



Yonkers Children: A Proven Return on Investment Yonkers Public Schools: A Cost-Effective Entity



CONFRONT ISSUES OF EQUITY IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS SUCCESS

**Budget Testimony before the New York State
Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees**

Presented February 11, 2020 by:
DR. EDWIN M. QUEZADA
Superintendent of Schools

Yonkers Students Today

32,678 Urban Students

27,473

**Prekindergarten-Three to Grade Twelve
In-District Students**

1,618 Prekindergarten 3 & 4

25,355 Kindergarten to 12

500 Out-of-District Students with Disabilities

19,995 74% Economically Disadvantaged

5,097 19% Students with Disabilities

3,742 13% English Language Learners

15,714 58% Hispanic

4,988 18% African American/Black

6,271 23% White, Asian/Pacific Islander,
American Indian, Multi-Racial

5,205 Yonkers Students in:

828 Charter School Students

4,377 City of Yonkers Parochial/Private students

- These students receive transportation, textbooks, library resources, nurse, pupil support services, Title I, II and III funds and special education services.

**Yonkers students reside in Westchester County and deserve to
have the same educational experiences and opportunities
as their peers throughout the county.**

**Recognize the difference in Yonkers population and poverty levels
compared to other Westchester County school districts.**

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Yonkers Public Schools: A Cost-Effective Entity

Distinguished members of the Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers City School District; I am Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, Superintendent of Schools. **Once again, it is an honor to proudly report that the state of the Yonkers Public Schools is strong and magnificently evident in the continuous academic progress of our students.** Please share in our pride because your commitment to the State's fourth largest city over the past few years helped shape the accomplishments exemplified in today's testimony.

Annually we ask New York State and the City of Yonkers to increase the fiscal investment in Yonkers children. To the best of your ability, you have gone out of your way to deliver additional funds to the Yonkers Board of Education. Above all, Yonkers Public Schools children, educators and staff deliver with yearly improvements in instruction and educational outcomes. **The investment you chose to make in Yonkers in the recent past, clearly demonstrates that we are a cost-effective entity. Maintaining this momentum requires dependable and recurring revenue. This continues to be the greatest challenge for the Yonkers Board of Education and the reason for our annual plea for sustainable equitable funding, rather than one-time appropriations.**

For 2020-2021, we are facing a \$46.7 million budget shortfall.

Our Accomplishments

Yonkers Public Schools, like urban cities across America, has high levels of poverty, families living in temporary housing, increasing numbers of students with disabilities and English language learners, socio-economic disparities as well as an antiquated deteriorating physical infrastructure. Despite these issues, we relentlessly work to meet the needs of ALL students. Today, I state with humility that **Yonkers' 88% on-time graduation rate for 2019 exceeds the Statewide graduation rate by two (2) percentage points and Yonkers is the first and only Big 5 cities school districts to achieve an 80% graduation, accomplishing this consecutively for four (4) years.** Most significant, is that Yonkers redefines the equity conversation for *all* children. Over the past five years, every Yonkers subgroup achieved percentage point increases in their on-time graduation rate: Black students increased 13 points, Latino/Hispanic students increased 12 points, Students with Disabilities increased 16 points, English language learners increased 26 points, males increased 8 points and economically disadvantaged students increased 10 points. Our 2019 drop-out rate for all students was 3% which is half the Statewide 6% rate, for Students with Disabilities it was 5% which is 6 points lower than the State's 11% and for English language learners it was 11% which is a noteworthy 16 points lower than the State's 27%.

These successes are attributed to the perseverance of Yonkers district and school leadership, teachers and staff who provide our students research-based academic and social-emotional opportunities. We embrace innovation by pioneering exemplar programs that are recognized nationally and across the State. Our data-driven practices identify students who may not achieve academic and social success without supports, and we create opportunities to foster their success.

- The **Yonkers My Brother's Keeper** (MBK) movement is thriving offering our young men of color opportunities and supports to change the trajectory of their lives and ultimately the future of our community. Across the country, young men of color continue to lag behind in all metrics: low graduation rate, below standard in all State assessments, lower attendance, as well as higher drop-out and suspension rates. The unfortunate outcome

is a disturbing incarceration rate for black and brown young men. Yonkers MBK is dramatically reversing these negative statistics, recognized as a model program in New York State and has gained considerable national recognition with our city partners, Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano and Rev. Dr. Jim Bostic of the Nepperhan Community Center. The MBK principles emphasize that all adults in the community are responsible for the education of our young people. Our community is energized and embraces the birth to graduation and beyond milestones of the MBK movement.

