

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY
WITH COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE

----- X

April 16, 2021
Start: 10:05 a.m.
Recess: 1:20 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: Mark Treyger,
Chairperson for Committee on
Education

Stephen T. Levin,
Chairperson for Committee on
General Welfare

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Alicka Ampry-Samuel
- Inez D. Barron
- Joseph C. Borelli
- Justin L. Brannan
- Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
- Daniel Dromm
- James F. Gennaro
- Barry S. Grodenchik
- Ben Kallos
- Brad S. Lander
- Mark Levine
- Farah N. Louis

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
COUNCIL MEMBERS (CONT.):

- I. Daneek Miller
- Kevin C. Riley
- Ydanis A. Rodriguez
- Deborah L. Rose
- Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
- Eric A. Ulrich
- Adrienne Adams
- Helen Rosenthal
- Antonio Reynoso
- Vanessa Gibson

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

3

A P P E A R A N C E S

Chris Caruso
Senior Executive Director at the Department of
Education's Office of Community Schools

Sarah Jonas
Executive Director at the Department of
Education's Office of Community Schools

Michael Hickey
Executive Director of Students in Temporary
Housing

Lauren Siciliano
Chief Administrative Officer

Jodi Sammons Chen
Senior Director of the Office of Pupil
Transportation

Jo Ann Benoit
Senior Executive Director of the Office of the
First Deputy Chancellor

Erin Drinkwater
Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental and
Legislative Affairs

Randi Levine
Advocates for Children

Raysa Rodriguez
Citizens Committee for Children

Leslie Armstrong
Volunteers of America

Diana Cruz
Hispanic Federation

Tammy Samms
Sanctuary for Families

Tydie Abreu (sitting in for Diana Cruz)
Policy Analyst for the Hispanic Federation

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Olga Rodriguez-Vidal
Safe Horizon

Deborah Berkman
NYLAG

Ted Houghton
Gateway Housing

Melissa Accomando
Brooklyn Defenders Services

Kenneth Jones
Salvadori Center

3 SERGEANT POLITE: Recording to the computer all
4 set.

5 SERGEANT BIONDO: Recording to the cloud ready to
6 go. Sergeant Sadowsky, please with your opening.

7 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Yes. Good morning and
8 welcome today's remote New York City Council Hearing
9 of the Committee on Education jointly with the
10 Committee on General Welfare.

11 At this time, would all Council Members and
12 Council Staff please turn on their video. To
13 minimize disruption, please place electronic devices
14 on vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit
15 testimony you may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov.
16 Once again, that is testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank
17 you Chairs. We are ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, good morning to
19 everyone on today's Zoom for the Committee on
20 Education and Committee on General Welfare, a joint
21 hearing on Youth in Shelter in the School System. My
22 name is Mark Treyger and I am the Chair of the
23 Committee on Education. I am joined by my colleague,
24 Chair of General Welfare, Stephen Levin who we will
25 hear from shortly.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

6

3 I want to thank the Department of Education and
4 the Department of Homeless Services for being here
5 today to provide testimony and answer Council Member
6 questions on this topic. Students experiencing
7 homelessness and living in temporary housing attend
8 schools in every single district in the city.
9 Citywide, there is over 100,000 students, a
10 significant portion of our student population.

11 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, homeless children
12 and youth already faced many obstacles that hinder
13 them from achieving their full potential. COVID-19
14 has exacerbated those obstacles and added new ones.
15 Some of the additional challenges posed by this
16 pandemic include a lack of appropriate educational
17 spaces within shelters, problems obtaining an
18 internet enabled device to engage in remote learning
19 and unreliable or no access to Wi-Fi.

20 These issues and so many more are acutely felt by
21 homeless students. Homeless students have the same
22 educational rights as anyone else and we as a city
23 must ensure that we meeting their social, emotional
24 academic needs. This hearing will allow us to hear
25 from the administration on efforts to bring Wi-Fi to
all shelters in the city, ensuring that every student

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

7

3 that needs a device has one. That we have
4 appropriate levels of support, staffing in shelters,
5 that we have planned appropriate educational supports
6 for the upcoming summer in so many areas that are
7 needed to be addressed.

8 The Committee on Education has been singularly
9 focused since the onset of the remote Council
10 hearings, to ensuring that the topics we cover shine
11 a light on the greatest disparities in our current
12 educational environment. As we have highlighted, in
13 the best of times, we as a city in the school system
14 were lacking in many facets at providing a free and
15 appropriate education to every single student in New
16 York City public school system. COVID-19 has brought
17 new obstacles, exacerbated obstacles and challenges.
18 We have highlighted the successes of the DOE
19 throughout this pandemic. We have also highlighted
20 where the DOE and the Mayor must do better.

21 Chancellor Ross Porter who testified at a
22 Preliminary Budget Hearing last month has brought a
23 zeal to the job as a former teacher, principal,
24 superintendent and executive superintendent seeing
25 first hand the many daily challenges being faced by
our students and their educators. In today's

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

8

3 hearing, I look forward to concrete plans and actual
4 answers to our questions on how the administration is
5 handling the issues facing homeless youth.

6 This Committee will also hear Intro. 139
7 sponsored by Chair Levin. A Local Law requiring the
8 DOE to report on student health services in
9 correlation with student housing status for students
10 in K-8. Before turning to Chair Levin for his
11 opening remarks, I want to thank Committee staff
12 Malcom, Kalima, Jan, Chelsea, Masis and Frank. I
13 also want to thank my own staff Anna, Vanessa, Maria
14 and Jeanine for preparing for today's hearing. And I
15 will now turn it over to my colleague Chair Levin.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Chair
17 Treyger. Good morning everybody and welcome to
18 today's hearing on Youth in Shelter in the School
19 System. My name is Stephen Levin, I am Chair of the
20 Committee on General Welfare in the Council and I am
21 proud to Co-Chair this hearing with my colleague
22 Council Member Mark Treyger, Chair of the Committee
23 on Education.

24 Approximately one in ten New York City public
25 school students are experiencing homelessness. That
trend has unfortunately remained steady over the last

1
2 several years. Advocates have argued that the
3 pandemic has likely caused this number to rise since
4 school staff have less of an ability to witness
5 changes to a students housing status.

6 The city's shelter system is intended to be
7 temporary. Yet, we know that the average length of
8 stay of student in shelter has increased to a
9 ridiculous 495 days. 495 days is the average length
10 of stay in shelter for a child. That's an increase
11 of 12.5 percent for families with children in the
12 first four months of Fiscal '21 as compared to the
13 first four months of Fiscal 2020. And that number
14 has been increasing steadily for the last ten years.

15 Students experiencing homelessness were already
16 at a disadvantage before the pandemic and the
17 disparities that they encounter have only been
18 exacerbated. Today, in addition to examining the
19 oversight topic, we are hearing two bills that have
20 introduced to address some of these disparities.

21 Intro. 150 would create a taskforce to address
22 the transportation of homeless students. Many
23 students who live in temporary housing have to
24 commute across the city to get to their schools.
25 These students are legally entitled to transportation

1 to their school of origin. According to advocates,
2 it took me at least six months since the beginning of
3 the pandemic for the city to finalize busing routes
4 for homeless students, despite the fact that they
5 have a right to transportation.
6

7 Moreover, as the city shifted to remote learning
8 during the pandemic, the average school attendance
9 rate declined to 71.4 percent compared to 86.7
10 percent during the same period of last year for
11 children in the DHS shelter system.

12 And an article just came out yesterday showing
13 the disparity between the attendance rates for
14 students in shelter and students who are stably
15 housed. Broadly speaking, homelessness is often
16 associated with inequities and health outcomes. An
17 effort to identify unique or acute health challenges
18 faced by students who live in temporary housing.

19 The second bill I am sponsoring Intro. 139 will
20 expand DOE's existing reporting requirements to
21 include data on school-based health centers, comment
22 student illnesses and health screenings. This data
23 would specifically be disaggregated by student
24 housing status for students in kindergarten through
25 grade 8.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

11

3 I want to thank the advocates, members of the
4 public and those with lived experience who are
5 joining us remotely today including any students who
6 are with us. I want to thank the representatives
7 from the administration for joining us and I look
8 forward to hearing from you on these critical issues.

9 I would also like to thank my Chief of Staff
10 Jonathan Boucher, my Interim Legislative Director
11 Nicole Hunt, the Committee Staff Aminta Kilawan,
12 Senior Counsel Crystal Pond, Senior Policy Analyst
13 Natalie Omary Policy Analyst and Frank Sarno our
14 Finance Analyst.

15 And I want to acknowledge my colleagues who have
16 joined us today. I see Council Members Lander,
17 Dromm, Louis, Ampry-Samuel and I don't know if I see
18 anyone else. Oh, Council Member Rose, Council Member
19 Gennaro, Council Member Riley, uhm, Council Member
20 Borelli is here as well. And if I am missing
21 anybody, please - Council Member Adams, Council
22 Member Rosenthal uhm, see anybody else? I don't
23 believe so - Council Member Brannan, Council Member
24 Reynoso. Thank you all. I want to thank all of my
25 colleagues for joining us.

3 And uhm, you know and lastly before we begin, I
4 just want to just say uhm, you know, we have to do
5 better by the children in shelter in New York City.
6 There is no excuse at all for there to be disparities
7 in educational outcomes and educational services, in
8 attendance rates, in inequities with access to
9 technology.

10 The wealthiest city in America. We have the best
11 school system in America and as I said in my opening
12 statement with the average length of stay in shelter,
13 well over a year and actually approaching a year and
14 a half in shelter, is the average length of stay.

15 That means that there are many children, thousands of
16 children that are staying over two years in shelter.

17 We have a responsibility to them to do everything
18 that we can and I don't think anybody that's on this
19 - in this hearing today could say that we are doing
20 everything that we can. And until such time that we
21 do that we shouldn't rest on our laurels, we
22 shouldn't be patting ourselves on the back and saying
23 we are doing a good job. Frankly, what I want to
24 hear today is what the plan is to do better not what
25 we have done that we think we done right. I want to
know what we are going to do better.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

13

3 So, with that, I will turn it back over to my Co-
4 Chairman.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you very much Chair
6 Levin for those words and for your leadership. I
7 think you had mentioned a number of the folks,
8 members that are already on the Council, so I will
9 not repeat that and with that, we will swear in
10 Administration to testify.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Tregyer and
12 thank you Chair Levin. I am Kalima Johnson, Senior
13 Legislative Policy Analyst to the Committee on
14 Education of the New York City Council.

15 Before we begin testimony, I want to remind
16 everyone that you will be on mute until you are
17 called on to testify. After you are called on, you
18 will be unmuted. I will be calling on witnesses to
19 testify in panels, so please listen for your name to
20 be called. I will be announcing in advance who the
21 next panel will be.

22 I would like to remind everyone that unlike our
23 typical Council hearings, while you will be placed on a
24 panel, I will be calling on individuals to testify
25 one at a time. Council Members who have questions
for a particular panelist should use the raise hand

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 14

function in Zoom. You will be called on in the order with which you raised your hand after the full panels has completed testimony.

We will be limiting Council Member questions to five minutes. This includes both questions and answers. Please note that for the purposes of this virtual hearing, we will not be allowing a second round of questioning. For panelists, once your name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the go ahead to begin after setting the timer. Please listen for that queue.

All public testimony will be limited to two minutes. After the end of two minutes, please wrap up your comments so we can move forward to the next panelist. Please listen carefully and wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin before delivering your testimony as there is a slight delay. Written testimony can be submitted to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

I will now call on the following members of the Administration to testify. Chris Caruso, the Senior Executive Director at the Department of Education's Office of Community Schools, Sarah Jonas, the

3 Executive Director at the Department of Education's
4 Office of Community Schools, Michael Hickey,
5 Executive Director of Students in Temporary Housing,
6 Lauren Siciliano, the Chief Administrative Officer,
7 Jodi Sammons Chen, the Senior Director of the Office
8 of Pupil Transportation, Jo Ann Benoit, the Senior
9 Executive Director of the Office of the First Deputy
10 Chancellor and Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner
11 of Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs.

12 I will first read the oath and after, I will call
13 on each panelist here from the administration
14 individually to respond.

15 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
16 and nothing but the truth before this Committee and
17 to respond honestly to Council Member questions?
18 Chris Caruso?

19 CHRIS CARUSO: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sarah Jonas?

21 SARAH JONAS: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Michael Hickey?

23 MICHAEL HICKEY: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lauren Siciliano?

25 LAUREN SICILIANO: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jodi Sammons Chen?

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

16

JODI SAMMONS CHEN: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Jo Ann Benoit?

JO ANN BENOIT: Jo Ann Benoit, I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: My apologies. Erin
Drinkwater?

ERIN DRINKWATER: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Chris Caruso, you
may begin when ready.

CHRIS CARUSO: Thank you so much. Good morning
everyone. It's a pleasure to be here today. Good
morning Chair Treyger and a happy belated birthday to
you. Chair Levin and members of the Education and
General Welfare Committees who are present today.

My name is Christopher Caruso and I am the Senior
Executive Director of the Office of the Community
Schools at the Department of Education. I am joined
today by Sarah Jonas, who will soon to be the Acting
Senior Executive Director of the Office of Community
Schools. As some of you know, I will be
transitioning from my current role in approximately
one week from today. So, I appreciate you guys
squeezing us in as a little last minute run through
with you guys.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

17

3 Sarah has been my partner in this work since the
4 Office of Community Schools was created six years ago
5 and I have no doubt that she will carry on the
6 important work with fidelity and supporting our most
7 vulnerable students, which is something that she has
8 been committed to throughout her whole career.

9 Also joining me today is Michael Hickey, the
10 Executive Director of the Students in Temporary
11 Housing team at the Department of Education, Lauren
12 Siciliano, DOE's Chief Administrative Officer, Dr. Jo
13 Ann Benoit Senior Executive Director of the Division
14 of the First Deputy Chancellor, Jodi Sammons Chen
15 from the Office of Pupil Transportation and Erin
16 Drinkwater, our colleague at the Department of Social
17 Services who serves as Deputy Commissioner of
18 Legislative Affairs.

19 We are pleased to be here today to discuss the
20 city's work to support students in temporary housing
21 and the proposed legislation. Before I begin, I
22 would like to thank Chairs Treyger and Levin for your
23 continued leadership throughout the pandemic and all
24 that you have done on behalf of our students and
25 families. I would also like to thank the many

3 advocates, nonprofits and city agency partners that
4 continue to support our students in shelter.

5 Supporting students living in temporary housing
6 and particularly our students in shelter, has been a
7 top priority of this administration. We recognize
8 that students in temporary housing face distinct
9 challenges and needs that have been further impacted
10 over the past year. The pandemic has had the
11 greatest impact on students with the greatest needs
12 and our students living in temporary housing have
13 faced immense trauma during this time. We have
14 worked hard to provide targeted supports aimed at
15 addressing their needs and keeping them connected
16 with their school communities.

17 We do this work in close cooperation, leadership
18 and guidance from the Department of Social Services
19 and especially the Department of Homeless Services.
20 The DOE's STH team has a close working relationship
21 with their DHS colleagues. In addition to frequent
22 email, phone exchanges, executive leadership from DOE
23 and DHS meet every two weeks with senior members from
24 our teams to discuss policy, operations, training and
25 a wide range of related issues. Those include
improving attendance and reducing chronic

1
2 absenteeism, informing families in shelter of
3 important DOE services and opportunities and ensuring
4 that DOE personnel are able to meet with all new
5 families seeking to enter the shelter system through
6 the PATH.

7 As part of the DOE's realignment three years ago,
8 the Students in Temporary Housing Team was placed in
9 the Office of Community Schools, as part of the newly
10 formed Division of School Climate and Wellness under
11 Deputy Chancellor LaShawn's leadership. This was
12 done with two very purposeful goals in mind:

13 First, we wanted to apply the proven successes of
14 the community school strategy in providing students
15 and families with the right supports at the right
16 time. According to a recent national study by the
17 RAND Corporation, our impact on improving credit
18 accumulation and decreasing chronic absenteeism in
19 community schools, was even more pronounced among
20 students who reside in temporary housing.

21 And secondly, to make those supports, make sure
22 that those supports were delivered in alignment with
23 the ultimate goal of the Division of School Climate
24 and Wellness, which is making sure that all students,
25 no matter who they are, what they might be dealing

3 with in their lives outside of school or where they
4 live, feel safe, welcome, and supported in their
5 school community, while experiencing school as a
6 second home where they could truly thrive.

7 It was fortunate that this intentional alignment
8 between our community school strategy and our
9 supports for students living in temporary housing was
10 in place during the pandemic. Schools offering
11 specific and targeted supports had built trust with
12 these students and families and were able to quickly
13 get them important resources when the crisis was most
14 severe. For example, in the South Bronx, Gabriel
15 Hernández was the Community School Director at MS 223
16 and his community based organization Arête Education,
17 partnered with Principal Ramon Gonzalez to alleviate
18 student and family barriers to learning once COVID-19
19 hit.

20 They focused on the whole family and ensuring
21 that all families at the school had STEM and Arts
22 kits at their home, so that they could engage in
23 hands-on-learning. They coordinated food support and
24 delivery, eliminated barriers that students might
25 experience in the way of remote learning and
supported families with accessing benefits, including

1 offering wellness workshops. And they even started a
2 hotline for families to call in for support. This is
3 what community schools are all about.
4

5 The DOE has applied this same approach for
6 homeless students across the city during the
7 pandemic, first taking into account the most obvious
8 needs, devices and tech support. To date, the DOE
9 has distributed a total of 470,000 iPads, all with
10 data plans, which we prioritized first for homeless
11 students. Nearly 14,000 iPads were delivered to all
12 students in shelter within the first two weeks of
13 schools going remote last spring and over 50,000 in
14 total have been delivered to all Students in
15 Temporary Housing. At present, there is no backlog
16 of students awaiting devices and we have continued to
17 work with new families as they arrive in shelter to
18 get them devices as quickly as possible.

