

Testimony of UJA-Federation of New York

**The Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing for Fiscal Year 2020-2021**

**Submitted by:
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On behalf of UJA-Federation of New York, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of maintaining and expanding support for education in New York State.

Established over 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to our mission is to care for those in need. We identify and meet the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. We connect people to their communities and respond to crises in New York, Israel and around the world. We support nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services.

Pre-Kindergarten

UJA's non-profit partners provide Pre-K programs to young children in neighborhoods across New York City, Westchester and Long Island. All of UJA's non-profit partners, who offer Pre-K services, provide programs and resources in their community. These programs offer extended hours and year-round care for children, which parents and/or guardians often rely on to continue to work to provide for their families. Providers are extremely knowledgeable of the specific needs of the communities they serve, and offer instruction in languages other than English when needed. Our non-profit partners in New York City are able to provide this service partially due to funding that the state contributes to support the Universal Pre-K for All initiative. UJA appreciates the inclusion of the \$370 million in the FY21 Executive Budget that supports the Pre-K for All program in New York City.

UJA is grateful for the \$15 million included in the Executive Budget dedicated to expand state funded Pre-K across New York State in districts where three and four year olds do not have access to these programs. However, more funding is needed to achieve truly universal Pre-K across the state. As of early 2020, 77,000 four-year olds across the state still had no access to full-day Pre-K. UJA recommends an additional \$125 million be included in the budget which will be used to expand access to Pre-K for 15,000 preschoolers.

UJA also supports an inclusion of \$25 million in the budget to further assist districts attempting to expand to universal Pre-K by helping them to offer quality programs and overcome barriers to expansion. High regulatory standards established by the Department of Education for the state's Pre-K program have not been coupled with investments in infrastructure and quality improvement strategies needed to be addressed as expansion continues across the state. The \$25 million proposed would be used for three critical purposes: (1) Evidence-based strategies to attract, retain and support qualified teachers in all settings, including improved compensation, professional development, coaching and mentoring; (2) Funding implementation costs, such as equipping new classrooms with supplies and transportation costs and (3) investing in regional technical assistance centers to support districts outside of NYC to meet the highest quality standards while supporting partnerships between school districts and community based programs. This investment would provide the supports districts need to successfully implement the expansion of Pre-K.

Preschool Special Education Programs

In recent years, the underfunding of 4410 preschools in community based organizations has resulted in teachers at these schools being paid significantly less than what they would be compensated working in similar school district programs. In some cases, school districts can pay teachers on average \$20,000 to \$40,000 more than what teachers receive at 4410 preschools. Lack of adequate funding has negatively impacted 4410 preschools ability to maintain competitive salaries for their staff ultimately making it impossible to recruit and retain qualified teachers for their programs. This underfunding has caused more than 60 programs in community based organizations to close in recent years and more are at risk in 2020. Due to the closure of multiple programs, many children with disabilities do not have access to services at a special education preschool, despite being entitled to this specialized education. According to a report released by Advocates for Children, by spring 2020, New York City alone will need between 1,028 and 1,932 new preschool special education class seats to properly serve preschoolers with disabilities and ensure they are receiving services they are legally entitled to.¹ UJA supports an increase in the reimbursement rate for preschool special education 4410 programs by at least 10% to provide the resources programs need to continue to serve this vulnerable population of children.

Nonpublic School Funding

The Executive Budget includes funding for programs that serve as critical sources of aid for nonpublic schools across the state. UJA appreciates the proposed funding included in the FY2021 Executive Budget and the Governor's recognition of the role over 1,600 nonpublic schools play in educating approximately 400,000 children in New York State. UJA is grateful for increased funding totaling \$199 million for important programs like Mandated Service Reimbursement (MSR) and the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP).

With families increasingly concerned about security, now more than ever UJA appreciates the Executive Budget proposal of \$25 million in capital funding for security upgrades for vulnerable institutions, which includes nonpublic schools. We urge the legislature to include houses of worship in the list of institutions that are eligible to apply for this funding. Historically, the budget has allocated \$15 million annually for the Nonpublic School Safety Equipment (NPSE)

¹ https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/waiting_for_a_seat.pdf?pt=1

Grant. This translates into approximately \$37 per child. In response to recent events, New Jersey increased its allocation to \$150 per child for security, doubling its previous rate. UJA urges the legislature to double the NPSE Grant to \$30 million, to provide greater protections to all children.

Lastly, while we are grateful for the \$35 million investment in the Executive Budget for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, we also recognize the demand outstrips the amount of funds available for these programs. New York created the program, the first in the nation, to help nonpublic schools afford high-quality STEM teachers. The state included \$30 million for STEM programs in nonpublic schools in the adopted FY 2020 budget. As of August 1, 2018 the program had received 1,800 applications totaling \$81 million in request for STEM program funding. We urge the legislature to include an additional \$46 million (for a total of \$81 million) in funding for STEM programs in nonpublic schools in order to properly address the need to enhance these programs.

Adult Literacy Education (ALE)

ALE funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes. In New York State, there are over 3.5 million individuals who lack their high school diploma, English language proficiency or both. There are 15,000 New York City residents on a waitlist for adult literacy classes. Each of these programs strengthens the abilities of adults to compete in the job market and improve their financial well-being across New York State.

However, the Governor's Executive Budget Proposal cuts the addition \$1.5 million added by the Legislature in the FY2019-20 Enacted Budget, funding ALE at \$6.3 million. UJA respectfully requests support for the restoration of \$1.5 million and the investment of an additional \$17.2 million in ALE programs. This additional investment would raise ALE funding to \$25 million.

Changes to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) have resulted in a loss of funding for English Language and Civics instruction as this funding has now transitioned to supporting a new Integrated English Literacy Program. This transition and focus on post-secondary and employment outcomes for students has left thousands of individuals no longer able to benefit from WIOA services. In addition, the requirement for programs to demonstrate employment outcomes to qualify for WIOA Title II funding has created a barrier for thousands of English Language learners with lower levels of English language proficiency. ALE is one of the few state funding streams able to address the current and expected new need by supporting community-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation programs. Expanding ALE would allow the State to serve an additional 10,000 learners, helping to fill the gap created by changes to WIOA-funded programs.

Conclusion

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist our state's most vulnerable and neediest individuals and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your consideration. Please contact Faith Behum behumf@ujafedny.org or 212-836-1338 with any questions.