



**Testimony by Jasmine Gripper, Executive Director  
Alliance for Quality Education  
Joint Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education**

Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, members of the joint budget hearing on education, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Jasmine Gripper. I am the executive director of the Alliance for Quality Education, a statewide coalition of community organizing groups, dedicated to organizing Black and brown parents to advocate for their children, their public schools and communities.

**Foundation Aid**

***100% Funding of Foundation Aid:***

For the first time in more than fifteen years, we are here today to deliver a big thank you to all of you who have stood up and fought for our public school children so they can have the quality education to which they have a right. Governor Hochul deserves a thank you for keeping her promise to deliver the funding that was committed in 2021. This year will mark the fulfillment of the three year phase-in of Foundation Aid, delivering a \$2.7 billion increase in classroom operating dollars (which is Foundation Aid) to all school districts, and in particular to the districts who have Black and Latinx, and low income students. Our kids and young people deserve all the resources they need to spread their wings and reach their full potential. We urge you to continue standing up for kids and continue to fund 100% of the Foundation Aid formula this year and in the years to come.

***Update the Foundation Aid Formula:***

The Foundation Aid formula needs to be updated as it is 15 years old and many changes have happened over this time. **We urge you to fund the \$1 million State Education Department's budget request to contract with experts and conduct a process to engage the public.** This is an important next step in ensuring that our state's primary funding formula is up to date, taking into account current demographic variables, and adequately addressing the challenges that our schools face, especially

due to the pandemic. AQE is fully in support of making changes to the formula that include a new cost study to determine the cost of “sound basic education” in today’s terms. We also support taking in consideration concentrated poverty, updated weights for English Learners and for students with disabilities, and regional cost, and other areas that may be necessary for the formula to continue to prioritize school districts with high needs and adequately meet the needs of their students.

### **Charter Schools**

#### ***Reject Governor Hochul’s Proposal on Charter Schools:***

It is deeply disappointing that when we should be celebrating the fulfillment of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and Foundation Aid, we are here raising the alarm about the disproportionate impact that lifting the regional charter cap would have on New York city schools, the very birthplace of CFE. Eliminating the regional cap and reauthorizing zombie charters, would make available another 80-100 new charter schools in NYC. At a time when the New York City Department of Education already spends about \$3 billion annually on charter schools, this would balloon costs even more. New York City is the only school district in the state that does not receive charter transitional aid, to offset the cost of charter schools. In addition, New York City is the only school district in the nation that is required to either provide free space or pay rent for charter schools. This means a disproportionate amount of the state’s Foundation Aid increase would go to charter schools although 80% of students attend traditional public schools.

#### ***Charter Schools Funding Increases in NYC are Disproportionate:***

It is essential that the NYS legislature act with urgency to protect funding for NYC public schools and stop the siphoning of resources to charter schools. Last year NYC schools received a \$348 million increase in Foundation Aid from New York State. In the same year NYC’s charter school cost in NYC increased by over \$200 million. Meaning about 57% of the Foundation Aid increase went to charter schools. Charter schools have approximately 14% of NYC students.<sup>1</sup>This disproportionate increase in charter school funding prevents the full funding of Foundation Aid from having its intended impact. Without an immediate remedy NYC public school students will continue to be shortchanged and denied opportunities.

#### ***NYC has a Declining School Age Population:***

In addition, New York City and the state have a declining population of school age children. A recent New York Times article on Why Black Families are Leaving NYC points out that, “About one in four Black children at district schools who left last year moved to the South, Education Department data shows. School enrollment has also been affected by a steady drop in birthrates, another national trend.” In fact, it was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aqeny.org/2022/01/24/2489/>

reported by Chalkbeat that [enrollment in charter schools also declined](#), “58% of the city’s charter schools shrank over the past three years.” Data and facts should drive policy decisions, which clearly indicate that New York City does not need to expand the number of charter schools. **We urge you to unequivocally REJECT this proposal and maintain the regional cap as is as well as not authorize “zombie charters.”**

