

Submitting Testimony



CITIZENS' COMMITTEE for CHILDREN
OF NEW YORK INC

Testimony of

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and
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*Regarding the
New York State Executive Budget Proposals for
Education
State Fiscal Year 2017-2018*

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Good afternoon. My name is Grant Cowles and I am the Senior Policy and Advocate Associate for Youth Justice at Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC). CCC is a 73-year-old privately supported, independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, nor represent a sector or workforce. For 73 years, CCC has undertaken public policy research, community education and advocacy efforts to draw attention to children and their needs so that we can advance budget, legislative and policy priorities that produce good outcomes for our youngest New Yorkers.

I would like to thank Chairman Farrell and Chairwoman Young and all the members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees for holding today's hearing on the Education-related proposals in the Governor's Executive Budget for State Fiscal Year 2017-2018.

We applaud the Governor for once again including a comprehensive plan to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York. As you know, New York remains one of only two states that prosecutes all 16 and 17- year olds as adults, despite the research proving that this is detrimental both to public safety and to the young people. We urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget with the Governor that includes Raise the Age this year.

CCC appreciates the Governor's efforts to alleviate burdens on the middle class and invest in programs and services that benefit children and families. Notably, we appreciate the Governor's proposals to raise the age of criminal responsibility, expand after-school programs and pre-kindergarten, re-introduce the Dream Act, and develop a plan for tuition-free college for middle class students.

On the other hand, the Executive Budget proposes numerous cuts to vulnerable New Yorkers, which concerns us greatly. For example, the Executive Budget proposes to cut funding for foster care, special education placement reimbursement, the Foster Youth Success initiative which supports foster youth in college, Title XX social service-funded programs, and school-based health services in New York City. Furthermore, the Executive Budget does not increase funding or create a new rental assistance program to help homeless families, does not increase funding for home visiting programs, and does not increase funding to ensure child care programs can implement new federal rules without decreasing access. Many of these cuts are specifically focused on cost-shifts to New York City.

In addition, CCC is especially concerned that the Executive Budget includes contingency language all throughout, which would authorize the Budget Director to reduce funding to localities if funding from the federal government is reduced, all without approval from the legislature.

Given the need for New Yorkers to rely on their State and Local governments more than ever, we urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget with the Governor that eliminates cost shifts and contingencies, and invests significantly more in the programs and services that will produce good outcomes for the children and families throughout New York.

We now turn to the Executive Budget proposals related specifically to education.

CCC believes that many of the education proposals in the executive budget are steps in the right direction, but we urge the state to go further to ensure every New York student receives a high quality education that prepares them for college and a career.

CCC is pleased that the State FY17-18 Executive Budget proposes additional investments in improving quality and access to education for New York's children from pre-kindergarten through college. There are several critical proposals in the Executive Budget relating to education that CCC strongly supports and we urge the Legislature to include these items. These positive additions include \$2 million for AP testing costs for 68,000 low-income students, \$300,000 for cyberbullying prevention, and \$35 million for after-school programs. That said, we also believe that the level of funding proposed for education is not sufficient to meet the needs of New York's school children so we urge the legislature to negotiate a budget with the Governor that includes additional investments in Education.

1. Education Aid

The State FY17-18 Executive Budget proposes to increase education aid by \$961 million (3.9%). This includes \$425 million for foundation aid, \$150 million for fiscal stabilization fund, \$333 million for reimbursement for expense-based aids/other, and the remainder for various initiatives.

While the education aid increases are positive additions, we are disappointed that the proposed increase to foundation aid, in particular, is not higher. New York State's requirement under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision by the Court of Appeals to provide a "sound basic education" is still unmet by this year's proposed education investment. While progress has been made, New York is still billions away from its court-mandated obligation. **We urge the Legislature to maintain this initial increase in foundation aid, but to also work with the Governor to enact a budget that makes significant additional increases.**

CCC is very concerned about the proposal to change the formula for distributing Foundation Aid starting in SFY2018-2019. While the proposed legislation maintains the formula for this current year, the formula is essentially repealed in the outyears by stating that districts will receive the amount of foundation aid in 2018-2019 and thereafter, that they receive in 2017-2018. The formula is a vital aspect for Foundation Aid as it ensures the money is invested in the schools that need it most. **We urge the Legislature to reject the proposal to change the foundation aid formula.**

2. Community Schools

CCC supports the Governor's proposal to add \$50 million to expand community schools. Community schools not only have positive impacts on academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, and post-secondary outcomes, but they are often better able to address the non-academic needs of the students, which in turn helps students be able to learn. Community schools become lighthouses for revitalizing and supporting entire communities through their

many services. The great successes of community schools throughout New York demonstrate their incredible value as investments, and we are pleased that the Executive Budget includes this expansion for more community schools.

Unfortunately, the Executive Budget does not ensure that funding is maintained for the Community School Grant Initiative, as the contracts for cohort 2 end in June 2017. These programs are vibrant resources for their communities and a key component of the success of community schools is that they become centerpieces for communities; failing to maintain existing community schools defeats much of the purpose. **We urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget with the Governor that restores funding for existing community schools in the Community School Grant Initiative.**

3. Pre-Kindergarten

Participation in high quality early childhood education has been proven to improve school readiness, setting children on the path to successful academic careers. This impact is especially true for disadvantaged children. Rigorous studies of these programs have shown positive and lasting effects, both nationally and internationally, finding that children who attend pre-kindergarten enter school with better reading and math skills, especially those who would otherwise be further behind, setting them up for future success.¹ Unfortunately, there are still an estimated 24,000 high-risk four-year-olds in New York without access to pre-kindergarten.

