

Buffalo City School District Budget Testimony Before The New York State Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees



Presented February 11, 2020
Dr. Kriner Cash, Superintendent of Schools
Buffalo City School District



The Education Bargain with Students and Parents

An equal and high-quality education is every child's civil right; and, as educators, we must deliver on this essential democratic principle. The Education Bargain is simple: The District will guarantee pathways to opportunity that will lead to achievement and success in exchange for hard work, commitment, and collaboration of our students and parents.



IT IS THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO:

- Place a high premium on education
- Make sure your child goes to school and to all classes every day
- Make sure your child does his in-school work to the best of his ability and puts in additional study time (up to two hours each day) outside of school hours
- Make sure you and your child show respect for teachers and for staff

Rigorous
Early Elementary
Education

Strong
Community
Schools

Innovative
High Schools

Extended
Learning Excellence
for All Our
Students

Services for
Our Neediest
Children and
Families

New
Relationship
with Our
Teachers



“In Buffalo, we are delivering an Emancipation Curriculum. This means working with tremendous intentionality on significantly elevating student voice, confidence, skill, and achievement.”

Dr. Kriner Cash
Superintendent of Schools

In 2015, just 10 schools in Buffalo were performing well enough to attain a *Good Standing* designation. Nearly half of our District, almost 30 schools, were in Receivership and headed toward closure. Today, as I address this esteemed body, 47 of our 60 schools, 78%, are in Good Standing! Just 3 schools remain in Receivership.

Great schools, great teachers, great leaders, surging confidence in public education locally, high expectations for all children, greater access, equity, opportunity, and quality in all aspects of the District’s work: That’s what we mean by an ***Emancipation Curriculum*** for Buffalo’s children.

Michelangelo said:

“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low and achieving the mark.”

Our District has made this substantial progress because we have set high expectations for every child. As a result, our youngsters are having their full voice, skills and aspirations sharpened for a successful life.

Our strategic transformation plan, ***The Education Bargain with Students and Parents***, exemplifies for the nation the fundamental and required benchmarks for providing the equal and high quality education every child deserves and every parent expects. We are fast becoming a national proof-point and reference for improved public education.

Attached to my testimony today is our catalog of accomplishments to date. We have shared this with our stakeholders and the whole Buffalo community. Investment in our children is yielding results—in academic achievement for students, fiscal and organizational accountability, and in a high regard for public education for the first time in generations.

In addition to the number of schools now in good standing in Buffalo, leading indicators of our success also include:

- 1) On-time graduation rates up from 48% to 65% since 2015;
- 2) 48 of 60 schools meeting annual academic performance targets—up from 4 of 60 in 2015;
- 3) New and fair labor contracts yielding a long-term reduction in retiree health care liability by over \$600 million as of June 30, 2019;
- 4) All levels of Buffalo’s civic leadership collaborating effectively with the District to support our students (parents, elected officials, higher education, business, faith-based & advocacy groups, philanthropy, and labor organizations).

Meanwhile, we are relentlessly working toward a minimum 70% four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2020. And, after five and six years, our aim is for 100% of the student cohort to graduate with a college and career-ready diploma. We are committed to becoming a District in Good Standing—100% of our schools performing above benchmark—by 2021. Our services and support for our neediest children and families will continue to be exemplary. And, District business and financial operations are now second to none in urban public education.

Governor Andrew Cuomo, in his recent State of the State address, committed to using state funds to close the funding gap between wealthy and less wealthy school districts. The Governor also committed to adding more Community Schools and increasing after-school programming. We applaud the Governor for this continued support of education in Buffalo and we are grateful for his strong leadership. Our Western New York Legislative Delegation, led by the Honorable State Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes and the Honorable State Senator Timothy Kennedy, has a record of exemplary and long-standing advocacy for our District. We are working closely with the Executive Budget Office and our esteemed legislators to secure the increased funding Buffalo's children need to close the opportunity gap so clearly identified by Governor Cuomo.

In 2019, Mayor Byron Brown again demonstrated his commitment to public education by adding supplemental funding to support the education of Buffalo's children. Staff from each City and District executive office continue to collaborate on specific projects that yield benefits to all of Buffalo's families. These include crucial traffic safety measures, exciting technology partnerships, upgraded athletics facilities, and beneficial youth employment expansion. Joining with Common Council President Darius Pridgen and his distinguished colleagues, we will continue to collaborate on a local legislative agenda that helps to improve outcomes for our children.

