next Chef
6 Ramsay, or maybe that student could take their
7 nutrient knowledge home to a chronically-ill
8 relative. A full belly might keep tempers even
9 enough to avoid an altercation. But we can never
10 know if we don't try. Besides, these are New York
11 City kids. You think they don't know good food?

12 In closing, more nutritional education means more
13 focus, more A's, and more grant money. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
15 Janani?

16 MS. VENKATARAMAN: Good evening. Thank you so
17 much, Chairperson Rita Joseph for putting together
18 this hearing, and thank you for the rest of the New
19 York City Council. I'm also a Wellness In The School
20 chef. And for the past seven months, I have been
21 working with various public schools in Bed-Stuy to
22 bring culturally-relevant, scratch-cooked, plant-
23 forward recipes.

24 These recipes were tested and approved by the
25 Office of Food and Nutrition Services but have just

2 disappeared from the menu in light of recent budget
3 cuts. The menu now lacks a much-needed variety and
4 cultural authenticity. School food feels and tastes
5 mechanical. And in 2024 when fast food is very
6 accessible and convenient, it is what people who work
7 long hours are feeding their children. The students
8 I can assure you are getting the fix of pizza from
9 Pizza Hut and Tenders from Popeyes. The result is
10 students turning away cafeteria food as they have
11 begun to call it fast-food wannabes.

12 A second grader in one of the schools that was
13 that had a meltdown a few weeks ago because he wanted
14 the real chicken, but all we had to offer were
15 chicken tenders.

16 The downsized menu is an injustice to the
17 students, as they ought not to go hungry and struggle
18 to focus in class as a result, but also missing a
19 valuable opportunity to move away from the
20 industrialized food system that is known to cause
21 chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes. We
22 must introduce them to a slower food system that many
23 cultures have practiced and continue to do so today.

24 I believe that we as Americans have forgotten how
25 to feed ourselves, and we're allowing big

2 corporations to tell us how to eat. Let us go back
3 to our roots: lentils, greens, potatoes, rice,
4 beans, pasta, yams, and plantains. All of these are
5 inexpensive, nutritious, and versatile foods that I'm
6 sure will be well received by the students in our
7 schools.

8 The well-intentioned vegan Friday's program has
9 been condemned by students and staff alike. And this
10 I believe is due to poor execution and a lack of
11 education on the importance of a plant-based diet.
12 It is good for our bodies but also for our planet and
13 the animals that are suffering in factory farms.

14 Our current vegan menu consists of a bland mix of
15 beans and tomato sauce. And as a vegan who lives off
16 of a tight budget, I can say that the school food
17 department has not put their best foot forward in
18 developing these recipes. And there are many
19 traditionally plant-based foods like falafel or dal
20 that they could incorporate into the menu. And it's
21 worth considering, once the more rudimentary concerns
22 of school food have been met.

23 The health and wellness of our students must not
24 be compromised by a reduction in budget. Let us feed
25 students healthy food and also empower them to

2 recognize that healthy living is easy and accessible,
3 so that their minds are nourished as well. Thank you
4 so much for your time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
6 Anthony?

7 MR. SPINO: Thank you Chair Joseph and the
8 Committee Council for having us here today. My name
9 is Anthony Spino, and I've spent the last eight years
10 working for some of the best vegetarian, vegan, and
11 plant-based chefs in New York. I've learned to make
12 dishes taste great with some of the traditional
13 ingredients that I used to think that we need.

14 Throughout the years I've also worked for
15 organizations that have taught people the power of
16 healthy food, and I've seen people reverse chronic
17 diseases and live healthier lives by changing what
18 was on their fork.

19 Throughout the last few months, I've had the
20 pleasure of going into our cafeterias with Wellness
21 In The Schools to help execute healthy new recipes.
22 Our mission at Wellness In The Schools is to create
23 healthier environments for children to learn, live,
24 and thrive. We do this by providing nourishing food
25 and active play.

2 I wear a chef's jacket that says "Feed Kids Real
3 Food". I think we can all agree that real food is
4 not processed foods like most of the options that
5 have been served in our schools in the past.

6 School food is a crucial part of education.
7 Healthy students are better learners. Nutrition
8 impacts brain development, memory, energy, attention,
9 and focus. We have an opportunity to create healthy
10 eating habits at a young age. The food that we are
11 introducing now consists of dishes that use fresh
12 ingredients that are plant-based and less processed.
13 We make the new recipes and sample them with the
14 kids. The hardest part of my job is getting the kids
15 to taste the new dishes, but once they try them, I
16 have found that a majority of the kids like them.

17 The deal that I make with the kids is they don't
18 have to like the food. I just need their opinion.
19 They enjoy being the judges and also they find out
20 they actually like cauliflower. The kids in the
21 communities that I've worked in are in need of all
22 the help they can get. For many these school meals
23 are their only chance to eat healthy food. School
24 food should always be a critical part of student's
25 education. Thanks again.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
3 Allison?

4 MS. MARINO: Thank you, Chair Joseph, for holding
5 this hearing and to your staff for facilitating our
6 delivery of our testimony. My name is Allison
7 Marino, and I'm the Director of Public Affairs for
8 Edible Schoolyard NYC. At Edible Schoolyard we
9 believe that edible education -- hands on cooking and
10 gardening experiences -- help kids gain the skills to
11 contribute to a healthy and sustainable food system
12 for us all. We teach kids that they can lead the way
13 to community wellbeing and equity.

14 Last school year we reached nearly 4000 students
15 and taught nearly 2200 hands-on cooking and gardening
16 lessons across 16 public schools in upper Manhattan,
17 Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. The 2023-2024
18 school year was a groundbreaking year for food and
19 nutrition education in New York City Public Schools.
20 The universal commitment to food education for all
21 public school students began with 60 initial schools
22 through the Food Education Expansion Program. Edible
23 Schoolyard NYC has partnered directly with three of
24 these schools to provide direct food education
25 services and has worked the New York City Department

2 of Public Schools to train over 300 teachers on
3 incorporating the key components of food and
4 nutrition education into their own classrooms.

5 Were thrilled with this momentum grateful for
6 this opportunity and optimistic that with ongoing
7 support from the City, this initiative will promote
8 healthy relationships with food, school peers and the
9 environment for students across the city in
10 meaningful ways for years to come.

11 The FY 25 city budget represents a unique
12 opportunity to amplify the impact of schools as
13 centers for food education, food access, and social
14 emotional and intellectual nourishment. We urge City
15 Council to prioritize school food by funding by fully
16 restoring the full \$60 million that were cut from the
17 Office of Food and Nutrition Services' FY 24 budget
18 through The Mayor's Program to Eliminate the Gap and
19 by protecting school food funding from future cuts.

20 Nearly 80% of New York City public school
21 children are at risk of food and nutrition
22 insecurity. And we know that school meals help
23 significantly address this issue.

24 Improvements in the cultural relevance of school
25 meals at the beginning of the school year showed a 9%

2 increase in school meal participation. This shows
3 that moving in a more culturally relevant and
4 responsive direction with school meals has
5 significantly encouraged more students to
6 participate. It also means that we need a consistent
7 and reliable investment in school food from our City
8 so that children have access to the healthy foods
9 which reflect their own backgrounds and provide the
10 fuel they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

11 We also request continued funding for the Food
12 Education Expansion Program. We at Edible Schoolyard
13 also know the hands-on food and nutrition education,
14 firsthand indelible impacts that are so positive on
15 students and their school communities. And our own
16 program data shows that nearly 90% of teachers and
17 school staff surveyed agree that students feel more
18 positively about school because of our classes, 96%
19 agree that our programming positively contributes to
20 student's emotional well-being, and 90% said it helps
21 them learn about others' cultures.

22 [BELL RINGS]

23 We also know that speaker Adams lifted up in
24 their State of the City address that students are

2 particularly interested in learning about others
3 cultures through food education.

4 I'm also going to lift up what some of the other
5 panelists said about translation and language support
6 needs. Students who speak other languages find
7 themselves to be doing particularly well in our
8 classes because of the hands-on aspects. It lowers
9 the language barrier. But if we don't have
10 translation and language support services, the
11 classrooms that we do our work in can become
12 dangerous really fast: hot surfaces, sharp objects.
13 So, I'm going to throw my hat in the ring on that
14 support as well. Obviously, there's lots of other
15 recommendations in our written testimony which you
16 have copies of. But thank you so much again, for
17 sticking with us tonight. We really appreciate your
18 support.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
20 David?

21 MR. BARTOLOMI: Am I on? There you go. It's my
22 first time giving testimony. I'm a little nervous.
23 Chair Joseph, I want to thank you for your patience
24 tonight, and you're calm. That's helping me. I'm
25 the Director of Youth Development at Family Cook

2 Productions. We're a nonprofit that supports hands-
3 on nutrition education and skill development in over
4 50 schools across four boroughs. We embed the
5 education by training teachers in the schools so the
6 education can continue without relying on our
7 organization.

8 We have collaborated with the nutrition
9 department at Columbia University's Teachers College
10 and the Tisch Food Center for over 20 years, and are
11 active members of the Food Ed Coalition.

12 Over the last fiscal year, New York City support
13 for nutrition education and healthy school meals has
14 been very encouraging. We urge The Council to
15 continue funding the Food And Nutrition Education in
16 New York City pilot, and provide the full \$2 million
17 in the FY 25 needed to build on the successes over
18 the last year. This funding has allowed our
19 organization to expand our award-winning program
20 Nibble with Willow, a preschool nutrition program,
21 from 3 to 33 classrooms and 10 new schools over the
22 last year. Yet the budget cuts of \$60 million to
23 OFNS directly and negatively impacted this expansion.
24 The food used in our preschool education was designed
25 to be USDA reimbursable, cost neutral, and provided

2 by OFNS. Two weeks before our program was launched,
3 we were told budget cuts to OFNS would make it
4 infeasible for them to provide the food. This
5 severely impacts our program sustainability. We
6 don't even know if there will be food funds to
7 continue next year, despite our having already
8 trained upwards of 65 teachers.

9 Budget cuts like those to OFNS can jeopardize the
10 value of the investment made in the nutrition
11 education effort. Restoring funds to OFNS, and
12 continuing the support for nutrition education can
13 ensure that the aims for a healthier New York City
14 will become a reality. Thank you for your time.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
16 Jessica?

17 State your name and then you can go ahead and
18 testify.

19 MS. BLACK: Hi. My name is Briona. Chair
20 Joseph, it's been a long night. So, thank you for
21 rocking with us, and respected members of the City
22 Council, particularly those serving on the Education
23 Committee, with your dedicated staff. Thank you for
24 serving the children of New York City.

2 My name is Briona Black and I am Executive
3 Director and Lead Educator at the Leap Better
4 Foundation. Our nonprofit has served over 10,000
5 students across New York City schools with programs
6 centered around youth leadership, food and nutrition,
7 and urban greening. Our mission is rooted in the
8 belief that every child deserves access to nutritious
9 food, regardless of their socioeconomic background.
10 Our programming includes providing healthy meals,
11 teaching cooking skills, and promoting overall
12 wellness. We are not just nourishing bodies, but
13 we're also empowering young minds to thrive
14 academically and personally.

15 We are excited to announce our partnership with
16 the Food Ed Coalition in supporting their vital
17 policy initiatives focusing on enhancing education,
18 well-being, and the health of our communities across
19 New York City.

20 These initiatives encompass expense, capital, and
21 discretionary budget requests. I'll be focusing on
22 the expense. We also strongly advocate for The
23 Council to continue funding for the food and
24 nutrition in the New York City Pilot Program of \$2
25 million in the fiscal year of 2025.

2 We're thrilled to witness the first round of food
3 and nutrition education in schools on a district-wide
4 scale, as the pilot project this year reaching 60 out
5 of 1800 schools.

6 Food and nutrition education plays a pivotal
7 role. This knowledge delivered in a culturally
8 relevant manner is transformative. In classrooms
9 where unhealthy food choices like Takis chips and
10 Arizona juices are commonplace for breakfast,
11 integrating food education and nutrition is
12 imperative.

13 Healthy students excel across all facets of
14 academic achievement, academic performance,
15 education, behavior, cognitive skills, and attitudes.