19 In addition, every student in shelter was given
20 headphones to connect to their devices to make the
21 experience of remote learning more accessible for
22 them. We also created several ways for families
23 affected by homelessness to access technology support
24 for remote learning. That included dedicated tech
25 support hotlines with full translation, access for

1 students in temporary housing, in-person tech support
2 available in shelters, and options to swap out LTE
3 service providers from T-Mobile to Verizon which
4 improved data access.
5

6 Any student or family residing in a shelter who
7 reports a connectivity problem to the DOE Help Desk
8 receives a response within 24 hours. In addition,
9 the city is working with Charter and Altice to
10 provide Wi-Fi service to all apartments in existing
11 DHS shelters to be in use beyond 2021 that serve
12 families with children. Planned new families-with-
13 children shelters that are opening under the Turning
14 the Tide plan will also be included.

15 Moreover, the city will provide Wi-Fi service to
16 all apartments in more than 40 HRA domestic violence
17 shelters, including families with children. So in
18 total, this represents over 200 sites, comprising
19 approximately 10,500 units.

20 Beyond devices and technology, we also wanted to
21 understand what other supports our families in
22 temporary housing needed most during the pandemic.
23 Within the first month of remote learning, we
24 conducted a survey of DOE personnel working directly
25 with students and families affected by homelessness,

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

23

3 including principals, social workers, parent
4 coordinators, guidance counselors and our Community
5 School Directors. Our teams made an enormous effort
6 to make contact with students in temporary housing to
7 determine what the main issues that those students
8 and their families were facing.

9 They found that some of the most common concerns
10 included the need for mental health supports and
11 trauma-informed care, as well as other essential
12 benefits such as emergency meals. Knowing this, we
13 were able to make both of these services a priority
14 for our families. We established clear protocols for
15 conducting remote tele-therapy with hundreds of
16 social workers and made mental health support and
17 trauma-informed training for staff a priority. We
18 also worked with our Food and Nutrition Services team
19 to make millions of meals available, especially at
20 sites that serve students effected by homelessness.

21 These efforts include food delivery and pick up
22 arrangements with specific shelters. And also,
23 additional guidance, training and engagement efforts
24 have evolved as we have learned lessons from our data
25 and experiences. With the strong advocacy of the
City Council, this administration has made

1
2 significant investments in supporting students living
3 in temporary housing. One guiding principle has been
4 to give schools the resources to build their capacity
5 to meet the differentiated needs of their students.

6 As you are all aware, the McKinney-Vento Homeless
7 Assistance Act requires school districts to take
8 action to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance
9 and success in school attributable to homelessness.

10 Chancellor's Regulations A-101 and A-780 outline
11 the DOE's obligations in this regard. And under
12 McKinney-Vento, students identified as living in
13 temporary housing include those living in family
14 shelters, doubled up or with family or friends due to
15 economic hardship, or in other temporary housing
16 conditions that are not safe or stable.

17 In the 2019-2020 school year, we had just under
18 100,000 students in our system who experienced
19 homelessness and over 20,000 students spent time
20 living in DHS shelters. On any given night, about
21 10,000 students live in a DHS shelter. Almost every
22 school in New York City has students who have
23 experienced homelessness. This is a reality that
24 every school in our system must be equipped to
25 address. But we also know that the numbers of

1 students experiencing homelessness are not evenly
2 distributed across every school, with a subset of
3 schools serving a disproportionate number of students
4 in temporary housing.
5

6 We understand that we cannot take a one size fits
7 all approach to supporting these students and
8 families. To advance equity and most effectively
9 respond to the universal reality of homelessness in
10 NYC schools, we have made the deepest investments in
11 schools with the greatest numbers of students. In
12 schools with at least 50 students living in shelter,
13 we have hired full-time staff focused on supporting
14 students in temporary housing. Thanks to the
15 advocacy of the Council, we now have 100 Bridging the
16 Gap Social Workers. Bridging the Gap Social Workers
17 are first and foremost dedicated to supporting the
18 mental needs of students in temporary housing through
19 direct counseling, group therapy and even school-wide
20 culture and climate initiatives that de-stigmatize
21 homelessness.

22 They also provide non-clinical supports,
23 assessing student and family needs while helping them
24 access public benefits and free support services
25 available in school or the larger community. WE also

1
2 have 107 students in temporary housing Community
3 Coordinators in 103 Schools. These roles are based
4 on the role of the Community School Director in our
5 community schools. And 62 of these schools have both
6 Coordinators and Bridging the Gap Social Workers on
7 site due to very high needs. Like Bridging the Gap
8 Social Workers, Community Coordinators work to
9 identify every student affected by homelessness in
10 the school, assess their needs and facilitate access
11 to supports and services available in the school and
12 community.

13 Finally, the DOE has 117 Family Assistants who
14 work directly in the family shelter system. Family
15 Assistants meet with families when they enter the
16 shelter and during their intake process assess family
17 needs. They ensure that families are connected to
18 enrollment, transportation and other DOE supports.
19 They track families as they move from temporary to
20 permanent housing and coordinate communication with
21 schools and other DOE offices. All of these STH-
22 dedicated support staff are supported by a team of
23 Regional Managers in the Office of Community Schools.
24 Experts in navigating the DOE who are trainers,

1
2 problem solvers, coaches and leaders for the school
3 and shelter-based staff.

4 Last September, we knew that despite the
5 challenges of reopening our schools for in-person
6 learning, it was especially critical to get as many
7 of our most vulnerable students back into school
8 buildings. For many of our students in temporary
9 housing, the school community is among the steadiest,
10 most reliable aspect of their lives, with people and
11 resources that they can count on. This remains the
12 case even for the majority of our STH who remain in
13 remote learning. And we are thrilled, though, that
14 over 26,000 of our students in temporary housing are
15 currently learning in person. During this period of
16 remote and blended learning, we knew that we had to
17 provide schools with significantly more guidance and
18 resources than usual and the STH team has attempted
19 to meet these needs in a number of ways.

20 For example, we created written guidance for
21 schools to address four key questions that we heard
22 repeatedly. And we offered schools clear protocols
23 for working with Bridging the Gap Social Workers,
24 Community Coordinators and School-Based Liaisons to
25

1 connect with students who were missing or attending
2 online infrequently at their school.

3
4 The first question that we heard was, "How can my
5 school tell if a student is living in shelter or
6 doubled up?" And in order to address this, we
7 provided a step-by-step guidance on using existing
8 DOE data to understand and act on the most up-to-date
9 student housing information.

10 Next, schools asked, "What strategies could I
11 deploy to reach students living in shelter?" The
12 pandemic has placed a spotlight on disparities that
13 existed long before. Students affected by
14 homelessness face unique barriers that are reflected
15 in their lower attendance rates, higher rates of
16 chronic absenteeism and challenges to academic
17 progress. During COVID-19, STH staff were trained
18 and supported to conduct multi-component wellness
19 checks with students and families in temporary
20 housing.

21 The third question was, "How can I contact
22 students who are living doubled up?" Because many
23 families affected by homelessness move frequently and
24 experience disruptions to phone and email services.
25 We shared best practices called from the most

3 experienced members of our teams and of our school
4 teams to and communicate consistently. These could
5 include networking through trusted teachers and
6 friends at the school or checking in using social
7 media.

8 Lastly, schools asked, "Once we have located the
9 student, what resources are available to support
10 them?" And for many families, we knew that essential
11 needs would be a major consideration and this portion
12 of the guidance provided details on accessing
13 emergency food, health and mental health services, as
14 well as other free public benefit programs. And
15 every student in shelter was automatically enrolled
16 in the Learning Bridges program. Along with this
17 guidance, in partnership with five other city
18 agencies including the Human Resources
19 Administration, DHS, the Administration of Children's
20 Services and the Department of Youth and Community
21 Development, and Department of Health and Mental
22 Hygiene, we created a simple website called Benefits
23 Navigator that provides quick links to the most
24 commonly requested public benefits and services.

25 This site is widely popular not just with
families but with the staff who support these

1 families, for quickly locating community-specific
2 referrals and services. In order to ensure the
3 guidance and services were put into action on the
4 ground, we worked with schools to engage their
5 dedicated School-Based STH Liaison and staff focused
6 on supporting students in temporary housing. We
7 significantly expanded and improved our annual
8 McKinney Vento training on STH, creating a fully
9 online, self-paced curriculum in collaboration with
10 our partners and advocates for children. We also
11 dramatically expanded the annual STH Achieve
12 Conference, an event for DOE employees focused on
13 sharing knowledge about promising practices,
14 partnerships and resources. And we hosted some 1,000
15 DOE employees in 90 workshop sessions over three
16 days.

17
18 Furthermore, our borough and citywide offices
19 have been providing training and resources on best
20 practices for teachers. And we will be building upon
21 this work through the Spring and into next year. In
22 addition, one of the major long-term areas we have
23 been focused on in supporting STH has been
24 transportation. And we have worked with many
25 stakeholders, including families and advocates,

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

gathering extensive feedback on necessary
improvements in transportation for students
experiencing homeless.

Based on this work, we updated our Chancellor's
Regulations to clarify that the DOE's commitment to
provide free transportation supports to all
Kindergarten through 6th grade students living in
shelter and we expanded related transportation
supports. We have implemented more effective
communication with families, schools and shelters,
reduced wait time between requests for busing and
routing and have added additional staff to address
STH exception requests.

As we look ahead, I want to thank the Council for
your continued advocacy on behalf of the city for
stimulus and state funding. Now, with the full
stimulus funding, in addition to the full funding of
Foundation Aid, we can deepen our investments to
begin to tackle the lasting impacts of the pandemic,
building on our commitment to address the needs of
all of our students, including our students in
temporary housing, who have gone through such
incredible challenges over the past years.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

32

3 It is now my privilege and honor to turn it over
4 to my friend and colleague Sarah Jonas, the incoming
5 Interim Acting Senior Executive Director of the
6 Office of Community Schools to provide information on
7 our plans for this summer and other efforts going
8 forward.

9 SARAH JONAS: Thank you Chris and good morning
10 Chairs Treyger and Levin. My name is Sarah Jonas and
11 as Chris has stated, I will soon be taking over as
12 Acting Senior Executive Director of the Office of
13 Community Schools. Since this is my first hearing
14 before the City Council, I would like to share a
15 little bit about my background. I have spent my
16 career in education, starting as a teacher and then
17 as a Community School Director. And prior to joining
18 the DOE, I was a Senior Director at the Children's
19 Aid National Center for Community Schools, where I
20 helped districts locally and nationally to implement
21 community school initiatives.

22 I am excited to take on this new role at such a
23 critical moment and I am looking forward to
24 continuing the strong partnership that the Office of
25 Community Schools has maintained with the City
Council in the pursuit of delivering impactful

1 programs and supports for our students. As the Mayor
2 and Chancellor announced on Tuesday, the Summer
3 Rising program is a bold vision for summer learning
4 that will be student-centered, experiential,
5 academically rigorous and culturally responsive and
6 sustaining. We know that this summer is critical to
7 ensuring continued learning, to build trust and to
8 creating space for young people to re-connect and re-
9 engage with one another.
10

11 Summer Rising will provide opportunities for
12 young people in grades K-12, including students in
13 temporary housing and other vulnerable populations of
14 students most impacted by the pandemic, to learn, to
15 get outside and engage with peers and caring adults
16 in safe, supervised and culturally responsive
17 programs. While at the same time, readying them for
18 a return to school in September 2021. In a testament
19 to the success of New York City Community Schools,
20 Summer Rising will be grounded in the core features
21 of the community school strategy, by offering
22 academics, enrichment and social emotional support
23 through robust partnerships between schools and
24 trusted community-based organizations.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

34

3 Summer Rising will integrate the DOE's academic
4 supports and the Department of Youth and Community
5 Development's school-based enrichment programming to
6 create a comprehensive summer program, including
7 full-day, full-week programs for students in grades
8 K-5, during this most critical summer for New York
9 City students. Moving forward, our biggest priority
10 for all our students, but especially those in
11 temporary housing, is making sure that we are
12 addressing the academic, social-emotional and mental
13 health needs they may be facing as a result of the
14 disruptions and stresses caused by the pandemic.

15 This is why we are providing targeted supports
16 for those hardest hit communities with 27 new
17 community schools and 150 additional social workers,
18 as well as a universal framework for assessing and
19 addressing gaps in academic learning. Let me briefly
20 now turn to the proposed legislation. Intro No. 139
21 requires the addition of health data for students in
22 temporary housing as part of a Department of Health
23 report. We, along with our colleagues at the
24 Department of Health, support the goal of greater
25 understanding of the health needs of all of our
students. Intro No. 150 requires the formation of a

1 task force to study transportation as it relates to
2 students in temporary housing. We support the goals
3 of this bill as well and continue to work diligently
4 and with many stakeholders on the issue of STH
5 transportation. We look forward to further
6 discussions with Council on both of these bills.
7

8 While we recognize that the past year has been
9 extremely challenging for students and families, the
10 DOE's commitment to our students in temporary housing
11 and specifically our students in shelter, has been
12 unwavering throughout this trying time. We testify
13 here today to share the highlights and lessons
14 learned from our shared experiences and to recognize
15 that there is still a tremendous amount of work to be
16 done. The Administration remains committed to
17 knowing and meeting the needs of our students in
18 shelter. We will continue to build on the
19 investments that we have made with the partnership of
20 the Council in order to better serve our students in
21 shelter across the city.

22 I am appreciative of the opportunity to serve in
23 this role and look forward to working with you to
24 expand the community school strategy, to serve all of
25

1
2 our students well and help every one of our students
3 to reach their full potential.

4 Thank you, and we are happy to address any
5 questions you may have.

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you. Thank you very
7 much for your testimony. I just want to note that we
8 have also been joined by Council Member Cornegy,
9 Council Member Gibson, Council Member Rodriguez,
10 Council Member Grodenchik, Council Member Levine and
11 if anyone else, just folks can message me and I will
12 announce them as well.

13 I want to first just acknowledge and thank Mr.
14 Chris Caruso for his incredible service to the City
15 of New York and for believing in community schools
16 before many others did. And I am a big believer in
17 community schools. They work, the research shows it.
18 It is never a mistake to invest in community schools
19 and every school should be a community school. It is
20 those connections and relationships in community
21 schools that have really carried many of our kids in
22 communities forward during this very trying time.
23 And just imagine if every school was a community
24 school during this time. How many more connections

1
2 and relationships, what we could have maintained and
3 sustained.

4 So, Chris, thank you for your service. I just
5 want to begin by acknowledging that because it has
6 not been easy and I just want to thank you and
7 congratulations. Sarah Jonas on your soon to be
8 taking over of the critical position in our school
9 system.

10 I want to begin; just get right to some key
11 questions that we have. Uhm, how many students; just
12 so we are all on the same page because data is really
13 important to us. How many students as of this
14 moment, does the DOE know are in temporary housing,
15 total citywide?

16 CHRIS CARUSO: Thank you Chair Treyger. It's been
17 an honor to work beside you and I have appreciated
18 your consistent advocacy on behalf of community
19 schools.

20 So, the last report that we published, there were
21 97,943 students who were identified as living in
22 temporary housing.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And that was as of when?

24 CHRIS CARUSO: That was at the conclusion of the
25 2019-2020 school year.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

38

3 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, that number
4 particularly in the moment that we are in, do you
5 feel that that number has grown?

6 CHRIS CARUSO: Uhm, you know it's a number that's
7 in flux over the course of the year. What that
8 indicates is that last year, those 97,943 students
9 spent at least one night in shelter. Or spent one
10 night in other some sort of temporary housing.

11 So, if we took a snap shot right now, it's hard
12 to say whether it would have been increased or
13 decreased because we still have another couple months
14 left of the school year. We try to compare year over
15 year data because it's a full academic year snapshot.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And of this number, do you
17 have just an up to date figure you can share with the
18 Council, a number of students who are doubled up and
19 students who are in shelter?

20 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, of that number, 30,459 had
21 spent time in a city shelter and a subset of that in
22 the DHS shelter system was 20,775. And the balance
23 were living in doubled up situations.

24 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you Mr. Caruso for
25 those figures, very sobering numbers. Do we have
data on how many students in shelter or overall

1
2 students in temporary housing are still without
3 internet connectivity? Do we have an updated number
4 on that?

5 CHRIS CARUSO: I am really pleased that my
6 colleague Lauren Siciliano has been such a steadfast
7 leader and making sure that our students have
8 connectivity is joining us today. And so Lauren, I
9 will ask you to address that question.

10 LAUREN SICILIANO: Absolutely, thank you Chris
11 and good morning Chair Treyger and the Council. We
12 have been prioritizing our students in temporary
13 housing for device distribution on the start. In
14 fact our students in the shelter were the first
15 students to receive the LTE enabled iPad that we
16 purchased.

17 I am very pleased to say that as of now, there is
18 not a backlog of students who are in need of devices.
19 This as you know, the device need is constantly
20 needed. Students who have access to a device and
21 connectivity yesterday may not have access today.
22 So, we are of course continuing to monitor this and
23 fill requests as they come in. And particularly
24 first who is in the shelter as Chris outlined, we

1
2 have had additional supports available through the
3 help desk and through onsite techs as well.

4 I am very pleased to report that and of course we
5 continue to need additional [INAUDIBLE 43:33].

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And I appreciate that
7 answer. Although, I ask how many of them still
8 cannot connect to the internet because even if they
9 received a device, we have heard numerous reports
10 that in shelters, they can't catch a Wi-Fi signal and
11 that's been a challenge for them. Do we have any
12 data on that?

13 LAUREN SICILIANO: Absolutely. So, for students
14 in shelter, the iPads as we know are LTE enabled,
15 which means that you can connect to the internet even
16 if you don't have Wi-Fi access [INAUDIBLE 44:07]. We
17 did as you know students who had T-Mobile supported
18 devices who could not connect to the cellular T-
19 Mobile network and we swapped out those devices for
20 Verizon whenever that was an issue.