- Three years ago, Yonkers was the first school district in the State to initiate **districtwide Computer Based Testing (CBT)** for the State assessments in grades 3 through 8 English Language Arts and Mathematics testing over 10,000 students. Last year, our students' proficiency levels increased 4 percentage points in English Language Arts and 5 percentage points in Mathematics.
- **Yonkers Career & Technical Education** programs continue to serve as models for the State. These programs are grounded in partnerships with business and industry professionals who serve on craft committees with our educators to prepare and mentor our students for industry standard jobs. Saunders Trades & Technical High School had a 100% on-time graduation rate in 2019.

Yonkers Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) between the City of Yonkers and Board of Education provides efficiencies, cost savings and a clearer understanding of the school district's regulatory, academic and social-emotional needs of our children. For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Mayor and City Council increased the Board of Education Maintenance of Effort by an unprecedented \$12 million dollars in recurring revenue. In addition, the IMA has been a catalyst for establishing strong relationships with the public and private sectors. The work accomplished in Yonkers is a model for New York State public schools.

Academic and Social-Emotional Challenges and Goals for 2020-2021

While we recognized that there is much to celebrate in the Yonkers Public Schools, we are fully aware and accept the responsibility for the substantial challenges that continue to confront our young people. Yonkers is an urban community engaged in a vibrant residential, industry and business renaissance. This growth has significant implications for the school district now and in the coming years. We are already experiencing student enrollment increases for children requiring English as a New Language services as well as Special Education and pupil support services. Critically important is the growing need to provide community schools with on-site social-emotional and health services to students and families; the results are improved achievement outcomes for children.

Our goals for 2020-2021 are targeted to:

- ✓ reinforce Early Childhood education,
- ✓ establish strong community schools,
- ✓ strengthen family engagement,
- ✓ expand Career & Technical Education programs,
- ✓ increase art, music and sports,
- ✓ increase school counselors and psychologists, and
- ✓ to ensure the business community is an integral partner in education.

Yonkers has demonstrated our commitment to educate *all* students, but the reality is that our current budget situation hampers our ability to sustain the current levels of success.

Fiscal Challenge for 2020-2021

For 2020-2021, our anticipated budget shortfall is \$46.7 million dollars. Why? The ever-present structural budget constraints that have for decades continue to challenge our ability to sustain educational programs and personnel. Annually, Yonkers must assume a revenue shortfall resulting from the previous year's one-shot appropriations, which always are critically needed and appreciated. We begin this budget process with \$21 million less than the year before because of the non-recurrent revenue, \$12.6 million in bullet aid and \$7.9 million from our fund balance.

The Executive's budget includes an increase of almost \$10.8 million in Foundation Aid for Yonkers. Although we are appreciative of this significant increase, it is important to examine the genesis of this funding:

\$2.8 million is an increase for expense-based aid,

\$0.9 million is an increase for community school aid, and

\$7.1 million is an increase based on Yonkers Public Schools high Modified FRPL Index.

This \$7.1 million dollar increase represents approximately \$267 per pupil. Although appreciated, this level of funding does not begin to address the extraordinary needs of our children in poverty.

Most importantly, these funds do not reduce Yonkers perpetual budget challenge for sustainable recurring revenue.

Solutions for Your Consideration

The Yonkers Board of Education would like to offer solutions for your consideration. These suggested solutions offer pathways for sustainable recurring revenue that is urgently needed to maintain Yonkers outstanding academic outcomes for *all* students.

Number 1: Fully Fund Prekindergarten for Yonkers Public Schools from \$12 Million to \$21 Million

The benefit of a prekindergarten program, especially in urban communities, are undeniable. As noted by the Urban Child Institute, children who receive high quality prekindergarten have better attendance, fewer behavior problems, and increased chances of reading at grade level in the 4th grade. Five years ago, we reinstated full-day prekindergarten for approximately 1,500 children annually and the benefits outlined above are palpable. Yonkers spends over \$21 million dollars to finance the program. Currently, New York State funds approximately \$12 million.

Consider fully funding prekindergarten for Yonkers, commensurate with the support provided to other urban districts, thus providing an additional \$9 million in sustainable recurring revenue.

Number 2: Increase the Host Community Video Lottery Terminal Allocation from \$19.6 Million to \$30 Million.

