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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council FY27 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing
Education Committee
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For 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systemic change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Dinowitz and members of the New York City Council Education Committee for holding today's important hearing on Education in the FY27 Preliminary Budget.

Early Care and Education

Households across the city face an affordability crisis, with 80 percent of all family households unable to find affordable care, and in some communities spending up to 63 percent of their income on child care, preschool or afterschool care alone.ⁱ Although New York City has led the nation in introducing universal Pre-K and expanding 3-K, families continue to struggle to navigate the system and access services.

We know from extensive engagement with and surveying of NYC families and communities that the demand for affordable childcare is enormous across the city, and that open seats are a reflection of barriers in access rather than lack of demand. Based on a citywide survey and focus groups with parents and providers, it is evident that families face significant bureaucratic barriers to entry, lack of knowledge of existing programs, and options that do not match families' needs and work schedules. Additionally, the ECE system faces threats due to the ongoing inequity between NYPS and community-based salaries; the burden of unpaid city contracts; and a host of operational barriers. These issues were chronicled in our report, [The Youngest New Yorkers](#).

We appreciate that the City Council and Administration are engaging in discussions on how to address these barriers, and look forward to continued engagement on how to enhance and streamline access to care for children and families.

New funding from the City and State to strengthen 3-K and pilot 2-K programs offers an enormous opportunity to reach more families with the care they need. CCC believes it is critical to approach a path to universal child care with a focus on those most marginalized by our existing system—including children with disabilities, immigrant families, and families experiencing housing instability or homelessness. For too long, children with disabilities have been left behind in the city's effort to expand access to care. At the end of May 2025, more than 7,000 preschoolers with disabilities were waiting for one or more of their services in New York City.ⁱⁱ We are grateful that the FY27 Preliminary Budget

baselined \$70 million for preschool special education services, evaluations and staffing. This will be critical for reducing waitlists for services, which are currently in violation of the legal rights of children with disabilities.

We urge the Administration and the Council to ensure the needs of children with disabilities are prioritized in the City's current and future ECE programs. This includes thoughtfully integrating EI services and EI providers into the new 2-K expansion sites. More generally, we urge the administration to lean on data to ensure expansion efforts prioritize children who face the most risks and barriers.

As a steering committee member of the Campaign for Children, we urge the City Council and Administration to restore and baseline the following ECE programs in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- **\$5 million for ECE outreach**, ensuring families are receiving the information they need to make informed decisions regarding ECE programs
- **\$10 million for Infant and Toddler Child Care pilot**, expanding child care access to families with children 0-2 years old in high need neighborhoods

We also urge the Administration and City Council to implement the following recommendations to ensure the path to universality:

- Create pay parity for the ECE workforce, including by:
 - Expediting payments of collectively bargained salary increases,
 - Bringing salaries and benefits in contracted ECE programs to parity with their counterparts in public schools,
 - Adjusting rates in home-based programs to allow providers to earn salaries at parity with public school salaries, and
 - Instituting longevity differentials for ECE workforce in line with comparable roles in public schools
- Prioritize those most marginalized by our existing ECE system, including children with disabilities, immigrant families, and families in shelter or other temporary housing.
 - Ensure that staff at community-based preschool special education programs are included in the recent labor contract agreement enhancements
 - Ensure Early Intervention and developmental supports are thoughtfully integrated in the City's 2-K expansion.
- Continue working with the State to ensure sufficient funding for child care vouchers and prepare to address shortfalls with city funding.
- Continue to convert school-day, school year seats to extended day, year round ECE seats to increase options for families with young children
- Strengthen the Family Child Care workforce by implementing funding and administrative reforms, recognizing that the FCC workforce is the backbone of infant and toddler care
- Allow for providers to directly enroll participants in ECE programs to streamline the process and allow more direct access to service
- Strengthen the care system for all children by strengthening access to afterschool and summer programs for children age 6-12

Restore Funding for the K-12 Education System

We are pleased that summer programming was funded and baselined in the FY27 Preliminary Budget. Unfortunately, many other crucial education programs are only funded through the end of June and are at risk of being eliminated if they are not restored and baselined.