In sum, the Buffalo City School District requests a **5.2%, or \$30.0 million increase in Foundation Aid** over 2019-2020 (**\$16.0 million more** than the proposed 2020-21 Executive Budget). Additionally, the District requests a permanent increase of at least **\$2.6 million in the Health Services Grant**, and the adoption of bills S.6551C/A.7966C to reimburse the District for approximately **\$10.0 million in Supplemental Charter Tuition** payments in the same year the tuition is paid. **These requests are essential in order to meet revised revenue targets of our long-term fiscal plan and to continue effective implementation of our strategic transformation plan, *The Education Bargain with Students and Parents*, which is yielding impressive results.**

Thank you for embracing and sharing our mindset of excellence and high expectations for all of Buffalo's children. As Governor Cuomo has often stated, "*The state with the most skilled workforce wins.*" You have my assurance that the Buffalo City School District will continue to deliver on this New York imperative.

Dr. Kriner Cash



Superintendent of Schools
Buffalo City School District



BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

2020-2021 LEGISLATIVE REQUEST SUMMARY

1. **Support for the Commissioner and Board of Regents proposals:** The Buffalo City School District affirms our support for the Commissioner and Board of Regents 2020-2021 legislative proposals.
2. **Foundation Aid Request:** For 2020-2021, the Buffalo City School District requests a **5.2% or \$30.0 million increase** in Foundation Aid over 2019-2020 (**\$16.0 million more** than the Governor's proposed 2020-2021 budget) given the extraordinary needs of District students and to continue effectively implementing the ***Education Bargain with Students and Parents***.
3. **Health Services Grant:** In the Governor's proposed 2020-2021 budget, there is a cut of \$1.2 million in District's funding for health services. However, the health-related needs of our students are growing. The District requests a permanent increase in the \$5.3 million health services grant (or a bullet aid allocation) of **\$2.6 million** to help offset the rising costs of providing nursing and health services to our students as shown in these projections:

Year	Costs of Services
2019-20	\$7.9 million (budgeted)
2020-21	\$7.9 million (projected)

4. **Supplemental Charter Tuition:** We request the Governor sign A.7966C/S.6551C into law, which will reimburse the District for Supplemental Charter Tuition in the same school year the tuition is paid by the District.
 - a. Charter school related costs are estimated at \$25.0 million more than the associated revenues of those students on an annual budget and cash flow basis.
 - b. This legislation would help reduce that budgetary and cash flow gap by an estimated \$10.0 million in 2020-21.
 - c. Note that the District's projected charter school tuition in 2020-21 is an increase of approximately \$14.5 million, exceeding the \$14.0 million Foundation Aid increase in the Governor's proposed budget.
5. **Charter School Tuition Formula:** The District requests relief from the current charter school tuition formula.
 - a. When charter school tuition was frozen for seven years, from 2010-11 through 2016-17, the per pupil tuition was increased by \$500, while charter schools in the Buffalo area were able to double their net assets, from \$42.2 million in 2010-11 to \$85.5 million at the end of 2016-17. This brought average net asset and cash balances up to 54% and 40%, respectively, of charter school expenditures by 2016-17.
 - b. With the current legislation, charter school tuition has increased \$989 per pupil in the last 3 years (17-18 to 19-20) and we project charter school tuition will increase as much as \$2,000 per pupil over six years.
6. **Proliferation of Start-Up Charter Schools:** Provide the District veto authority in approving new public charter schools in Buffalo to ensure new charter schools fulfill an unmet need in the District (e.g. a school that has flexibility to creatively work with HS students at risk of dropping out). Otherwise, new charters are continuing to saturate the District with more general education K-8 seats when most of our elementary schools (70%) are in Good Standing.
7. **Independent Receiver for Closed Charter Schools:** We request legislation that appoints an Independent Receiver for closed charter schools to audit and ensure that public assets are protected and returned to the District of residence so they can be utilized to support the re-enrolled children.



BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

2020-2021 LEGISLATIVE REQUEST SUMMARY

8. **Reject Cap on Transportation Aid:** We request that the proposed cap on the growth of Transportation Aid be rejected. Transportation costs are driven largely by market conditions outside of the control of school districts. Cost increases above inflation would require a permanent diversion of Foundation Aid away from classroom instruction in order to fulfill transportation contracts.
9. **Reject Changes in Building Aid Reimbursement:** Proposed reductions in Building Aid ratios and reimbursement of incidental cost allowances would reduce Building Aid revenues and require a permanent diversion of Foundation Aid away from classroom instruction to ensure the long-term maintenance of District facilities.