The City of Yonkers is fortunate to have a successful gaming enterprise that according to public records annually operates at a profit. Twenty years ago, \$19.6 million was appropriated to Yonkers as a host community. This appropriation has remained unchanged while casino's profits have exponentially increased. Because of this success, one of America's successful corporations, MGM Resorts & Casinos, now owns Empire City.

Consider increasing the Video Lottery Terminal Allocation dedicated for Yonkers Public Schools to sustain instructional program, thus providing an additional \$10.4 million in sustainable recurring revenue.

Number 3: Continue to Appropriate \$12.6 Million in Bullet Aid to Yonkers Public Schools

The most concerning fiscal challenge for Yonkers is the necessity for our annual plea to the State for non-recurrent revenue to provide an equitable quality education for *all* Yonkers children. Last year the Assembly and Senate rescued Yonkers helping to address a budget gap by appropriating \$12.6 million in bullet aid. We appreciate both the Senate and Assembly for fighting for Yonkers children especially our distinguished delegation. Unfortunately, as a non-recurrent appropriation, it exacerbates next year's budget gap and continues this unfortunate annual cycle.

Consider a mechanism to permanently include the Bullet Aid in Yonkers yearly appropriation, thus providing an additional \$12.6 million in sustainable recurring revenue.

Number 4: Fully Fund Health Services for Yonkers Public and Non-Public Schools from \$1.2 Million to \$6.9 Million

The Yonkers Public Schools is required to provide nurse services to 39 public schools and 13 non-public schools in the City of Yonkers. The total cost to provide these services is \$6.9 million dollars that includes \$1.2 million appropriated from the State's Health Services Grant.

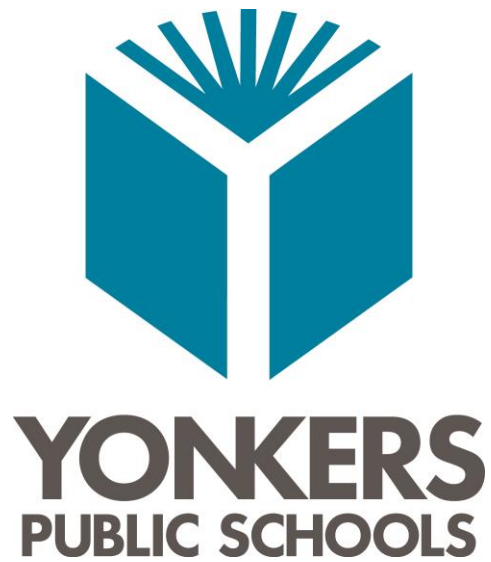
Consider fully funding health services, thus providing an additional \$5.7 million in sustainable recurring revenue.

Please consider these four viable solutions to help resolve Yonkers Public Schools perpetual structural budget challenge. Understand that Yonkers is an urban learning community where over 74% of its students live in poverty, 77% are young people of color, and a significant number of children are recent immigrants. Despite these challenges, our success is undisputable. These solutions if enacted will generate \$37.7 million in recurring revenue for Yonkers school district. I urge you to embrace the role of Equity Warrior and fight for sustainable solutions. Yonkers Public Schools continuous progress advancing sustainable academic and social-emotional outcomes for *all* children must be able to thrive.

Let me take a moment to reiterate the significant infrastructure concerns faced by the school district and the City of Yonkers as well as remind you of the Mayor's Rebuild Yonkers Schools campaign, which you jump started by passing the Modernization Plan legislation last year. The average age of our schools is now 80 years and the potential cost required to repair these schools is close to \$600 million. Yonkers has not built a new school in 20 years. Yonkers taxpayers by themselves cannot take on the financial burden to rebuild our schools under our current reimbursement of 75%. Consider a higher reimbursement rate, thus providing equitable educational environments for children, educators, staff and families to expand their knowledge and develop as productive citizens.

In closing, I look forward to you joining Yonkers Public Schools league of Equity Warriors who relentlessly seek opportunities for *all* children from every circumstance and background in our city. Our leaders in Albany have demonstrated the resolve to deliver an equitable education to urban, suburban and rural children throughout the state. **Confronting issues of educational equity begins with equitable, sustainable and recurring funding. Embrace this challenge now, join the league of Equity Warriors, New York's children, Yonkers' children, in particular, depend on you.**

Respectfully submitted.



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2019-2020