



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
PRESIDENT MICHAEL MULGREW**

**BEFORE THE  
NEW YORK STATE SENATE & ASSEMBLY  
COMMITTEES ON FINANCE, WAYS & MEANS, AND EDUCATION**

**REGARDING THE PROPOSED FY20 EXECUTIVE BUDGET**

**FEBRUARY 6, 2019**

Good morning. My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). I want to thank both the Senate and the Assembly for this opportunity to discuss the proposed Executive Budget and share our perspective on several key initiatives. Joining me today is Cassie Prugh, Assistant to the President of the UFT; Andy Pallotta, President of the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and NYSUT's Director of Legislation, Chris Black.

On behalf of my members, I want to recognize Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie for their strong leadership, and once again congratulate Senator Stewart-Cousins on her historic achievement.

I want to recognize the support, guidance and commitment of their colleagues — our new Education Chairs Shelley Mayer and Michael Benedetto, the new Finance Chair Liz Krueger and Ways & Means Chair Helene Weinstein — and welcome them to their respective committee roles. I also want to congratulate Cathy Nolan, the Assembly's new Deputy Speaker, and thank her for the years of heartfelt support of public schools. We are looking forward to partnering with all of you in the months ahead.

Thanks to the hard work of this Legislature and Governor Cuomo, New York City public schools are moving in the right direction, and indicators such as high school graduation and college readiness rates are at historic highs.

## **SAFEGUARDING WORKERS & PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Much of our work as a union is geared around advocacy on behalf of our members and their school communities. It is our collective mission to strengthen and support our public schools and our professionals, to better serve our students and families, and ensure a safe, productive working environment for all our members.

That work begins with empowering our educators and ensuring that they have a professional voice in their workplace. Our latest collective bargaining agreement, which started going into effect over the last few months, is filled with a whole catalog of new rights and opportunities to do just that.

Our work also means protecting our hard-working members and their families in the face of continuing pressures against their livelihoods. We should all be alarmed by the very real threats we face from instability inside the White House and beyond.

Make no mistake: Not only is public education under attack in this country, but so too are our families and our basic rights. The misguided federal policies being put forward by the Trump administration, including the cap on state and local tax (SALT) deductions, are already causing unspeakable harm, and the well-funded anti-worker forces behind the Janus case are only just getting started with their efforts to dismantle unions and harm their families.

Federal education policies also threaten New Yorkers as the Trump administration advocates shifting funds from traditional public schools to the private and charter school sectors. Given these external threats, it is high time to demand greater transparency and accountability from New York's own charter school sector, which still enrolls and keeps far fewer high-needs students than traditional public schools, despite demanding an ever-larger share of public dollars. Our message on charters has not changed: Until they agree to basic levels of accountability for how they treat all students and how they use tax dollars, the existing cap should remain in place, and in NYC we need to examine off-setting the increased aid charters are getting through allowable rental costs.

This year promises to be incredibly challenging and that means our partnership with you will be more important than ever. The firewalls Albany put in place last year to minimize the impact on workers and their families, and protect their rights as employees, will go a long way toward warding off attacks. For that, we thank you.

The Governor takes this work a step further by advancing a budget proposal supported by the UFT that prohibits public employers from disclosing personal contact information of public employees when certain organizations target them in an effort to convince them not to support the unions that represent them in collective bargaining.

We also want to take this time to thank you for the safeguards you have enacted in the opening weeks of this session by passing historic legislation: including the Reproductive Health Act, the

Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act, efforts to safeguard voters' rights, the Child Victims Act, legislation to prevent discrimination based on gender identity, a ban on conversion therapy and a package of gun control legislation, including the Red Flag bill.

Also, on Jan. 23, Albany passed a new meaningful teacher evaluation bill. By helping to end New York State's overreliance on standardized testing and prioritizing teaching and learning over test prep, the Legislature took a bold step as we seek to minimize the role of tests and restore balance in our schools. Governor Cuomo is expected to sign the bill; the same version of the legislation was included in his budget as a show of support.

When this new law is enacted, local districts can decide what is right for them. That's what this bill is about — giving control to educators and local school communities, and letting local educators decide the role assessments play. Teachers can be the professionals they are and teach. Students won't have the same pressure on them as the new law also removes those test scores from students' permanent records. Parents and teachers across the state applaud these developments.

We're proud of the progress being made and we're proud to partner with you on these efforts. We want to build on that in 2019.

This is government at its best and reflects our shared commitment to the vital role the Legislature has in protecting New Yorkers. We will stand beside you as you continue this important work.

## **INVESTING IN CLASSROOMS**

We are encouraged to see that an increase in funding for public education is once again in the Governor's Executive Budget proposal and the legislative agendas for both the Senate and Assembly, including an allocation for high-needs districts. That critical investment is essential to fulfilling our mission of improving outcomes for children, especially students with the greatest need.

