



Testimony of

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Before the  
New York City Council  
Finance and Education Committees

Regarding the  
New York City  
Fiscal Year 2015 Preliminary Budget

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Good afternoon. My name is Moira Flavin, and I am the Policy Associate for Early Education, Education and Youth Services at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC). CCC is a 70-year old, independent child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

I would like to thank Chairs Ferreras and Dromm, and the members of the Finance and Education Committees, for holding today's hearing on the impact of the FY15 Preliminary Budget on education.

CCC is pleased to testify before the City Council at this exciting time for education in New York City. We look forward to working with the Mayor, Chancellor Fariña and the Department of Education, and the City Council Education Committee, to ensure that every child in New York City is fully prepared for school, receives a comprehensive quality education, and graduates prepared for college and career.

We are extremely grateful that millions of dollars for early childhood education, youth services, and health and mental health services for children have been baselined by both Mayor Bloomberg and Mayor de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio has also declared the budget dance to be over, and this Preliminary Budget takes some steps to begin the expansion of critical services for children. These services, including the City's plan to provide full-day pre-kindergarten to all four-year-olds and to offer after-school programs to all middle school students, will help children begin school fully prepared and provide them with valuable enrichment opportunities and support once they are in school.

### **Current Data on New York City Public Schools**

While CCC is grateful for the efforts to prioritize investments in programs and services that help children prepare for and succeed in school, there is still significant work to be done to improve reading and math proficiency, increase graduation rates and to address disparities in educational outcomes for the City's 1 million public school students.

In 2013, the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Math exams were aligned to the Common Core State Standards for the first time. Results of the exams show that, overall, 46.9% of students in grades 3 through 8 scored at or above proficiency on the ELA test, while 29.6% of 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students scored at or above proficiency on the Math test.<sup>1</sup> The data show stark disparities among racial and ethnic groups. For example, 46.8% and 48.1% of White and Asian students, respectively, scored at or above proficiency on the 2013 New York State ELA test, as compared to 16% and 16.3% of Black and Latino students.<sup>2</sup> On the 2013 New York State

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<sup>1</sup>Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. Keeping Track Online, Common Core-aligned ELA test scores, 2013. <http://data.cccnewyork.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Math exam, 61% of Asian students and 50% of White students scored at or above proficiency, compared to 18.6% of Latino students and 15.3% of Black students.<sup>3</sup>

Similar disparities are evident in New York City's graduation rates. The New York City Department of Education reported that the graduation rate for the class of 2012 was 71%,<sup>4</sup> an increase of 20 percentage points since 2002.<sup>5</sup> While this is an improvement, far too many students are still not graduating. The graduation rates for Black and Latino students in the class of 2012 (59.8% and 57.5% respectively) are significantly lower than for White and Asian students (78.1% and 82.1% respectively) in the same class.<sup>6</sup>

We also know that many of those students who do graduate need remedial assistance in their college programs.<sup>7</sup> The Department of Education reported that 39.4% of 2012 graduates met the "College Readiness Index," meaning that they obtained a Regents Diploma and scored at least an 80 on Mathematics Regents exams and a 75 on the English Regents (which roughly predicts they will get a C in a similar college subject).<sup>8</sup> While the data for 2012 graduates' performance on the College Readiness Index is not available by race and ethnicity, 2011 data suggests that disparities exist for this outcome as well. For example, 2011 data show that 39.3% of White students and 51.8% of Asian students graduated "college and career ready" compared to 11.6% of Latino students, and 10.1% of Black students.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that more needs to be done to ensure that all New York City students enter school prepared to learn, receive the support they need while in school, and graduate prepared for post-secondary education and careers.

### **The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2015**

CCC recognizes that New York City's budget faces some fiscal uncertainty, some of which is attributed to the unresolved union contracts, as well as lower State education funding. With that said, we are grateful that the City's FY15 Preliminary Budget does not contain cuts to education.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>As per the Department of Education, "NYC traditional calculation includes Local and Regents Diplomas, GEDs, Special Education diplomas, and August graduates. It does not include disabled students in self-contained classrooms or District 75 students." (Slide 2, <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/31DFBEE6-2620-4792-BE7A-01B00F2E5B56/0/2012GraduationRatesPUBLICFINALWebsite.pdf> )

<sup>5</sup>New York City Department of Education. *New York City Graduation Rates, Class of 2012 (2008 cohort)*. <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/31DFBEE6-2620-4792-BE7A-01B00F2E5B56/0/2012GraduationRatesPUBLICFINALWebsite.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Note these percentages are four-year graduation rates.