16 Reflecting on my own journey within the same
17 nonprofit I work for, I recall the opportunity to
18 cultivate my own firsthand farm-to-table experience
19 that I wouldn't have otherwise encountered. This
20 firsthand experience underscored a profound impact of
21 nutrition education fostering mindfulness about the
22 origins of food.

23 All schools deserve consistent, adaptable funding
24 to deliver essential food and nutrition programs. We
25 urge the City Council to champion the continuation of

2 this initiative in New York City Public Schools,
3 promoting equitable access across all council
4 districts. Focusing on allocating resources to food
5 and nutrition funding at this juncture will
6 contribute to building a more robust, healthier New
7 York City. Thank you for your attention.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Many of you have shared that
9 food and nutrition education pilots have been
10 effective. What has been the impact of the 60
11 schools with the programming? And do you have an
12 estimate of how much it would cost to expand the
13 program citywide?

14 DR. CADENHEAD: I'll start but I think some of
15 our other providers can continue. So, it's been
16 mixed. They're just actually starting in some
17 schools, because they got matched late in the fall.
18 And then there were contracting issues.

19 So, many organizations are just getting started.
20 I think the ones who have been able to get started
21 have reported beautiful results so far. And we're
22 actually at The Tisch Center, along with The Mayor's
23 office and the New York City Public Schools are going
24 out and visiting each of the schools to see what it
25 looks like on the ground.

2 What was the other part of your question?

3 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : If we expanded citywide,
4 what would the cost be?

5 DR. CADENHEAD: Oh. That, I'd have to get back
6 to you. Right now there are about a million dollars.
7 We're asking for another 60 schools. So, that brings
8 it up to \$2 million.

9 MS. MARINO: I can also add to the cost for so
10 the \$2 million ask is, like Jen said, to keep it in
11 the 60 schools that we've started with this year.
12 So, to sustain what we've started. And then to add
13 another 60 schools-- The office that is running this
14 program only has two staff members: its director and
15 one, like, administrator. I have-- A lot of us have
16 actually spoken with-- We're all working very closely
17 to help, sort of, advise and roll out, you know, work
18 through those contracting issues with that office.
19 That office desperately needs additional staff.

20 So, not only is it sort of, like, a million
21 dollars per 60 schools, sort of, calculation, we also
22 need to add a couple more staff people per 60 schools
23 to that Office of Food and Nutrition Services,
24 because right now, they-- they really don't have the
25 capacity to administer faster matching, quicker

2 paying out, putting together a curriculum, any of
3 those pieces that would make scaling up something
4 that could happen. I think that has a lot more to do
5 with the capacity of that office than anything.

6 DR. CADENHEAD: And-- And if I could just add:
7 right now the city owes The Tisch Food Center
8 \$750,000, which is a drop in the bucket for the city,
9 probably but for us is actually a big deal. But we
10 were-- Because we're under the Teachers College, we
11 were able to provide that funding to our partner
12 organizations in the years that that work was
13 performed. And that is actually part of the reason
14 why the Food Ed Hub Coalition exists, because of this
15 contracting issue.

16 MS. BLACK: Can I also just add, we're in six of
17 the 60 schools, and we're a really small nonprofit.
18 So, this initiative has helped us provide cooking
19 classes. It helped us provide urban greening for the
20 schools. And we're actually building three new
21 gardens at the school. So, it does provide New York
22 City students that farm-to-table experience that I
23 feel like they wouldn't have had otherwise.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: : Thank you all. Thank you
25 for rocking with me too.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to this
3 panel. Our next panel: Logan Vanhoutte, Nora Moran,
4 Debra Sue Lorenzen, Lulu Fogarty, Jada Saltec, Monika
5 Salam, Michelle Kraus. Please make your way to the
6 front table.

7 Logan when you're ready, you may begin your
8 testimony.

9 MISS VANHOUTTE: Hello, my name is Logan. I go
10 to Brooklyn Brownstone School in Bed Stuy. I'm here
11 to talk about Ms. Cooper, our social worker. It
12 might be unusual to have a kid talk, but I know a lot
13 about Ms. Cooper. She really helps our kids. And we
14 need her, because every time they have something
15 hard, she always helps them. She's really nice.
16 She's kind and helpful. And I think we should try to
17 keep at least a couple of social workers, because our
18 kids need them.

19 The social workers solve kids' problems. They
20 help them get through difficult stuff. Social
21 workers help with stress, anger problems with friends
22 or teachers, problems at home, and anything that's on
23 your mind. And that why I think we need Ms. Cooper.
24 If we did not have Miss Cooper, our kids would be
25 sad. They would have a bunch of problems at school.

2 They wouldn't have anyone to help. I encourage you
3 to find some money for school social workers. Thank
4 you, everyone for listening, have a great rest of
5 your night.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you, Logan. What--
7 How old are you?

8 MISS VANHOUTTE: Seven.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're in second grade?

10 MISS VANHOUTTE: Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you love your social
12 worker, right? You want to make sure we keep her
13 there, right?

14 MISS VANHOUTTE: [NODS YES]

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: That will make you happy?

16 MISS VANHOUTTE: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, I hope The Mayor and the
18 Chancellor is listening too, to let them know what
19 your needs are.

20 Seven years old, and she's testifying to keep her
21 social worker. And thank you for being patient, and
22 I apologize. You waited so long to-- to testify.

23 MISS VANHOUTTE: It's okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. She's getting a
25 social worker.

2 I appreciate that. Thank you, Logan.

3 MISS VANHOUTTE: You're welcome.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Let your classmates that
5 know you testified in front of the New York City
6 Council, so you can-- so you can get to keep your
7 social worker at your school.

8 MISS VANHOUTTE: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: I love it.

10 MISS VANHOUTTE: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
12 testimony. Nora? Debra? Lulu?

13 Go ahead.

14 MS. FOGARTY: Hi, everyone. Hello, and thank you
15 Chair Joseph, and to the rest of you and City Council
16 for your support of Arts Education. I'm Lulu
17 Fogarty. I'm a New York City public school kid and
18 Director of Education at Symphony Space. It starts
19 with the arts, and you know it. And I'm calling on
20 our city to prioritize funding for arts in New York
21 City schools. Symphony Space is a performing arts
22 and education organization located at 95th and
23 Broadway. And since 1980, our education programs
24 have reached over 300,000 New York City students in
25 all five boroughs, from the pre-K to 12th graders who

2 participate in our global arts workshops and
3 performances, to ASOL and ABE learners in All Write!,
4 our unique model for arts based adult literacy.

5 For over 40 years, our global arts program has
6 led New York City School students on a journey of
7 exploration and celebration of traditional and
8 indigenous arts from around the world. We've served
9 over 15,000 public school students in 50 schools this
10 year alone, 10% of whom are in districts represented
11 by this committee.

12 For some students, these programs are a window
13 onto unfamiliar cultures, and for others our
14 programming provides a mirror in which they see their
15 own histories represented and valued.

16 As for conveying our impact, I leave that to a
17 teacher at PS 75 who said, "As a result of what your
18 Native American teaching artists do, my students are
19 able to see and witness that Native American culture
20 is very much alive. While we can't change the past,
21 we can preserve history to teach the young people
22 that will lead in the future."

23 That is what the arts do. On our stages and in
24 our classrooms, they open up the world. Arts
25 Education should be available to all students and not

2 just some. Our artists and staff prove that the arts
3 aren't merely add-ons to the school day, but that
4 careers in the arts are essential to the economic
5 tapestry of our city.

6 The support of the City Council and this
7 dedicated committee is crucial as we collectively
8 keep New York City the most vibrant arts landscape in
9 the world. We are so grateful for your service and
10 your tenacity in this challenging time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

12 Jada? Monika? Michelle? You may begin.

13 MS. KRAUS: Good evening, honorable members of
14 the City Council Education Committee. My name is
15 Michelle Kraus and I'm the Manager of Social Work and
16 Intake Services for the Disability Justice Program at
17 New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. I thank
18 Chairwoman Joseph and the Education Committee members
19 for allowing me to present testimony at this hearing
20 for your commitment through many hours in this
21 evening.

22 As a social worker engaged mainly in special
23 education matters, I work with parents whose children
24 have disabilities and are students in the New York
25 City educational system. I often hear about these

2 student challenges and want to highlight the urgent
3 need for enhanced understanding of this crisis by the
4 New York City Department of Education, and the
5 provision of specialized support and resources.

6 Speaker Adams's proposals to establish a peer-to-
7 peer support model, student-led mental health clubs,
8 and school wellness group groups in Department of
9 Education schools will go a long way to preventing
10 mental health crises, combating social isolation,
11 encouraging kids to talk about mental health, and
12 eliminating the emergency room as the primary mental
13 health care provider.

14 Understanding the scope of the need to support
15 and educate the over-7,000 students in the New York
16 City Education System classified as having emotional
17 disturbance is of utmost importance in our work.

18 Students classified with emotional disturbance are
19 nearly 50% black and 40% Latino, predominantly males
20 who grew up in economically disadvantaged
21 circumstances.

22 In 2024 NYLPI has prepared a report about the
23 failure of the NYC DOE to identify, classify, and
24 adequately serve and educate students with emotional
25 disabilities. The report titled "A Crisis in Special

2 Education: New York City's Failure to Educate
3 Students Classified With Emotional Disability" states
4 that NYC students, if not identified in their early
5 tenure in the education system as needing support,
6 and if delayed in being offered targeted services,
7 will encounter significant barriers to academic and
8 social success due to the outcome of their emotional
9 and behavioral needs. They are likely to be deprived
10 of educational and related support in and out of the
11 classroom to which they are entitled, resulting in a
12 lower than 60% graduation rate.

13 Without prioritizing investments in our students'
14 emotional well-being, they continue to fall behind
15 academically, experience social isolation, and face
16 long term adverse outcomes.

17 [BELL RINGS]

18 To understand the vastness of the needs of this
19 vulnerable cohort of the NYC school system, we looked
20 at qualitative and quantitative data from the DOE.
21 We identified the urgent need for more meaningful
22 data that accurately shows the number of students
23 affected by, and the results from current educational
24 support and curriculum interventions for this
25 population. The absence of this data signals that it

2 is incumbent on the DOE to reform its assessment and
3 evaluation protocols to identify the current scope of
4 the needs of the student population, and to disclose
5 evidentiary data all of which require additional
6 funding.

7 What we're determined to be the students' most
8 pressing issue is the need for additional trained
9 educators and clinical staff within the school
10 system. We do thank Speaker Adams for being
11 conscientious about NYC children's mental health
12 struggles, and recommending as part of the budget's
13 mental health allocation, funding for a peer support
14 model to combat social isolation that could lead to
15 left low self-esteem, depression, and self-harm.

16 This model is a great start, but the education
17 system needs to offer a holistic, consistent, and
18 high quality set of in-school clinical and behavioral
19 services to meet the complicated needs of students
20 labeled with emotional disabilities.

21 In addition, all stakeholders invested in
22 remedying the devastating impacts of the youth mental
23 health crisis -- the parents, the students, school
24 personnel, city and state officials and expert
25 clinicians -- need to come together to build

2 culturally and developmentally appropriate services
3 that are school and community based.

4 NILPY urges the Education Committee to prioritize
5 the night needs of students with emotional
6 disturbance, and take concrete steps to enhance
7 support and resources within our school system.

8 My colleague from NILPY's Environmental Justice
9 Program wanted me to take this opportunity to apprise
10 The Council of the following information: Following
11 the New York City Council's lead in passing an all-
12 electric school bus mandate for New York City, New
13 York State has now mandated that all school buses be
14 zero emission by 2035. The Department of Education's
15 Office of Pupil Transportation transports roughly
16 150,000 students to and from school along 9,000-plus
17 bus routes and about 52 bus companies which have over
18 17,500 employees. According to Local Law 120, which
19 became effective on July 1, 2023, and seeks to
20 improve the safety and reliability of the school bus
21 fleet, the DOE must report to The Mayor and the City
22 Council Speaker on implementing electric school
23 buses.

24 We look forward to seeing the initial report in
25 the coming months and request that The Council ensure

2 that the DOE meets the goals of the electric school
3 bus mandate. Further we request that The Council
4 work closely with the DOE, New York City School Bus
5 umbrella services, and other bus contractors to
6 ensure compliance with the electric school bus
7 mandate.