While we have made many advances in school aid funding in recent years, the Executive Budget Proposal falls short of where we need to be, which means there is still significant work to be done to further support and strengthen our school communities. Consider for a second how poverty continues to decimate so many families. In New York City, 1 in 10 New York City children are living in temporary housing, including nearly 24,000 who slept in a homeless shelter last year. The number of English language learners and students with special needs also continue to grow, up by 14% and 18%, respectively, between 2006–07 and 2016–17. The need for more mental health services that help students navigate difficult situations in their lives is also growing. The personnel and programs we have started to put into place to address these and other needs play crucial roles in the lives of our students, and we must do all that we can to support this work.

It's also important to note that many of our schools still need technology upgrades and infrastructure repairs as we continue to align our classrooms with the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Many of our schools are struggling to keep up with the growing need to "connect" with the tools of the modern-day classroom, starting with the bandwidth for smartboards, digital books and other electronic resources. It is critical that we continue to upgrade technology in our schools to best prepare our students for a life in a tech-savvy society and economy. We are also cognizant of the increasing challenges we face to keep our aging school buildings up and running, including the daily need to address "quality of life" projects such as getting a broken bathroom back online, repairing playground equipment or removing trailers so that students can have a schoolyard to use. These types of projects make a difference in the lives of our students and members, and improve working and learning conditions for all.

Our schools are continuing to move in a positive direction. In the coming weeks, the NYC Department of Education and the UFT will share more about the new Bronx Plan to bring additional resources and programs to more than 40 schools that have been traditionally underserved. These are schools where collaboration is key and bottom-up leadership will empower teachers and other school staff to help tackle the challenging situations their school communities are facing. The people who work in our schools know best what our children need to succeed. They just need the resources to make it happen. We're doing this work because we believe in it.

The warning signs of heading in the other direction — disinvestment — are all too clear, as we are witnessing across the country, most recently in Los Angeles.

The UFT is calling for a \$2.2 billion increase in education funding this budget cycle. That figure is in line with recommendations from the state Board of Regents and the Education Conference Board and will help ensure stability in the coming months. What's more, we have long advocated driving funding to the schools with the highest numbers of students in need.

With this level of support, New York City and other districts could focus on providing equity for their highest-need students and begin to create a level playing field for all schools. We don't want schools to face difficult choices over what can and can't be funded. We also don't want schools that have done the work to create great working environments and successfully recruit and retain quality educators to suddenly be penalized because lower class sizes, special programs and experienced teachers become unintended budget liabilities.

We look forward to advocating for more funding in the final budget for public schools.

## **RESTORING TEACHER CENTERS**

The UFT's award-winning Teacher Centers provide professional learning opportunities, resources and support for thousands of educators, many of them during the day at school sites or at other locations close to where teachers work, all across New York City. We are very proud

of the work our Teacher Centers are able to perform, and we were disappointed that the Executive Budget failed to include this vital resource. In fact, two budgets ago, the Executive invested an additional \$5 million, but hasn't since. The Assembly funds Teacher Centers statewide each year with an investment of \$14.26 million, and we are hoping you continue that support. It's time for the Governor and Senate to join the Assembly in restoring Teacher Center funding to the 2008–09 level of \$40 million.

Educators know they must adapt to the ever-evolving education landscape and keep up with the latest techniques, curriculums and technologies. We live in a rapidly changing world, and if we're not meeting the kids where they are at, we're doing them a monumental disservice.

As our profession has evolved, so, too, have our Teacher Centers. Each day, Teacher Center staff provide educators with one-on-one assistance, as well as relevant, hands-on, research-based professional learning to learn new skills. Our members can register for classes, workshops and conferences taking place every day around the five boroughs, and we've made it easier than ever to do so through the UFT mobile app.

Teacher Centers are also a safe place for educators to reflect on their work and experiment with new approaches. This is especially important for newer educators, many of whom leave the profession if they aren't exposed to support and guidance early in their careers. Teacher Centers mentor those new teachers, as well as help experienced professionals deepen their knowledge and skills; they identify educational leaders across diverse communities and empower them to share their expertise with their colleagues. It takes time and practice to make sure the knowledge and skills are passed down directly to the teachers in the classroom. That's where our Teacher Centers come in. They represent the very best in professional learning opportunities.

Thanks to your investment in Teacher Centers, the UFT was able to open six new Teacher Centers in New York City this past year, for a total of 116 centers across all five boroughs. Each is staffed with experts who work with educators at their sites and surrounding schools. Through this network, last school year, the UFT provided professional learning to more than 246,000 teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, school staff and parents in New York City.