21 So, we have addressed those requests that we
22 received. There is not a backlog right now and
23 again, as new requests come in, we continue to
24 address those as well.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

41

3 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, to be clear, because
4 you know, if this is the case than this is certainly
5 a positive step forward. There are no students in
6 temporary housing shelter or that you know of that is
7 currently in need of internet service or a device.
8 Is that what you are saying?

9 LAUREN SICILIANO: That's correct. There is no
10 backlog. I do want to stress that this is
11 extraordinarily fluid. There are new requests that
12 are coming in every moment and we are addressing them
13 in real time as they come in and of course, if you
14 hear students who are struggling with connectivity,
15 please continue to let us know and we will
16 troubleshoot and address those issues.

17 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: The most common thing that
18 we have been hearing in recent you know; weeks and
19 months is that it's also making sure that they get
20 still the appropriate device particularly older
21 students getting Chrome books and with internet
22 connectivity. That is - are you still getting
23 reports and requests on that with regards to not just
24 the Chrome book but also you know the hotspots
25 because Chrome books, I don't think they come
internet enabled. You have to get a separate device

1
2 to connect them to the internet. Are you aware of
3 those requests?

4 LAUREN SICILIANO: So, uh, key things that I will
5 say about that. One is that we do have hotspots
6 available for students who have a device but are not
7 able to connect to the internet and schools can
8 request those the same way that they request iPads.
9 So, for any, for any students who need those they can
10 make those requests.

11 In terms of instances in which the device might
12 not be the appropriate one, we have other keyboard
13 case orders. So, since the summer we have been
14 purchasing keyboard cases for our iPads. We have
15 190,000 keyboard cases in the system right now and if
16 a student is struggling with the screen on the iPad
17 and we have a keyboard case, they can reach out to
18 our front desk for support.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And Lauren, just for
20 context, uh, how recent would you say the DOE has
21 delivered some of these devices or switched out the
22 T-Mobile for the Verizon devices? Are we talking
23 about that this happened a few weeks ago or did this
24 happen six months ago? Can you give us any timeframe
25 on that?

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

43

3 LAUREN SICILIANO: It has been happening and as
4 new requests come in, we are addressing them.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right. It's my concern
6 that a number of students, you know started the
7 remote shift from last March not having a device and
8 internet. I know that there are many issues and
9 reasons for that but still the fact is many kids did
10 not really have the same start to remote learning as
11 their peers.

12 We previously learned at previous hearings that
13 thousands of children entered the fall school year
14 with still not having a device and internet. So, I
15 just want to kind of give a context for my colleagues
16 and the public that, there are many kids who did not
17 start at the same time as many of their peers and
18 went months and months and months of interrupted
19 instruction or just kind of disjointed schedule of
20 starting the remote learning.

21 I want to get to the attendance; the January '21
22 attendance data released by the DOE in response to
23 Local Law 10 of '21 show that students in shelter had
24 the worst attendance rate of any student subgroup.
25 Can you please tell us the attendance rate for the
full school year to date. For number one, students

1
2 in temporary housing generally. Two, students who
3 are doubled up and three, students living in shelter?

4 CHRIS CARUSO: Yes and the data that I will be
5 giving you is through February 26th. So, it's
6 through the last full month that we reported on.
7 Year to date attendance rates for all students is
8 88.5 percent.

9 Year to date for students in temporary housing.
10 So, this includes doubled up and students in shelter
11 is 81.8 percent and year-to-date attendance rates for
12 students living in shelter is 73.7 percent. I don't
13 have with me the year-to-date for only the doubled up
14 portion of the students in temporary housing but we
15 could follow up with that data.

16 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Now, does that include high
17 school as well just to be clear?

18 CHRIS CARUSO: It does.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Okay, uhm, these are very
20 concerning numbers and I just want to you know just
21 kind of start out by saying that. Now, given the low
22 attendance rate, also — actually Mr. Caruso, just
23 before I get there, we understand that many of the
24 117 shelter-based DOE Family Assistants are working
25 remotely and are not on site at the shelters. Do you

3 have data on how many family assistants are currently
4 working remotely?

5 CHRIS CARUSO: Uhm, I am going to ask my
6 colleague Mike Hickey who supervises the team that
7 supports our shelter-based family assistants to talk
8 a little bit about the role that they play and how
9 many of them are currently working in person in
10 shelters. Mike?

11 MICHAEL HICKEY: Thanks Chris and Chair Treyger,
12 I appreciate the question. As you know, the
13 Department of Educations 117 STH family assistants,
14 their role is to meet with families as they enter the
15 shelter system to connect and conduct an intake with
16 them and ensure that those families are being
17 referred to enrollment, transportation and other
18 important supports. Just to make sure their child's
19 education isn't interrupted.

20 During the pandemic, when we initially went into
21 remote learning at the end or sorry, last Spring, of
22 course all of our family assistants were working
23 remotely. That was the decision we made in close
24 collaboration with our partners in labor in DC37.
25 When we looked to the return to school, the beginning
of the fall. Again, discussing the situation with

1
2 them; we were able to make the determination that
3 family assistants who were not on a medical
4 accommodation could return to working in person, as
5 long as there was a place in the shelter where they
6 could be, you know maintain social distancing and
7 have appropriate health and safety precautions in
8 place.

9 The about 50 percent, just under 60 of our STH
10 Family Assistants are currently on medical
11 accommodation. Meaning that, no matter what the
12 condition is in the shelter, they have a health risk
13 that would keep them from being able to continue to
14 work in person. Those accommodations will continue
15 through the end of June this year.

16 We have provided since last spring, since we were
17 100 percent remote last spring, very detailed
18 guidance for any staff member that's working remotely
19 about how to continue their activities including very
20 extensive guidance on conducting wellness check-ins
21 and outreach to families as they enter shelter, even
22 if they have to do it via phone, video or text.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Uh, you know, I am just,
24 you know, I took notes again on the attendance
25 figures and they are deeply sobering because I think

1
2 - I don't have tell you Chris that attendance is a
3 major indicator of school climate and what's
4 happening and 73 percent, I mean that is uh, you know
5 I - So, I will get right to it. You know, given the
6 low attendance rate for students in shelter and the
7 number of DOE family assistants working remotely,
8 which we are hearing is about half or so, what is the
9 city doing to help students in shelter connect with
10 school? What can you tell us about the barriers to
11 connection and what is the city's plan to improve
12 these attendance rates?

13 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, uhm, we agree that it is
14 important to improve these attendance rates. Around
15 this country, every school district has been
16 grappling with how do we identify and reconnect with
17 our students? This is not a challenge that is unique
18 to New York. Yet, it is one that we take very
19 seriously and one that we are committed to
20 addressing.

21 In my testimony, I talked about how we are
22 employing the community school strategy to connect
23 people to resources, to make sure that our families
24 have what they need. That's an essential part of
25 this. I think that even though family assistant,

3 many of them have been working remotely, a lot of
4 this work is about personal connections. How do we
5 deploy mentors to make sure that our students know
6 that they are valued and loved and missed when they
7 are not in school? How do we make sure that our
8 schools are doing follow-up with those students?

9 So, those are some of the strategies that we are
10 using. I will say that and you know Lauren spoke
11 about our commitment to providing access to
12 technology and the ramp up of that early on in the
13 year. And how we prioritized our students in
14 temporary housing.

15 We have seen an increase, a quite dramatic
16 increase since the beginning of the year attendance
17 rates to where we are now. So, we know that we are
18 on the right trajectory. And if I may, at the end of
19 November, uhm, the attendance rates for students in
20 shelter was several percentage points below where we
21 are now hovering just around 70 percent.

22 And so, we have been making progress and once you
23 know, when you start off behind, it's quite
24 challenging to catch up. I think that the work of
25 our schools to make online learning more engaging, to
do outreach and really cultivate the relationships

1 with families has been essential. And Mike, I am
2 wondering if you can talk a little bit about some of
3 the ways that our Bridging the Gap Social Workers and
4 Community Coordinators have been really you know,
5 aggressive at making contact with families?
6

7 MICHAEL HICKEY: Thanks Chris. Again, just to
8 frame this, that I think we carry a real awareness
9 that this is a period of heightened exposure to risk
10 and trauma for these students and families and we
11 wanted to make sure that we are really equipping the
12 members of the STH team whether they are Social
13 Workers, Coordinators or Family Assistants with the
14 right guidance and tools to really make a meaningful
15 difference still even if they are working remotely.

16 I mentioned wellness check-ins before; I want to
17 just go quickly through some of the things that we
18 are asking in those check-ins. So, we created direct
19 guidance for each of these staff members in their
20 role that included a lot of information, for instance
21 for Bridging the Gap Social Workers, the guidance
22 included how to conduct remote teletherapy and
23 counseling and the permissions that would be required
24 in order to continue providing clinical services even
25 in a remote environment.

3 We also trained our staff to make sure in each
4 wellness check-in, they are asking questions about
5 the students ability to access remote learning and a
6 required technical support that might be needed. To
7 check in about how students were fairing emotionally
8 and asking if they wanted to set aside some time to
9 talk in order to work through any feelings of
10 distress they were experiencing.

11 How are students feeling physically? Not just
12 for them but for their family members? Were there
13 any health or other emergency issues that needed to
14 be addressed? And were there any other outstanding
15 issues? We found a lot of our families did have some
16 real concerns about food and hunger.

17 And so, making sure that we could direct them to
18 emergency food supports was critical. So, just to
19 say that this outreach, before we can get students to
20 school we have to make sure that students are feeling
21 psychologically physically ready to get to school and
22 the work of our team is about making sure that we are
23 moving those barriers initially.

24 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, Michael, if I can
25 interject real quickly.

MICHAEL HICKEY: Yes.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: How do you ensure that the
3 outreach and the wellness calls and whatever
4 communication the system takes to reach our students,
5 how do you make sure it doesn't increase trauma or
6 increase harm because of the concerning reports that
7 we had about ACS case referrals? Does a family
8 that's experiencing trauma, which we all you know
9 acknowledge that if you are homeless, already that's
10 a very traumatic experience. How do we make sure
11 that we are not adding trauma and not adding harm?
12 Because we are getting reports that in some cases
13 that happened?

14 MICHAEL HICKEY: So, first off just to be clear,
15 when members of the students and different housing
16 team are reaching out to families, they are checking
17 to make sure again, people are doing well. Students
18 are stable and healthy.

19 If they encounter a situation for instance where
20 a student is disconnected from school and where there
21 might be a risk of an educational neglect report,
22 they will actually work directly with an ACS
23 counterpart with the school in order to make sure
24 that those reports. That all other circumstances are
25

1
2 addressed before any kind of education and neglect
3 effort or outreach is made to ACS.

4 I want to also be clear that the DOE has defined
5 very specific guidance for schools around education
6 and neglect reports. Attendance and remote learning
7 are not reasons to report educational neglect.

8 Finally, just we also track the numbers. So, we are
9 in close communication with our ACS colleagues. And
10 in fact, year over year educational neglect cases
11 have been declining. That includes for the year to
12 date period this year in comparison to last year.

13 CHRIS CARUSO: I would just add to that Chair
14 that the work here and the outreach is being done by
15 trusted community members. Right, I think the beauty
16 of the Bridging the Gap program is that this is not a
17 stranger from the district office or someone from
18 Tweed that's calling a family to say, "why aren't you
19 in school" right? This is you know Mr. Hickey or
20 whoever it might be that I see in my classroom that
21 like reaches out to me on a regular basis. And so,
22 it is built on those relationships that we think is
23 why families will be receptive and open to this idea.

24 This is work for the long term. Like, we cannot,
25 we have to create school climates that are welcoming

1 and warm and embracing. All of our children and
2 families no matter what their housing situation is.
3 And students and families need to feel that from
4 people that they trust and love. And so, the idea
5 that a wellness check is being done by you know some
6 bureaucrat and his tie is not the case here. These
7 are people on the ground that families know day in
8 and day out.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right and my question is,
11 now that you know you mentioned as of February, the
12 attendance for kids in shelter is 73.7 percent.
13 What's the response? What's the plan and what can we
14 say are the barriers to attendance at this point if
15 you saying that internet and technology is no longer
16 a barrier, what is the barrier now?

17 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, look across the
18 board attendance is down right? And unfortunately,
19 New York and many other cities see that students who
20 experience homelessness are more likely to miss
21 school than their peers who are permanently housed.
22 And that's why we have taken such a robust effort to
23 invest in school-based services to make sure that
24 schools that are disproportionately impacted by
25 poverty and economic needs, have the resources they

3 need to make connections and support these students
4 and families.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Chris, are metro cards
6 mailed to students or do they have to come to the
7 school to pick it up?

8 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, we have made I think a lot
9 of progress on including, updating Chancellors regs
10 on how we meet our obligation to provide
11 transportation supports for students in temporary
12 housing. And I am glad that my colleague Jodi
13 Sammons from the Office of Pupil Personnel or Office
14 of Pupil Transportation is on the call with us and
15 Jodi, I would love you to answer that question.

16 JODI SAMMONS CHEN: Thank you Chris and thank you
17 Council Members. We are committed to reducing the
18 burden on families particularly those in temporary
19 housing.

20 So, students only metro cards twice per year.
21 One in the fall and one in the spring and they do
22 pick them up from their schools. We cannot mail them
23 because they do have monetary value but we do provide
24 students in temporary housing with a metro card to
25 get to and from the school the first time to pick up
their metro card.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Jodi -

JODI SAMMONS CHEN: Parents and guardians - I am
sorry.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I am sorry, I am sorry,
please continue I am sorry.

JODI SAMMONS CHEN: Oh, sorry. Their parents and
guardians are also eligible to receive a metro card
to travel with their child to and from school. This
is something that we have also made a process
improvement this year in partnership with the
students and temporary housing team, to make them
available at the schools instead of at the borough
citywide offices. And we have also made these
monthly, so that the parents do not have to travel
that often to pick them up.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And Jodi, is it accurate to
say that at the start of the school year, the DOE
stated that if students opt or families opted for
full remote, that they would not be given a metro
card, is that correct?

JODI SAMMONS CHEN: So, that's correct for the
general population but not for students in temporary
housing. We were able to give students in temporary
housing metro cards and to continue to assign these

1 metro cards to the students on a long-term basis so
2 that they could to and from their enrichment
3 opportunities as well as to pick up free meals from
4 the city.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah and to be clear, as I
7 stated at previous hearings, I disagree with that
8 policy even for the general student population
9 because many students opted for full remote, no fault
10 of their own. They are now taking on additional
11 roles, helping their parents pay rent, working and
12 so, we should have provided everyone with a metro
13 card at the start.

14 I want to just finalize in terms of my colleagues
15 who have been very patient. The number of students
16 in temporary housing who are signed up for in-person
17 versus remote right now. Do we have data on that?

18 CHRIS CARUSO: Yes we do. Uhm, there are 26,221
19 students participating in blended learning. And
20 there are 54,012 students participating in full
21 remote learning and this is as of, I think a week ago
22 or so, early April we will call it.

23 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And why do you believe that
24 the majority of students in temporary housing, even
25 with the opportunities to reenroll in blended

3 learning, why do you think that the majority has
4 still opted for full remote?

5 CHRIS CARUSO: I think that you know we value
6 parental choice in this decision and I think parents
7 are assessing what's best for their children at any
8 given point and time taken into consideration their
9 own employment status, childcare needs and a number
10 of other things and it has been important to this
11 administration to make sure that parents have choice
12 this year.

13 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And Chris, when you have
14 students who are doubled up and just to kind of spell
15 it out further, there are multiple folks in a
16 dwelling and more than likely not a very large
17 dwelling and as a teacher, I could tell you, it is a
18 challenge to get folks, students to pay attention, to
19 keep their attention even with a sizable class. And
20 I can only imagine what students are going through as
21 far as trying to have a kind of a quite you know
22 space to learn and to pay attention. And it is very
23 concerning about the amount of instructional loss
24 that our kids are experiencing in addition to their -
25 to social/emotional disconnections at this time.

1
2 And the final question and I will turn it to
3 Chair Levin is uhm, what is the city doing? You know
4 I join the Mayor and I thank you Chris for your help
5 in spearheading the Summer Rising program. What are
6 we doing to make sure that there is absolutely no
7 barrier, zero barrier for registration? To make it
8 as seamless as possible for all of our kids,
9 particularly students in temporary housing to
10 register to sign up for the summer programming
11 because these kids absolutely need it.

12 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, we are incredibly excited
13 about the vision for summer rising. This is an
14 opportunity to get children off of screens. To get
15 them back in person to connect with their peers. To
16 learn and address their unfinished learning. To play
17 and have opportunities for recreation. Throughout
18 this year, we have shown a commitment to making sure
19 that we reduce any structural barriers to students
20 participating in the efforts that we are making to
21 support all of our students.

22 And I think a good example of this is the
23 Learning Bridges program. You mentioned students who
24 are doubled up and how, what type of learning
25 environment they have to participate in remote

3 learning. Learning Bridges was an opportunity where
4 kids can go to a nearby center, staffed by our
5 amazing community-based organizations and participate
6 in remote learning from a supervised and welcoming
7 environment.

8 We automatically enrolled every student in
9 shelter in that system. There was no need for
10 parents to find out what the right link was. Who do
11 I have to call? What kind of documentation do I need
12 to show? It was a given. They were enrolled in the
13 system and then we did the follow up to make sure
14 they knew they were enrolled and how they could get
15 there.

16 With Summer Rising we will be having an extensive
17 outreach campaign. We have staff on the ground in
18 our community-based organizations, in our
19 neighborhoods to connect with students and families.
20 We will make sure that our colleagues at DHS and our
21 staff that work in shelters have all the information
22 they need, so that children know what their
23 opportunities are.

24 And one thing I think is really important and I
25 want to highlight here. As you know Chair Treyger,
many of our children in temporary housing traveled

1 quite a distance to participate in school because
2 they are entitled to stay in their school of origin
3 when is an incredible right that they have.

4 For Summer Rising, if it's more convenient for
5 that family to attend Summer Rising in the local
6 elementary school across the street from their
7 shelter, they are welcome to do that. There is no
8 barrier in terms of getting back to that school of
9 origin. If they choose to want to stay with their
10 friends and make that trip, that's fine too but we
11 think that that's going to be a critical pathway to
12 help ensure that our students in temporary housing
13 have access to these programs.