### **Pre-Kindergarten and Child Care**

#### ***Need Robust Investments in Child Care Workforce:***

Early childhood education is the foundation of our education system. We believe that pre-Kindergarten should be universal and free, open to all three and four year olds that want to attend. We believe that child care should be universal to all children, regardless of immigration status. And, even though child care is not under the purview of the education department or this committee, it is the cornerstone of the successful development of children and it should be adequately funded. The budget ask for child care is at \$5 billion<sup>2</sup> much of it should be invested in the workforce which is the lowest paid sector of the care economy with 97% of other jobs in New York paying more.<sup>3</sup> Early care and learning programs have closed because they cannot sustain themselves, and now we find ourselves to the point where the governor is correctly making more families eligible for assistance, but if investments in the workforce are not sufficient families will have vouchers but no one to provide the care. The childcare workforce needs a \$1 billion investment this year, unfortunately the executive budget includes only \$389 million. If there is no more investment in the workforce, all the good proposals that the executive includes around eligibility for assistance, making families eligible if they are on other public assistance programs, and streamlining the application process will only remain a talking point, not steps towards what we really need, universal child care. And, the early care and learning field will continue to lose educators to the public school system, crippling the operation of those programs.

#### ***Continue Pre-K Expansion, but with Adequate Rates:***

The executive budget includes a \$125 million investment in pre-K, \$100 million that is through the allocation of funds through universal pre-K program and \$25 million through the competitive process of the statewide full day pre-K program. This investment is positive and must happen. However, the state must address the per child rate that school districts that opted in the program early receive to this day. We urge you to focus on increasing rates for school districts that were early adopters of Universal Pre-K who continue to have programs that are funded from local tax revenue. Currently, some school districts continue to receive from the state \$5,400 per child for full day pre-K, an amount that is inadequate to cover the cost of any quality program. In addition, school

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.empirestatechildcare.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rockinst.org/blog/five-things-to-know-about-the-care-workforce/>

districts that contract with community based organizations (CBOs) to administer the pre-K program, do not provide an adequate amount for teachers to be paid a thriving wage, condemning the teachers that work for these CBOs to poverty wages. Ensure equitable distribution of pre-K funding to community based organizations and family child care programs to ensure continuity of learning for children that honors families' choice.

Ensure that preschool special education is adequately funded by establishing a methodology to calculate rates for providers that more accurately reflect the cost of delivering the service and instruction, as well as ensure the longevity of the programs.<sup>4</sup>

### **Community schools and high impact tutoring programs**

We support the continuation of funding for community schools at \$250 million. We continue to encourage the legislature to create its own categorical aid for community schools, outside the Foundation Aid formula. We also support the investment in high impact tutoring but again, that must be outside the formula.

### **School Climate**

The executive budget continues funding in areas that improve school climate such as \$3 million in grants for schools incorporating alternative approaches to student discipline, \$10 million in student mental health support grants, as well as budgetary increases in funding for school based mental health programs and violence prevention programs. As student discipline is directly tied to the lived conditions of students, the funding of these programs would help to address the root causes, and give students, teachers, and administrators the resources they need and deserve.

### **Revenue from casinos**

#### ***Maintain State Law the Earmarks Casino Money for Education:***

The executive budget includes a proposal to take revenue from new casinos and invest it in the MTA. Current state law requires that all casino revenue, after everything is paid out, it is to be dedicated to public schools. We urge you to protect these funds for our children. We understand the MTA needs massive investments and there are several proposals to raise revenue by taxing the ultra rich. The legislature must look at the [Invest in Our New York package](#) that includes revenue raisers that could raise \$40 billion in new revenue for New York State. We can invest in the MTA and protect dedicated revenue for education. **We urge you to reject this proposal and maintain existing law to dedicate the revenue from casinos to education.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://thechildrensagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Kids-Cant-Wait-2023-Policy-Priorities-1.pdf>

## ONLY TAXING NEW YORK'S ULTRAWEALTHY

### **CORPORATE TAX \$1980**

Strengthens corporate tax reform law, permanently.

### **INCOME TAX \$2059**

Restructures income tax: 10 new tax brackets raise rates on the top 5% of earners.

### **CAPITAL GAINS TAX \$2162**

Taxes capital gains income over \$500k a year, curbing federal loopholes.

### **HEIRS TAX \$2782**

Overhauls broken policy by making generational wealth inheritances of-and-by the ultra-rich taxable.

### **BILLIONAIRES TAX \$1570**

Creates a tax on assets (like stock and investment portfolios) that have accumulated value during the course of a year, making billionaires pay income tax rates on these investment gains.