



**Submitted Testimony of Lena Bilik, Policy Analyst at Children's Aid
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2020-2021 Executive Budget Proposal:
Elementary and Secondary Education
February 11, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2020-21 Executive Budget Proposal as it pertains to Elementary and Secondary Education. For 165 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. We are leading a comprehensive counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life. We have constructed a continuum of services, positioned every step of the way through childhood and young adulthood, which build well-being and prepare young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, Children's Aid employs over 2,000 full-and part-time staff members to support nearly 50,000 children, youth, and their families across 42 locations, including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers, and school-based and community health clinics in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

As an agency with a strong state advocacy agenda, we are members of and support the platforms of the New York State Community Schools Network, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the New York School-Based Health Alliance, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, Winning Beginning NY, and the Fostering Youth Success Alliance. Together, we are on a mission to connect children with what they need to learn, grow, and lead successful, independent lives.

Transforming Education through Community Schools

For over 25 years, Children's Aid has operated community schools in partnership with the New York City Department of Education. We believe that community schools is a strategy to remove the barriers to learning that get in the way of youth success – both academically and socially. We integrate expanded learning programs, comprehensive health services (physical, mental health, dental, and vision), and family engagement strategies into each school building so that school staff can focus on teaching and children can focus on learning. Through our National Center for Community Schools, we provide ongoing technical assistance and training nationally and locally to schools, school districts, and intermediaries interested in implementing the community school strategy. Currently, Children's Aid partners with 21 community schools in New York City. Children's Aid community schools provide programs and services across four domains: academic, social-emotional, health and wellness, and family and home. These programs and services include afterschool programming, targeted academic interventions, attendance support, school-based health clinics with medical, dental, and vision services, mental health services and counseling, parent workshops, family events, and many other services.



Nationally, community schools have shown success increasing student and teacher attendance, and have a positive impact on increasing parent engagement. Key to the success of community schools is having a lead partner who coordinates the services at the school level; advocates for the school's needs; brings in additional resources, programs, and services; conducts needs assessments and supports with data-driven decision making; and has a full-time presence in the school. Children's Aid provides every one of our schools with a full-time Community School Director to coordinate with school leadership and ensure resources, programming, and services are integrated, both during the school day and during extended learning time.

A 2013 study conducted by the Finance Project measured the social return of investment of Children's Aid's community schools—and the results were positive. The report highlighted the fact that every \$1 spent in our community schools saw social returns between \$10.30 and \$14.80.¹ A study of NYC Community Schools published by RAND in January 2020 found the NYC Community Schools Initiative (of which 13 of our schools are a part of) had, among other successes: a positive impact on student attendance, math scores, and on-time grade progression; a reduction in disciplinary incidents; and a positive effect on students' sense of connectedness to adults and peers.² Children's Aid has also seen recent dramatic decreases in chronic absenteeism – and associated increases in attendance – at many of our community schools, notably CS 211 and Samara Community School in the Bronx.

Community schools need time and sustained support to increase student learning and success. We thank the Governor for including \$300 million in Foundation Aid Community Schools Set-Aside in his Executive Budget Proposal (\$50 million which is new funding). But additional funds are needed to adequately fund, sustain, and grow the community schools strategy across the state.

As a part of the New York State Community Schools Network, we request the following:

- Maintain the \$300 million proposed in the Executive Budget for the Foundation Aid Community Schools Set Aside for high needs districts, and maintain the minimum amount of funding a school district receives at \$100,000.
- Invest \$100 million in new funding for community schools through a Community Schools Categorical Aid.
- Add an additional \$650,000 in funding for the Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), so that each TAC can hire a dedicated staff member or enhance existing capacity for on-site technical assistance and coaching. This will also allow for an annual statewide convening for community school directors.

In our community schools work, we've found that several targeted services and strategies are important factors to alleviate the barriers to learning for children. We know that regular attendance at a high-quality afterschool program over several years can close the achievement

¹ Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Case Study, The Finance Project. 2013.

² Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative, the RAND Corporation, 2020.



gap in math for low-income students.³ Currently, across all our community schools and centers, Children's Aid serves over 3,000 young people in afterschool and expanded learning programs. These programs are crucial parts of a comprehensive set of services to help schools adequately address the needs of high-poverty communities. Our afterschool programs offer a balance of academic support, opportunities in leadership, fitness, the arts, and life skills development, all embedded within social-emotional supports reinforced by our staff. Researchers have identified these types of activities as key for enabling youth to build the critical thinking and social skills that prepare them for success in college and career in the 21st century.⁴

Because we know firsthand the importance of afterschool programs for children, we are supporting the Network for Youth Success' ask for New York State to restore base level funding for the Advantage After School Program. The Governor's Executive Budget included a base funding of \$17.2 million, a \$5 million reduction from last year's budget, which puts at least 3,600 students at risk of losing their afterschool program next year. We also support asking New York State to:

- Maintain the \$10 million increase to the Empire State After-School Program and add an additional \$15.2 million to increase the per student rate to \$2,320, and invest an additional \$5.12 million in the Advantage After School Program to raise the per student rate to \$2,320.
- Safeguard funding for existing state grantees by baselining \$33 million for Advantage After School, including the \$10.7 million minimum wage increase through FY23-24, and protect the \$24.3 million for the Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention program and the \$15.6 million for the Youth Development Program.
- Ensure equitable support for professional development and quality standards for all state-funded grantees by investing an additional \$1.8 million in the Educational Incentive Program for a total funding of \$7 million, and directing \$5 million in new funding towards three new Technical Assistance Centers to support all state-funded afterschool and summer grantees.

In addition to afterschool and expanded learning opportunities, community schools increase access to medical and mental health services. School-based health clinics (SBHCs) are a proven strategy that integrate primary medical, preventative, dental, vision, and mental health services for youth in their schools. Many of the students served by SBHCs live in medically underserved neighborhoods, and SBHCs are their primary medical home. We know from experience that if children need medical attention, they will likely not attend school (contributing to chronic absence), or, if they are in school, will not be able to focus on learning. Children's Aid operates six SBHCs which provide students with primary care, first aid, behavioral health care, dental, and vision care. These services are crucial to helping students be able to focus on school and

³ Deborah Lowe Vandell, *The Achievement Gap is Real*, <http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/The%20Achievement%20Gap%20is%20Real.pdf> (2013).

⁴ Robert Halpern et al., *Realizing the Potential of Learning in Middle Adolescence*, <http://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/Realizing-the-Potential-of-Learning-in-Middle-Adolescence.pdf> (2013).

⁴ New York State Office of Children and Family Services CCR Data as of January 1, 2103



reach their full potential. For example, in 2017-2018, we offered vision screening to 2,600 students across 15 of our community schools, and 61% of those screened needed and received eyeglasses.

We thank Assembly members for adding \$3.823 million in the final State Budget last year (2019-20) for SBHCs. We ask Senate and Assembly members to support and maintain \$17,098,000 in non-Medicaid grant funding appropriated in Governor Cuomo's 2020-21 proposed State Budget for SBHCs. We also ask Senate and Assembly members to support \$5 million in new funds to fully restore cuts to SBHCs whose non-Medicaid grants funds were disproportionately reduced in 2017, and we ask Senate and Assembly members to hold SBHCs harmless from any Medicaid Cuts in the 2020-2021 State Budget.

Closing Remarks

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York State Legislature for their support of New York youth and their families and schools. Ensuring that our children have the best opportunities available to them so that they are able to realize their full potential is not only the right thing to do, but imperative for the future of New York State. We believe that in order to do that, we must invest in schools as hubs of services, programs, and opportunities that can give youth that chance to thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these critical issues in the lives of children and families in New York State. Please feel free to contact Lena Bilik at lbilik@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.