CCC supports the Executive Budget proposal to add \$5 million for pre-kindergarten for three- and four-year olds in districts that do not have pre-kindergarten programs.

Currently, there are seven different statewide pre-kindergarten programs, all of which have different funding mechanisms, eligibility, etc. CCC and our colleagues have been urging the state to create one coherent pre-kindergarten program. The Executive Budget proposes to consolidate one of the pre-kindergarten grant programs expiring this year with the “Universal Prekindergarten” program. **CCC supports this proposal as an important step towards begin to consolidate the seven programs into one system.**

To further strengthen pre-kindergarten, we make the following additional recommendations:

- Reappropriate the full \$22 million from the SFY16-17 budget, but open eligibility to four-year olds (not just three-year olds) to ensure all funding is spent.
- Amend the budget language to ensure that the additional \$5 million being allocated this year can be re-appropriated to other school districts if the remaining districts without pre-kindergarten consider to opt out.
- Ensure the changes to the foundation aid formula being proposed do not negatively impact pre-kindergarten programs. New York City has estimated that the change would result in their loss of \$34.0 million, or 3,400 pre-kindergarten seats.

¹ Institute for the Study of Labor and Columbia University, Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Care and Education, November 2011. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6149.pdf>

4. Mayoral Control

CCC supports the Executive Budget proposal to extend Mayoral Control of New York City's public schools for three years. Mayoral control has brought continuity and stability to New York City's education system through higher city funding levels and accountability. It is important to continue this progress and not lose the positive gains that have been invested. Since 2002, New York City has seen an increase in student achievement and graduation rates as well as meaningful education reforms like universal pre-kindergarten and the expansion of community schools. Research has demonstrated many of the benefits that have resulted from mayoral control.² **We urge the legislator to support the three-year extension that both the Governor and Mayor have embraced.**

5. Dream Act

CCC supports the Governor's proposal to enact the DREAM Act and we urge the Legislature to prioritize passing the bill this session. The DREAM Act would allow undocumented youth who graduate from a New York high school the opportunity to apply for state college tuition assistance. Other states such as Texas, New Mexico, California, Illinois and Minnesota have already extended state financial assistance for higher education to undocumented students and it is time for New York to do the same. The DREAM Act provides all New York high schoolers with the same opportunity for a college degree. It is in the best interest of our state to have a highly educated workforce, our state colleges will continue to thrive with motivated students, and the tuition assistance can open the invaluable door to college for individual New York youth. This cost effective investment would have a positive impact on the growth of New York's economy as workers with higher education earn more in wages and pay higher taxes than those with a high school diploma.

6. Services and Transportation for Students in Temporary Housing

New York State has over 140,000 students identified as living in temporary housing. Outcomes for students living in temporary housing have been linked to increased absenteeism, suspensions, higher grade retention rates, and higher drop-out rates. These students need an effective education yet they face particularly acute challenges due to circumstances beyond their control, including accessing services intended for homeless students and challenging transportation hurdles.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides protections for homeless and temporarily-housed youth, all with the goal of enabling homeless children to succeed in school with a right to school stability. The Executive Budget includes Article VII legislation to address the 2015 federal reauthorization, including: making it clear that McKinney-Vento protections

² Hess, F., *Assessing the Case for Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2008, available at http://www.aei.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/20080825_0423422EduOAugust_g.pdf. See also, Herman, J., "Top 5 Things to Know About Mayoral Control of Schools," Center for American Progress, 2013, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2013/03/22/57723/top-5-things-to-know-about-mayoral-control-of-schools/>.

apply to children in pre-kindergarten; addressing barriers to participation in summer school and after-school activities for students in temporary housing; ensuring that students in temporary housing receive transportation for the remainder of the school year in which they become permanently housed; and requiring that information about the living situation of students in temporary housing be kept private. **The Executive Budget includes changes to state law to align with these changes to the federal law, and CCC supports these changes to better support the needs and services for these students.**

New York City youth living in temporary housing also face additional transportation burdens that are not adequately addressed by current programs. Students living in temporary housing currently have the right to transportation to their original school, which helps alleviate the burden and disruption caused when a student moves to temporary housing by providing a consistent learning environment. New York City serves these students in temporary housing primarily by providing MetroCards so they may take public transportation to their original schools, until busing can be arranged. This is inadequate however for certain students or circumstances when public transportation is not viable, such as when a school or housing facility is not near public transportation or when physical disabilities make public transportation inaccessible. **CCC calls on the Legislature to amend Section 3209(4)(e) of the New York Education Law require school districts to provide an alternative form of transportation for students living in temporary housing when public transportation is not a viable option.**

Conclusion

Education is the bedrock for our state's youth and New York's future. Investments in our schools provide some of the single best returns on investment. New York has taken important steps to ensure our students receive the robust education they deserve, and we commend the additional steps proposed in the Executive Budget this year, but there continues to be an urgent need for additional state support for the 2.5 million students across the state. We urge the Legislature to enact a budget that ensures New York's children are healthy, housed, educated and safe.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.