



**Testimony of the Alliance for Quality Education
at the NYC Council Hearing on the City Budget
Wednesday, June 10, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Zakiyah Shaakir-Ansari, and I am the Co-Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE). AQE organizes parents statewide who are pushing for quality public education for all children, regardless of zip code.

ADVOCATE TO BUILD ON STATE AID WINS FOR NYCPS

Although state education funding is determined in Albany, the state budget has many direct consequences for NYCPS and the students, families, educators, and communities this Council represents. This year's state budget included meaningful Foundation Aid investments and formula updates, including a \$1.027 billion increase in Foundation Aid, a 2% minimum year-to-year increase for school districts, an increased weight for English Language Learners, and a new weight for students experiencing homelessness or are in foster care. These changes begin to recognize student need more accurately and reflect years of organizing by families, educators, advocates, and community groups across the state.

At the same time, the enacted budget did not finish the work of making the Foundation Aid formula reflect the true cost of educating students today. Earlier this year, [the IBO released a report](#) showing how much funding would come to NYCPS if the Foundation Aid formula were updated by revising the Regional Cost Index, adding weights for students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care, and increasing the weight for English Language Learners. The final state budget moved important pieces of the formula forward, but the Regional Cost Index piece remained unresolved.

As the City adopts its own education budget, City Council should protect the services students rely on now and continue making clear that NYCPS needs a Foundation Aid formula that fully reflects the cost of educating students in New York City.

BASELINE CRITICAL SERVICES

We also stand with the [Coalition for Equitable Education Funding](#) in calling on the City to extend and baseline funding for essential education programs that are currently funded for this year only and are, therefore, at risk of significant funding cuts in July. We are pleased that the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget extends and baselines funding for several essential initiatives, including preschool special education services, summer programming, Learning to Work programs, and early childhood education outreach. However, the Executive Budget still leaves out funding for other critical programs that currently serve thousands of New York City students and families.

These programs include Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) programs for students with intensive sensory needs (\$8.5M), restorative justice to help students stay in school and resolve conflicts instead of being suspended (\$6M), the Mental Health Continuum to provide mental health care to students at 50 schools (\$5M), immigrant family communications and outreach to help families receive information about their child's school in a language and mode they can access (\$4M), and Student Success Centers to allow trained youth leaders to build a culture of college-going and help their peers with the college admissions process (\$3.75M).

We appreciate that the City Council called for funding for these programs in its response to the Preliminary Budget, and now urge the Mayor and City Council to restore and baseline funding for these programs in the final FY 2027 budget so students and families can continue to benefit from them next year and beyond. The City must also make significant additional investments to support students, with a focus on those with the greatest needs.

We appreciate that the City Council called for funding for these programs in its response to the Preliminary Budget. We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore and baseline funding for these programs in the final FY 2027 budget so students and families can continue to benefit from them next year and beyond. The City must also make

significant additional investments to support students, with a focus on those with the greatest needs.

ENSURE STABLE TRANSPORTATION FOR STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

When students are removed from their homes and families and placed into foster care, school is often the only source of stability in their lives. Recognizing the importance of school continuity, federal and state law require school districts to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original school, unless it is in their best interest to transfer to a new school. Despite these requirements, it often takes weeks or even months for NYCPS to begin school bus service for these students.

While students await bus service, NYCPS offers a prepaid rideshare service, but it does not become available until a student has been waiting for a bus for more than ten school days and requires an adult chaperone to accompany the student. That expectation is often impossible for working foster parents, especially when they are caring for children who attend multiple schools. While the City also offers transportation reimbursement, it will not reimburse for the cost of a chaperone, and the daily reimbursement cap is often insufficient to cover rideshare services that include a vetted chaperone or longer cross-borough trips.

As a result, many students miss school or are forced to transfer schools even when it is not in their best interest to do so. During the 2024-25 school year, 55% of students in foster care were chronically absent, meaning they missed at least one out of every ten school days, and one in five transferred schools at least once.

There are feasible solutions. For example, the City could contract with transportation providers that use vetted drivers and do not require additional chaperones, such as Kid Car, which operates in NYC, or HopSkipDrive, which is used by districts including Los Angeles. The City could also use ACS or other city-owned vehicles that include escorts, as is done for students placed at the Children's Center, launch a dedicated interim transportation service for students awaiting bus routes, hire aides to accompany students using rideshare services, or, at a minimum, reimburse chaperone costs and increase the daily reimbursement cap to cover longer trips and services such as Kid Car.

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 moment in their lives.