Those investments are made strategically to meet the specific needs of a particular school community. A typical example is the new Teacher Center opened in Washington Heights this school year with legislative funds to help educators meet the needs of English language learners, 28% of the neighborhood's student population. The UFT created a program for educators on how to help students who may have social language skills in English, but need to acquire fluency in academic English if they are to succeed in school. We are seeking a continuation and expansion of funding for this pilot project focused on ELL students.

## **ENHANCING COMMUNITY LEARNING SCHOOLS**

The most transformative work taking place inside our schools today is arguably the community schools movement, which essentially reshapes our school buildings into community hubs offering a wide range of programs and services such as health services, food programs, mentoring, tutoring and academic intervention, just to name a few. The recent focus on community schools has led to a seismic shift in the way we think about schools, and it's making a difference.

The UFT's Community Learning Schools (CLS) Initiative began in 2012. Thanks to help from the state and city, we now provide additional medical, social and academic services to more than 20,000 students in 31 schools, roughly the size of the Syracuse school district.

Building a community school requires hard work, but research shows it's worth it. Test scores at CLS schools are exceeding expectations, attendance is up, incident reports are down and parent engagement is on the rise. Most importantly, CLS schools are able to address their students' needs in a holistic way by matching them with available resources right there in the building. The results are increased academic performance and attendance, decreased long-term absenteeism, a healthier school climate and increased parent satisfaction.

The UFT leverages state and city funding by providing each CLS school with a Community School Director whose sole job is to bring in needed services. This \$100,000 investment generates, on average, more than \$600,000 in new resources as the CSD secures partnerships with local non-profits, private sector businesses, hospitals, universities and communities of faith. Every model is independent and unique, based on the needs of that particular community.

CLS is also a proud partner with the Governor and legislators in the Vital Brooklyn project. Seven of our CLS schools are providing fresh, New York farm-grown produce to families and staff, in communities where healthy, fresh food alternatives are otherwise scarce.

With city and state support, the UFT also opened two full-service vision centers inside existing School-Based Health Centers. With state help, the UFT is breaking down barriers so that these vision centers and other primary care, mental health and dental programs can serve students in surrounding schools as well as their own.

We've learned a great deal in the process, and we stand ready to work with more schools that are willing to give this model a try. The UFT hopes to share its CLS expertise through a new project, providing technical support and assistance to schools and districts across New York State that seek to replicate the UFT's model.

We seek \$5 million to support the UFT's Community Learning Schools. In addition, we ask that the \$50 million in additional funds in the Executive Budget for the statewide community school set-aside be distributed outside the foundation formula, so the Governor, Senate and Assembly can better track the results of this investment. The UFT supports increasing the minimum

amount of the district set-aside from \$75,000 to \$100,000 and we support the additional \$1.2 million for the regional technical assistance centers.

## **IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE**

The realities of the outside world don't stop at the classroom door. Today's teachers have to be mindful of our students' daily challenges, stresses and emotions, and be equipped to deal with them. Only by addressing these needs will we build learning environments where children thrive academically and feel supported and valued.

For example, we know that suspending a student can have an adverse effect on his or her social-emotional development and life trajectory. Likewise, research also tells us that a positive approach to school discipline can improve students' academic performance and life trajectory.

It's this understanding that prompted the UFT and the NYC Department of Education to reimagine "school discipline." Our shared goal was to move away from the overreliance on suspensions and instead implement restorative justice practices to build safe, nurturing school environments for all children. The Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC) was born from those discussions.

PLC started in the 2012 school year and now supports 17 schools, with plans to add six more this winter. Our first cohort of PLC schools serve, on average, higher numbers of English language learners, children with special needs and children in temporary housing than other public schools across the city.

The success of PLC in our first cohort of schools is clear: suspensions in the first cohort of schools have fallen nearly 82% (compared to a New York City decrease of 31%). Equally important: The violent incidents that can lead to suspension have fallen 54%. And as the school climate improved in the first cohort, so did the academics: increases in test scores in these schools met or exceeded New York City gains in ELA and math.

PLC achieves these results with a whole-school approach to changing school climate. All staff in a PLC-supported school receive intensive training, and everyone in the building — from the Principal to the School Aides — work together to implement the PLC approach to support positive behavior. The whole-school approach includes strategies to de-escalate incidents; early intervention and support for students with learning and behavioral needs; techniques to help students develop and learn social, emotional and behavioral competence; and supports to create LGBTQ- and gender-inclusive schools that prevent bias-based bullying, as well as support transgender and non-binary students. These steps are groundbreaking, and they make a huge difference in a school's atmosphere and culture.