8 We also request that The Council collaborate with
9 the state and federal government to secure additional
10 funding sources to support the electric school bus
11 mandate. NYLPI and our partners are alarmed by the
12 recent restrictions on New York City's idling law
13 proposed by the Department of Environmental
14 Protection. These restrictions would severely limit
15 the city's ability to issue violations to vehicles
16 illegally idling near our schools. We hope to work
17 with The Council to ensure that the city maximally
18 enforces its idling law which is intended to protect
19 the health of children and students.

20 Thank you for your attention to these critical
21 issues. I could answer any of the disability justice
22 issues, and please contact my colleague, Suhali
23 Mendez, regarding the environmental issues discussed
24 here. Thank you so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
3 testimonies. Logan, I have a quick question for you.
4 What is your favorite thing about your social worker?

5 MISS VANHOUTTE: My favorite thing about my
6 social worker is that she's really nice, and she's
7 always helping me.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You heard it, The Adults.
9 Thank you. Thank you all.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you all for your
11 testimony.

12 MS. KRAUS: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panel, Steven
14 Morales, Milena Mohica, Yahaira Elizabeth Bernal,
15 Violeta Luna Chico, Megan Demarkis, Michelle Norris,
16 Trenton Price, David Adams, Deborah Freeman. Please
17 state your name before testifying, and then you can
18 begin your testimony.

19 MR. MORALES: We good? All right. Good evening.
20 My name is Steven Morales. I'm the New York Policy
21 Director at All Our Kin. Thank you, Chair Joseph.
22 Thank you, committee staff. It's been a long day. I
23 think you got even a leg cramp you're working on over
24 there. So I know it's been a while.

2 So like I said, I'm the New York Policy Director
3 at All Our Kin. We're a nonprofit organization that
4 trains, supports, and sustains family childcare
5 educators who operate licensed childcare programs in
6 their home. So, I'm here to talk about early care
7 and education with a specific focus on family
8 childcare.

9 And I wanted to thank this committee and to thank
10 Chair Joseph, because you've met with us in the past.
11 And I think, unfortunately, this group of family
12 childcare educators is an often-ignored and
13 misunderstood group, and you guys do understand them,
14 and you've given them that time. But I wanted to
15 talk about them today.

16 First off last week's State of the City address:
17 We heard it. speaker Adams affirmed that we need to
18 renew our commitment to deepen our commitment to New
19 Yorkers and to those Early Childhood programs,
20 including 3K. We heard The Mayor, who affirmed that
21 as well. We then heard testimony earlier today about
22 The Administration, and how they're going to get that
23 money and so, great, let's-- let's get that money for
24 Early Childhood.

2 And I had a-- A colleague earlier today
3 mentioned this. We're not just talking about
4 restoring cuts here. We need to be talking about
5 committing to investing in early care and education
6 for all children from birth through five this year
7 and beyond. And that's what we need to be talking
8 about, because we know how critical childcare is for
9 families, for educators, for our communities, for
10 everyone.

11 So, I've included our full agenda in our written
12 testimony. But I want to highlight three key things:
13 First, of course, fully funding all of our Early
14 Childhood programs including 3K. That's the
15 baseline.

16 From there, again, I want to bring it back to
17 family childcare. We need to give parents the access
18 to the full range of Early Childhood programs. If
19 we're talking about seats that are going unfilled--
20 We've heard theories for why that is, but I would
21 also say there's a lot of families who need family
22 childcare, who need home-based care which can-- which
23 can care for mixed ages, which can care for flexible
24 hours. And so I want to-- Our City has
25 systematically excluded and limited the participation

2 of family childcare in pre-K and 3K, and we need to
3 add that and bring family childcare in to that
4 system.

5 And last but not least, we need to make sure that
6 all educators -- and that includes family childcare
7 educators -- are paid salary and benefits that's
8 equivalent to our public school teachers. They're
9 all doing that crucial Early Childhood learning. Our
10 CBO staff should get paid just like our public school
11 teachers, but also our family child-care educators
12 need that adequate compensation.

13 [BELL RINGS]

14 We know how important the work that they do is.
15 So, again, you have the rest of my testimony in front
16 of you. Thank you for the opportunity today.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next up? We can
18 go down the line. Just please state your name before
19 testifying.

20 MS. NORRIS: I'm Michelle Norris. I'm a licensed
21 professional engineer. I'm the owner of Northwest
22 Engineering, 28 years as a WB engineer for existing
23 construction in New York City. I'm also the parent
24 to Melissa, Abby, and Izzy and Abby Weitzman is a
25 wheelchair user.

2 I come to talk to you about accessibility. I am
3 an expert on both construction accessibility and
4 needing accessibility.

5 The ADA was passed in 1990. In 2018, I began
6 tracking accessibility across New York City Public
7 Schools. I found that only 18% of the schools were
8 accessible. I found that in the 2015 to 2019 five-
9 year Capital Plan, 17 schools would become fully
10 accessible. If the construction had continued at
11 that rate, full accessibility we reached in 250
12 years.

13 I testified here five years ago that if you
14 allocated five \$1 billion to every five-year plan,
15 our city would have accessible schools in 25 years,
16 by 2045. Thanks to your support and the great work
17 of the New York City Public Schools, the capital
18 budget for accessibility in 2020 to 2024 was raised
19 to \$750 million, and we are now at 31% accessible.

20 The proposed allocation of \$100 million for 25 to
21 29 sounds like an increase. But with construction
22 inflation of 25% over the last five years, it
23 represents a decreased commitment to making our
24 schools accessible, extending compliance for another
25 10 years. Based on my calculation, you need \$18

2 million to make 1% of schools accessible. We have
3 69% of our schools inaccessible to schools, families,
4 teachers, staff and New York City residents with
5 mobility related disabilities. We need \$1.25 billion
6 to be allocated to reach full accessibility by 2045.
7 I just gave you the construction facts. Let me show
8 you why using my family as an example.

9 My son Abby grew up across the street from our
10 local elementary school, which still is inaccessible.
11 Instead of rolling to school in his wheelchair, he
12 was bused an hour-plus to Nassau County. He missed
13 out on making friends in our neighborhood, playing
14 with classmates in the playground. He missed out on
15 after-school, because busing doesn't extend to after
16 school. He wasted thousands of hours of his life
17 staring out the bus window.

18 Abby is in college now. He'll be graduating in
19 two years, and I wonder: Where will he work? The
20 New York City schools employ 80,000 New Yorkers. My
21 son could be one of them. But he will be at an
22 unfair disadvantage because he can only apply to
23 schools in an accessible building. Imagine being
24 restricted to applying to only 31% of the jobs that
25 you're qualified for. That is the result of 69% of

2 our school buildings lacking the basic accessibility
3 features like elevators and bathrooms.

4 I urge you to support increase in the 2025-29
5 capital budget for accessibility to \$1.25 billion.
6 Your fellow New Yorkers, students, families,
7 prospective teachers, guidance counselors, and
8 principals are counting on you. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
10 Next panelist.

11 MS. FREEMAN: Thank you, Chair Joseph for holding
12 this hearing and for your stamina and holding on till
13 tonight.

14 My name is Debra Freeman. I'm testifying on
15 behalf of Four Freedoms Democratic Club. Four
16 Freedoms opposes budget cuts and supports increased
17 funding for public schools in New York City.
18 Sustaining education programs funded with expiring
19 COVID federal stimulus funds, including Arts
20 Education as a member of the Emergency Coalition to
21 Save Education Programs.

22 The drastic cuts to New York City Public Schools
23 and expiration of federal stimulus funding will be
24 devastating for students and families. Public
25 Schools provide children with essential services and

2 skills, and drive community health and success. They
3 need more funding, not less, as students continue to
4 struggle with recovery from learning loss and mental
5 health challenges resulting from the pandemic.

6 Schools need sufficient funding that preserves
7 programs to help students recover from the pandemic
8 and prepare for success in college and careers. The
9 budget must prioritize and protect public school
10 funding, not make cuts.

11 We've heard from the students today that have
12 made it so clear that they need this support for
13 their mental health, for the pandemic recovery.
14 Their words are powerful. They must be heard.

15 Many essential education programs are at risk of
16 elimination as a result of federal stimulus funding
17 expiring in June.

18 Examples-- And these programs supported long-term
19 needs. They support long term needs that must be
20 continued. Examples of such programs include Arts
21 Education programs that support social emotional
22 wellness and assist pandemic recovery, with expanded
23 access to arts instruction that engages our students
24 and addresses systemic inequities in schools that
25 don't have sufficient access to Arts Education

2 required by the state; mental health support and
3 wellness support from social workers, psychologists
4 and community schools; shelter coordinators and
5 bilingual staff that support our homeless students
6 and newly-arrived students; and critical literacy and
7 dyslexia initiatives that address our literacy
8 proficiency crisis in our New York City schools.

9 The need for these programs continues and must be
10 funded. With federal stimulus aid expiring in just a
11 few months, it is urgent that our elected officials
12 act now to reverse the cuts and increase funding to
13 put our students first and stand up for public
14 education. We urge city council leadership to do
15 everything possible to provide sufficient funding to
16 meet our school needs, ensure continuation of these
17 critical education programs, including Arts
18 Education, that are being impacted by loss of federal
19 funding in just a few months.

20 Please. We've heard how the money is available.
21 And we're talking about a policy decision. Policy
22 decisions should be made to protect our children and
23 put them first for the future of New York. Thank you
24 so much for the chance to testify.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
3 Next panelist?

4 MS. DEMARKIS: Hi. It's good to see you. I'm a
5 constituent and a mega fan. We've worked on some
6 things together in the past, and I just want to say
7 thank you for convening this, Chair Joseph. Thank
8 you for your amazing staff and all the staff of City
9 Hall here tonight.

10 My name is Megan Demarkis. I've worked with, and
11 in partnership with the DOE for 25 years as a
12 bilingual teacher, as a parent coordinator, as an SLT
13 member, a CEC rep, and the Director of Summer and
14 After School Learning Programs, and most importantly,
15 as a public school parent of a student with
16 disabilities.

17 So, over these 25 years, I've learned a couple of
18 things that I want to point out as really important
19 elements to fund: One is that meaningful cross-
20 cultural parent engagement is really the key driver
21 of school culture and student success. It's not a
22 new or original concept. And I've also learned that
23 community-based organizations are key to supporting
24 school staff who are well meaning but incredibly
25 underfunded and under supported. Parent

2 coordinators, social workers, guidance counselors,
3 pupil enrollment, secretaries: they all need
4 fundamental support, and I think that could happen
5 from CBOs.

6 I'm here today representing Mixteca, which is my
7 field placement. I am currently a social work
8 student at Hunter College. We know social workers
9 really are important, and I've taken that to heart.

10 So, I want to talk a little bit about Mixteca,
11 and what Mixteca does, and how additional funding to
12 Mixteca can help us increase what we do.

13 Mixteca does a ton of vocational education with
14 families, including OSHA training, small business,
15 skill development, nutritional education, computer-
16 based literacy, just basic literacy. And we could do
17 a lot more if we had the space in the staff to do
18 more. We do a lot of in-house ESL classes as well,
19 six for adults, one for children. People come--
20 We're in Sunset Park, and people come from all over
21 the city, and all over the world in terms of country
22 of origin, to take place to take part in the classes
23 that we have to offer, because we offer them with
24 dignity, respect, and cultural relevance every time.

2 But I want to talk about what we're doing to
3 support the Department of Education. The Department
4 of Education has a lot of really cool and fancy
5 platforms for parents to access, but they can't
6 access them well. Starting with the D 79 platform:
7 There's a different way to enroll in D 79 classes in
8 every single borough, and it's really difficult for
9 families to understand how to make use of those
10 services, even though they're absolutely fantastic.
11 So, we do a lot of that work one-on-one through
12 advocacy to help families find a program that will
13 work for them geographically, and that has the
14 content that they're looking for and the schedule
15 that they're looking for. But it takes an advocate
16 to do that work.

17 SYEP: Totally impossible, even if your child is
18 eligible and has a social security number, to sign up
19 via that system. It's glitchy and it's difficult and
20 they need support. We already know guidance
21 counselors can't do it. Every guidance counselor has
22 a caseload of like 300 kids. We've learned that
23 today. I've learned so much today.