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you for that answer
15 and I will turn it over to Chair Levin. Thank you
16 for your patience Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much Chair
18 Treyger. I want to thank the Administration for your
19 answers so far. I am going to start to ask for your
20 reaction to the report that came out yesterday in the
21 Daily News regarding the lower attendance rate among
22 remote learners in temporary shelter compared to
23 their more stably housed cohorts in the city. What
24 is the explanation for that at this point?
25

1
2 CHRIS CARUSO: My reaction is disappointment and
3 not surprised. This is what we see nationally. This
4 is what our trends have been in New York. As I said
5 to Chair Treyger, we are committed to creating warm
6 and welcoming environments. I think that at the
7 beginning of the school year, there was a big
8 transition, not only for our families but for our
9 teachers. We have improved our systems over the
10 course of the school year and we see attendance rates
11 rising in recent months.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay but what's the
13 explanation though for uhm, with remote learning in
14 particular. You know, what would be the explanation
15 that you would identify now or some contributing
16 factors now for specifically what went into these
17 lower rates and I think that they were for January of
18 this year.

19 So, I mean, I will just read here, 10th graders
20 who were in shelters saw the lowest attendance rates
21 logging in 64 percent of the time in January our
22 rate. 18 percent lower than their classmates in
23 stable housing according to an analysis of DOE
24 attendance data from Advocates for Children. And I
25 want to note that because there were no high school

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 62
3 classes in person in the month of January, that can
4 be assumed to be all remote log ins.

5 So, we are seeing a kind of pretty significant
6 disparity there. I want to get some specifics here,
7 what have we focused in on as potentially the cause
8 of that disparity? We are talking about purely
9 remote learning. So, this particular issue does not
10 have to do with transportation obviously. Uhm, so
11 what is causing that? What do we think are some of
12 those causes?

13 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I think that our
14 Superintendents and Principals have been working very
15 hard to make sure that our online and remote learning
16 opportunities are as robust and as engaging as
17 possible.

18 We are joined today by Dr. Jo Ann Benoit who
19 works in the division, the first Deputy Chancellor
20 and does a lot of work in training superintendents
21 and supports for that and Jo Ann, I am wondering if
22 you could talk a little bit about the ways that we
23 have been working to improve our remote learning
24 capabilities?

25 JO ANN BENOIT: Yes, good morning again everyone.
Good morning Council. It has as Chris has said, Mike

1
2 has said, it has been you know a challenge not just
3 nationally but citywide for us right? To ensure that
4 all of these students are engaged and that their
5 families also you know have the resources and
6 opportunities to help them engage in remote, the
7 remote learning setting.

8 Both students in shelter and high school students
9 face unique barriers to learning this year due to the
10 pandemic as we know, which has deepened existing
11 disparities. Students in shelters experience
12 significant disruption and trauma in their daily
13 lives, which make it difficult for many families and
14 students to engage on a daily basis.

15 Many high school students took on additional work
16 and responsibilities during the pandemic. Either
17 looking after younger siblings or working to support
18 the family as Chairman Treyger mentioned himself.

19 When students are at risk of being chronically
20 absent, we respond as a whole school community to
21 identify individual student needs and work to address
22 those barriers in their particular situation.

23 Schools, district staff, borough citywide offices
24 have looked throughout this year and actually since
25 the beginning of the pandemic to align the services

1
2 to these families. The Data Managers at the borough
3 and citywide offices have continuously disaggregated
4 the data to ensure that they have identified these
5 students and have worked with attendance teachers as
6 well as classroom teachers, counselors, as well as
7 the STH Family Assistants to keep in touch and in
8 contact with families. So, that we know what the
9 issue are.

10 We have partnered with community-based
11 organizations such as Morning Side Center. The
12 Children's Aid Society just to provide teachers with
13 additional supports. Uhm and resources to kids to
14 specifically meet the needs of students in temporary
15 housing.

16 Borough and citywide offices are providing
17 professional learning opportunities to administrators
18 at the school, as well as family leadership
19 coordinators, family support coordinators on the
20 district side.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Dr. Benoit, if I may
22 interrupt just for a second. What I am trying to get
23 at is what are some of the specific causes that we
24 are looking at of why a student in temporary housing
25 is having a harder time attending than a student

3 that's stably housed on - because you mentioned about
4 you know taking on additional responsibilities for
5 high school students. I mean, that's across the
6 board, so I would imagine that students in stable
7 housing are also taking on additional
8 responsibilities in their families daily activities.
9 So, I am just trying to try to drill down a little
10 bit on why we are seeing for remote learning in the
11 month of January, where everybody is remote for high
12 school students, why are we seeing such a disparity.

13 You know because I mean, I think that you know as
14 we look at larger trends, if we had had this hearing
15 18 months ago, we could say listen, okay, we have
16 real challenges with transportation. We have real
17 challenges around connecting to school communities
18 and shelter capacity issues and so that you know you
19 could have your child in school in Brooklyn and all
20 of a sudden you are placed in a shelter in Queens.

21 Those issues are not at play here. So, I really
22 want to know what issues are we identifying. So, we
23 are kind of diagnosing this issue. I sympathize, I
24 am right there with you.

25 CHRIS CARUSO: Chair Levin I think that they're -
like look, I think that the differentiated impact of

1
2 this pandemic on communities of color and low-income
3 communities has been well documented. And so, I
4 don't think it's surprising that our students in
5 temporary housing, for some of the reasons that Chair
6 Treyger mentioned around access to a welcoming
7 environment to participate, to kind of accessing the
8 content. These are the reasons why. You know, it's
9 the reason why a student in temporary housing is not
10 participating in remote learning is not that
11 different than the reason why a student who is
12 permanently housed doesn't participate.

13 There is a culmination and an exponential fact on
14 at first childhood experiences that make it that much
15 more difficult. And it is our obligation to remove
16 those barriers and make connections with those
17 children and families.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I am not totally
19 satisfied with that answer but I will move on. There
20 is - I want to ask Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater
21 about length of stay. So, what is DSS or DHS doing
22 from a broader perspective. We seen at the length of
23 stay obviously as really shot up. About ten years
24 ago, it was 200 and some odd days increasing to
25

1
2 around you know around 430, 440, 450 days for
3 families with children from years 2015 through 2019.

4 And then I think we were talking about 495 that
5 the latest data is showing. What is DSS doing to
6 reduce the average length of stay? And what is the
7 game plan, particularly with families with children
8 to reduce that length of stay? Because if one thing
9 that we are seeing is if attendance rates, even
10 remote attendance rates are so much lower for
11 students in temporary housing than students that are
12 stably housed and the very best thing that we could
13 do is make sure that that length of time that they
14 are in temporary housing is reduced.

15 ERIN DRINKWATER: Thank you for the question
16 Council Member and thank you for your dedication to
17 our students in shelter.

18 For the length of stay, I want to point out that
19 one of the best things that we can do to address
20 length of stay is to address entry into shelter in
21 the first place. We have invested seriously in our
22 prevention tools in terms of paying rent arrears.
23 The recreation of various rental assistance programs.
24 The universal access to counsel. All of those

1
2 investments prior to the pandemic have been driving
3 down the families with children census.

4 We have seen this census further decline because
5 of the eviction moratorium but it is important to
6 note that those investments are paying off and we are
7 avoiding entry into shelter and we are seeing the
8 overall number of families in shelter decline.

9 In respect to the length of stay, our rental
10 assistance programs are important in terms of
11 transitioning families out of shelter. Building
12 those programs up has been critically important to
13 move families out, as well as looking to the Mayor's
14 Housing plan and increasing affordable housing across
15 the city, so families are able to exit shelter more
16 quickly.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I think that this is
18 something that uhm, even though you know we are in
19 the kind of waning days of this administration, uhm,
20 you know I hope to see more on. I would appreciate
21 the administrations support on Intro. 146 that I am
22 sponsoring, which would increase the City FHEPS
23 voucher amounts to make them a more viable option for
24 families leaving shelter, so that they are not stuck
25 with a voucher that's paying 80 percent of fair

1 market rent in a city that is a fair market rent
2 city.

3
4 So, anyone from the administration, if you are
5 talking to your colleagues at OMB or at City Hall,
6 one thing that you can recommend to them to help
7 address this issue in moving children out of shelter
8 and back into permanent housing is to support raising
9 the City FHEPS voucher rates to fair market rent,
10 which is what Intro. 146 does. For the record, the
11 administration is very opposed to this and OMB is
12 very opposed to this and we have been fighting for a
13 long time for that. So, I am once again calling on
14 the administration to support this legislation.

15 Chris, you had mentioned earlier about - I think
16 that you said that they are providing iPads to; I am
17 looking at your testimony here, to 50,000 students,
18 is that right?

19 CHRIS CARUSO: Uhm, yes, that's right.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But also in your testimony,
21 you have acknowledged that right, so nearly 14,000
22 iPads were delivered to all students in temporary
23 housing within the first two weeks and over 50,000
24 total have been delivered to all students in
25 temporary housing. But then also in your testimony,

1
2 you acknowledged that under McKinney Vento
3 definition, there is closer to 100,000 students in
4 temporary housing that meet that definition under
5 McKinney Vento. What are we doing for those students
6 that are not in that 50,000 cohort that have received
7 those iPads but are in – that are also under the
8 definition of temporary housing under McKinney Vento?

9 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah and I can start and then ask
10 Lauren to jump in. Any student that was identified
11 as being in temporary housing was prioritized and
12 furthermore, any student in the system was eligible.
13 And so, we wanted to you know, take an equity stance
14 here and start with our students who were among some
15 of our most vulnerable and prioritize them at the
16 top. But since then, we have opened it up to any
17 student and as Lauren mentioned earlier, we currently
18 don't have a backlog.

19 And so, between kind of the outreach that we have
20 done and not only centrally but like, schools and
21 teachers, if a child is not logging on or not having,
22 is having connectivity issues, they can also help the
23 parent make the request for the device.

24 LAUREN SICILIANO: That's absolutely right Chris
25 and all I would add is that the 54,000 number, that

3 is the number of students in temporary housing who
4 have received iPads who outside of the shelter
5 system, another 24,000 on top of that 54,000 never
6 received iPads at a time they were in a shelter
7 system.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, uh, with the effort on
9 upgrading all shelters to be Wi-Fi, you know to have
10 workable Wi-Fi, uhm, my understanding is that the
11 objective date to do that or you know the date to try
12 to do that was initially set for right before the
13 coming fall semester, than it was moved up to the end
14 of the spring semester. Now it is moved back to the
15 beginning of the fall semester. Can we get a little
16 bit of an update on that process and where the
17 progress stands on that and what are the obstacles?
18 What's gone into this changing of dates that we see
19 and how are we addressing that?

20 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I would turn that over to
21 Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater to address.

22 ERIN DRINKWATER: Sure, thanks Chris. So, we are
23 you know really happy with the partnership with DoITT
24 in terms of the installation. I know we recently
25 communicated an update to Chairman Treyger about our

1 progress on the installations. I am happy to report
2 that that progress continues today.
3

4 As of earlier this week yesterday, installations
5 have occurred at 133 facilities, which accounts for
6 over 6,100 units. We are currently complete with 29
7 of the 30 prioritized sites. The one outstanding
8 site is delayed due to site related construction
9 activities and then we are currently underway or
10 excuse me, DoITT is underway with construction at
11 additional 21 locations, which account for an
12 additional approximate 1,200 units.

13 We do expect this work to be complete by the end
14 of summer and we will keep the committee updated on
15 any progress that's made as this installation takes
16 place.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you and before I get to
18 the next question, I want to acknowledge Council
19 Members Barron, Kallos, Salamanca and Ulrich.

20 Uhm, I want to ask about in light of the historic
21 nature of the scope of educational services that
22 students in temporary housing have missed in the last
23 year. And also in light of the historic now federal
24 investment that we are receiving, what are some of
25 the additional academic and social/emotional

1
2 programming that DOE is looking to provide to
3 students in temporary housing specifically?

4 So, are we looking at extra tutoring services? I
5 know you mentioned social workers; I give Chairman
6 Treyger credit for fighting for that so vociferously
7 for the last several years on the budget. Because
8 keep in mind that was not originally supported by the
9 administration.

10 But what are some of the academic, supplemental
11 academic services that we are looking to provide
12 using new federal funds?

13 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, as the Mayor has said, this
14 is the best budget that we have seen for New York
15 City in a while. I think the influx of federal
16 stimulus dollars in addition to the work in Albany to
17 honor the commitment to increase school funding is
18 going to be tremendously beneficial for all students
19 but especially for students who are most resilient
20 and vulnerable, including students in temporary
21 housing.

22 There is a bunch of work happening right now to
23 understand the guidelines federally on how we can use
24 the stimulus funding and to develop plans to do so.
25 So know that this is a work in progress and after the

1
2 Executive Budget comes out in a couple weeks, we will
3 have more details. But I can point to two very
4 specific things that we have already announced that
5 are underway that will have a direct impact on our
6 students experiencing homelessness.

7 First, is we have announced an expansion of the
8 community schools work. We will be rolling out
9 community schools, new community schools in September
10 in each of the neighbors most hardest hit by the
11 pandemic. That is actively underway and we are on
12 track. For those of you that have you know worked in
13 city procurement, the fact that we are going to turn
14 this around in eight months is something to be said.
15 But we are on track to be having community-based
16 organizations, community school directors hired and
17 services in place by the first day of school this
18 coming September.

19 And so, that's going to have a huge impact and
20 you know as has been our practice, we prioritize
21 schools with high numbers of students in shelter and
22 students who are doubled up when we are assessing the
23 criteria to decide which schools can most benefit
24 from that investment at this time.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

75

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And what does the investment
4 look like?

5 CHRIS CARUSO: The dollar amount?

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, no, no, I mean, what are
7 we talking about in terms of what's the investment
8 going to get us?

9 CHRIS CARUSO: Oh, so, why don't I turn it over
10 to my colleague Sarah Jonas who can talk a little bit
11 about the plan to launch these 27 community schools
12 and what families can expect by going to a community
13 school.

14 SARAH JONAS: Thanks Chris. Yeah, so as Chris
15 said, we are so excited to have this opportunity to
16 really expand the community school footprint into
17 these communities that are hardest hit by the
18 pandemic. And as in any community school, what we
19 are talking about here are deep partnerships between
20 schools and community based organizations. Because
21 we know that schools can't do this work alone of
22 supporting the whole child.

23 So, through this community school strategy and in
24 these neighborhoods, schools will be partnering with
25 a community-based organization to provide academic
support, social and emotional supports, enrichment

3 programs, things like afterschool programming. Adult
4 education and other types of parent engagement
5 activities and really a whole wealth of supports for
6 students in all of these spaces including health,
7 mental health. Really looking at the particular needs
8 of the students and families and through the
9 partnerships and the leveraging and tapping into
10 community assets and resources, providing these
11 supports for children and families in these
12 communities.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, I remember when we had a
14 hearing on students in temporary housing several
15 years ago and a principal testified about; as a
16 member of CSA testified about having like a washing
17 machine and dryer in her school, to be able to have
18 students in temporary housing have access to washing
19 their clothes. Are those the types of services that
20 we are talking about in a community school?

21 SARAH JONAS: Yeah, so absolutely. So, in any
22 community school, really, we are looking at you know
23 the school together with the families and the
24 communities and the community-based partners are
25 looking at the particular needs and assets of that
community and then developing the community school

1 programs and services based on those identified
2 needs.

3
4 So, the example you gave you know in schools that
5 have students in temporary housing, that is one of
6 the strategies or one of the supports that the school
7 might identify and the community school partnership
8 could help to bring to the school.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: One thing that was clear
10 prior and was an issue prior to COVID, was that
11 students in shelter in particular, were not able to
12 attend afterschool programming because they could not
13 get transportation back to a shelter if it was you
14 know a significant distance away from their school,
15 you know as part of the you know after the
16 afterschool programming. That's a real problem and
17 if a student wanted to stay in there school of origin
18 while in shelter, you know it is virtually impossible
19 to get a bus home. How are we going to address that
20 once we are you know hopefully soon back to all in-
21 person learning?

22 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I appreciate the mention of
23 afterschool services which we think are incredibly
24 important to provide the experiences that children
25 need to thrive. When we think about the ways that

1
2 our middle and upper class families support their
3 families through piano lessons and sports leagues and
4 chess clubs. Often times, our students living in
5 poverty don't have access to these same experiences
6 and those can shape the students perspective on
7 learning and grappling with texts and really
8 participating fully in the educational experience.

9 We are really proud that this administration has
10 made afterschool universal for middle school. So in
11 every middle school across the city, there are free
12 afterschool programs through the Schools Out New York
13 City Initiative. And many of our elementary schools
14 also have afterschool programs.

15 Students in addition to school-based afterschool
16 programs, there are a number of center-based programs
17 as well including many in Tier 2 family shelters.
18 And so, I know that when I worked at the Department
19 of Youth and Community Development, we were really
20 proud that for the first time we invested in direct
21 contracts with Homes for the Homeless, so that the
22 Saratoga Family Inn would have a full afterschool
23 program for students to attend once they return home
24 from school after the traditional school day.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

79

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's not what I am asking
4 though. What I am asking is, what are we doing to
5 ensure that students are able to attend afterschool
6 programming and access all those wonderful things
7 that you just talked about in their school of origin.
8 Because unless we are placing afterschool programs in
9 their shelters or right next to their shelters, that
10 allow for the gap in time between them leaving school
11 at the end of the school day and then getting home.
12 So, what ever time they are allowing for that and
13 then provide the services you know onward from that
14 time until mom and dad can go pick them up after work
15 at 6 or 6:30. What is the plan? This is a serious
16 issue and this was a serious issue before the
17 pandemic and I mean, honestly I didn't hear you
18 acknowledge that this is a real problem about how
19 youth are accessing. Youth in temporary housing are
20 accessing afterschool programs. It is great that we
21 are making it universally acceptable. It's
22 universally acceptable for everybody but kids that
23 are in shelter.