<sup>7</sup>More CUNY freshmen need remedial math, fewer need remedial English. *Capital New York*. October, 21, 2013. <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/politics/2013/10/8534769/more-cuny-freshmen-need-remedial-math-fewer-need-remedial-english>

<sup>8</sup>New York City Department of Education. *New York City Graduation Rates, Class of 2012 (2008 cohort)*. <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/31DFBEE6-2620-4792-BE7A-01B00F2E5B56/0/2012GraduationRatesPUBLICFINALWebsite.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Citizens' Committee for Children. *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, Tenth Edition, 2013.

We appreciate the Mayor's efforts to restore and baseline many important initiatives that support students and teachers. For example, CCC is very pleased that the Mayor's FY15 Preliminary Budget restores and baselines \$347,000 for training opportunities for parent volunteers, \$1.2 million for professional development for teachers, and \$1.5 million for funds used to pay teachers for their work after school or during vacations. CCC applauds efforts to engage parents in their children's schools, as well as to fully compensate teachers for their tireless work on behalf of New York City's students.

On the other hand, CCC was disappointed that none of the City Council initiatives in the Department of Education's budget were baselined. These initiatives, long-supported by the City Council, are aimed at supporting health and wellness, after-school enrichment, and teacher training, and promoting positive educational outcomes for New York City's students. These initiatives include C.H.A.M.P.S., Chess in Schools, The Child Mind Institute, the UFT Community Schools Program, the Dropout Prevention and Intervention initiative, Urban Advantage Science Education, Teacher's Choice (school supplies), and the Middle School Expanded Learning Time pilot.

The C.H.A.M.P.S initiative, supported by the Council since 2007, is funded at \$125,000 in the current fiscal year, FY14. C.H.A.M.P.S engages middle school students in physical activity in order to improve overall health. The initiative offers programming before and after school in more than 200 middle schools in all five boroughs.

Chess in Schools is funded at \$200,000 in the current fiscal year, FY14. Chess in Schools offers chess classes during the school day as well as supports chess clubs after school. Chess in Schools also runs the Project Chess Initiative that trains teachers to teach chess and launch chess education programs.

The City Council also allocated \$250,000 to the Child Mind Institute in FY14. The funding supports the Institute's Teacher-Child Interaction Training, aimed to provide teachers with specific skills to manage students' disruptive behavior in class.

The United Federation of Teachers' Community Schools Program is funded at \$150,000 in the current fiscal year, FY14. The program, launched in six schools, is designed to link students and families with health and social services.

The City Council has supported the Dropout Prevention and Intervention Initiative since 2008. The initiative is funded at \$2.25 million in FY14. Funds were allocated to 11 community-based organizations to provide services to New York City public school students at risk of dropping out of school.

The City Council also awarded \$2.5 million in funding for the Urban Advantage Science Education program in FY14. The Urban Advantage program is a collaboration of seven science

institutions that provides professional development to middle school science teachers, offers resources to schools, and helps students meet State science requirements.

The City Council also provided one- year funding of \$4.58 million for Teacher's Choice this year. This money reimburses teachers and other school staff for personal funds they spend on purchases for student instruction. These funds are critical, as many teachers often have to use their own funds to buy instructional materials for students.

In FY14, for the first time, the City Council awarded \$1.55 in funds for the Middle School Expanded Learning Time pilot, in partnership with the Robin Hood Foundation and The After School Corporation (TASC). The initiative extends the school day at 20 high-needs middle schools and offers intensive literacy and enrichment for all sixth grade students.

CCC will be urging the Administration to restore and baseline these programs in the Executive Budget and respectfully requests the Council to urge the Administration to do so as well.

### **Strengthening the Education System**

This budget represents the Administration and City Council's first step toward strengthening New York City's education system. Moving forward, CCC urges you to pay specific attention to key strategies and programs that address child well-being and therefore positively impact children's educational outcomes. These include schools' efforts to identify struggling students and intervene, school meals programs, physical education, and school-based health and mental health services.

### ***Keeping Struggling Students on Track***

Of particular concern to CCC is how best to support schools in identifying struggling students and addressing their needs. CCC's recent brief, *Keeping Middle School Students on Track for Success: Risk Identification and Intervention in the Middle Grades*,<sup>10</sup> includes findings and recommendations from our research designed to document national best practices to identify struggling middle school students and intervene, as well as to explore how some schools in New York City are handling interventions for middle school students.