24 And also Summer Rising. That closes in one week
25 from today. That application processes also glitchy.

2 If you apply for pre-K and now you want to play for
3 summer rising, you'd have to go through a whole other
4 set of processes but nobody's doing the outreach to
5 tell people about, one, that summer rising exists and
6 how to apply. Mixteca does that work and can do a lot
7 more of it.

8 [BELL RINGS]

9 One last thing that I want to say that Mixteca
10 does, is they do a lot of know-your-rights education
11 with families so they can become their own advocates
12 within the school system. I have found that
13 enrollment secretaries, parent coordinators, et
14 cetera, don't seem to know what the McKinney-Vento
15 protections are for students in temporary housing, or
16 even what temporary housing is. It means if you're
17 doubled up, if you're living with another family, if
18 you're renting a room, you are afforded these
19 protections. But we keep finding that even staff and
20 family welcome centers don't know what those
21 protections are. We have to do better. And I think
22 funding to CBOs like Mixteca, and especially Mixteca,
23 we can deliver that-- we can deliver that education
24 to families. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Next
3 panelist.

4 MS. MOHICA: I am Milena Mohica. This is my
5 first time here, and although I know we are all like
6 super-exhausted, I didn't expect this to take this
7 long, honestly. I'm mostly surprised by your energy,
8 Chair Joseph, and willingness to listen to all of us.

9 I serve as the Education Coordinator at Mixteca
10 in Brooklyn. It is truly an honor to be here today,
11 shedding light on the invaluable support Mixteca
12 offers to our Latinx, immigrant, and indigenous
13 communities. Mixteca stands as a beacon of hope and
14 assistance for countless immigrants striving for a
15 better life in our city.

16 Every month, we aid over 450 individuals, guiding
17 them through bureaucratic hurdles, providing language
18 assistance, nourishment, clothing, mental health
19 services, invaluable cultural guidance, and much
20 more.

21 Throughout every interaction our advocates
22 prioritize serving our community members with utmost
23 respect, dignity, culture, affirmation, and empathy.

24 In our education program, we provide services
25 that include ESL, computer literacy, financial

2 literacy, Spanish literacy classes, and education
3 advocacy. Just this past month, we saw numbers as
4 high as 60 to 100 individuals per day expressing
5 interest in joining our English classes at Mixteca,
6 attracted by our flexible scheduling options, and our
7 dedicated team of volunteer teachers among other
8 benefits. Regrettably, due to limited classroom
9 space, we can only accommodate 10% of these eager
10 learners.

11 Mixteca is at a pivotal point where we need to
12 expand our services. We need a larger space, a
13 bigger building. We are reaching out to you for
14 assistance in securing the necessary funds to expand
15 and continue offering relevant and culturally
16 affirming services to our diverse community. Your
17 support is essential for our growth.

18 Having grown up in a Colombian conflict zone, and
19 having work at the border aiding the Venezuelan
20 diaspora, I've witnessed firsthand the critical
21 importance of support for immigrants. While our city
22 does a commendable job assisting its newest members,
23 there is always more that can be done. By bolstering
24 support for organizations like Mixteca, we can ensure
25 that resources are distributed more effectively to

2 those who need them the most. Thank you for your
3 attention.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
5 Next panelist.

6 MR. PRICE: Hi. Thank you Chair Joseph. Your
7 persistence and enthusiasm tonight is commendable.
8 And members of the Education Committee. My name is
9 Trenton Price. I'm the Executive Director of the
10 Salvadori Center. I'm a former middle school
11 teacher, school leader, and district leader for Arts
12 Education here in New York City before joining
13 Salvadori Center last year. I'm passionate about
14 education and facilitating experiences for young
15 people who work together and empower their creative
16 and analytical voices.

17 At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services
18 (that's STEM plus the A for Arts, and in our case,
19 Architecture) to schools after school sites and
20 community centers across the five boroughs, focusing
21 on the built environment. Our goal is to make STEM
22 and the arts come alive for students and to foster
23 the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and
24 problem solving, just like real life architects,
25 designers and engineers. In fact, over 10 years of

2 evaluations show that Salvadori students not only
3 learn the STEAM content, but also change their
4 perceptions about learning and careers in STEAM. We
5 want children to know that they have career pathways
6 in New York City STEAM professions, and those
7 professions look like them with exposure to those
8 professions.

9 I am testifying today to thank, and to encourage
10 this council and The Committee for their commitment
11 to ensuring that schools and after school programs
12 are funded adequately and equitably. All too often,
13 we see schools that serve students with compounding
14 needs without the adequate resources needed to
15 provide a well-rounded education. From the work we
16 do with project-based learning. We know that well-
17 planned lessons that have students creating their
18 understanding through real world applications
19 requires time and resources.

20 We thank you for advocating for full, robust, and
21 increased funding for schools, and for after school
22 programs, and for creative and Arts Education
23 citywide. We know that these are important levers
24 for student achievement as well as career pathways
25 here in New York City.

2 I thank you for facilitating this important
3 hearing, and your commitment to educational equity
4 and arts and creative education, and the
5 opportunities for every student. We at Salvadori are
6 grateful to be able to serve New York City's youth
7 and we stand ready to do more. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
9 Next panelist.

10 Good after-- Good evening, esteemed members of
11 the City Council and Chair Joseph. As my other
12 panelists have said, I am deeply inspired by your
13 dedication and your perseverance to this long
14 testimony. We appreciate your public service and we
15 will honor that in this testimony.

16 I am David Adams, Chief Executive Officer of the
17 urban assembling, and I come to you deeply concerned
18 about a proposed \$9 million funding cut to the
19 Affinity contract for next school year which will cut
20 \$1.3 million from the Urban Assembly. I appreciate
21 your advocacy when the Chancellor came and you asked
22 him questions around the Affinity contract, and our
23 continued service to our city.

24 The decision undermines going through the
25 exceptional work of the urban assembly in providing a

2 rigorous career connected education to New York
3 City's most vulnerable students without admission
4 screens. Urban Assembly students and schools
5 consistently outperform city averages, boasting
6 graduation rates of 91.2%. We have reroutes reversed
7 or significantly closed racial and socioeconomic
8 gaps. The graduation rate for black students at the
9 Urban Assembly surpassed the city's average by nearly
10 12 percentage points, Hispanic students 11 percentage
11 points, English language learners 15%, and students
12 with disabilities by 18%, demonstrating our
13 commitment to education and high quality equity for
14 all.

15 Urban Assembly has founded over 20 schools since
16 1997, and in 2018, we welcomed three new schools from
17 New York City Department of Education or New York
18 City Public Schools. After four years of UA support
19 the schools averaged 23% growth in their graduation
20 rates. It's clear to me that we have more Urban
21 Assembly schools, not less. Yet with the planned
22 budget cuts the city loses these gains. The proposed
23 cuts represent 0.24% of New York City Public School's
24 \$38 billion budget, in comparison to the \$1.3 million
25 budget that the Urban Assembly receives for its 22

2 unscreened schools, over which 80% of students are
3 black or Hispanic. Specialized high schools receive
4 approximately \$12.6 million in additional funding,
5 and this is an investment going into instruction that
6 offered 3% of its seats to black students and 7%
7 Hispanic students.

8 So, ask us: Where is the equity in that
9 structure?

10 Let me compare this to the Urban Assembly Gateway
11 School for Technology with a graduation rate of 97%
12 in 2023, and a special education rate of 30%.

13 Stuyvesant High School has a 99% graduation rate,
14 but a special education rate of less than 1%. These
15 numbers speak for themselves, yet the funding
16 doesn't. I feel like it is time for us to
17 collectively speak for equity.

18 So, I am asking for full continuation of funding
19 for the Urban Assembly and by standing with me,
20 you're standing up for a system that values all
21 children's potential, regardless of their background.

22 And thank you for your time consideration.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your testimony
24 and we get it. I get it. Thank you all. Thank you,
25 Megan. Good seeing you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to
3 everybody on the panel.

4 Our next in-person panel is Jennifer Choi,
5 Jasmine Rosa, Minister Sandra E. Hynson-Simpson,
6 Herman Francis, Jr., Brenda Vargas, Cynthia Suarez-
7 Espinal, Lori Cochran, Christopher Rizzo, Greg
8 Mihailovich.

9 If you wish to testify in person and you did not
10 hear your name called, please just make your way to
11 the Sergeant at Arms desk in the back and fill out a
12 witness slip.

13 Please state your name before testifying. We can
14 start.

15 MS. COCHRAN: Laurie Cochran. Hello. My name is
16 Laurie Cochran, and I am the mother of boy-girl twins
17 born in the Fall of 2018. I'm here today-- or
18 tonight to briefly share with you all why I see
19 universal 3K as one of the best things this city has
20 done in the past 10 years that I've been a resident,
21 and also more generally why the diversity of programs
22 supported under current DOE funding is so critical to
23 our city's continued vitality and growth.

24 Starting back in 2021 are twins were just past
25 two years old, and at our pediatricians'

2 recommendation, they were tested for potential speech
3 and developmental delays. They were evaluated as
4 slightly delayed, but not significantly enough for
5 city services, and that left my husband and I with a
6 debate of what to do: Did we just wait and see as
7 they got older? Did we pay for private therapy?

8 We were also really concerned about, you know,
9 starting school with them. I had been fortunate
10 enough as a child to begin a nursery school program
11 at three. But even though, you know, we are both
12 working parents, we couldn't see our family budget
13 stretching to cover two private preschool tuitions at
14 that time.

15 So, as we were having this family debate, we were
16 really very thankful to hear the announcement that 3K
17 would be available in all districts citywide
18 regardless of family income for children born in
19 2018.

20 So, we did successfully navigate my school's
21 application process, and our kids started school in
22 September of 2021, at K280, The School of Journeys,
23 in Brooklyn.

24

25

2 They were not yet three years old, they were
3 talking, but not a lot. And our son particularly was
4 very shy and fearful around groups.

5 We immediately saw the impact of 3K in their
6 communication. They both really began to talk, and
7 we heard about music, and we heard about library, and
8 we heard about science. We heard about the teddy
9 bears that came to visit their classroom, and
10 suddenly their own teddy bears that they'd had since
11 birth, were given names that they came up with
12 themselves.

13 At the same time, our son's acting out in groups,
14 and when he didn't want to do something, did become
15 more noticeable and problematic in contrast. And
16 around the time of the spring parent teacher
17 conferences, their 3K Teacher along with the school's
18 3K support teacher both met with us and discussed
19 additional evaluation and testing for our son.

20 And they presented it so positively. They told
21 us that he's a great kid, he just needs some extra
22 help to be all he can be. And that presentation made
23 all the difference. They walked us through the steps
24 as parents to request an evaluation. And his
25 classroom teacher even made a point of participating

2 in our first IEP meeting that summer from his own
3 family vacation.

4 [BELL RINGS]

5 Our twins are now midway through kindergarten at
6 our neighborhood school, and they have grown so
7 incredibly much. Their vocabulary, and their
8 interests, and their curiosity are just so much more
9 than I really thought possible, because they have
10 been so used to going to school. Now it's their
11 third school year. And still, their discussion of
12 all the different courses that they have the benefit
13 of having, from science, their art teacher, their
14 computers. They just talk about all of their
15 teachers with so much excitement and love.

16 I do also want to, you know, share more about our
17 son. He's now had a year and a half of push-in and
18 pull-out services, and they've made a massive impact
19 in his overall behavior.

20 He loves the MTA and trains, our son who two
21 years ago would hide from babysitters now will walk
22 up to people on the bus and ask them about their
23 commute, and talk to them about, you know, what stops
24 they take.

2 And instead of, you know, running and screaming
3 when there's something that he doesn't like, instead,
4 he tells us what he doesn't like. He told us we
5 ruined his lunch plans, because we changed where we
6 were going after church.

7 And so, you know, him achieving his annual IEP
8 goals and this early identification by being in 3K,
9 and being surrounded by those early education
10 professionals, has just made all the difference in
11 him being his best self.

12 So in conclusion, this is just our one family's
13 story. But I, you know, hope you can see as with
14 everyone else that's testified today, the massive
15 impact of these programs in really setting up our
16 youth for success. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next panelist.

