



Testimony of

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Before the  
New York City Council  
Finance and Education Committees

Regarding the  
New York City  
Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget

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Good afternoon. My name is Alexis Henry and I am the Policy Associate for Early Education and Education at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC). CCC is a 71-year-old, privately supported, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chairs Ferreras and Dromm, as well as the members of the City Council Committees on Finance and Education for holding today's hearing regarding the City's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2016.

The Preliminary Budget takes important steps to address income inequality and improve child safety and well-being in New York City. Mayor de Blasio made clear at the budget briefing that the Preliminary Budget is just a first step towards developing the Fiscal Year 2016 budget and that there is a great deal more to look at and evaluate as we move towards the Executive Budget in April. This is good news because there are a number of areas that must be addressed in Fiscal Year 2016 in order to improve outcomes for New York's children and families.

Specifically, we look forward to an Executive Budget that makes the investments needed to: improve access to high quality early childhood education and after-school services; bring school breakfast to all classrooms and universal lunch programs to all schools; support primary preventive services that strengthen families and prevent abuse and neglect; and expand access to children's health and mental health services in schools and communities.

This testimony focuses on the new investments in the Preliminary Budget related to the Department of Education. The testimony highlights the Preliminary Budget proposals we support, the initiatives we hope to see restored and baselined, as well as the additional programs and investments we hope to see in the Executive Budget. In short, we are urging the Administration and the City Council to adopt a budget that is holistic in its approach to improving the public education system in New York City. We urge the City Council to focus on the areas identified in this testimony as you develop your priorities and that you also urge the Administration to use the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget to make NYC a better place to be a child.

Furthermore, we appreciate that both the City Council and the Mayor have made securing additional state resources, extending Mayoral Control, and rejecting untenable teacher evaluations systems key components of state advocacy agendas. We remain cautiously optimistic that the state budget will include additional Education Aid for New York City and that the City's Executive Budget can reflect these new investments.

## **CCC Supports the Preliminary Budget Proposals That Will Improve Educational Outcomes for Children**

CCC appreciates that Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina have spent much of the first year of the Administration re-evaluating various aspects of the City's education system structure and putting into place new ideas aimed at better engaging parents, better supporting teachers and principals, and thus improving the classroom and outcomes for children. We look forward to learning more about key changes such as the new school evaluations, the restructuring of the networks into district offices, the superintendents and the Renewal Schools.

In addition, CCC appreciates the de Blasio Administration's passionate commitment to expanding prekindergarten to every 4-year old and expanding after-school programs for over 100,000 middle school students. While the implementation of any large-scale reform always has challenges, we have been extremely impressed with the roll out of these expansions and we look forward to the second round of implementation next year. These programs have the potential to be life-altering for countless NYC children and we applaud the administration, DOE, DYCD, ACS and DOHMH for all that they have done to ensure a successful launch this year. We look forward to learning more details regarding the second wave of implementation when we get to the Executive Budget.

We also appreciate the new investments in improving outcomes that are in the Preliminary Budget and we urge the City Council to support these. Specifically we support the following proposals:

- Adding \$1.1 million for guidance counselors and social workers at Alternative Living Centers
- \$2.6 million for 9 new School Food sites
- \$655,000 for Literacy Intervention Teams, which is literacy training for teachers, including those who work with students with dyslexia
- \$462,000 for Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Training for staff who work with students with behavioral issues
- \$214,000 in FY16 (and increasing each fiscal year) to add 12 new varsity girls teams each year
- \$47,000 for the Language Line which supports over the phone translation for parents and a one-year add of \$68,000 for a public awareness campaign regarding the Language Line.

While we believe that all of these initiatives are very important investments, we believe that many of them would be stronger if they received additional investments. For example, we feel that every school should have guidance counselors and social workers, that there needs to be a larger investment in literacy initiatives and that more efforts must be made to ensure translation of documents (such as notes home and IEPs) for parents who do not speak English.