24 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I mean look, students in
25 middle school often have metro cards. There are
other ways. We are not able to provide yellow busing

1 at the end, at six o'clock in the evening. And so,
2 we do work with our community-based organizations to
3 reduce barriers to provide other means of
4 transportation. I know that we also support family
5 metro cards. And again, by expanding the number of
6 programs, we are making more local to where families
7 live.
8

9 So, that idea that if a student does have to take
10 the bus home after the traditional school day, there
11 likely could still be options in their neighborhood
12 either directly in their shelter or nearby.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we have any data on what
14 percentage of students who are in a DHS Shelter or a
15 DHS and HRA Shelter, any type of city shelter? What
16 percentage of those students are engaging in
17 afterschool programming? And how that compares to
18 the general population?

19 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, we could uhm, we'd be happy
20 to work with our colleagues at the Department of
21 Youth and Community Development to pull that data. I
22 don't have with me now.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That would be interesting to
24 see. Okay, I just have a couple more questions and I
25 will turn it over to my colleagues.

3 Actually, at this point, I will turn it over to
4 my colleagues and I will circle back on the second
5 round.

6 CHRIS CARUSO: Sounds good.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Treyger and
8 Chair Levin. I will now call on Council Members in
9 the order they have used the Zoom raise hand
10 function. We will limiting Council Member questions
11 and answers to five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms
12 will keep a timer and will let you know when your
13 times is up.

14 I see that Council Member Salamanca has his hand
15 raised. Council Member Salamanca.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Can you hear me?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Yes, how are you
20 Commissioner? So, thank you for this very important
21 hearing. I just have a few questions regarding
22 transitional housing in communities of color. I know
23 myself, my colleagues Diana Ayala, Vanessa Gibson,
24 you know when Ritchie Torres was a Council Member.
25 We are the Council Members in the Borough of the
Bronx that have the most transitional housing in our

3 communities and we are actually housing more families
4 out of our districts, in our districts. I have a
5 school in the West Farms area where over 50 percent
6 of the students are in transitional housing.

7 So, my question is schools that are housing a
8 large percentage of students that are in transitional
9 housing, need extra resources. What extra resources
10 are they getting compared to other schools that have
11 very low transitional housing students?

12 CHRIS CARUSO: Thank you for your question
13 Council Member. That is the reality of our
14 situation. That we do have schools that have much
15 higher concentrations of students in temporary
16 housing. And that's why we have taken a two pronged
17 approach in this administration to make equity
18 investments in those schools with the greatest
19 concentrations and also support all schools with
20 baseline supports.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay, I'm sorry I have
22 five minutes. What equity, I want to know, tell me
23 specifically what equity changes you are making in a
24 school such as mine?

25 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, so we are investing social
workers in those schools. We are investing community

1 coordinators to connect with families and connect
2 them to resources and we are placing more family
3 assistance in those shelters. Those are three
4 concrete human capital investments that we are making
5 in the schools with the highest numbers of students
6 experiencing homelessness.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Another issue that I
9 have as I speak to my homeless families in
10 transitional housing, one of their biggest challenges
11 is that many of – they prefer that their children
12 continue to attend the same school that they were in
13 before they got into the homeless shelter system and
14 unfortunately the way the system works is that they –
15 when a family goes into the homeless shelter, DHS
16 just fits you in wherever there is an opening. So,
17 what is DHS actually doing to ensure that families
18 entering the shelter system are staying in their
19 communities?

20 CHRIS CARUSO: Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater, do
21 you want to take that?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Please, my time is
23 running.
24
25

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

84

3 CHRIS CARUSO: Can someone unmute Deputy
4 Chancellor – uh, Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater
5 please?

6 ERIN DRINKWATER: Thank you so much and apology
7 for the technical issue. Thank you for the question
8 Council Member. As you know, chief priority of this
9 administration and value under the Mayor's Turning
10 the Tide plan is opening shelter in every district
11 across the city. So, that way families do have the
12 opportunity to be placed close to the anchors of
13 their life. Whether that be the school that their
14 child is attending, a religious institution or
15 friends and neighbors. We have announced 89
16 shelters, 46 of which have been open. Of that larger
17 which have been announced, 38 are to serve families
18 with children populations.

19 So, when families come to us at intake, we do
20 place them in a conditional placement. This takes a
21 host of considerations into account. There might be
22 a borough preclusion because of an incidence of
23 domestic violence. But we do make every effort to
24 place the family close to the youngest child's
25 school.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

85

3 We did add recently a metric to the MMR. So, you
4 will note in the MMR there is actually two measures.
5 There is the measure at initial placement and then
6 there is a point and time count, which is much
7 higher. For March of this year, that number is 74
8 percent.

9 I think what's important to include also or not
10 is that as has been mentioned, something that's
11 important is family choice. Families do make
12 decisions based on where they would like to be
13 placed. They might be willing to travel to get their
14 youngest child to school but they want to prioritize
15 an older child and making sure that that older child
16 has an easier commute to their school.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay.

18 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, family choice is also
19 important but we do make every effort to make those
20 placements. And that capacity brought on through the
21 Turning the Tide plan is really important to make
22 sure that we have vacancies to place families
23 accordingly.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay, I have two very
25 quick questions. How many students are in the
transitional housing setting that are enrolled in the

3 public school system. Do you have that number off
4 the top of your head?

5 CHRIS CARUSO: On any given night, there are
6 about 13,000 students who reside in DHS shelters.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay and then my last
9 is a question/statement Mr. Chair if possible.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yes please Council Member.
11 Since you lost time with the delay, you have more
12 time, please.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, thank you,
14 thank you Chair. I heard that there was a question
15 about metro cards and there was a statement made that
16 if the child opts, the family opts for the child to
17 do remote learning, that they will not receive a
18 metro card. Is that correct?

19 CHRIS CARUSO: That is not true for students in
20 temporary housing.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay, so students in
22 temporary housing, even if they choose remote
23 learning, they still get a metro card?

24 CHRIS CARUSO: Jodi, can you confirm that please?
25 Sorry, can we unmute Jodi Sammons?

3 JODI SAMMONS CHEN: Yes, yes, that's true. So,
4 students in temporary housing do still have access to
5 metro cards even if they are learning remotely. We
6 wanted to make sure that they had access to the
7 enrichment opportunities and to access free meals.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay, I just would
9 have to say, that I am happy to hear that they still
10 have access to metro cards. I think every student,
11 whether they are doing remote learning or not, they
12 should still have access to a metro card. Whether
13 they are in temporary housing or not.

14 One of the biggest challenges in talking to my
15 parents, is the technology that they get with DOE,
16 many times they need to be replaced or there needs to
17 be troubleshooting and families yes, they can call
18 DOE but it is very difficult to navigate that system.

19 And so, families decide or they choose to
20 actually go the physical school and the school helps
21 to navigate. And if you are not providing them with
22 a metro card, you are just creating another barrier
23 and an excuse for them not to go to the school to get
24 a new piece of technology. And with that, thank you
25 Mr. Chair for the extra time.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

88

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
4 Salamanca. This is a reminder to Council Members, if
5 you would like to ask questions of the
6 administration, please use the Zoom raise hand
7 function.

8 Seeing that no other Council Members have their
9 hand raised, I will turn it back to Chair Treyger.

10 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER. Thank you very much and I
11 just want to have a couple of just quick follow ups.
12 As mentioned that the latest data that the DOE shared
13 with us, we have over 97,000, approximately 98,000
14 students in temporary housing total. And how many at
15 this moment social workers, do we have assigned to
16 students in temporary housing?

17 CHRIS CARUSO: Uhm, I think that - so this is
18 what I could say to that. We have 100 Bridging the
19 Gap Social Workers, which you are very familiar with.
20 They are directly placed in schools, explicitly
21 trained and put in schools with high numbers of the
22 students in the borough housing. However, that by no
23 means represents the footprint of social workers who
24 support students in temporary housing.

25 As I mentioned in my testimony, almost every
school in this system has students who are

1 temporarily housed. When we think about our 300
2 community schools, all of which have mental health
3 services and all of which have students in temporary
4 housing, those supports are also benefitting our
5 children experiencing homelessness.
6

7 So, you know we could start with 100 Bridging the
8 Gap Social Workers but really, you know the social
9 workers across the system are generally supporting
10 students that are experiencing homelessness.

11 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right and I certainly
12 understand. That's why you know I looked at just if
13 you do the ratio, 98,000, 100 Bridging the Gap social
14 workers, that's one social worker for close to 1,000
15 students. But I understand you mentioned that there
16 is other supports but does anyone really have an
17 actual ratio number of how many social workers to
18 students in temporary housing? Does anyone kind of
19 track that or have that?

20 CHRIS CARUSO: Well, I am trying to find our
21 total number of social workers in the system.

22 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: It's still very much
23 inadequate Mr. Caruso. Yes and that's why you know I
24 think some folks might have seen our budget response
25 where we are calling for a much more dramatic

1
2 increase than what the administration proposed. We
3 welcome the 27 additional you know community schools
4 and 150 social workers but we still need so much more
5 and there is really no, there is no excuse. We are
6 at point where we have to produce and we have to rise
7 to the moment and meet the needs of our children.

8 I will say Mr. Caruso that you know I am a big
9 believer regardless of kids in temporary housing.
10 It's particularly kids who are facing trauma every
11 day. We need to get to a point where we have one
12 social worker for every 150 students across the
13 school system particularly for kids who are serving
14 high needs.

15 I also just want to say, in addition to social
16 workers, you know one of our big priorities is making
17 sure that we expand dramatically PSAL programming
18 across the city, particularly communities of color
19 that don't have access to that. That also is another
20 meaningful connection for a number of students.

21 I want to share with you Mr. Caruso also,
22 recently we had an announcement in my district about
23 a community school PS188 in Coney Island where we are
24 making a lot of investments for a lot of great things
25 happening there. But some of the feedback from

1 students when they talked about what they felt with
2 their art. They have an art therapy program which we
3 supported in the schools. The feedback from kids
4 meant everything to me and just to share with my
5 colleagues and the public, just these little words
6 mean so much. Students said they feel safe. They
7 feel supported. They love art. They want to go to
8 school because of these wonderful programs and
9 sessions. They enjoy the quite time.

11 These are things that some folks might take for
12 granted but they mean the world to our kids and to
13 our school communities. It's making an impact in
14 terms of attendance, in terms of better supports.
15 So, to me yes, social workers, counselors but also
16 art programs, music programs. The afterschool
17 programs. We need to significantly move the needle
18 forward. This is something just letting folks know
19 that the Council is going to go very hard on this
20 issue and rightfully so. And I think that many folks
21 in DOE will agree on the need to go very big and
22 bold. The last question I have; the last point I
23 want to raise. In January, more than 30
24 organizations sent a letter asking the DOE to fill
25 the vacant positions in the DOE's Office of Students

1
2 in Temporary Housing that were on hold. We are glad
3 that DOE that moved forward with filling several of
4 these positions; however, we understand that there
5 are still two important positions. Director of
6 Policy Intergovernmental Partnerships and Director of
7 Capacity Building. Why these positions on hold at a
8 time when students in shelter need all the support
9 that they can get and when does the DOE plan to fill
10 them?

11 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, we appreciate the
12 recognition that a strong infrastructure is important
13 to supporting children and families. I think that
14 just as a side, one of the fine names from the Ran
15 Study, when you talked earlier about the impact of
16 community schools was that there was a robust office
17 centrally supporting the schools. Ensuring that
18 there is a level of consistency, common expectations
19 and support across the system. And when we talk
20 about our investments for students in temporary
21 housing. And as I was saying to Council Member
22 Salamanca, you know the bulk of our human capital
23 investment is the addition of social workers,
24 community coordinators and family assistants.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

93

3 And in order for those 300 plus school and
4 shelter-based staff to be effective, we need a strong
5 team of managers to coach them. To provide them
6 feedback. To listen and train and onboard them. And
7 we are really grateful we did have a number of
8 vacancies in that role and we still have vacancies.
9 But we have recently been authorized to fill these
10 positions. We just onboarded a new employee, a new
11 regional manager last week. We have another one
12 starting in another week and we are confident that we
13 are going to be able to fill these positions quickly.
14 I can assure you that Mr. Hickey is hustling everyday
15 to bring people through the interview process. You
16 mentioned these two other additional positions, I
17 would just say that one of those our director
18 capacity building became vacant a couple of weeks
19 ago. These are - have been - the people that fill
20 those roles have played critical roles on our team.
21 As we go into the next fiscal year and look at what
22 kind of the stimulus is going to offer and what the
23 program offerings are it has been an opportunity for
24 us to make sure that we have the staffing structure
25 that best supports the work and we are currently just

1
2 assessing how we want to structure our team for
3 greatest impact.

4 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: So, to be clear, we are
5 expecting to fill these positions in the near future,
6 is that right?

7 CHRIS CARUSO: Well, I am not sure that those are
8 the exact positions we need, right? Those were
9 positions that were filled several years ago. Folks
10 did their work and like the world is going to change
11 in the next couple of weeks in terms of the funding.
12 And we want to make sure that we have the right
13 staffing supports to support that.

14 So, I am not going to commit right now to fill
15 those exact positions but we are actively hiring to
16 make sure that our students in temporary housing team
17 is as robust as possible to serve our students and
18 families.

19 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Right, I mean, the world
20 likely will not change as far as the number of kids
21 in temporary housing in our city and I agree that we
22 need adequate infrastructure to make sure that we are
23 moving the needle forward here but you need
24 infrastructure. You need folks in these key
25 positions and so -

3 CHRIS CARUSO: I will give you an example Chair
4 Treyger. So, like for instance, we also just created
5 a brand new role, right. Acknowledging all of our
6 school social workers. We created a director of
7 clinical services are really happy that Rebecca
8 Askew[SP?] just took on this new role a couple of
9 weeks ago.

10 So, now that we have that capacity, like it's you
11 know that's what a supervisor has to do. They have
12 to look at the assets on their team and determine
13 what the best kind of capital decisions that need to
14 be made are when they have vacancies. And you know
15 that we have been committed and working hard to make
16 sure that all of our positions are filled and that we
17 are supporting our students and we will continue to
18 do that. I am just not ready to commit right now on
19 like specific titles. You know we are not in a
20 position to do that right now.

21 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: I mean, just to kind of
22 close up the point, this is similar to what I have
23 [INAUDIBLE 1:56:25] with kids with IEP's. That you
24 need someone at the macro level, having a bird eye
25 view of things. Making sure that services are being
26 rendered, parents know their rights, kids know their

1
2 rights. This is a sizable student population and we
3 just can't deal with it sort of in piecemeal or in
4 silos and I really do think that these are critical
5 things and Chris, I do acknowledge that you have been
6 helpful in building out some of the infrastructure
7 that we have in place right now but I think that we
8 still have more work to do.

9 I want to share one last thing. I mentioned some
10 of the students who shared about the art sessions
11 meant but one of the parents said, again, I want to
12 share. These are real stories from real folks of the
13 families. "My child has been talking about this
14 upcoming session, meaning the art session, all
15 morning." In reference to the student anticipating
16 his session later on the day.

17 I think for me the key word is connections,
18 connection to our students. And closing out with the
19 administration here, one of the advantages and I
20 share this publicly of the community schools
21 initiative and that incorporates all the key
22 wraparounds but also just enrichment and art, music
23 and other critical programs and dealing with food
24 insecurity, other things. These connections mattered
25 a lot during this period of time. And that also

3 includes I want to say for the record, not just
4 community schools but also learning to work LTW
5 programs, which we are also going to fight like hell
6 to get not just restored but even more money for.

7 These connections are really important and it is
8 - you can't just overlook them and go right straight
9 to academic. You know I was a teacher; I know you
10 know before you open up a notebook, there are so many
11 things you have to establish in that classroom and in
12 that school environment in the first place. Where
13 every kid feels safe, supported, embraced, welcomed,
14 loved, housed, nourished. There is so many things
15 that go into making education work.

16 And so, and I know that the community schools
17 program and other programs we are talking about here
18 really make a critical difference and I think that
19 they are even more critical for kids in temporary
20 housing who really rely on these key relationships to
21 be great you know source of a stability. In a sense
22 that they have a great social safety net that's
23 around them to support them and to lift them up.

24 So, we will be going bigger and bolder Mr. Caruso
25 and to all folks, just letting you know
unapologetically going bigger and bolder and uh,

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

98

3 again, we thank you for your time and service here
4 and we wish you continued success in your career.

5 CHRIS CARUSO: Thank you very much. Thank you
6 for the opportunity to testify.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. We would
8 just like to make sure Council Member Levin doesn't
9 have anymore questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I do actually. Sorry, I have
11 my two year old here, so bear with me. So, yes, I
12 have a few questions that I would like to get to
13 here. I would like to hear more about the specific
14 plans for students in shelter in the Summer Rising
15 Program. Is there going to be busing for that? What
16 is the shelter outreach plan? Has that been
17 developed yet and if so, what is it?

18 CHRIS CARUSO: I could start and then I will turn
19 it over to my colleague Sarah Jonas and I just want
20 to kind of pick up Chair Treyger's call to be bold in
21 terms of reimagining what schools can be. And as the
22 Mayor announced on Tuesday, Summer Rising is the end
23 of summer school as we have known it. This is a
24 drastic reformation around what traditional summer
25 school is and what it can be going forward.

1
2 Removing this false choice that we made families
3 to make between enrolling their child in an academic
4 program or enrolling them in a fun childcare program.
5 It's really bringing those things together and we
6 know that our students in temporary housing are going
7 to be able to benefit from this immensely and Sarah
8 has done an amazing job at helping to design this
9 program. So, why don't you talk a little bit about
10 the outreach and how that will work.

11 SARAH JONAS: Sure, so I think a key piece of the
12 outreach for Summer Rising will be those trusting
13 relationships with community-based organizations.
14 So, Summer Rising you know is really taking up the
15 community school strategy and the values that we have
16 talked about here around that trust and that
17 relationship and how important that is to engaging
18 students and families in school, in learning and to
19 connect with one another.