18 Thank you so much for staying here today. It's
19 10 o'clock and I feel so energized. Thank you. My
20 name is Jennifer Choi. I am a Queens parent of two
21 New Yorkers with disabilities. And I am the founder
22 of New York City Parents of Teens With Disabilities,
23 a 1400 member group. This year, New York City Public
24 Schools held a press conference to announce the first
25 report of the reimagining Special Education Council.

2 On every page of this report, you're going to see the
3 logo of New York City Public Schools. But the report
4 also starts with a disclaimer: "The views and
5 opinions reported in this document are those of the
6 advisory Councilmembers and do not necessarily
7 reflect the views and opinions of New York City
8 Public Schools." To parents, this is a colossal
9 disappointment. This district found the
10 Councilmembers. The district chose the
11 Councilmembers. They took down the members words.
12 They wrote a spot-on report. And now it's not their
13 report?

14 So, what does this mean for today's topic? With
15 the lack of commitment, and the impending budget
16 cuts, our families are demoralized. And because the
17 Fair Student Funding Special Education Formula has
18 been so difficult in the first place, how do we know
19 this? Well, in most schools, we have shared-- and I
20 have shared a graphic about this, but students are
21 not provided special education teacher services for
22 World Language and Career Technical Education
23 classes. This effectively bars access to ready-to-
24 work certification classes in areas like culinary,
25 health care, construction, computer tech, aviation.

2 It goes on. This is a civil rights violation.
3 Anything to do with a special education teacher
4 direct to student is funded by a formula, and it is
5 per student and not by class. And I'm sure you
6 remember this very well from your days.

7 This makes it so hard for schools to do the right
8 things by students with IEPs. So teachers don't come
9 in pieces but the fair student foreign funding
10 formula treats them like they do. And students face
11 constant discriminatory actions such as what came
12 into school-- what came into the parents today. I
13 just brought it right here. This came in just today.
14 "No, we do not provide ICT and CTE classes," March
15 18, 2020. "Our AP classes are not ICT. We do not
16 have ICT in world language," November 30 2023. These
17 are actual New York City Public Schools. And this
18 one: This one's a killer. "Please understand that
19 your child, if he or she chooses to stay in the
20 industry, will not be accommodated as far as their
21 accommodations." I don't even understand what that
22 means. But basically, the discrimination is not
23 going to stop until these budget directives work
24 differently for special education.

25 [BELL RINGS]

2 I'm almost done.

3 Due process complaints will continue to rise, as
4 you know, until the Fair Student Funding formula is
5 reimaged to be fair to students with disabilities.

6 Even the ASD specialized programs that are being
7 expanded now is a program that is not funded by the
8 Fair Student Funding formula. So, therefore, I ask
9 you, Chair Joseph, and the Education Committee to
10 just use all of your legislative powers as much as
11 possible so that our students with disabilities, who
12 wanted to contribute to our city be treated fairly,
13 and how we treat them at it defines us as New
14 Yorkers. Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
16 testimony. Next panelist.

17 MS. HYNSON-SIMPSON: Hello, my name is Sandra
18 Hynson-Simpson. I did think about the other lady. I
19 am a senior. I had a learning disability when I was
20 in fifth grade. I got left back. Thanks to the
21 program that under Mayor Koch, that they had Head
22 Start. I don't know if it was Head Start, but under
23 Mayor Koch.

24 And I went to another school because of the
25 principal, because it was 30 children in a classroom,

2 and I couldn't keep up. So, they transferred me to
3 out to another private school, and I did better, 15
4 students in a class and I graduated. I've done a
5 little better.

6 My children and my grandchildren, my girls, they
7 have learning disabilities because of comprehension,
8 not understanding. When there's a math problem in a
9 sentence, that's the problem I had. My boys, my
10 young men, they do-- they do very well. But I'm
11 thanking God that this is not my first time being
12 here. I did get a certificate from Mayor Koch, doing
13 good in school. And I thank God for that. And I
14 thank God for y'all. Thank you.

15 I do have to get my Access-A-Ride. I have to
16 leave. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

18 MS. HYNSON-SIMPSON: Bless you all.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You too.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
21 Next panelist. Thank you.

22 MR. FRANCIS JR: Greetings, everyone. My name is
23 Herman Francis Jr., a former school board member of
24 district 7 until Bloomberg came and assumed mayoral
25 control. I also sat on Community Board 1 for 12

2 years, 6 years as Chairperson of the National Service
3 Committee, which meant that every government agency -
4 - federal, state, city, and county -- had to come
5 before my committee and explain about what project
6 they was putting in for development in the district.

7 This was highlighted by State Senator Robert
8 Jackson in his lawsuit against the State of New York
9 and his campaign for fiscal equity. Mr. Jackson was
10 piggybacking on one of the greatest legal minds who
11 does not get the recognition he so richly deserves:
12 Charles Hamilton Houston, builder of Howard
13 University Law School, law professor and mentor to
14 Thurgood Marshall (someone had to teach Thurgood
15 Marshall law), architect of Brown versus Board of
16 Education, which was not about black and white child
17 sitting next to each other. It was about what is
18 being talked about today: The unequal distribution
19 of the resources that are available due to policy,
20 because the money is there.

21 All you got to do is look at the city budget,
22 right now, as The Mayor explained, what?, \$107
23 billion, and \$36 billion goes to education when you
24 include the construction, and the state budget is,
25 what?, \$260 billion?

2 It was explained to me last year by a
3 representative that the State of New York is finally
4 going to pay the City of New York the money it owed.
5 But the money is there. Why is that? 75 percent of
6 the inmates in the state prison system come from the
7 City of New York, and of that 75%, 90% of them come
8 out of seven districts.

9 Now it costs the state \$100 a mattress to keep a
10 prison. That's \$36,500 a year for one inmate. And
11 yet the City of New York knows that it costs them
12 close to \$160,000 to keep youngsters 16 years age and
13 younger inside that youth house across the street on
14 Brook Avenue from that middle school.

15 They closed [INAUDIBLE] for a reason. Now they
16 want to expand that, and the youth house to take over
17 the state youth house on 161st Street, and they want
18 to build a jail 6 blocks from where I live at. Keep
19 in mind, there is no state jail in New York City.
20 Why is that? Well? While I was up there in the
21 Catskills attending some jazz concert, I overheard
22 people talking about-- against former governor--
23 about him closing down the penitentiary, which is
24 providing a livelihood for the municipality up there.

25 [BELL RINGS]

2 But keep in mind, when you look at the census,
3 11% of this country's population is living in a city
4 with 50,000 or more. The majority of this country's
5 population live in the municipality of less than
6 5,000 people. And the biggest chunk in their budget
7 goes to public education.

8 School boards work. We leave New York City.
9 It's only in the cities. Because five of the largest
10 Cities in New York State are under mayoral control
11 for one reason only: Control of that budget and the
12 awarding of contracts.

13 If we are really, in this country, after World
14 War Two, can rebuild Europe and parts of Asia, well,
15 you need take that Marshall Plan and invest it in the
16 cities, in the United States, or North America,
17 because the money is there. It is just being wasted
18 and going in the wrong direction.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for your
20 testimony. Thank you, sir. Thank you for your
21 service when you served on the Board. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much to this
23 panel.

24 We will now move on to virtual testimony. Again
25 as a reminder to all of our virtual panelists, please

2 wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin
3 before delivering your testimony.

4 Our first virtual panel: Virginia Diaz-Mendoza,
5 Jolene Gunther-Doherty, Dan Chen, Danny Lamb, Ryan
6 Ford. On deck: Tishna Lopez, Smitha Milich,
7 Christie Scott, Olympia Kazi, Emily Hellstrom,
8 Tanesha Grant.

9 Virginia Diaz-Mendoza? You may begin your
10 testimony.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 MS. DIAZ-MENDOZA: Thank you. Good evening. My
13 name is Virginia Diaz-Mendoza, a professor at the
14 City University of New York. As a faculty member and
15 a researcher, I'm deeply committed to public
16 education and academic research that contributes to
17 the public good. My research stems from a deep
18 desire to make school safer, more caring spaces,
19 where children can learn and educators can teach more
20 effectively.

21 In 2016 the New York City Council funded the
22 first Restorative Justice pilot project. I traveled
23 to schools located in all five boroughs to evaluate
24 their implementation of Restorative Justice
25 practices.

2 Participating schools use restorative practices
3 to build community, mediate conflict, and address
4 harms. Restorative Practices helped community
5 members of the school feel seen, heard, and valued.

6 From my research, I learned how schools can shift
7 their practices to include a more holistic approach
8 to student learning and misbehavior. The use of
9 evidence-based restorative practices reduced over
10 reliance on punitive discipline and improved school
11 culture and climate.

12 My findings suggest that in order to effectively
13 implement Restorative Justice, New York City Public
14 Schools need funding. If New York City is committed
15 to providing safe and caring schools, then there
16 needs to be consistent funding and support for
17 Restorative Justice initiatives in all of New York
18 City Public Schools.

19 Based on my observations of the implementation of
20 restorative practices in New York City Public
21 Schools, and my research findings, I ask the members
22 of the City Council to consider allocating adequate
23 funding directly to schools to fund school-based
24 Restorative Justice for the following: Restorative
25 Justice training for educators, school staff,

2 students and their families; curriculum development
3 opportunities for educators and students to develop
4 Restorative Justice curriculum; development of
5 Restorative Justice collectives, clubs, and
6 advisories, including opportunities for students to
7 obtain course credit; development and sustainability
8 of paid school-based internships for young people to
9 lead Restorative Justice practices; also, allocating
10 funding directly to New York City High Schools to
11 hire school-based Restorative Justice coordinators;
12 and, finally allocating adequate funding to New York
13 City schools to hire support positions, such as
14 counselors, social workers, paraprofessionals, parent
15 coordinators, and youth advocates.

16 That is my testimony. Thank you so much for
17 listening and I appreciate all that you do.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
19 Jolene?

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 MS. GUNTHER-DOHERTY: Good evening and thank you
22 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jolene
23 Gunther-Doherty, and I am the Director of The Guild
24 for Exceptional Children's 4410 Preschool Special
25 Education Program. I'm here today to talk about the

2 importance of funding, and finding funding to support
3 preschool special education.

4 Preschool special education teachers of community
5 based-programs were the lowest paid Early Childhood
6 teachers in New York City. The Mayor and the City
7 Council took decisive action in 2022 in investing \$96
8 million to support preschool special education
9 students and their families.

10 The New York City Department of Education used
11 its temporary federal COVID-19 funds for many
12 important programs, including the \$96 million for
13 preschool special education. The problem is that the
14 federal funding is expiring this year, and there is
15 not yet a plan for how to continue these important
16 programs. We've begun to notify our teachers that
17 come July, some of them will be looking at a salary
18 reduction. For some that can mean as much as
19 \$15,000. Our teachers have families to support and
20 school loans to pay off. Our TAs will also be facing
21 a reduction in pay.

22 The failure to act to save this preschool special
23 education funding will result in many preschool
24 special education teachers and teacher assistants

2 resigning. There is the potential for hundreds of
3 4410 classrooms being closed across the city.

4 The impact on preschool students with
5 disabilities and their families would be devastating,
6 causing thousands of preschool children who have a
7 legal, federal right to special education services,
8 to sit at home waiting for a seat.

9 "In partnership" is how the DOE closes each line
10 of correspondence with its 4410 providers. We are
11 asking that the DOE continues to honor this sentiment
12 by providing funding to save 4410 preschool special
13 education.

14 A news organization has already published an
15 article quoting Chancellor Banks' City Council
16 testimony from this morning, saying he has great
17 confidence that good news around Early Childhood will
18 come. We hope that includes 4410 preschool special
19 education. Thank you so much for staying with us
20 this evening.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
22 Dan Chen.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 MS. CHEN: Hi. Thank you for giving me the
25 opportunity to speak with you. My name is Dan Chen,

2 and I'm the mother of Ricki, a four-year-old student
3 with autism. Ricki attends the Guild for Exceptional
4 Children, a preschool special education program in
5 Brooklyn. This program has been a big help to my
6 son. But I'm worried that if the cuts are made to
7 the preschools' special education, his school will
8 lose teachers, and the children will not get the
9 service they need.