In addition, the Preliminary Budget includes \$5.2 million in FY 15 for Renewal Schools, but no investment in FY 16 or the outyears. While the Administration has indicated that funding will be included in the Executive Budget, it is critical that there be information sooner rather than later regarding the amount of the funding and how it will be invested in ensuring these schools have access to the services the students need.

CCC believes strongly in the community schools model and appreciates the de Blasio Administration's commitment to expanding the model. We agree that implementing "Renewal Schools"/Community schools in the City's struggling schools has the potential to raise the performance at these schools and enable the children of today and tomorrow to thrive. We have already seen the success of various community school models in New York City, so we are excited that the Administration has embraced community schools and is expanding them. We are also extremely pleased to see the three components of the model are: 1) coordination of enhanced staff and financial resources as well as parent/community engagement; 2) expanded learning and enrichment activities; and 3) mental health services. We agree that integrating these three components into the school's mission and daily operation is critical to the success of community schools, as well as the ultimate goal of improving the academic, social and ultimate life outcomes for the students in these schools.

In addition to the 128 Renewal Schools there are also other community school models in NYC including the 80 Beacons, the Governor's community schools, the UFT community schools, the Children's Aid Society Community Schools, etc. (some of which are also Renewal Schools). We will be urging the administration to ensure coordination of all community school models, within the new community schools division of the DOE. This will help us keep track of all of the initiatives and learn which models/which components help turn around schools and student outcomes.

### **CCC Urges the Administration to Restore and Baseline City Council Initiatives Related to Education**

CCC appreciates the City Council's long-standing commitment to investing critical resources into the Department of Education to strengthen the programming available to public school children. We will be urging the Administration to restore and baseline the initiatives supported by the City Council in Fiscal Year 2015 and we hope the City Council will do so as well. Specifically, these are:

- \$6.5 million for universal free lunch for middle school students (in stand-alone middle schools)
- \$125,000 for C.H.A.M.P.S. fitness program in 200 middle schools
- \$400,000 for Chess in the Schools, Inc.
- \$250,000 for Child Mind Institute
- \$250,000 for community schools
- \$1.0 million for the Dropout Prevention and Intervention initiative
- \$1.55 million for Middle School Expanded Learning Time
- \$825,000 for Small Schools Athletic League
- \$6.085 million total for Teacher's Choice (school supplies)
- \$3.5 million total for Urban Advantage

## **CCC Urges the Administration to Make Additional Investments to Strengthen the New York City Public School System**

The New York City Public School System serves over 1 million students from prekindergarten through high school in over 1,800 schools with over 75,000 teachers. Unfortunately, at this time the outcomes demand that the City devote resources and attention to the schools. As documented in the Mayor's Management Report<sup>1</sup>, only 28.4% of students in grades 3-8 met or exceed English Language Arts standards, only 34.2% of students in grades 3-8 met or exceeded Math standards, only 68.4% of students graduated high school in 4 years, and only 32.6% of those graduates were college and career ready when they graduated.

While we are grateful for the paradigm shift that we are seeing at the Department of Education, we also need to see additional investments for the reforms to be successful. Strengthening the system and improving the academic and life outcomes of the students requires a holistic approach that touches on all aspects of the education system.

We hope to see additional investments in the Executive Budget that address issues such as overcrowding, the depleted budgets of principals unable to invest in the services and supports they wish they had for their students, the academic needs of students, and the social supports needed at schools.

Specifically this means investing resources into both the expense and capital portions of the school budget to reduce class size; ensure children with special needs are appropriately evaluated and then able to receive the services they need; ensure equity for students in that a full curriculum is available to them in all schools including AP classes, physical education, art, sports teams, etc.; increase parent engagement; make all information (including flyers and IEPs) understandable to parents who do not speak English or who are deaf; recruit and retain highly qualified teachers; provide teachers with the training necessary to meet the needs of students; build new schools based on the real projections of need; ensure students graduate college and career ready; provide guidance counselors, college counseling and school social workers; provide on-site health and mental health services; reduce suspensions and improve school climate; and ensure all public school children eat nutritious, free breakfast, lunch and summer meals.