Making this kind of lasting change takes hard work and resources. Legislation that simply eliminates suspensions or sets caps without providing ongoing, schoolwide training and

resources is not the solution, and could make life in schools worse for students and educators as yet another unfunded mandate. A reduction in suspensions should be the natural outgrowth of a sustained investment in changing the culture inside a school. For these reasons, we oppose Montgomery/Nolan School Suspension Bill (S.767/A.1981), which mandates outcomes yet provides no strategy or resources to achieve those goals. PLC and other similar programs are in a position to share best practices and successful techniques with schools across the state.

That's why the UFT supports the \$3 million school climate pilot program outlined in the Governor's budget as a way to focus on what works and to share it with more school communities. The UFT also supports the \$1.5 million included in the budget to create enhanced mental health support grants for wraparound services to improve schools. Until last year when our program received city funding, the PLC had been supported entirely by UFT member dues. This year, the UFT respectfully requests \$1.5 million in state funding to expand our PLC program to 10-15 additional schools in New York City.

## **PROVIDING AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE**

Our union has long championed the important work of New York City's 6,000 home-based child care providers, whose high-quality services allow many thousands of New Yorkers the peace of mind that they are leaving their children in a safe and nurturing place while they go to work.

Our child care providers are licensed by New York State and care for children ranging from just a few weeks old to their teenage years, often in their own homes. Many parents choose this type of home-based child care because of the flexibility of non-traditional hours and the opportunity for their children to flourish in a smaller, familiar setting. Most importantly, it's often the only affordable option for many New Yorkers. That's a tangible economic and social benefit to our city and state.

We urge that appropriate funds be dedicated to preserving and, if possible, increasing the number of child care slots and that the state fully fund federal mandates. Our providers also deserve additional compensation for the vital work they do. By investing now in our city's children and families, our state will reap long-term economic and social benefits. That access is key. An insufficient investment in this vital service would otherwise undermine our ability to help every child develop to his or her fullest potential.

## **PAYING THEIR FAIR SHARE**

My colleagues and I are fully aware of the gravity of the threats coming from Washington and the subsequent reduction in state revenue. We also understand that New York's long-term budget sustainability rests on raising additional revenue. We stand behind proposals that would distribute the burden in a fair and practical way, while also raising the revenues we desperately need.



As the Governor stated in his budget speech, New York is the number one donor state to the Federal Government. New York already contributes \$48 billion more each year than we get back in tax dollars. Forty other states take more than they give, lowering New York's revenue. The elimination of full state and local tax deductibility will cost New York families about \$14.3 billion each year. New Yorkers will more fully realize this impact this tax year.

The UFT strongly supports the continuation and expansion of the Millionaire's Tax, which has protected vital community services by generating over \$4.4 billion annually. Additionally, New York could generate an added \$2.3 billion by simply increasing the top rates of this tax for those who make \$10 million to \$100 million a year.

We should also explore the concept of a luxury tax on real estate transactions over \$5 million. This "fairness fee" concept, which previously has been part of an Assembly one-house proposal, would generate \$500 million a year. New York could also explore a "clawback" on the Federal Tax cut for the huge corporations that didn't increase wages or create jobs to raise over \$1 billion a year.

Asking the wealthy to pay a higher income tax rate is a matter of fairness. While the vast majority of New Yorkers continue to struggle with stagnant salaries and rising everyday costs, the state's richest citizens have seen their wealth multiply many times over. Addressing that substantial income inequality and preventing massive disinvestment requires this kind of boldness, and these mega-earners can afford it.

New York's modestly progressive tax rates haven't chased away billionaires and millionaires — far from it. We've got 63% more millionaires than we did when we passed the so called "Millionaires Tax" in 2009. And New York City is home to 103 billionaires, more than any city in the world.

And when it comes to fairness, the UFT also strongly supports closing the "carried interest" loophole that allows hedge fund managers to pay a substantially lower tax rate on their capital gains, effectively allowing them to pocket tens of millions of dollars. What makes this a particularly compelling proposal is the fact that simply requiring the wealthy to pay their fair share could generate \$3.5 billion in new revenue annually. The UFT advocates working with allies in New Jersey and Connecticut to first pass legislation in a three-state solution. Once that change is accomplished, we support broadening the legislation to more states.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Amid all the uncertainty in this world, UFT members will continue to focus on what's important: educating the next generation of New Yorkers. We are grateful of your support of their work. That continuing commitment is essential to providing a robust education for each and every child, so they are able to pursue their goals and dreams.

We also want to once again recognize your hard work to protect working families from the onslaught of anti-worker attacks. Many of you have spoken forcefully against the threats to our members, and we thank you for putting a spotlight on these important issues.

In the coming months, I hope we can build on these accomplishments together. Thank you.

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