10 I'm here to request the City continue the \$96
11 medians in expiring COVID-19 relief money for
12 preschool special education, and make sure there's
13 enough funds to hire teachers and open classes for
14 Ricky, and for all the children with disability who
15 are still waiting for the class and service.

16 Ricky has a hard time with his speech, but at his
17 program, he has also been able to get help with
18 speech therapy. This has been so important for him
19 at an early age. His speech therapy has helped him
20 with our learning things, and he has gotten much
21 better.

22 But Ricky just lost his speech service on March
23 1st, because the speech therapist left the position,
24 and based on my research so far all the agencies
25 nearby pay much higher rates than what Ricki's school

2 can offer for a speech therapist. So, I can predict
3 that Ricky's speech therapist will easily find a
4 higher-paying jobs outside of the school. And our
5 school, and the children are still waiting for a new
6 therapist to come. But it's not easy to find someone
7 who can accept a low-pay job and maintain a good-
8 faith heart to helping children with disabilities.

9 Hundreds of students with disabilities have to
10 wait for the preschool class and service. Before the
11 DOE increased funding for preschool special
12 education, Ricky's teachers are some of the lowest
13 paid teachers in the city. If these funds go away in
14 July, the teachers at the preschool special program,
15 who is the teacher working with the young children
16 with some of the greatest need in the city, will have
17 to take a pay cut.

18 If the teachers have to take a pay cut, I worry
19 they will leave. And if the teachers leave, the
20 class will close. And if the class closes, the
21 children will not get the help.

22 If the city does not continue that \$96 million in
23 funding for preschool special education, Ricky might
24 lose his class and support, and even more children
25 won't receive service in the first place. So, please

2 make sure that Ricky does not fall behind because of
3 the budget cut, and all the preschoolers with
4 disabilities get the support they want. Thank you so
5 much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Danny.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 MS. ORZOLA[SP]: Hi, good evening. My name is
9 Andrea Orzola[SP] and I'm speaking on behalf of New
10 York Edge. Madam Chair and members of the committee,
11 I am here today to ask that you prioritize New York
12 Edge fiscal year 25 citywide funding requests.

13 We are seeking \$1.2 million under The Council's
14 after-school enrichment initiative, an increase of
15 \$200,000 over last year. This would be our first
16 increase in 16 years.

17 We are also seeking for the first time \$250,000
18 under The Council's Social and Emotional Supports for
19 Students Initiative. SEL is integrated into every
20 element of our programming.

21 New York Edge is the largest provider of school-
22 based after-school and summer programming in New York
23 City, serving almost 30,000 students in over 100
24 schools throughout the five boroughs. Our mission is
25 to help bridge the opportunity gap among students and

2 under-invested communities. Core components of our
3 programming include STEM education, social emotional,
4 learning and leadership, visual and performing arts
5 sports, health and wellness academics, and college
6 and career readiness, and summer programs.

7 We are as identified by MOSAIC, by ACT, the
8 largest after-school provider in the nation offering
9 SEL supports. We are also one of the city's largest
10 providers of college access programs. Council
11 citywide funding has enabled us to enrich and expand
12 our school year and summer programs and has allowed
13 us to develop and implement new, unique, and engaging
14 programs such as our student led podcast, Formative,
15 winner of the prestigious Community Voice Award in
16 Education, Art, and Culture, Podcast Or Audio
17 Category. Our book publishing program, our Heart For
18 Art program, our partnership with the Van Gogh Museum
19 in Amsterdam, and our recently launched Read Across
20 New York Edge program.

21 New York Edge, its students, and families are
22 extremely grateful for The Council's 32 years of
23 support. Together, we are guiding students so that
24 they grow up healthy, happy, and empowered.
25 Together, we are creating the next generation of

2 active and productive community members and problem
3 solvers. Together, we are creating New York City's
4 next generation of doctors, mechanics, chefs,
5 writers, engineers, entrepreneurs, and so much more.

6 The time has come however, where increased
7 funding is vitally needed. Unlike contracts with
8 DYCD and other agencies, Council discretionary
9 contracts are not, and have never been, eligible for
10 COLA increases. This is making it increasingly
11 difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain
12 quality staff and to continue to offer the wide array
13 of programs that we are known for.

14 We are now looking to you to meet the needs of
15 the next generation of young people by supporting our
16 FY 25 funding request. Thank you so much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
18 Ryan Ford?

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 MR. FORD: Good afternoon, or should I say good
21 evening? My name is Ryan Ford. I am a student at
22 the Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program at The
23 College of Staten Island. I'm testifying today about
24 the potential proposed cuts in the city's budget
25 towards education for people with disabilities.

2 Education is a human right and should be free and
3 accessible to all. And I want to talk about--
4 specifically about the proposed cuts to school
5 psychologists and family workers following the
6 expiration of COVID-19 relief.

7 School psychologists and social workers were very
8 important to me during high school. Whenever I had a
9 problem, I asked for their advice. It would be very
10 bad, unfair, for the city to cut the number of school
11 psychologists and social workers in school.

12 Without the help of social workers and
13 psychologists I would not have graduated on time,
14 unable to attend college to get the job I have today.

15 I also want to highlight the importance of post-
16 secondary readiness programs, much like the one I
17 attended. If money from these programs are taken
18 away, it would be terrible impact on our city,
19 students, and their ability to go to college, join
20 the workforce, and move up.

21 Councilmembers, I ask you to vote in favor of the
22 people's budget that restores and ensures funding
23 from important programs in education.

24 That's all Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
3 testimony. Our next panel, Trishna Lopez, Smitha
4 Milich, Christie Scott, Olympia Kazi, Emily
5 Hellstrom, Tanesha Grant, followed by Venus Sze-
6 Tsang, Cynthia Seiden, Leslie Martinez, yyy Paula
7 Magnus, Paullette Healy, Lupe Hernandez.

8 Trishna Lopez, you may begin.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Anitha Millage?

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Christie Scott.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 MS. SCOTT: Thank you, Chair Joseph and
15 Councilmembers for allowing me to speak tonight.
16 We're truly humbled. My name is Cristie Scott, a
17 mother and a special education teacher at Birch
18 Family Services, a 4410 preschool that serves
19 children with special needs and their families in our
20 city.

21 My autistic son Aaron attended the birth school
22 in 2022. Due to the benefits of the preschool
23 special education enhanced funding that was provided,
24 Aaron received his services in OT, PT, and speech.
25 He continued to thrive, moving from a class of 10, to

2 a 12, and then to a less-restrictive setting of an
3 ICT integrated setting.

4 My son was given the opportunity to learn from
5 highly experienced and certified teachers due to the
6 essential temporary federal COVID-19 funding. Based
7 on a recent survey of New York City preschool special
8 education providers, this funding allowed for teacher
9 retention, and raised teacher salaries as well as for
10 teaching assistants. And for this, I am forever
11 grateful.

12 Without the continued funding, teachers like
13 myself in 4410 schools are put in a compromising
14 position of choosing between our passion and calling
15 as an early childhood special education teacher at
16 organizations like Birch, or leaving for higher
17 paying jobs due to financial hardship restraints.

18 Students with disabilities will go without proper
19 placement. 4410 programs like ours have saved
20 families from feeling defeated and provide a glimmer
21 of hope for their children with special needs.

22 My son Aaron Scott is now a thriving, happy,
23 talkative kindergartner is living proof that when
24 programs who have proper funding excel and will
25 continue to make waves.

2 I am the voice of many families and teachers who
3 work and support children who benefit from adequate
4 and needed 4410 funding.

5 Please provide a restored and needed budget for
6 us. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 Smitha?

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 MS. MILICH: Hi, Chair Joseph. My name is Smitha
11 Milich. I'm the Senior Campaign Strategist for New
12 York City with the Alliance for Quality Education.

13 We're really happy that through community and
14 council pressure The Mayor has canceled the third
15 round of PEGs. But despite record reserve funding of
16 over \$8 billion dollars, record state funding for
17 education, and surplus city revenue that can ensure a
18 balanced budget without drastic cuts, our public
19 schools will still be recovering from two previous
20 rounds of cuts totaling more than \$700 million.

21 In addition to the massive cuts, City Public
22 Schools are also as at risk, as many folks talked
23 about today, \$2 billion worth of federally funded
24 programs that will be running out in June.

2 This dire consequence can be avoided, even in a
3 worst-case scenario where the state doesn't provide
4 extra revenue to save the programs. In the short
5 term the City should use every available resource
6 from surplus tax revenue projected by the city
7 council to reserve funding which is currently in the
8 billions to restore these vital services for
9 vulnerable New Yorkers.

10 In the longer term, however, the City and State
11 must work together to raise more revenue. While
12 raising revenue largely falls under the purview of
13 the State Legislature. The Administration and City
14 Council have an important role to play in passage,
15 given the power of down state's constituency and the
16 outsized impact on federally funded education
17 programs set expiring federal funds. The City must
18 push for revenues at the state level and advocate for
19 more funding. A recent Sienna poll shows that New
20 Yorkers overwhelmingly support taxing the ultra-
21 wealthy and corporations.

22 Constituents want these laws passed. And at the
23 center of all this is the issue of racial equity.
24 The New York City Comptroller released a report in
25 December showing that the racial wealth gap in New

2 York State is higher than the national average, and
3 that the median household net worth of white
4 households is 15 times greater than black households.

5 The New York Times just published an article,
6 pretty recently, showing that a quarter of New York
7 City's children live in poverty, and that black,
8 Latinx, and Asian New Yorkers are twice as likely to
9 live in poverty as white people.

10 While these statistics are not solely based on
11 educational opportunity, public education remains the
12 surest path out of poverty and into a life of dignity
13 and comfort that we all deserve. So, investing in
14 our children from birth to college is an investment
15 in fairness and the promise of our democracy. Thank
16 you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
18 Olympia?

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 MS. KAZI: Thank you Chair Joseph for holding
21 this marathon hearing, and for the opportunity to
22 testify. My name is Olympia Kazi. I am a public
23 school parent of a first grader and a third grader.

24 I first want to applaud the students who
25 testified this afternoon to call for funding mental

2 health support and Restorative Justice programs. I
3 wholeheartedly support their asks. I also agree with
4 the students who spoke about the manufactured budget
5 crisis tactic that this mayor has adopted in order to
6 pit various valid interests against each other.

7 Let's be clear: What today's 12-plus hours of
8 testimonies have demonstrated is that we don't buy
9 it. We know that the school of the schools of the
10 wealthiest city on the globe, that according to the
11 IBO will have a \$3.2 billion budget surplus next
12 year, can afford to both take care of the students
13 with disabilities and universal education. We can
14 cap students at 2025 per class and have mental health
15 counselors. Not to mention that we can afford
16 nutritious yummy meals, including the chicken
17 dumplings that the kids want.

18 So, we know that when there is will, there is a
19 way. DOE needs to adapt a can-do attitude and become
20 proactive. That is the opposite of what they
21 demonstrated here today.

22 I want to thank you again, Chair and all the
23 other Councilmembers because you asked great
24 questions, and I hope you'll continue to hold our
25

2 mayor accountable and make sure that they reverse all
3 the harmful budget cuts.

4 What brought me here today is my kids overcrowded
5 school that is 130% over capacity, yet DOE has
6 presented no plans yet about how the class size is
7 going to be reduced. At PSIS 187 in District Six, we
8 have three first grade and they have 30, 30, and 28
9 kids, and as you can imagine, that's not ideal. Our
10 principal said that we would need 10 more classrooms,
11 like literally spaces, and teachers, and of course
12 more funds for all sorts of services. Yet there is
13 no plan from DOE, and we-- they don't even plan to
14 build another school as you saw from the capital
15 budget in District Six.

16 At the same time, I keep receiving mailers from a
17 charter, the Success Academy, regularly that happens
18 to be located just next to PS 187. We discovered
19 that DOE pays \$5 million for two success academies in
20 District Six, and from a question that Councilmember
21 Brewer asked this morning, we discovered that the DOE
22 pays \$100 million just for rent while the state
23 reimburses another \$135 millions.