In addition to urging the Administration to invest resources into building new schools, reducing class size and enhancing the budgets of individual schools we urge you to also support the following programs and initiatives:

### **1) School Meals**

First, CCC would like to thank the City Council and the Public Advocate for their commitment to universal school lunch and Breakfast After the Bell. Your efforts have ensured that thousands more middle school students eat lunch every day. We look forward to continuing to partner with you to ensure that these two programs become universal by next September.

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<sup>1</sup> Preliminary Mayor's Management Report FY15, Department of Education.  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/pmmr2015/doe.pdf>

CCC was extremely disappointed that the Preliminary Budget did not include the funding for the school meals programs that we know increase student participation in school meal programs and that the de Blasio administration committed to during the Mayoral Campaign. Specifically, we were very disappointed that a) the \$6.5 million invested by the City Council for universal school lunch for middle school students (in stand-alone middle schools) was not restored or baselined; b) that the Administration did not use the success of the middle school universal lunch pilot as the basis to expand universal free school lunch to all public school students; and c) that the administration still has not committed to universal Breakfast in the Classroom/Breakfast After the Bell.

Unfortunately, too many children who could benefit from school meal programs do not participate. For example, more than 400,000 New York City public school children – over half of whom are income-eligible for free or reduced-price meals – do not participate in school lunch. A number of these children choose not to eat school meals because they do not want others to label them “poor.” To help destigmatize school meals and ultimately improve participation, programs such as universal school lunch and Breakfast After the Bell should be implemented citywide.

CCC is disappointed that the Mayor’s Preliminary budget did not expand these programs. We are urging the administration to include a universal school lunch program in the Executive Budget, which would cost \$20 million City Tax Levy (\$13.5 million beyond the \$6.5 million in the FY15 budget for middle school students). Initial estimates have shown a 9% increase in the take up rate for middle school lunch participation with less than one year of implementation. This shows that the poverty stigma was a large contributor to lack of participation and that we must take steps to ensure that elementary and high school students also have this access to nutritious, free lunch.

Establishing citywide, universal free school lunches would remove the stigma associated with buying school lunch, while helping to feed students who do not have consistent access to the healthy food they need to grow and learn. In particular, a universal free lunch program would reach eligible students who do not participate in the program, as well as children who are not income-eligible for school meals programs, but whose families still do not earn enough to make ends meet.

The Mayor has the authority to stop charging school fees for school lunches, as was done with the school breakfast program in 2003. An investment of \$20 million of city funding will improve school lunch participation by an estimated 20 percent – meaning 120,000 more children will eat school lunch than last year. A 20 percent increase in participation will, in turn, increase federal and state reimbursement for school meals. In addition to ensuring children eat healthy lunches, these funds would be reinvested into the local economy. We respectfully request that the Council also urge the Mayor to include universal school lunch in the Executive Budget.

CCC would also like universal Breakfast After the Bell<sup>2</sup> programs, which provide breakfast in children’s classrooms at the start of the school day, throughout the City. According to the annual Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) school breakfast report, New York City’s school

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<sup>2</sup>Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) is a type of Breakfast After the Bell program.

breakfast participation rates are repeatedly the poorest among major U.S. city and suburban school districts, despite the fact that breakfast is free for all our City's public school children. This year, NYC is ranked 61 out of 62 urban districts. This is unacceptable.

CCC believes expanding breakfast in the classroom/Breakfast After the Bell to all classrooms would ensure more children have access to a healthy breakfast. For example, these programs eliminate the stigma some children associate with receiving a free meal in the cafeteria prior to the beginning of the school day. They also decrease parents' stress, because they would otherwise have to rush their children to school early in the morning, before the school day begins, in order to guarantee that their children eat breakfast in the school cafeteria. Because Breakfast After the Bell programs help to diminish these obstacles, they result in more children actually eating breakfast, which is critical to their healthy development and ability to achieve academically.