CCC joins the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding urging the City Council and Administration to ensure the following education programs are extended and baselined in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- \$31 million for Learning to Work
- \$12 million for Sensory Exploration, Education and Discovery (SEED)
- \$6 million for Restorative Justice
- \$4 million Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach
- \$5 million for Mental Health Continuum
- \$3.3 million Student Success Centers

Ensure Transportation for Youth in Foster Care

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, NYCPS currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to students in foster care. It can take weeks or even months for NYCPS to arrange bus service, causing significant disruptions for students in foster care. In fact, during the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent—missing at least one out of every ten school days—and one in five transferred schools at least once.

The City should invest \$3 million to provide interim transportation for students in foster care awaiting bus service, ensuring uninterrupted access to school at a critical time.

Enhance Students' Access to Community-Based Services Provided through School-Based Mental Health Clinics (SBMHC)

Schools play an essential role in meeting the behavioral health needs of children, yet New York City's approach to addressing the social-emotional needs of students in schools has often been fragmented and insufficient. Far too many students experiencing an emotional crisis are still sent to emergency rooms, subjected to police intervention, or punished with disciplinary practices such as suspension.

Schools need the resources and training necessary to support the mental health of all students, rather than relying on punitive and traumatizing responses to student behavior. We urge you to take the following actions in the budget to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of students.

Article 31 School-Based Mental Health clinics provide on-site services to children during the school day, including diagnosis, psychiatry, and individual and family counseling. SBMHC staff work closely with school staff to identify children in need and coordinate services. They engage the whole family and can serve family members at their community location. SBMHCs provide crisis mental health services,

ensuring children receive a compassionate response when they are in crisis and reducing the use of suspensions, detentions and punitive measures.

These clinics are primarily funded by Medicaid and, when available, private insurance. However, funding is deeply insufficient. For example, Medicaid does not cover services to children without a diagnosis, and clinics are not reimbursed for services provided to children without health coverage. Other essential supports that clinics can offer schools – such as mental health education and training for staff, de-escalating a child-in-crisis scenario to prevent law enforcement involvement, and consulting on specific behavioral supports for classrooms – are not reimbursable through the Article 31 SBMHC model.

A \$3.75 million investment would enable up to 50 SMHC to provide the types of comprehensive wraparound services necessary to support students' mental and social-emotional needs. Flexible funding to meet the specific needs of schools could include hiring an after school social worker for the clinic; hiring a behavioral specialist to consult with clinic staff several times each week; hiring a family/peer support worker; hiring a clinician that specializes in working in schools and advising on behavior supports for students; and numerous other targeted interventions designed to complement the school-based mental health clinic model.

We urge city leaders to invest \$3.75 million to expand school-based mental health clinic services in up to 50 clinics. Ultimately, we recommend a long-term goal of expanding funding to all SMHC's in the city.

State Advocacy for Foundation Aid

We echo the call of our partners within the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding and urge the City Council and administration to join our advocacy in ensuring the Foundation Aid Formula is updated in a manner that will support NYC students. After last year's budget, NYC schools are slated to receive \$350 million dollars less than they would under the current formula. In their own One House budget proposals, the State Senate and Assembly both included two updates to help improve the funding formula which would increase resources to NYCPS:

- Adding funding for each student who is homeless or in foster care, and
- Increasing the amount of funding districts receive for each student who is an English Language Learner (ELL).

We urge city leaders to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure these changes are included in the final state budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

ⁱ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2023). "CCC Brief: From Birth to Age 12. The (Un)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City." <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2023/10/CCC-From-Birth-to-Age-12-Child-Care-Affordability-and-Cost-Burden.pdf>

ⁱⁱ AMNY (July 2025). "With new funding, advocates and City Council seek greater support for preschoolers with disabilities." <https://www.amny.com/news/new-funding-advocates-city-council-seek-support-preschoolers-disabilities/>