24 Now at the same time, no other state in the US,
25 beyond New York State, pays for charter rents. And

2 DOE hasn't endorsed the bill that Senator-- State
3 Senator Liu has introduced to make it possible for
4 DOE not to have to pay this rent. That don't make
5 sense. So, they have been undermining public
6 schools. And they have been pushing parents to leave
7 the city or definitely leave the public school
8 system, and if they can afford to go private,
9 otherwise they go to more charters and we're
10 privatizing more public goods, and we put kids to
11 unsafe learning environment.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has
13 expired.

14 MS. KAZI: Thank you.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.
16 Emily Helstrom.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 MS. HELLSTROM: Wait, hello.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin, Emily.

20 MS. HELLSTROM: Oh, thank you so much. I
21 appreciate your-- your being here tonight so late.

22 I'm here today on behalf of Literacy Academy
23 Collective and the students and families we serve, as
24 the school support organization for the first in-
25 district public school, specifically designed for

2 children with dyslexia and other struggling readers,
3 PS 642, the South Bronx literacy Academy in district
4 seven in the South Bronx.

5 In order for students to enter our school, they
6 need to be below the 16th percentile in their
7 benchmark reading scores. And in fact, at the
8 beginning of the year, we found that 97% of our
9 students tested on average at the 5th percentile.
10 These students had made essentially zero growth for
11 their first two to three years of schooling.

12 When we retested students in January, we saw
13 significant changes, with 47% of students now making
14 at least typical growth, including 33% making above,
15 or well above typical growth.

16 While we don't yet have end of year data, we
17 assume that they will mirror those from our students
18 in our pilot last year. For that group of students,
19 their average growth was the equivalent from moving
20 from the 16th percentile to the 68th percentile in
21 one year.

22 But I want to share with you the voices of our
23 students and families who could not be in the room
24 today. One mother wrote to us and said, "In the
25 first two months of attending FBLA, I saw a drastic

2 change in my son's ability to sound out words, read
3 and write. I was literally blown away when he came
4 home and started to sound out words and actually
5 write letters."

6 One of our students turned to her mom after the
7 first month of school and said, "Mama, in my new
8 school, I'm smart."

9 We are not performing magic in our school. But
10 we are deeply training our teachers, reconfiguring
11 curricula so that our students can actually access
12 grade-level content, we are providing coaching and
13 feedback for our educators, and we are mounting a
14 summer teacher practicum. While all while serving
15 students in our Summer Rising program.

16 I am bringing these success stories here into
17 your room, so that you know that the good work that
18 NYCPS can do if we invest deeply in our school
19 system, in our students, in our teachers, and in our
20 families. We need to be expanding these programs and
21 schools, not shrinking them. Our most vulnerable
22 students are English language learners, our students
23 with disabilities, and our students living below the
24 poverty line: These students can succeed. They can

2 learn to read and write, and experience academic
3 success, but their needs must be put first.

4 Our budget must reflect the needs of these
5 students first. Budgets are a reflection of our
6 values. I know our city can do better. We all need
7 to be part of crafting a budget that centers the
8 students who need these budget dollars the most.

9 Thank you so much for your time.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Tanisha Grant?

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 MS. GRANT: Hello, my name is Tanesha Grant and I
13 am a mother and grandmother, first of all. I am also
14 the grandmother of a child who is nonverbal and
15 autistic. I am also the Executive Director of
16 Parents Support and Parents New York, and Moms United
17 for Black Lives in New York City. Thank you, Chair
18 Joseph, for your extraordinary leadership as Chair of
19 the City Council's Education Committee. I want to
20 thank all of the courageous students who came today
21 to testify. Our students voices should always be
22 front and center.

23 Chair, today you heard how deep the underfunding
24 of our public schools affect our students firsthand.
25 A lot of our community partners also testified on how

2 devastating any cuts to vital education programs will
3 be. As Executive Director of Parents Support and
4 Parents New York, we not only ask that any and all
5 cuts to our education budget be restored, we ask that
6 these programs are fully funded. We can't keep
7 taking from some schools and students to give to
8 others.

9 In many ways, all of our children are vulnerable.
10 Every child should have access to pre-K, 3K, social
11 worker, school counselors, great food, art, music,
12 special education services, language access, school
13 nurses (department of education certified school
14 nurses), social and emotional learning, culturally
15 responsive mental health services, access to NETC and
16 every other program that the Department of Education
17 offers.

18 I would also like to say that parent engagement
19 and communication with the DOES is severely lacking.
20 To get access to a lot of things, New York City
21 Public Schools is demanding parents to go or not
22 online, knowing this is not accessible to all parents
23 because of all of the things: Not having internet
24 service, language access. It leaves great gaps in
25

2 parents receiving information and parent
3 participation.

4 Parents feel unseen and unheard. Our students
5 feel unseen and unheard. Every day, our community-
6 based organization uses every resource we can acquire
7 to support our families: We give laptops to
8 children, we buy groceries, and provide anti-violence
9 programs for our students in our community. But it
10 is never enough.

11 So, we want all the education services fully
12 funded in every budget. We will not pick one service
13 over another. Our children deserve them all.

14 Lastly, I would say that it is very disrespectful
15 to come on these hearings, and stay with you Chair
16 and stay with the City Council and the committee for
17 hours and hours, and watch the leadership of the
18 Department of Education come here--

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has
20 expired.

21 MS. GRANT: --and give testimony and leave, and
22 not even hear from the people, from this community
23 that they are supposed to serve. Thank you for
24 listening to my testimony tonight.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. And
3 thanks to everybody on the panel.

4 Our next panel, Venus Sze-Tsang.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 MS. SZE-TSANG: Good evening, I'm Venus Sze-Tsang
7 and current Staten Island parent elected pep member,
8 Class Size Working Group member, my children's PTA
9 board member, and volunteer member. I'm speaking in
10 my own capacity as a New York City public school
11 parent of three public school students.

12 Thank you, City Council, for giving me an
13 opportunity to engage in conversation. Thank you for
14 all of your dedication securing funds for essential
15 New York City programs. I hope the City Council can
16 do all they can to save programs such as Summer
17 Rising, after school programs that partner with
18 communication organ community organizations, 3K and
19 pre-K programs, nutritious and appetizing lunch
20 options, internet access and other programs, like
21 project PIVOT that have shown to work.

22 I have a special asked to give Chancellor Banks
23 support so he can continue to lead our schools with
24 his vision and his heart. We are still recovering
25 from the pandemic, and we need to prioritize these

2 vital programs and to remain steady and, you know,
3 like, not change leadership in a short two years,
4 because there's good things on the horizon and, you
5 know, we want to continue them and build on them.

6 My daughter who is currently in 3K talked to me
7 about what she learned in school, and I'm so
8 impressed with early childhood learning. She taught
9 me about red choices and green choices. We need to
10 continue investing in our students, especially when
11 it is proving to work. Thank you for listening and
12 being here.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Cynthia?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

15 MS. SEIDEN: Hello. Thank you for having us.

16 And thank you for hanging in there this late evening.

17 My name is Cynthia Seiden. I'm Principal at the
18 Birch Soundview School in the Bronx, and I'm part of
19 Birch Family Services, a not-for-profit agency.

20 Our particular site provides school education to
21 both special education students and pre-K and 3K
22 students. Most of our classes are integrated
23 classrooms, providing support to both the
24 neurotypical students and special-needs students.

2 All our students come from the New York City,
3 obviously, public school, New York City Department of
4 Education, and therefore our teachers are responsible
5 to address both special-needs students and general
6 education students in their classrooms.

7 It's also really imperative that our teachers are
8 certified, and our TAs are certified to work with all
9 these different types of students with a range of
10 needs. This means that our teachers'
11 responsibilities are twofold in the integrated
12 classrooms: They are writing regular reports of
13 progress, developing weekly lesson plans, and
14 developing and monitoring IEPs, and it's very
15 difficult to find-- with the funding-- if the funding
16 is cut, it will be very difficult to find teachers to
17 fill those positions with all those additional
18 responsibilities and all the range of students' needs
19 that they have to meet.

20 Even in our case, too, it was frustrating when
21 our 4410 club programs did not-- our teachers were
22 not eligible for the raise that CBO pre-K teachers
23 received as well.

24 At Soundview, we also were-- excuse me. For that
25 reason the funds provided the preschool enhancement

2 were essential in aiding retention of existing
3 teachers and teacher assistants, and providing
4 encouragement for other teachers and other TAs to
5 become more certified.

6 If the funding is not continued, and salaries are
7 reduced, we will lose classroom staff, and we will
8 have to close classrooms. It also will impact the
9 hours of our programming. Part of the enhancement
10 program that we received allowed us to go ahead and
11 extend the school day for our special-needs students.
12 If we don't-- If the funding is cut, we do not have
13 those hours, our students will lose out on their
14 introduction to new integral peers and will impact
15 these already vulnerable students.

16 Early childhood and early childhood special
17 education services are imperative to development and
18 provide the foundation for ongoing learning. Without
19 the qualified staff available to these students, they
20 will be left behind as they enter into the public
21 school curriculum.

22 We ask the budget provide adequate funding for
23 preschool special education teachers and staff with
24 salaries on par with their DOE counterparts to ensure
25 a free and appropriate, free and appropriate public

2 education to which the students are entitled. And I
3 thank everybody for speaking today. It's been
4 wonderful to hear everybody fight so much for our
5 children.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Cynthia. Leslie?

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

8 MS. MARTINEZ: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much
9 for staying with us so late and for listening to all
10 of us. Thank you for holding the hearing and the
11 opportunity to testify.

12 My name is Leslie Martinez, my child is
13 attending-- First of all, I want to say that I echo
14 everything that everyone has said around how
15 important it is to have early childhood care,
16 disability, mental health, good-- real food, and the
17 arts and all the other things that were mentioned.

18 However, my testimony today is related to class
19 size, which is my biggest pain point at the moment.

20 I am the mother of a first grader at PS 187 In
21 School District 6. I'm also expecting a child whom I
22 hope will also attend our local public school.

23 Our school is currently at 130% over capacity
24 from the New York State Class law passed on June 22.
25 The law requires that, you know, we cap class sizes

2 at 20 students per class. Currently, my son's school
3 has 33 kids in his classroom and one teacher. In
4 total, we have about 776 students, and there's no
5 budget or room for us to grow to the demands per
6 seat.

7 So, I'm afraid that waiting until 2028 to act on
8 this law will be too late for hardworking parents
9 that believe in public education and diversity, but
10 can also-- will afford to go somewhere else. We
11 might have to give up diversity, which is what
12 attracted me to come to this school, the fact that
13 there is a high level of Hispanic population in a
14 high-performing school. I'm afraid that I have to
15 give up my community and all of that. And also
16 alongside with other people, leave to the suburbs
17 just for a better chance for my child to have a
18 better education.

19 My child is not-- does not have a disability.
20 And I think that, you know, the-- the class sizes
21 affect not just children with disability, but it
22 affects all children. Someone's being left behind.
23 And in this case, I mean, I'm going to shorten it
24 because of the time, but you know, it's like all the
25 effort that I put in as a mother from zero to-- from

2 ages zero to six, investing a lot of time in his--
3 aiding his love for learning. It wasn't necessarily
4 teaching, but I was following the Montessori
5 principles. We enrolled him in a Montessori school.
6 In fact, we moved to the neighborhood for that school
7 and-- in Washington Heights. And I feel like all
8 that effort, now that I put them in public school,
9 I'm struggling to see that this is the right fit for
10 us.

11 But nonetheless, we know that it's important to
12 have people from different backgrounds, social-- not
13 just racial, but also social-economic backgrounds,
14 and some of us have a little more possibilities to
15 leave the public school system, what are you going to
16 be left with. You know what I mean? So, I think it
17 is important for me, but also for other parents to
18 have diversity in their schools, and you know-- but
19 it is not enticing to have 33 kids in a classroom
20 with one teacher.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has
22 expired.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may continue.