## **2) Physical Education**

Quality physical education during the school day not only provides a number of health benefits to children but also improves a child's academic achievement and overall well-being.

Unfortunately, New York City is out of compliance with state regulations regarding physical education. We urge all City Council members to sign on as co-sponsors of Intro 644, which is a data reporting bill regarding physical education in schools, to pass Intro 644, and then to urge the Administration to implement reforms that will improve physical education in schools including hiring more physical education teachers and addressing space issues, particularly in co-located schools.

Children who engage in physical activities are more likely to have increased concentration, persist in learning and exhibit other positive classroom behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Students also develop other critical skills like teamwork and leadership through physical education classes. Increased physical activity can also help combat the epidemic levels of obesity in New York City. Obesity rates for New York City children (21.3%) are higher than the national average (19.6%) and one in every five New York City public school students (K-12) are classified as obese.<sup>4,5</sup>

Unfortunately, many New York City schools are not meeting the New York State's minimum physical education requirements. The State requires that students in grades K–6 must receive a minimum total of 120 minutes of physical education per week (including daily physical education for students in grades K–3 and physical education at least three times per week for students in grades 4–6). In grades 7 and 8, schools must be able to provide students with physical education three times a week in one semester and two times a week in the other for a minimum total of 90 minutes a week. High schools must be able to provide students with physical education three times a week in one semester and two times a week in the other semester.

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<sup>3</sup> Florence MD, Asbridge M, Veugelers PJ. *Diet quality and academic performance*. Journal of School Health. 2008 Apr; 78(4):209-15.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*. 2007-2008. [http://wwwn.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/search/nhanes07\\_08.aspx](http://wwwn.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/search/nhanes07_08.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *NYC Vital Signs*. June 2009. 8(1). <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2009fitnessgram.pdf>

A 2011 audit conducted by the New York City Comptroller found that, of 31 elementary schools audited, none were in full compliance with the State requirements for physical education. Schools in the sample lacked certified physical education teachers and space in which to offer physical education.<sup>6</sup> While schools face many barriers to compliance, the lack of data/inconsistency of data makes it difficult to assess compliance. It is not clear, for example, which schools are offering PE, as all the classes are called something different.

Therefore, CCC urges the City Council to sponsor Intro 644 and then pass the bill. Intro 644 would require the reporting of important data points including the frequency and total minutes of physical education in each school; the number of certified physical education teachers and designated facilities in each school; and the total number and percent of schools in compliance. Ensuring schools meet physical education requirements will not only help combat child obesity and decrease the risk of chronic illnesses like heart disease and cancer but will also boost academic achievement and socio-emotional skills.

Finally, we know that schools and principals need help to be able to be in compliance with the state regulations. We believe a critical step is ensuring all schools have physical education teachers and thus we urge the administration and the City Council to add funding for PE teachers in the Executive Budget. In addition, we know that there are space issues, particularly in co-located schools. CCC anxiously awaits the recommendations of the City's task force focused on these space issues. CCC urges the Administration and the City Council to work together to ensure that all schools have the resources they need to comply with New York State physical education requirements, as well as to incorporate regular physical activity into daily schedules.

### **3) Maintain Elementary After-School Programs for 1,882 Children**

Despite the well-known benefits of after-school programs, the DOE contract with 17 elementary after-school sites is due to expire on June 30, 2015 without any intent by DOE to renew the contract. In addition, DYCD has no funds to support this contract nor ability to take over the contract. This would cost \$5.9 million (\$2 million for summer 2015 and \$3.9 million for the upcoming school year).

CCC urges the Administration and the City Council to ensure that these 17 sites are saved and that we do not return to the days of cutting after-school programs.