20 And so, a key piece of the outreach will be those
21 relationships that the community-based organizations
22 already hold with families and students and that they
23 will be able to outreach and connect those students
24 and families to this amazing opportunity of summer
25 rising. And all of those enrichments and academic

3 and social/emotional supports that the program will
4 bring. So, that will be sort of a key piece of that
5 connection to the program.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: When you say community-based
7 organizations, are you speaking about shelter
8 providers specifically?

9 SARAH JONAS: So, the Summer Rising program is
10 going to, will be partnering schools with community-
11 based organizations and providers through the
12 Department of Youth and Community Development. So,
13 many of these are providers that support afterschool
14 programming throughout the school year and will be
15 partnering with schools in the summer to provide -

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I hear that. What I am
17 saying is that so, in particular families - the
18 family shelter system is largely not for profit
19 based. So, you know there is probably about 30 or 40
20 providers that are not-for-profits that some of them
21 may do afterschool programming. Some may not. So,
22 they may or may not have relationships with DYCD, I
23 don't know.

24 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, there is actually a
25 significant amount of overlap there between CAMBA and
Bronx Works and Sobril[SP?] and those types of

3 organizations. All the Summer Rising programs are
4 going to be in schools.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Chris, if a kids lucky, they
6 get to be placed at Bronx Works. They get a
7 placement by Bronx Works or CAMBA or Henry Street or
8 WIN. If they are unlucky, they get a placement with
9 at a hotel with you know, with a skeletal crew and
10 skeletal services and unfortunately a much too high
11 percentage of children are getting placed in those
12 types of circumstances.

13 So, what I am concerned about is, not the kids at
14 WIN, who you know have access to these programs or
15 not the kids at Henry Street. I am worried about the
16 kids that are placed with CSS or CCS excuse me, CCS
17 in a hotel, like out on North Conduit that are not
18 getting linked up. So, that's what I am worried
19 about.

20 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, if I could just jump in.
21 This is a good opportunity to just point to the
22 commitment under Turning the Tide to end the use of
23 clusters and commercial hotels.

24 So, in terms of your concern Council Member, we
25 currently have approximately a little under 1,500
families in commercial hotels and we continue our

1
2 close down to be able to transition those families to
3 the high quality Turning the Tide sites that have
4 been opened up. I also want to point out, as of
5 earlier this week, all clients have exited CCS
6 operated locations.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That was just an example but
8 there are still a lot of children. If there are
9 1,500 families than there are you know likely to be
10 about 3,000-5,000 at least children who are still in
11 commercial hotels. I just want to make sure that
12 there is an outreach program from Summer Rising
13 directly to those providers that have contracts with
14 DSS, DHS, that's all.

15 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, absolutely. There will be a
16 robust outreach effort and we are opening more school
17 buildings than we ever have before this summer to
18 ensure that even that family on North Conduit will
19 have a school building in Ozone Park that is
20 accessible. Like, they will have the access nearby.
21 There will be programs in every neighborhood across
22 the city and our combination of nonprofit partners,
23 the DHS partners and our school system will be doing
24 really active outreach to encourage and support
25 families to apply.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

103

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can uh, sorry, just changing
4 topics here. Is there a breakdown? Chair Treyger
5 asked about students in temporary housing in generals
6 in person versus remote breakdown. Do you have a
7 breakdown of students in shelter, specifically so the
8 shelter population, subpopulation of students in
9 temporary housing and the breakdown of whether they
10 are remote or in person?

11 CHRIS CARUSO: Uhm, let me check. I don't think
12 I have that handy. Uhm, I apologize.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If you don't have it, that's
14 fine. Can you get it to us?

15 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah absolutely.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, how many students in
17 temporary housing participated – have participated or
18 are participating in Learning Bridges?

19 CHRIS CARUSO: I have the number of students from
20 shelters that participated and that's about 1,700.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, if it is possible to
22 augment that with the broader universe of students in
23 temporary housing, that would be helpful.

24 CHRIS CARUSO: Sure, we can do that.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then, and I think you
touched on this throughout the testimony but if you

1
2 could kind of enumerate for us, what you see as your
3 priorities for the federal funding coming in, in
4 terms of the use and how that's going to address the
5 needs of students in shelter in temporary housing.

6 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah, I am happy to reiterate
7 that. I think that there is you know the Executive
8 Budget will be coming out shortly and there is going
9 to be an engagement process to really examine how we
10 can best use the stimulus funds. So far, we have
11 made several investments. So one, is the expansion
12 of 27 new community schools in the neighborhoods
13 hardest hit by the pandemic.

14 Two, is the launch of Summer Rising, which we are
15 real excited about. We have also hired, announced
16 hiring 150 new social workers and screeners to do
17 mental health screenings across the city. So, kind
18 of addressing the whole child and family and
19 acknowledging the average child experiences that are
20 a result of the pandemic are among our top priorities
21 with increased funding.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uhm, so seeing the time right
23 now and knowing that we have members of the public
24 that wish to testify, I am going to follow up with

1
2 questions in writing for you all but I think that
3 that's it for me right now.

4 The last thing that I just want to reiterate to
5 everybody and I just want to leave you with this in
6 terms of how we think about this. You know I am
7 working here from my home. I have a nice decent
8 sized apartment with multiple rooms and so, my wife
9 is able to just take my two year old and go into a
10 different room, so that he is not on top of me while
11 I am doing this. And my daughter is able to do what
12 she is doing and we all have some semblance of some
13 space. When you are in a hotel room trying to do
14 this for a family of four or family of five in a
15 single hotel room for 495 days, just think about what
16 that's like. And what that does to a child's
17 social/emotional intellectual growth.

18 And so, when we talk about all these things,
19 there are thousands of children that are, I mean if
20 they are lucky they get placed in you know with one
21 of these tier 2 providers that we know and have
22 longstanding relationships with. But if they are not
23 lucky, you know they are kind of on their own. The
24 parents are on their own and they are stuck with this
25 voucher that's not worth you know a damn. It's not

1
2 useful. And the sense of you know just isolation and
3 desperation that can result from that is just
4 traumatizing and it is happening to thousands of
5 kids.

6 And we are not talking about – when we say
7 temporary, temporary you know temporary housing 495
8 days, think about that as temporary. You know that's
9 more than half of my son's lifetime, so.

10 CHRIS CARUSO: Yeah.

11 ERIN DRINKWATER: And Council Member I think just
12 to reiterate, I think the concern is well understood.
13 We acknowledge that. The commitment to end the use
14 of commercial hotels for families is of the utmost
15 importance. We continue to make progress on that. I
16 mentioned the number of cases; I think what's
17 important that I just want to add to that is as of
18 February 28th, there were 987 school aged children
19 placed in commercial hotels.

20 So, while there are individual impacts for each
21 and every one of them, that we want to work to avoid
22 and prevent, those numbers do continue to come down
23 and our commitment to close those commercial hotels
24 is the temporary gap for our families. We are well
25 on our way.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

107

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much and I
4 appreciate all of your time and testimony today.
5 Thank you.

6 ERIN DRINKWATER: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin.

8 Seeing that no other Council Members have their hand
9 raised, we will now turn it to public testimony.

10 Once more, I would like to remind everyone that
11 unlike our typical Council hearings, we will be
12 calling individuals one by one to testify. Council
13 Members who have questions for a particular panelist,
14 should use the Zoom raise hand function and you will
15 be called on after each panel has completed their
16 testimony. For panelists, once your name is called,
17 a member of our staff will unmute you and the
18 Sergeant at Arms will give you the go ahead to begin
19 after setting the timer.

20 All testimony will be limited to two minutes.

21 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may
22 begin before delivering your testimony. Again,
23 written testimony can be submitted to
24 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

25 The first panelist will be Randi Levine from the
Advocates for Children, Raysa Rodriguez from the

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

108

3 Citizens Committee for Children, Leslie Armstrong
4 from Volunteers of America, Diana Cruz from the
5 Hispanic Federation and Tammy Samms from Sanctuary
6 for Families.

7 We will first be hearing from Randi Levine.

8 Randi, you may begin when ready after the Sergeant –

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 RANDI LEVINE: Thank you for the opportunity to
11 speak with you. My name is Randi Levine and I am the
12 Policy Director of Advocates for Children in New
13 York. I want to start by just expressing our
14 appreciation for the work of all of the Department of
15 Education folks who are here today and in particular,
16 just want to acknowledge the work of Chris Caruso and
17 wish him well as he moves on from the Department of
18 Education.

19 Despite the hard work of many educators and DOE
20 staff members including the DOE students in temporary
21 housing office, the pandemic has worsened the
22 inequities that have long existed for students in
23 shelter. Over the course of the pandemic, we have
24 heard from families in shelter about students having
25 to wait months to receive an iPad. Students whose
iPads did not work properly, due to lack of Wi-Fi and

1 adequate cellular reception in shelter units.

2 Students who had difficulty focusing on school work,
3 while trying to complete assignments in small rooms
4 that they shared with their parents and multiple
5 siblings of varying ages, grade levels and needs.

6 And students whose instruction or special education
7 services were not effective over a screen.
8

9 We've already discussed attendance today in
10 general but it is even more concerning at the high
11 school level. Tenth graders in shelter in January
12 had an attendance rate of just 64 percent, [LOST
13 AUDIO 2:14:17-2:14:23].

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Randi, your -

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You froze Randi sorry.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry about that Randi and
17 it's okay if you can please slow it down because we
18 are doing some testing at the Council, so you can
19 take your time. Thank you.

20 RANDI LEVINE: Thank you. We have already
21 discussed attendance in general but it is even more
22 concerning at the high school level. Tenth graders
23 in shelter had an attendance rate of just 64 percent,
24 meaning they missed one out of every three school
25 days.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

110

3 We continue to call on the city to use attendance
4 data to reach out to all families of students in
5 shelter who are not currently engaging in school or
6 have not been regularly engaging and identify and
7 resolve the barriers that are keeping them from
8 participating in school.

9 Given the significant systemic road blocks
10 students in shelter faced during the pandemic, the
11 city should keep the needs of students in shelter
12 front and center as it decides how to use the
13 billions of dollars of COVID-19 Education Relief
14 funding it is receiving from the federal government.

15 A number of the recommendations in the City
16 Council's response to the Preliminary Budget such as
17 summer programming, smarter tutoring, evidence based
18 literacy curriculum, compensatory services for
19 students with disabilities and social workers, will
20 be critical for students in shelter.

21 But as we saw in the case of iPads, merely
22 offering resources to all students or even saying
23 that students in shelter have priority for resources,
24 is not sufficient to ensure students in shelter have
25 meaningful access. Rather to ensure students can

1
2 access supports, the city needs an intentional
3 targeted plan for students in shelter.

4 For example, when it comes to the city's new
5 Summer Rising program and any other supplemental
6 programming such as tutoring that the city may offer
7 next year, the city should conduct intensive
8 strength-based outreach to ensure families in shelter
9 specifically know about the services and get support
10 signing up, listen and respond to any concerns
11 parents in shelter may have and connect them with
12 other professionals who can provide additional
13 information as requested. Provide door to door
14 transportation for the summer and all services
15 including any that take place outside regular school
16 hours, provide summer services and tutoring on site
17 at shelters that have space available. And ensure
18 there is a remote option with sufficient support for
19 families including IT support, language access and
20 accommodations for students with disabilities.

21 Some of this intentional planning will require
22 targeting resources specifically to students in
23 shelter, especially at a time when the DOE is
24 receiving more than \$6 billion in federal COVID-19
25 relieve funding.

1
2 As just one example, AFC has recommended that the
3 DOE hire a core of professionals to focus on outreach
4 and engagement. Given the number of students in
5 shelter who have not been regularly attending school,
6 the DOE should include as part of this core at least
7 150 shelter-based community coordinators to focus
8 specifically on helping students in shelter connect
9 with school and access any supplemental programming,
10 services and supports the DOE will be offering.

11 Quickly, with respect to Intro. 150, we support
12 this bill which would establish a taskforce on
13 transportation for students who are homeless. We
14 have more information in our written testimony about
15 the improvements that the DOE has made to
16 transportation for students in shelter, as well as
17 some recommendations for strengthening the bill.

18 And I want to just end by thanking the City
19 Council and especially Chair Levin and Chair Treyger
20 for the incredible leadership you have shown and
21 standing up for students in shelter drawing attention
22 to their needs and fighting for targeted resources
23 such as Bridging the Gap Social Workers.

24 We look forward to continuing to work with you to
25 ensure that students in shelter can participate in

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

113

3 school and get the academic and social/emotional
4 support they need after the disruption and
5 devastation of the past year.

6 Thanks for the opportunity to speak with you and
7 I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Randi. Next, we
9 will be hearing from Raysa Rodriguez.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Before – I’m sorry, I just
11 have a question for Randi. So, are you as kind of
12 along with Raysa, two of the most established
13 organizations that are advocating for students in
14 temporary housing in the city. Uhm, are you – is
15 there a structured engagement with the Department of
16 Education on these issues, especially in light of the
17 federal funding coming in, to make sure that the
18 resources are getting to students in temporary
19 housing in the way that’s most effective?

20 RANDI LEVINE: We are in regular communication
21 with the Department of Education and definitely
22 appreciate our partnership. With that said, I think
23 we are looking to see more from DOE leadership to
24 ensure that for every announcement that comes out
25 from the Department of Education about any new
programs, support or service that’s going to be

1
2 offered from the federal funding, there is a specific
3 plan to ensure that students in shelter have access
4 and can benefit from it.

5 So, you know, I gave Summer as one example and
6 since that is the one that was announced this week,
7 we want to hear more. We definitely appreciate the
8 Summer Rising program. We were excited to hear about
9 it and we want to hear more about the specific
10 intentional targeted proactive outreach that's going
11 to happen to ensure that students in shelter can sign
12 up but then also, how are they going to get there?

13 As you know, they are entitled to transportation
14 to school and educational services.

15 So, what does the transportation plan look like?
16 Will there be any Summer Rising programs that are on
17 site at shelter for shelters that have space or that
18 are nearby? Of course, to be said, students want to
19 stay in their school programs for the summer. We
20 want to ensure they can do that. So, we are
21 concerned.

22 As I mentioned, you know we definitely appreciate
23 that the DOE as one example prioritized giving iPads
24 to students in shelter first. That was a great step
25

3 and probably wouldn't have happened five years ago.
4 So, we acknowledge that is progress.

5 With that said, we saw that that didn't mean that
6 every student in shelter ended up with an iPad in
7 their hand and it certainly didn't mean that every
8 student ended up with a working iPad. In fact, so
9 many students ended up at [LOST AUDIO 2:21:16].

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I think you are breaking up
11 again Randi.

12 RANDI LEVINE: I finished; I am not sure where
13 you were.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Just about the end. Yeah, we
15 just greatly appreciate all the work you do and you
16 have been as tenacious as anyone I know on these
17 issues. So, much appreciated and we should be in
18 pretty constant contact about in the coming months,
19 about how these federal funds are going to be spent.
20 Thank you Randi. Sorry Raysa.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Randi and Chair and
22 this is also a reminder to all other Council Members
23 that is you would like to ask questions of the panel;
24 just use the Zoom raise hand function and we will
25 call on the Council Members after the entire panel.

3 I will now turn it to Raysa Rodriguez from the
4 Citizens Committee for Children for testimony.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, Raysa, I think that we
7 are having a hard time hearing you but you are not
8 muted, so I don't know why. Now you are muted
9 though. Can't hear you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Raysa, we will come, we will
11 circle right back to you.

12 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: How is that?

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There we go.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh perfect. We hear you.
15 Thank you.

16 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Okay, sorry about that all.
17 Thank you for having me. My name is Raysa Rodriguez,
18 Associate Executive Director for Policy and Advocacy
19 at Citizens Committee for Children. It is a tough
20 act to follow when my colleague and partner Randi
21 goes before me but I am so glad to be able to echo so
22 many of the priorities she outlined.

23 CCC is a multi-issue advocacy organization. Our
24 work really aims at ensuring that all New York
25 children are healthy, housed, educated and safe. We
are a lead organization in the family homelessness

1 coalition. That's a diverse group of stakeholders
2 including shelter providers, advocates and other
3 stakeholders seeking to combat family homelessness.
4 Our goals are to prevent family homelessness, improve
5 conditions in shelter when shelter is unavoidable and
6 expand affordable housing options.
7

8 Even before COVID, the needs of students in
9 temporary housing was a and continues to be a key
10 priority for the family homelessness coalition.
11 What's at stake is even deeper inequity. We are
12 really concerned about the needs and the current year
13 that students have had with abrupt school closures,
14 inequitable remote learning. Now is the time to make
15 bold investments. We want to make sure that we call
16 attention to a historic moment if you will. With an
17 unprecedented amount of resources coming to New York
18 City, now is the time to make really bold investments
19 and making sure that the needs of students in
20 temporary housing are met.

21 I don't have to go through the numbers. I think
22 that our colleagues and partners at Department of
23 Education did a great job in outlining what the
24 numbers look like. I would caution that you know any
25 numbers or count during an unprecedented year of a

1 lot of uncertainty is worrisome. We know that on
2 average citywide -

3
4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

5 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Out of every ten students in
6 temporary housing experience housing instability and
7 in areas like the Bronx, that ratio is much higher.
8 We call on the administration and the Council to
9 ensure that all students living in shelter have full
10 access to programs and supports. As Randi mentioned,
11 we need to prioritize all resources and programming.
12 To these students, we want to make sure that we
13 increase capacity to meet their needs. We also call
14 on the expansion of 150 community coordinators to
15 really navigate the system. We heard a lot, so much
16 about the difficult time families have in navigating
17 those systems. These roles can facilitate in that
18 and then lastly, if I have to end, I will end that
19 calling attention to the need for behavioral health
20 supports.