24 MS. MARTINEZ: Oh. Thank you. Yeah, so as I was
25 saying-- Thank you so much for allowing me to

2 finish. As I was saying, it is not very enticing for
3 us to stay. And the example I wanted to give-- just
4 to speak, when my son came to me, and he said, "Mom,
5 I've been stuck at the black sticker label in my
6 reading level. I still have more-- four colors to
7 go." Just to explain what he is saying, there is an
8 assessment that is done in the classroom, where the
9 kids get a sticker when they move through different
10 levels depending on where they are. And that is kind
11 of like their assessment, the assessment that they go
12 through. And so, he was just saying to me, "Mom, I
13 haven't really had time to sit with my teacher again
14 so she could assess me, and I'm stuck here. So
15 essentially what he is expressing is, "I'm bored."
16 And that, to me, is a sign of-- He's not challenged,
17 and, you know, he's ready for more. So, I think
18 it's, you know, having-- I even feel that this is a
19 teacher responsibility, because she has 33 kids in
20 the classroom. So, of course she needs to prioritize
21 the kids that need additional help. So, I wanted to
22 bring that to your attention and I have--

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please wrap up.

24 MS. MARTINEZ: I-- one final question: Which
25 family profile does the DOE serve? I'm not rich

2 enough to afford private schools, but I do earn
3 enough to move away and go find other schools that
4 are better-suited for us. So, I just want to ask--
5 ask you to take into consideration just different
6 family profiles as you look into budgeting, and how
7 you could keep us all here, especially those of us
8 that really want to stay within the school system,
9 and we value the diversity that the city provides.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Paula?

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 MS. _____ Good evening, Chair Joseph, and
13 Counsel. Thank you for your commitment to this
14 cause, as it has been shown throughout this hearing
15 from 10 a.m. until this very moment.

16 Our future for our children is real. Lots of
17 issues that must be dealt with here. Cutting from
18 the future of our youth is not the answer. So, you
19 know who we are: Northside Center for Child
20 Development is a 78-year-old, Harlem-based, family
21 mental health clinic that runs a wide variety of
22 high-quality behavioral health and educational
23 programs, including Head Start, early Head Start
24 programs in East Harlem, downtown Brooklyn, and the
25 South Bronx. Northside was actually founded by the

2 premier black psychologist, Dr. Clark, that developed
3 the black-white doll study, and was used in the Brown
4 vs. Board of Education segregation case that was
5 referred to earlier this evening.

6 I am Paula Magnus, the Deputy Director of the
7 Northside Center. Special education students suffer
8 one or more of these conditions: Learning
9 disabilities, speech and language impairments,
10 autism, cognitive impairments, emotional-behavioral
11 disorders, physical disabilities like cerebral palsy
12 (we can go on and on), where they're impaired by
13 their vision or hearing, chronic medical illnesses
14 and other conditions that affect a child's optimal
15 education.

16 As we reflect on this going forward from today, I
17 hope children suffering these conditions will be
18 among the first we help, and the last we deprive of
19 services. Let us discuss some of the benefits of
20 special education enhancements that may be cut. In a
21 September 2022 research paper by two pediatricians
22 entitled "Special Education", they wrote "Early
23 identification and proper remediation of
24 developmental delays in young children, and learning
25 difficulties in older students, have lifelong

2 benefits," something you know being an educator.
3 Students achieve higher academic levels and financial
4 independence when these services are provided. If
5 these cuts go into affect in July, special education
6 teachers will face salary reductions of \$10,000 to
7 \$20,000 per year, you heard, wiping out, trying to
8 reach salary parity for pre-school education
9 teachers, and hourly pay for many teachers, this will
10 be reduced to minimum wage again. These budget cuts
11 will likely trigger special education teachers and
12 teachers assistants resigning, potentially hundreds
13 of 4410 classrooms being closed across the city,
14 leading to even more children waiting for the classes
15 and services they have the legal right to receive.

16 The City must make the necessary investments to
17 maintain the preschool special education contrast
18 enhancements, and keep these classes open for our
19 preschoolers with disabilities.

20 As the hearing has shown today, not having these
21 programs will negatively impact our most vulnerable,
22 our children, and our self-sacrificing staff, who are
23 already either underserved or underpaid. Thank you
24 for giving your time, heart, soul, and skill to the
25 attention of this important hearing with gathering

2 data by asking the hard, good questions you've been
3 doing throughout the day, and even at this late hour.
4 And yes, I would agree, you are beyond a saint.
5 Thank you so much.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 Paullette?

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

10 MS. HEALY: Chair Joseph, you are officially the
11 Queen of Hearings: 12 hours and going. So, let's--
12 let's get this going so you can get home. My name is
13 Paullette Healy, and I'm a disability advocate
14 raising two students with disabilities, attending New
15 York City Public Schools.

16 As my colleagues from the Emergency Coalition to
17 Save Education Programs have already stated, programs
18 linked to the \$700 million federal funds that we are
19 about to lose will only increase the \$1 billion the
20 DOE is spending in impartial hearings.

21 It was infuriating to hear the Chancellor say he
22 wishes he could keep all the programs that are on the
23 chopping block if he can only find the money. Yet,
24 students testified today that if we just shifted the
25 money away from school safety officers, we would be

2 able to save \$400 million, which would allow us to
3 keep the 450 social workers and 100 shelter
4 coordinators that are being funded through the
5 emergency funds.

6 The students from UIC and Make The Road said, you
7 know, one testimony after another, that police in
8 schools make them feel less safe rather than more
9 safe, and our children need-- seem to know the
10 answers on how to be more thoughtful about how we
11 fund our schools. And our children can also see the
12 false scarcity designed to pit factions of
13 populations against each other.

14 So the only thing the Chancellor did today was
15 demonstrate once again why mayoral control of our
16 schools just does not work.

17 On the subject of safety, the DOE must stop
18 throwing money at costly contracts like-- like
19 automatic locking doors and security doors that are
20 just cosmetic enhancements with no real protection.
21 We spend more money to staff call centers and GPS
22 appears than transportation coordinators at our
23 schools. We spend more money on online assessments
24 like I-Ready and Acadience, than special education
25 interventionalists. And when we follow the money,

2 this administration continues to spend millions on
3 contracts that contribute to population control, and
4 not social or emotional learning for our diverse
5 spectrum of students. And that includes the practice
6 of using our schools to launder more money back to
7 the NYPD.

8 So, do we need to protect these essential
9 programs? A hundred percent. Do we need to find
10 sustainable funding streams to maintain the
11 continuation? Absolutely. Do I trust this mayor to
12 prioritize our New York City families? Not for a
13 second. So the burden falls on you, City Council.
14 Speaker Adams spoke earlier this-- last week very
15 powerfully about showing our mayor what real
16 leadership looks like. So I urge you to invest in
17 our children, invest in our families, invest in our
18 immigrants, and invest in the future of New York
19 City.

20 And as a D 75 parent, I would be remiss not to
21 bring attention the mercenary way the DOE has been
22 rolling out recent mergers and truncations, I guess,
23 you know, in preparation of the class size law. Our
24 D 75 programs are being affected with very little
25 engagement. They are the sacrificial lamb when they

2 are talking about space. And I, for one, am a huge
3 proponent for class sizes being smaller, because then
4 the targeted support for every student will be in
5 place, but not at the expense of our District 75
6 programs. So I ask you, Chair Joseph, as Chair of
7 the Education Committee, to please hold a hearing on
8 how the DOE is coming to a determination on these
9 recent mergers and truncations, because honestly the
10 math isn't mapping. It doesn't make sense.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.
12 Your time has expired.

13 MS. HEALY: I'm just going to finish up. We're
14 squeezing children into over-populated spaces and
15 then pushing out smaller programs that work. So, I
16 would greatly appreciate your partnership, but let's
17 keep holding the DOE's feet to the fire, and let's
18 hold that hearing to find out how they are coming up
19 with these particular proposals. Thank you so much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
21 Lupe?

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

23 MS. HERNANDEZ: Hi. My apologies. My name is
24 Lupe Hernandez, and I am speaking to you this evening
25 as a New York City parent. Thank you, Chair Joseph

2 and City Council for holding another historical
3 hearing, and I am speaking in my own personal
4 capacity to you.

5 Regarding \$1 billion federal COVID dollar
6 spending, many programs-- we new this was coming down
7 the pike. In fact, I want to say many of our
8 testimonies we have heard today is very similar to
9 last year, like Groundhog Day.

10 If the DOE doesn't to recognize these as cuts, we
11 should name them exactly-- they're definitely not
12 being sustained, as they need to be. Many of these
13 programs needing funding prior to the pandemic. And
14 whoever-- whatever administration decided to use the
15 funds as they did, regardless we knew that early
16 childhood education, special education, 4410s needed
17 to be sustained. The funding for these programs
18 needed to be sustained, and I can tell you, as a
19 parent that you know lives in the education space, it
20 was very difficult to be able to get my own son in
21 the early, extended-day and year program. And as a
22 4-year-old that is in the 3K program, still not
23 receiving his related services for speech and
24 occupational therapy.

2 We know that birth to 5 years old needs to be
3 fully funded with pay parity for those providers that
4 will be impacted most. These providers are mostly
5 women of color and immigrant families. Our students
6 in temporary housing, we need shelter-based
7 coordinators to be sustained. And as previous
8 testimony mentioned, under the McKinney-Vento act,
9 families are not aware of their rights when it comes
10 to enrollment and even transportation for even
11 families that are also doubled up.

12 Fair student funding needs to be readdressed. It
13 is not fair. We heard today from the DOE how funding
14 was missing, or how it didn't get used for
15 Restorative Justice practices because it got to the
16 schools too late. This continues to be an issue.
17 ADA accessibility lacking in our SCA budgeting, it's-
18 - it's really hard for a CDC member, parent members,
19 to be able to submit capital improvement submissions
20 versus Reso A, as you heard Councilmembers testify,
21 why is Reso A having to fund this? Why is
22 participatory budgeting funding a PA system that
23 needs to be accessible to their deaf community.
24 Building and facilities, these fundings need to be
25 there, and the students that had passed, I just want

2 to uplift the \$75 million in Restorative Justice. We
3 need more healing centers in schools. We have the \$3
4 billion in additional tax revenue. And I apologize,
5 Chair Joseph. My son-- my 10-year-old son heard some
6 of the other students testifying this afternoon, got
7 really inspired, and wanted to share, if you have
8 time. He wanted to share his lunch experience with
9 you, if you do not mind.

10 Yes, you can say your name.

11 NICO: My, my name is Nico, and I'm going to talk
12 about how-- about the school lunches, and yeah. So,
13 basically the school lunches are-- they used to be,
14 like-- they used to be good food. But a few months
15 ago, we-- there was a poster that said Eric Adams was
16 removing all meat, and only putting vegan options in
17 the school. And that's kind of disappointing,
18 because the food that, like, they're kind of serving
19 is kind of disgusting. It was like-- It was like
20 one time at school when I got a school lunch, it was
21 like-- there was like these to long spaghetti strips
22 or whatever, and it was like-- it was like brownish,
23 like, on the inside it was like brownish, and, like,
24 I don't know what it was, but, like, it was, like,
25 brown to where like-- I don't know what-- I don't

2 know what was inside it, but it was like something
3 spaghetti. And there was this-- there was this other
4 lunch thing--

5 MS. HERNANDEZ: [INAUDIBLE]

6 NICO: Oh yeah. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
8 testimony, and thank you to everybody on the panel.

9 If the following panelists who registered to
10 testify on Zoom are logged on, please use the raise
11 hand feature: [START PHONETIC SPELLING] Katheryn
12 Hoy, Bella Gibbs, Shawn Henry, and Jeannie Ramm-
13 Nereen, Nicholas Lafleur, Brain Manden, Giovanni
14 Percivalli, Natalia Foreman, Diana Moreno, Susanna
15 Saul, Lauren Phillips, Giselle Hearn, Ian Huntley,
16 Steven Koss, Nuria Rodriguez, Rebecca Haberstick,
17 Heda Thier, Alexander Haridopolis, Maria Elena
18 English-Christianson, Dolly Ocasio, Natasha Perlman,
19 Veronic Hixson, Lennie Heamson, Lauren Johnson, Shiff
20 Soyn, Martha Larson, Loualle Nagningo, Michael James
21 Ranz, Nigel McDonald, Steven Kopf, Jeannine Kealy,
22 Lara Krikow, Hasni Zanat, Natania Harris, Sheday
23 Johnson, Espa Zegoris, Tishna Lopez [END PHONETIC
24 SPELLING]

25 No hands? This concludes our virtual testimony.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for all who
3 participated in the 2024 preliminary budget hearing.

4 [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 April 25, 2024