Through reviews of literature and interviews with education experts, CCC found that a few key indicators, including attendance, behavior and course performance, can help to determine which students are at risk of falling off track. A school's climate and the capacity of the school to respond to students' needs are also important in setting students up for success. Schools that have systems in place to identify struggling students and intervene use student data strategically to

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<sup>10</sup>Citizens' Committee for Children. *Keeping Middle School Students on Track for Success: Risk Identification and Intervention in the Middle Grades*. January 2014. <http://www.cccnewyork.org/data-and-reports/publications/keeping-middle-school-students-on-track-for-success-risk-identification-and-intervention-in-the-middle-grades/>

inform decisions about resources, as well as approaches to instruction, staffing and linkages with community-based organizations.

We urge the Administration and City Council to work together to adopt a budget that includes resources to identify and support struggling students. This includes supporting existing promising practices, such as the DOE's Middle School Quality Initiative and their work to address chronic absenteeism, as well as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention models.<sup>11</sup> Further, CCC urges the City to invest additional resources to help schools: 1) utilize student data to develop both individual and school-wide interventions; 2) provide professional development and support for teachers on risk identification and intervention; and 3) implement strategies for parent engagement and linkages with community partners. Lastly, CCC urges the Department of Education to continue its work to expand restorative justice approaches to discipline that keep students in the classroom and engaged in school rather than excluding students from school.

### *School Meals*

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. This could be accomplished because the Mayor has the authority to stop charging school fees for school lunches, as was done with the school breakfast program in 2003. It is estimated that an investment of \$20 million of city funding will improve school lunch participation by 20 percent – meaning 120,000 more children will eat school lunch. A 20 percent increase in participation will, in turn, increase federal and state reimbursement for school meals by \$59 million. We therefore respectfully request that the Council also urge the Mayor to include universal school lunch in the Executive Budget.

CCC is a member of the Lunch 4 Learning campaign, which has been advocating to make healthy school lunch free for every New York City public school student. 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

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

meals programs, but whose families still do not earn enough to make ends meet. Further, funding universal school lunches would ultimately help create jobs in the school cafeteria.

CCC would also like the new Administration to expand Breakfast After the Bell<sup>12</sup> programs, which provide breakfast in children's classrooms at the start of the school day, throughout the City. According to an annual Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) school breakfast report, New York City's school 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, expansion of Breakfast After the Bell programs can be implemented at minimal cost to the City. The benefits of such implementation, as well as the federal cash reimbursement for the increased number of meals served, will outweigh the cost of the investment to grow the program. We hope that the City Council will also urge the Administration to implement Breakfast After the Bell programs citywide.

### ***Physical Education and Physical Activity***

Quality physical education as part of the school day enhances students' academic achievement, instills good habits for healthy living, and teaches teamwork, among other critical skills. Unfortunately, many New York City schools are not meeting New York State requirements for physical education, in large part due to challenges with space and difficult decisions regarding how to allocate limited resources. 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>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) is a type of Breakfast After the Bell program.

<sup>13</sup>This year, New York City ranked 63<sup>rd</sup> out of 63 large U.S. school districts in breakfast participation.

<sup>14</sup>For more information, please see CCC's report, *The School Breakfast Program in New York City Public Schools: Results from a Parent Survey Concerning Student Participation*.

<sup>15</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)

Physical activity, distinct from physical education, is also important in helping children lead healthy lifestyles. While physical education has clear learning outcomes and structured instruction, physical activity is defined as bodily movement of any type that may include fitness and recreation activities.<sup>16</sup> Both are important tools to promote health and wellness, keep students engaged in school, and foster positive academic outcomes.

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 the daily schedules of all students.

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

CCC is extremely grateful that the 2013 November Plan baselined funding for four school-based health centers.

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>17</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 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 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**

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<sup>16</sup>See the National Association for Sport and Physical Education for definitions.

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/publications/teachingTools/PAvsPE.cfm>

<sup>17</sup>These clinics provide students and families with assessments and evaluations; individual, group, and family therapy/sessions; service coordination; case management; and crisis intervention.



In conclusion, CCC is committed to working with the Administration and the City Council to ensure all New York City students benefit from full-day UPK, enter school prepared to learn, receive a quality K-12 education, and graduate prepared for college and career. We urge the City Council and Administration to work together to invest in critical programs that positively impact children's educational outcomes.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.