21 This is true even before COVID but after the year
22 that we have had, we need to make that students in
23 temporary housing have access to social/emotional
24 supports that we know are critical to ongoing

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

educational progress. Thank you so much for your
time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And I will have a follow up
question for Raysa as well. Similar question that I
asked Randi about just the level of engagement that
you are having right now with DOE and you know making
sure that they are – that any of the kind of gaps
that might be – that they might have in their
planning are being kind of identified and that there
is a feedback loop that's very quick and effective in
reaching the right people directly and reaching the
right people at the right time.

RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Sure, I have to give a shout
out to Mike Hickey and his team. I know that they
have done you know as best as a job as possible at
maintaining open lines of communication. We want to
build on that as Randi said. We want to make sure
that and I know that that's been part of the goal, so
I don't want to suggest that that hasn't been the
goal. Again, given the amount of resources, we want
to make sure that we work together to not only use
data to call attention to the need but also to think

3 creatively around how to support students who are
4 hardest to reach.

5 So, yes, we have been working and talking. Our
6 goal is to continue to build on that.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And uhm, and they have been
8 receptive to your recommendations and if there are
9 areas where you want to see more resources go, there
10 are open to those or?

11 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: We have to continue
12 conversations around what plans and priorities with
13 current level of resources. We haven't talked about
14 the current budget but we have had a lot of time
15 sharing you know what we are hearing from providers
16 and from the ground in terms of what challenges
17 families and students are facing with remote learning
18 for instance.

19 So, they have been really welcoming of that type
20 of information. I think what's ahead of us is
21 beginning to strategize again about leveraging
22 resources and making meaningful investments.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And just as my pitch for both
24 advocates for children and CCC's. You know long
25 before COVID, your two organizations have been
advocating for the needs of students in temporary

1 housing. Whether that's transportation or
2
3 afterschool social/emotional learning.

4 So, you know, I thank you and I want you to uhm,
5 I want to make sure that your voices are part of this
6 conversation, especially as we are looking at an
7 influx of federal funds.

8 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you so much for the time.
9 I submitted testimony and as part of that, there are
10 right ups and recommendations on how to enhance and
11 improve Intro. 150, which we support. Thank you so
12 much.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Raysa.

14 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: And if I could just ask one
15 quick follow up to both folks who I deeply respect
16 and the Council has greatly learned from. Two
17 stellar organizations, which we appreciate both of
18 you.

19 We got data that the majority of students in
20 temporary housing have still – the families have
21 still opted for full remote even now. I have
22 mentioned this before and I will mention this again
23 that you know there are some folks out there strictly
24 focused on academics. To me, as a teacher, I am
25 focusing on how do we reestablish connection.

1
2 Because you can't get to academic if we can't connect
3 with kids. We have to know where they are, that they
4 are okay, that they are safe, supported. And so,
5 from just a question to both Raysa and Randi, uhm,
6 what do you believe based on things that you have
7 heard, things that you have seen are the remaining
8 barriers to reconnect students in temporary housing
9 and what are some of the lessons learned now so we
10 get kids enrolled in Summer Rising. And certainly,
11 as we prepare for deepening connections in the fall.

12 RANDI LEVINE: Do you want to go first Raysa?

13 RAYSA RODRIGUEZ: Sure. So, I think you know
14 there is a lot of lessons learned. I think we have
15 been pushing for certain, you know whether in person
16 or remote, we need to make sure that we improve
17 instruction and access to high quality teaching for
18 students, whether they are remote or in-person.

19 And so, we are happy and encouraged by the
20 progress made with internet services and devices but
21 we need to do more. It's not enough you know that we
22 are making progress. Any child that can't log on
23 appropriately is too high of a number right. And as
24 we have mentioned in our testimony, you know in terms
25 of supports, we want to make sure that supports are

1
2 available both on site right. Every family is
3 different right and I am not going to you know claim
4 like I know what everyone's situation is. Every
5 family is different, situations are different. What
6 we want to make sure is that there are ample
7 opportunities to access educational supports both on
8 site in shelter and when that's not available, that
9 there is transportation right. And that there are
10 roles and like care coordinators for instance whose
11 job it is to promote. So, that is if it is a matter
12 of just information, that also is covered.

13 So, it's about outreach, it's about onsite
14 support and it's about supports to get kids to where
15 they need to be if it is not going to be in shelter.

16 RANDI LEVINE: I echo those points as well and I
17 will say that we are so grateful the Council and for
18 the DOE's - launch the Bridging the Gap Social Worker
19 program and so, we have 100 Bridging the Gap Social
20 Workers in our schools and 100 students in temporary
21 housing, community coordinators in our schools as
22 well. And think that their work has been important
23 during this pandemic.

24 At the same time, we know that three out of every
25 four students living in shelter attends a school that

3 does not have a Bridging the Gap Social Worker or a
4 community coordinator, just given the numbers of
5 students in shelter.

6 And so, we do think that part of the next phase
7 is looking at the onsite support at shelters. There
8 are currently 117 Department of Education family
9 assistants but as we heard right now about half of
10 them are working remotely. But even when they
11 return, we have seen a huge increase in the number of
12 students who are homeless and we have not seen an
13 increase in the number of family assistants. And
14 also, see a need to make sure that everyone in those
15 roles is fully qualified and has the skill set
16 needed.

17 And that's where this recommendation for using
18 some of the federal money for 150 community
19 coordinators based in shelters comes from. That
20 they, combined with the family assistants can have
21 more of an impact being onsite to help students and
22 families reengage with summer programs and then with
23 school in the fall. Uhm and we think it is going to
24 be really important to listen to their concerns. To
25 take a strained space approach to figure out what the
individual barriers are. I think the barriers are

1 still buried. As far as the attendance rate, I think
2 technology is still a problem. For some, low digital
3 literacy space. The need for mental health support.

4 We you know other responsibilities. We think
5 that there are still a number of barriers out there
6 and that is really going to take folks to connect
7 with families on an individual basis. Figure out
8 what the barriers are and to resolve [LOST AUDIO
9 2:33:55].

10
11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Randi, you are breaking up
12 again.

13 RANDI LEVINE: As students return to school,
14 having social/emotional support there will be
15 critical. So, we definitely appreciate the Council's
16 call for additional social workers, as well as other
17 mental, direct mental health support.

18 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you Randi and Raysa
19 and I agree with you wholeheartedly on the need for
20 more full-time social workers. I mean, I kind of go
21 back to basics. I mentioned this numerous times but
22 just to summarize quickly. When I visited the
23 community school, renewal schools so to speak,
24 whatever they called them at the time but the school
25 and the international high school in Queens when they

1
2 invested in the full-time bilingual social worker,
3 that also spoke the language of the community that
4 they were serving. And how she right away identified
5 the trauma that kids were experiencing with regards
6 to the hostility toward immigrants from the previous
7 federal administration and how she had to establish a
8 safe space for them immediately because of the fear
9 of encountering any authorities figures.

10 That was one of the biggest barriers, if not the
11 biggest barrier to attendance in that school. And
12 that bilingual social worker was able to immediately
13 flag that and become a resource for the kids and for
14 their families, which picked up after her hire.
15 Attendance picked up and then soon afterwards the
16 scores began to pick up.

17 So, I agree with you that once we put these
18 supports in place, it will identify additional
19 barriers that we have to overcome for our kids. I
20 really appreciate both of you highlighting that.

21 Are there any other – Kalima, are there any other
22 members that have questions?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. So, as I
24 said earlier, we will wait until the entire panel has

1
2 gone. We still have a few more folks and then we
3 will turn it to the Council Members to ask questions.

4 So, we have Leslie Armstrong who is up next.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 LESLIE ARMSTRONG: Thank you. My name is Leslie
7 Armstrong, I am the Assistant Vice President for
8 Volunteers of America. I oversee all New York City
9 Emergency and Housing and Shelter Services. We are
10 an anti-poverty organization that provides housing
11 and support services to over 11,000 people every
12 year. We operate four transitional family shelters
13 that offer onsite services for our residents, as well
14 as three confidentially located emergency shelters
15 and scattered site safe houses for individuals and
16 their children who have experienced domestic
17 violence.

18 Our staff has been an essential resource to our
19 families as they manage the impact of COVID-19. Our
20 team has been delivering DOE meals right to the doors
21 each day and our case managers have worked with DOE
22 liaisons to ensure our youth have devices and
23 internet connectivity to facilitate remote learning.
24 Our families have experienced long waiting periods
25

1
2 for their children to be in incorporated into busing
3 routes.

4 One particular egregious case involves a youth
5 who resides at our region family residence on the
6 upper west side and relies on a wheelchair for
7 mobility. He was unable to attend school for six
8 weeks due to delays and assigning him a bus route.
9 The proposed taskforce must review mechanisms for
10 ensuring transportation is provided promptly for
11 students in shelter. With adequate accommodations
12 for different students.

13 We have also observed the need increase the
14 number of buses and routes servicing our youth.
15 There have been cases where students have scheduled
16 for a 5 a.m. pick up to be dropped off at their
17 schools at 8 a.m.. Sleep deprivation, resulting from
18 early pickup time, noticeably impacted how those
19 students perform their classes, in their classes.

20 Our youth are often precluded from participation
21 after school or summer programs because bus routes
22 are unable to accommodate activities outside of
23 regular school hours. We support the proposed
24 legislation to require the creation of a taskforce -

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

129

3 LESLIE ARMSTRONG: For transportation of homeless
4 students. I would like to thank the Committee on
5 Education and General Welfare for providing us with a
6 platform to discuss the challenges that youth in
7 shelters face in New York City and we look forward to
8 partnering with the City Council to address the needs
9 of this population. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Leslie. We will
11 now hear from Diana Cruz.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 TYDIE ABREU: Thank you Council Member and
14 Committee Chair Treyger and all the other Committee
15 members for taking the time to listen to the
16 testimony drafted by the Hispanic Federation.

17 We are a non-profit organization seeking to
18 empower and advance Hispanic communities through
19 programs and legislative advocacy. My name is Tydie
20 Abreu, I am sitting in for my colleague Diana Cruz.
21 I am the Policy Analyst for the Hispanic Federation.
22 And yes, I am here to advocate for youth in shelters
23 across New York City but particularly those from
24 communities of color struggling to face the
25 challenges that COVID-19 has posed in their lives
since the full shut-down of our schools last year.

3 Black and Brown students make up 94 percent of
4 students living in shelters and are navigating a
5 myriad of challenges beyond their unstable living
6 situations, due to disproportionate inequities
7 affecting students of color in education systems.

8 These challenges make it hard for students to
9 engage in schoolwork, which leads to incomplete
10 education goals. For example, high school
11 graduation. In fact, only 45 percent of homeless
12 youth graduate high school in four years.

13 As school districts and the city receives funding
14 to support education, it is imperative that students
15 living in homeless shelters are provided the
16 necessary resources to achieve their educational and
17 career goals. To address this, the Hispanic
18 Federation strongly urges the Council and City
19 leadership to include and prioritize the following
20 recommendations:

21 One, ensure access and continuation of technology
22 high-quality internet, devices and literacy trainings
23 at homeless shelters. Two, increase culturally-
24 relevant and linguistically diverse mental health
25 supports. Three, train shelter staff and/or hire
more education-focused professionals to navigate

3 education related issues and directly support the
4 youth at homeless shelters. Four, pursue holistic
5 approaches -

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

7 TYDIE ABREU: Pursue holistic approaches to lead
8 homeless youth to equitable postsecondary and career
9 opportunities. And five, engage in a city-wide
10 initiative that addresses educational barriers for
11 homeless youth, which includes housing, food and
12 financial insecurities in collaboration with the
13 education department and community-based
14 organizations who are experts in working with
15 homeless youth. Thank you for your time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Thank you Diana.
17 Next, we will be hearing from Tammy Samms.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 TAMMY SAMMS: Thank you so much. Good afternoon.
20 My name is [LOST AUDIO 2:41:27].

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Tammy Samms, we can no longer
22 hear you. Give us one moment.

23 TAMMY SAMMS: Can you hear me now?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we hear you perfectly.

25 TAMMY SAMMS: Awesome, thank you. Good afternoon
every. I am Tammy Samms, the Program Director of

1 Children and Family Services at Sanctuary for
2 Families. New York States largest provider of
3 comprehensive services exclusively for survivors of
4 domestic violence with children.
5

6 We are so grateful to the City Council for the
7 opportunity to testify today and to Council Member
8 Levin for bringing this urgent discussion of school
9 aged youth in the shelter system to the Council's
10 attention. For the last years 30 years Sanctuary has
11 run a large 58 family transitional center and four
12 small crisis shelters that together provide residence
13 for 350 to 400 adults and children annually.
14 Including over 200 children last year.

15 Sanctuary Shelter provides a safe, nurturing,
16 clinical and educational support system for school
17 aged youth with wrap around services including
18 individual and group counseling. Afterschool
19 programs, one to one tutoring, a summer camp and year
20 around youth and family recreational activities. You
21 may be aware that domestic violence is the single
22 largest driver of family homelessness in New York
23 City. According to 2019 NYC Comptrollers report,
24 domestic violence accounts for over 40 percent of
25 families entering the city's DHS shelters.

1 As this hearing acknowledges that it is crucial
2 to address the educational needs of children living
3 in shelters, especially given the profound challenges
4 of families have faced during the pandemic.

5 Throughout the COVID public health crisis,
6 Sanctuaries five shelters have remained operational
7 in that capacity rigorously following health and
8 safety guidelines and we quickly adapted our services
9 to continue supporting shelter resident families
10 disproportionately effected by the pandemic.

11 For school aged children specifically –

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

13 TAMMY SAMMS: Our shelter staff has provided
14 virtual counseling, frequent wellness checks with
15 every family virtual group program including
16 literacy, arts physical movement activities and
17 academic support, including enrichment packets,
18 school supplies and extensive treatment programs.
19 All families have received access to emergency food,
20 clothing and other basic needs.

21 Sanctuary's response and service continuity in
22 the last year has been critical. Even before COVID,
23 school aged children in our shelters, as well as
24 other shelters across the city have faced an array of
25

1 obstacles to healthy development and academic
2 achievement exacerbated by the pandemic.

3 Transportation issues, language and communications
4 areas are a steep digital divide and difficult with
5 remote learning. Frequent moves between schools,
6 attending underfunded schools, placement in the
7 shelter located in a different borough from their
8 school and chronic absences are just some of the
9 issues we have seen. These challenges are all
10 compounded by the ongoing trauma of poverty, housing
11 insecurity, structural racism and experiencing
12 violence.
13

14 Transportation has been an issue for school age
15 youth in shelter. All of whom have the right to
16 busing. Because school staff are often unfamiliar
17 with mandated HRA protocols for these students and
18 due to confidentiality concerns for students in
19 domestic violence shelters, the process of arranging
20 busing typically takes weeks.

21 In the past, students were given metro cards to
22 limit absences during the interim period. However,
23 the process has become even more difficult during the
24 pandemic. Families have not received metro cards in
25 months and DOE officials in charge of serving school

1
2 aged children in domestic violence shelters have been
3 unresponsive at times. These transportation issues
4 are coupled with stark digital divide that leaves
5 many students in shelter without adequate devices or
6 reliable internet to attend classes, all contributing
7 to the chronic absences for both in person and remote
8 learning.

9 Recent DOE attendance data show that in the month
10 of January 2021, students in shelter missed more than
11 any other group citywide. Youth in shelter who have
12 experienced and they are witness to abuse, were
13 always more susceptible to chronic absences as
14 families adjust to new shelter and school
15 environments and as they begin to heal and adapt
16 after enduring months or years of abuse, heightened
17 patterns of absences have hindered students capacity
18 to stay connected with their peers in an already
19 isolating time and remain on track academically.
20 Particular without robust support from DOE schools.

21 Additionally, language and communication barriers
22 have intensified our students and families in
23 shelter. Heavily impacting immigrant families.
24 Those who were monolingual or limited English
25 proficiency. Those without adequate digital devices

1 and students with IEP's. Amidst school closings and
2 remote learning often with schedules changing last
3 minute, communication from the DOE has been almost
4 entirely in English. As a result, families have
5 missed important messages such as invitations to
6 vital IEP meetings. In many cases, they are not able
7 to get information via phone, via email, despite
8 often not having necessary technology or language
9 capacity.
10

11 In light of these heightened profound set
12 academic social and emotional challenges for school
13 aged youth in shelter, further amplified for youth
14 who have been exposed to family violence. Sanctuary
15 urges the Council to address enhanced communication
16 from DOE schools and administrators. Including
17 multilingual communication to families in at least
18 several major languages.

19 Increased availability of school officials by
20 phone, better oversight regarding responsiveness to
21 families with academic transportation and technology
22 requests and improved academic support for families
23 struggling with remote schooling and for children
24 with IEPs.
25

3 We applaud Council Member Levin and the joint
4 General Welfare and Education Committee's oversights
5 efforts through the two pieces of legislation being
6 discussed today. Youth in the shelter system and
7 their families are some of the most vulnerable
8 members of our community. And those most impacted by
9 the intersecting public health crisis of domestic
10 violence and COVID-19.

11 Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for
12 your continued work on behalf of marginalized youth,
13 abused survivors and New Yorkers in need.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much Tammy and
15 thank you for the good work you do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. This concludes
17 that panel. This is a reminder for Council Members.
18 If you have questions for this panel, please use the
19 Zoom raise hand function and we will call on you.

20 Seeing no hands raised, I will now call on our
21 next and final panel. Olga Rodriguez-Vidal from Safe
22 Horizon, Deborah Berkman from NYLAG, Ted Houghton
23 from Gateway Housing, Melissa Accomando from the
24 Brooklyn Defenders Services and Kenneth Jones from
25 the Salvadori Center and first, we will be hearing
from Olga Rodriguez-Vidal from Safe Horizon.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

138

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

4 OLGA RODRIGUEZ-VIDAL: Thank you. For some
5 reason, I am having a hard time getting on camera, so
6 I apologize for that.