FUND EFFORTS FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

We are also part of the Integration Coalition, a group of advocates and organizations committed to addressing school segregation through a Real Integration framework and a model of solidarity, not scarcity, across NYCPS. The coalition has identified a critical gap in the proposed education budget: the lack of dedicated investments to advance school integration and inclusion across NYCPS, despite renewed commitments by both the Chancellor and the Mayor to address segregation in NYC's school system.

We are calling for \$2 million annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027 and continuing for three years, to support implementation of laws passed by the Council in 2019 and bolster integration planning and initiatives.

With the Mayor and Chancellor expressing willingness to support remedies for historic school segregation, the City Council has a continued role in funding forgotten mandates with the urgency needed to make them real. A \$2 million annual investment is a modest but essential step to operationalize these laws, turning existing mandates and data into real, community-driven integration outcomes across the system.

EXPAND SCHOOL-BASED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & MENTAL HEALTH ACCESS

When it comes to school safety, the education budget must include school-based restorative justice and mental health access. That means investing \$80 million to hire School Climate Coordinators in 500 schools. These new School Climate Coordinator roles would be responsible for training staff and implementing restorative justice and healing-centered programming in priority middle and high schools.

We can fund this expansion simply by not hiring new School Safety Agents through attrition or new classes, and by cutting all vacancies. This would allow the City to shift resources away from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring,

and training of school police, and stopping funding for surveillance technology. By not hiring additional school police, NYC could save up to \$90 million in one fiscal year.

REFORM SCHOOL GOVERNANCE OF NYCPS

Lastly, while we are witnessing rising levels of authoritarianism from the federal government, parents in NYC are pushing for more democracy in the largest public school system in the nation. The enacted budget included a two-year extension of the mayoral control system in NYC. This shorter extension gives New York State time to design a more democratic process that gives students, parents, educators, and communities a meaningful role in shaping the future of NYC school governance. That work should begin now.

Parents across NYC want the ability to engage in their children's education in ways that carry real weight in the decisions that shape their schools. Too often, parent leaders are asked to participate in processes where their ability to influence policy is limited, with CECs currently lacking clear authority over most decisions outside of school zoning.

Council can help strengthen this system by calling for clearer authority for CECs, stronger support for parent leaders, and a more reliable election process. Citywide elections involving hundreds of thousands of voters require dedicated capacity and clear accountability. After recent CEC election cycles raised serious concerns among parent leaders, including calls for a full audit in 2023 and recommendations from the NYC Comptroller to improve the process, NYC has an opportunity to build a stronger foundation for meaningful parent participation.

We urge the Council to support parent leaders calling on the DOE to:

- Create an advisory committee of parent leaders and representatives of community organizations, who will survey rightsholders and develop recommendations on:
 - The functions and roles of FACE
 - The structure of FACE
 - Immediate implementable improvements to provide support to parent leaders

- Audit the 2025 [CCEC Elections](#); begin preparing for 2027 cycle with dedicated staff and engagement with CCEC and CPAC members.
- Increase the number of students whose families have at least one NYCSA account by 20%, focusing on families of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in temporary housing.
- Ensure FACE is in a collaborative and supportive relationship with the Division of School Leadership, the Division of Inclusive and Accessible Learning (DIAL), and other central offices, in order to inform and work in partnership with CCECs on directives to meet district goals and priorities.
- Allow Community Education Councils to approve school co-locations and closures.

In order to build towards a better system, AQE echoes the Coalition for a New Democratic School Governance System's demands to:

- Convene and fund an independent and community-led, School Governance Commission that includes students, parents/caregivers, educators, and other education stakeholders to articulate a transition plan for a fully elected school board for NYCPS by 2027.
 - This Commission should be tasked with ensuring parents, particularly parents of color, whose children make up the majority in NYC public schools, are educated and informed about how to run for local positions and receive training in how to manage school operations.
 - The commission should ensure the new system centers the needs of historically marginalized groups, Black, Brown, low-income, students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, foster care students, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, and English Language Learners.
 - This includes keeping certain types of decisions intentionally centralized and system-wide.
 - The commission should ensure the new democratic school governance system secures real decision-making power for students, parents, and

educators. They must also have access to independent support, mentorship, and training to participate fully in governance.

- The new democratic school governance system must establish an effective relationship between local and centralized decision-making. Even citywide decisions should have a local mechanism for feedback and implementation planning.

We also echo the ECC's reforms, sent to the Mayor and Chancellor, that would strengthen district leadership teams, community and citywide education councils, and school leadership teams without requiring action from the state.