The 17 sites are:

- 1) Westhab at Hyde Leadership Charter School in the Bronx (123 children) (CM Arroyo)
- 2) Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation at East New York Elementary School of Excellence in Brooklyn (120 children) (CM Barron)
- 3) New York Junior Tennis League at The Fresh Creek School in Brooklyn (120 children) (CM Barron)
- 4) New York Junior Tennis League at PS 148 in Queens (120 children) (CM Dromm)
- 5) Sports and Arts in School Foundation at PS 376 in Brooklyn (120 children) (CM Espinal)

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<sup>6</sup> New York City Comptroller, *Audit Report on the Department of Education's Compliance with Physical Education Regulations in Elementary Schools*. October 2011. [http://comptroller.nyc.gov/wpcontent/uploads/documents/MD11\\_083A.pdf](http://comptroller.nyc.gov/wpcontent/uploads/documents/MD11_083A.pdf)



- 6) Child Development Center of the Mosholu Montefiore at PS 41 in the Bronx (120 children) (CM King)
- 7) Queens Community House at PS 117 in Queens (81 children) (CM Lancman)
- 8) NY Mission Society at PS 192 in Manhattan (116 children) (CM Levine)
- 9) Union Settlement at PS 112 in Manhattan (120 children) (Speaker Mark-Viverito)
- 10) Police Athletic League at PS 48 in Staten Island (93 children) (CM Matteo)
- 11) New York Junior Tennis League at PS 12 in Brooklyn (95 children) (CM Mealy)
- 12) Brooklyn Chinese American Association at PS 69 in Brooklyn (84 children) (CM Menchaca)
- 13) SCO Family of Services at PS 94 in Brooklyn (120 children) (CM Menchaca)
- 14) YMCA of Greater New York/Bronx at PS 106 in the Bronx (96 children) (CM Palma)
- 15) The Child Center of New York at PS 273 in Queens (120 children) (CM Ulrich)
- 16) Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation at PS 121 in the Bronx (120 children) (CM Vacca)
- 17) The Child Center of New York at PS 96 in Queens (114 children) (CM Wills)

#### **4) School-based Health and Mental Health Services**

School-based health centers play a vital role for children and youth needing primary health care by offering students on-site access to a range of primary, preventive and specialty care – including reproductive health services and sometimes behavioral health supports. In addition, school-based mental health clinics (SBMH) offer mental health care delivery in a school setting, with mental health clinicians providing a wide array of services.<sup>7</sup> By bringing health and mental health care to school grounds through SBHC or SBMH, student needs are far more likely to be evaluated and treated.

The presence of school-based services is also markedly beneficial to children whose parents may not have the work schedule flexibility to access services in the community. The availability of health and mental health services in schools has been linked to higher test scores; fewer discipline referrals and fewer absences. Benefits extend beyond students who receive on site services and have been shown to improve the school environment and provide teachers, other school staff and parents with needed resources for children.

CCC is very grateful that school-based mental health services are a key component of the Renewal Schools model. The success of these services will require addressing the fiscal viability of the Article 31 clinics operating on-site at schools. In the past 3-4 years, we have lost over 100 school-based mental health clinics because they are not fiscally viable.

CCC will be working with our colleagues at the state level to urge the State to create a special designation for these organizations within the managed care system that will simplify and streamline the billing system, and make certain that the services rendered on school grounds are part of established health homes and networks so that these school-based clinics can remain fiscally viable. We respectfully request that the City Council include this request as part of your

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<sup>7</sup>These clinics provide students and families with assessments and evaluations; individual, group, and family therapy/sessions; service coordination; case management; and crisis intervention.

State advocacy. Moreover, we believe that in addition to ensuring the continuation of existing SBHCs and SBMH clinics, we also must work to expand the number of schools with these services on-site. We hope that the City Council and the Administration can work together to increase the City's investment in both SBHCs and local SBMH clinics.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we appreciate all of the efforts both the Administration and the City Council are making to strengthen the NYC Public School System for the over 1 million children we educate each year. We look forward to continuing to partner with the City Council and our colleagues at the DOE.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.