7 Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to
8 testify today before the Committee of Education and
9 General Welfare. My name is Olga Rodriguez-Vidal, I
10 am the Vice President for Domestic Violence Shelters
11 at Safe Horizon. The nation's largest nonprofit
12 victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a
13 client centered trauma informed response to 250,000
14 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence
15 or abuse and we are increasingly using a lens of
16 racial equity to guide our work with clients with
17 each other and in developing the positions we hold.

18 Safe Horizon operates six emergency domestic
19 violence shelters and one transitional shelter or a
20 Tier 2 across New York City providing 673 beds total.

21 We will soon be opening a second Tier 2, which
22 will add 101 beds. Confidential domestic violence
23 shelters provide healing environments for families
24 and individuals leaving a dangerous situation. An
25 essential service for survivors of intimate partner
violence.

1 Families in DV shelter need help with clothing
2 and with school supplies including technology.
3 Families in DV shelter need more services for
4 students with needs around additional assistance.
5 For example tutoring, improvements to McKinney Vento
6 and that IEP process. Residents are struggling with
7 remote learning and with striking a balance between
8 work, children to remote education and the many
9 appointments needed to attend. For example public
10 benefits, housing, medical and legal.
11

12 We have also heard from clients about
13 technological issues. Some families have faced
14 issues with connecting to remote learning, as not all
15 of our shelters have been equipped with Wi-Fi,
16 although Altice is currently in the process of
17 equipping our shelters with Wi-Fi access.

18 We know this area the administration is working
19 on but it has been harder for many shelter residents
20 for the entirety of this pandemic. Families have
21 also voiced issues with the learning devices provided
22 to them by the DOE and needing to have these devices
23 replaced more quickly.

24 Additionally, families are frustrated by the
25 disruption to in-person learning when a classroom or

3 school must be shutdown due to positive cases. The
4 families in our shelters including children are
5 dealing with so much disruption to their lives
6 already. These changes from month to month, week to
7 week, day to day are simply too much.

8 Our shelters consistently run into issues with
9 having children evaluated for additional support
10 services and educational strategies, especially
11 through CPSB, which is a very confusing system.
12 Additionally, children who are supposed to receive
13 related services such as PTOTST are not receiving
14 them. There is a citywide lack of services for
15 children who require additional support and families
16 are left without adequate services. This is
17 especially concerning and frustrating for the
18 families in our DV shelters who are navigating so
19 many systems as well as the traumas of violence,
20 homelessness and so much more.

21 With respect to the two bills on today's agenda,
22 Intro. 139 2018 and Intro. 150 2018, we are generally
23 in support of both. We support Intro. 139 2018 which
24 would require the Department of Education to report
25 to student health services in correlation with

3 student housing status for students in kindergarten
4 through the 8th grade.

5 By disaggregating data by student housing status,
6 we will ideally be better equipped to identify unique
7 or acute health challenges faced by students who
8 reside in temporary housing. We also support Intro.
9 150 2018 which would establish a taskforce on
10 transportation for students experiencing
11 homelessness. As our families are still experiencing
12 significant delays with establishing busing. The
13 families coming into Safe Horizon shelters have
14 experienced pain, trauma and violence at the hands of
15 family members and loved ones. They are also living
16 through the trauma of homelessness, racism, poverty
17 and now our collective trauma of COVID-19.

18 To ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our
19 families in shelter, including youth, the city must
20 invest in both a short-term and long-term healing.
21 That investment must include intentional and targeted
22 plans to help students in shelter be able to
23 participate and access any additional programing
24 provided by the DOE, including tutoring, summer
25 programming, mental health support and services for
students with disabilities. Thank you very much.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we will be
4 hearing from Deborah Berkman.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 KENNETH JONES: I think they unmuted me first by
7 mistake, if that helps you.

8 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Oh, okay, thank you. Chairs
9 Levin and Treyger, Council Members and staff, good
10 afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak
11 to the Committees on Education and General Welfare on
12 youth in shelter and the school system. My name is
13 Deborah Berkman, and I am a Coordinating Attorney for
14 the Shelter Advocacy Initiative at NYLAG, which is a
15 free legal services provider.

16 The shelter advocacy initiative provides legal
17 services and advocacy to low-income people in and
18 trying to access the shelter system. And also
19 advocates for those experiencing street homelessness.

20 NYLAG is grateful that you are examining the
21 barriers that students living in the shelter system
22 have in traveling to school and we fully support
23 Intro. No. 150 as a necessary first step. Challenges
24 getting children to school are constant for my
25 clients who live in DHS shelter. These problems
present most often when clients have recently applied

1 for shelter and are engaged in the initial
2 application process. During that time, families
3 experiencing homelessness are generally given a
4 temporary, 10-day stay at a location that serves as
5 only a temporary shelter assignment.
6

7 At that time, parents have two options: either
8 keep their children at their prior school or have
9 them leave their prior school, often mid-semester and
10 enroll them in the local school. It is rare for us
11 to see DHS intentionally place a family near a school
12 their child already attends. Rather, it appears that
13 families are placed randomly and expected to figure
14 out a way to get their child to school. Arranging a
15 school bus can take weeks or even longer and until
16 such time that a school bus is provided, my clients
17 are expected to get their children to school on
18 public transportation, which can take hours in each
19 direction.

20 As a result, children are often absent or late
21 for school. And if they are absent or late too many
22 times, a school may contact ACS and initiate a case
23 of alleged educational neglect, which can endanger
24 custody for my clients. Temporary placements are
25 often assigned repeatedly as families experiencing

1
2 homelessness are continually deemed "ineligible" for
3 shelter.

4 Prior to the pandemic, this happened daily to our
5 clients who were required to apply again and again
6 for months before DHS could verify their housing
7 history. These success and temporary placements were
8 not necessarily in the same location. Resulting in
9 further disruption to school placement and
10 transportation and forcing families to repeatedly
11 navigate each disruption or base a case of
12 educational neglect. It was often logistically
13 impossible for parents to get their children to
14 school at all, let alone on time.

15 Since the pandemic, a temporary policy change has
16 made it much more likely that temporary placements
17 will be in the same place. But the problem will
18 return when DHS reverts to its pre-COVID policy,
19 which it has indicated it will do. Because of these
20 substantial challenges families face getting their
21 children to school, NYLAG does enthusiastically
22 support Intro. 150 as a first step and hopes that it
23 will lead to effective solutions to ease the burden
24 of children in shelter traveling to school. Thank
25 you for your important work on this topic.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

145

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Thank you
4 Deborah. Next, we will be hearing from Ted Houghton.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 TED HOUGHTON: Hi thank you for hearing from me.
7 I am Ted Houghton, President of Gateway Housing, a
8 technical assistance provider that works with
9 nonprofits in government to improve shelter programs.

10 In 2018, Gateway Housing launched Attendance
11 Matters, a pilot initiative to improve the school
12 attendance of children living in homeless shelters.
13 This intervention was simple, it's just very much
14 staged from the ground up onsite at shelters. Funded
15 by the Robin Hood and JP Morgan Chase foundations, it
16 was a partnership with the DHS and DOE, in particular
17 the Office of Students in Temporary Housing and four
18 leading family shelter providers, Bronx Works, HELP
19 USA, CAMBA and Win.

20 It's not rocket science. We worked with DHS and
21 DOE to improve access to up-to-date attendance data,
22 we offered trainings on evidence-based practices, had
23 Advocates For Children provide training on how to
24 navigate the DOE system and we hired an attendance
25 coordinator to lead weekly meetings where DOE and
shelter staff sat together and identified which

1 students had poor attendance and develop service
2 interventions to address familial and logistical
3 challenges.
4

5 Sometimes it was transportation or getting an
6 IEP. Sometimes it was really intervening in a
7 complex social service intervention but by just
8 meeting every week to look at what the problems were,
9 we really found that we could improve school
10 attendance of children that needed it most. We made
11 it clear to shelter staff that getting kids to school
12 everyday is a priority. We strengthened DOE's staff
13 relationships with shelter staff onsite and we gave
14 them the tools they need and we achieved a measurable
15 improvement in homeless children school attendance.

16 Attendance Matters has been independently
17 evaluated and confirmed by researchers at Princeton,
18 UPENN and Marist Universities will have a report out
19 soon.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 TED HOUGHTON: The things we found out that were
22 important were that DHS client care coordinators are
23 essential. DOE Community coordinators and family
24 assistants really help. Transportation taskforce
25 would be great. Community schools are a good thing

1 and installing Wi-Fi in family shelters is
2 fundamental. Thanks for your time.
3

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we will be
5 hearing from Melissa Accomando.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

7 MELISSA ACCOMANDO: My name is Melissa Accomando
8 and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Education
9 Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. Thank you
10 for the opportunity to testify.

11 BDS's education unit provides legal
12 representation and informal advocacy to our school
13 aged clients and to parents with children in New York
14 City schools. Many of the families we work with are
15 experiencing homelessness or housing instability.
16 BDS commends the City Council for its attention to
17 students in temporary housing. Problems experienced
18 by students living in temporary housing have been
19 particularly acute this year due to remote learning.

20 Our office has worked with families living in
21 shelters who waited months to receive remote learning
22 devices, despite being a priority group. And even
23 when families receive these devices, they struggle to
24 participate due to the inability to log on. While we
25 are pleased that the city is committed to installing

1
2 Wi-Fi in all shelters housing school aged children,
3 many students living in temporary housing have lost
4 over a year of school. The city must come up with a
5 plan to provide compensatory education services to
6 students who have missed so much school this year
7 including those living in temporary housing.

8 Even without the added stress of a global
9 pandemic, the process of entering shelter can be
10 confusing and burdensome. Families who do not
11 initially qualify for temporary housing may have to
12 repeatedly returning to DHS's half intake center and
13 endure multiple provisional placements. The DHS
14 COVID-19 rules that do not require school aged
15 children to attend path intake and follow up
16 meetings, should be made permanent.

17 In addition, DHS and DOE must create a more
18 streamlined process to ensure that sufficient space
19 exists in the shelter system so that families are
20 placed near their childrens schools. When this is
21 not possible, the process for requesting a transfer
22 should be made clear.

23 Finally, when families are placed far from their
24 home schools, yellow bus service should be made
25 available. Currently, many families are forced to

1
2 choose between long commutes on public transportation
3 or transferring schools. We have expanded upon many
4 of these recommendations -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 MELISSA ACCOMANDO: In our written testimony.
7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on
8 this critically important topic.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Melissa. Next, we
10 will hear from Kenneth Jones.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 KENNETH JONES: Hello everybody and thank you for
13 the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Salvadori
14 Center. For those of you that don't know about the
15 Salvadori Center, we are pushing program K-12 STEAM
16 education which is Science, Technology, Engineering,
17 Arts and Math.

18 Traditionally, we go into the public schools and
19 we help schools achieve their STEAM goals. You know,
20 when I was first starting out in college I wanted to
21 be an architect and I actually got my license and
22 practiced for a number of years but as my master's
23 thesis, I wrote a thesis on transitional housing for
24 the homeless.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

150

3 And so, the importance of providing a
4 rehabilitative and supportive environment for the
5 homeless is incredibly essential for the success of
6 our students. One of the things we were very proud
7 to do at the Salvadori Center was the last three
8 years partner with the Department of Education to
9 bring programs directly into the shelters to help
10 students to bolster their in school education. To
11 have a sense of normalcy and to engage each other
12 through a collaborative project placed approach to
13 learning grade level math and science.

14 The really cool thing about the last couple of
15 years is we have done some independent research that
16 has shown that students who engage in hands on and
17 collaborative project based learning that's tied to
18 the communities in which they live, the buildings
19 they enter, the bridges they cross, the parks they
20 play in. That they get a greater sense of relevancy
21 for what they are learning in school.

22 And what's really kind of cool is while the show
23 that while they are in Salvadori, the sense of
24 relevance spiked for the better because if not, we
25 would be out of a job.

3 But what was really interesting about this study
4 is after participating in our approach, which is a
5 collaborative project based approach to learning, the
6 sense of everything else they are learning in school.
7 The relevance of that continued to increase and
8 stopped declining.

9 So, it's very exciting and I think what I really
10 am here just to advocate for whatever you can do for
11 the students in shelters. Organizations like
12 Salvadori will be there to have your back and to help
13 you provide successful programming to the students.

14 So, thank you all for what you are doing. If
15 there is anything that we can do to help, please
16 never hesitate to ask. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. This is a
18 reminder to Council Members that if you would like to
19 ask questions of this panel, please use Zoom raise
20 hand function.

21 Seeing no hands raised, that was the last panel.
22 However, if we inadvertently missed anyone that would
23 like to testify, please use the Zoom raise hand
24 function and we will call on you in the order your
25 hand is raised.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

152

3 Seeing none, we have concluded public testimony
4 for this hearing. I will now turn it back to Chair
5 Treyger and Chair Levin for closing remarks. Chair
6 Treyger.

7 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you very much Kalima
8 and also, I don't know if Ms. Berkman from NYLAG is
9 still here or she - yes, you had mentioned with
10 regards to ACS referrals in cases. I asked the
11 question earlier at the DOE about steps that they are
12 taking to make sure that we are not adding trauma to
13 kids and families who are already experiencing enough
14 trauma in their lives. And they had mentioned that
15 they were taking certain steps but I am hearing from
16 you that this is still an ongoing issue. Can you
17 just elaborate further on that?

18 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Sure, well, so this happened
19 more prior to remote schooling. Because not it's a
20 little bit easier for students to log on from home.
21 So, what I was speaking about is when people actually
22 had to physically get their children to school but a
23 lot of my clients had this burden where they were not
24 able to get their clients to school. They were not
25 able to get their children to school on time and ACS
case was started.

1
2 And after that happens, it's very difficult to
3 get out of ACS's web. So, it is very difficult and
4 it is entirely on their fault.

5 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Yeah, that is not their
6 fault and so, this is an issue that you were flagging
7 prior to this?

8 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Well, not only part of it but
9 DHS has indicated that it is going to go back to its
10 pre-COVID policy of - Well, first of all, I am
11 sorry. This supposes that kids will have to go back
12 to school right in person, which I think they will
13 have to go back at some point.

14 DHS use to give successive ten day placements
15 when there was an ineligibility finding and they
16 wouldn't necessarily be in the same shelter. So,
17 now, there is a policy that people can reapply from
18 within shelter. So, they are kept within the same
19 shelter, so really if there is problems getting to
20 school it shouldn't last more than a couple of months
21 in the beginning.

22 But when people are switching shelters every ten
23 days, it's much more difficult to get a
24 transportation plan.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

154

3 CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: This is a lot. This is a
4 lot and a lot of burden being placed on this family
5 that with no fault of their own or any – it just
6 speaks to I think just the inadequate support
7 structure to help them, folks navigate this because
8 the process should be seamless. We should not be
9 adding anymore headaches, trauma, problems, barriers
10 to folks facing enough in their lives and thank you
11 for kind of crystalizing that point for us. And we
12 certainly appreciate and just to kind of close out
13 and I will turn it over to my Co-Chair Chair Levin.
14 You know, from the start of this pandemic and even
15 before the pandemic, we always talked about making
16 sure that our kids are safe but also under a lens of
17 equity.

18 I go back and remind folks that even when the
19 city rolled out their rep center model, that we had
20 called for including students in temporary housing to
21 be provided this critical access in service because
22 many of them again rely on school to be a source of
23 stability, the great equalizer. That regardless of
24 whatever was happening in their lives that schools,
25 the doors are open for them and kids are loved, safe,
supported and so forth.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

155

3 So, now that we are in receipt of significant
4 amount of resources from Washington, from Albany, we
5 need to even further center that lens of equity to
6 make sure that the kids that were really shortchanged
7 the most, kids that were underserved the most, that
8 they are front and center and we will
9 unapologetically be very big and bold in our budget
10 response. We will await the Administrations
11 Executive Budget proposal but the fight for school
12 budget, the fight for social workers, for art, music,
13 afterschool, programming, support structure, the
14 coordinator, critical coordinator positions, our kids
15 deserve nothing less. They deserve a whole lot more.

16 So, thank you all for testifying. The advocates,
17 colleagues, friends, I truly appreciate all of you
18 and I will turn it over a great leader in the city on
19 this effort for many, many years, Chair Levin.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Chair Treyger. I
21 just want to thank the last panel. Ms. Rodriguez-
22 Vidal, Ms. Berkman, Mr. Houghton and Mr. Jones, Ms.
23 Accomando for the work that you are all doing in
24 trying to address these issues systemically and for
25 your testimony and for being with us this afternoon.

1 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

156

3 I just want to once again reiterate what a strong
4 role obligation that we have as a city government and
5 as a network of service providers, not-for-profit
6 providers and policy makers to prioritize the needs
7 of students in temporary housing. When I say
8 prioritize, I mean put it front and center in
9 everything that we do and make sure that as we are –
10 we have a limited amount of time and energy and
11 bandwidth and we can never forget those children who
12 are – who really need the resources that we have at
13 our disposal.

14 And we can do a lot better. I know that there
15 has been a significant effort and I want to thank Mr.
16 Caruso and I want to wish him well. I want to thank
17 the entire DOE staff for the work that you do and the
18 work that you continue to do day in and day out.
19 It's not easy work.

20 With that said, we have to do better and we have
21 to – and we can't just throw up our hands and say
22 that these are intractable problems because they are
23 not intractable problems. They are issues that we
24 can address with the right policy solutions and
25 resources and focus and effort. And we shouldn't be
stopping our work until every child is having an

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE 157

equitable education that's any other child in New
York City.

So, with that, I wish you all well. I wish you
all a good weekend and I thank you very much for your
time here today. I will turn it back over to Mark.

CHAIRPERSON TREYGER: Thank you. Thank you Chair
Levin. We have a lot more work to do and time is of
the essence because this is time our kids will never
get back. I am always mindful of that. You know how
whenever folks in government talk about you know the
plan ahead. You know you are only four years old
once. You are only five years old once. You don't
get this time back and so we need to act with a sense
of urgency and thank you all for being here today.
Thank you also to our great City Council staff.
Committee staff, my staff, Council Member Levin's
staff, thank you all for helping make this possible
here today as well.

And this hearing is adjourned.

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 June 11, 2021