

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 2022-2023**

**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 more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA has more than 50,000 engaged donors in the New York area, supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services, and allocates over \$150 million each year to strengthen Jewish life, combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being and respond to crises here and across the globe.

Pre-Kindergarten

UJA's non-profit partners provide Pre-K programs to young children across New York City, Westchester and Long Island. All of UJA's non-profit partners that offer Pre-K services provide a wide range of programs and resources to their communities. These programs offer extended hours and year-round care for children, which parents and/or guardians have relied on to continue to work to provide for their families during the pandemic. Providers are extremely knowledgeable of the specific needs of the communities they serve and offer instruction in languages other than English when needed. UJA's 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 continued investment provided in the FY 23 Executive Budget for the Universal Pre-K program in New York City.

The FY 22 Enacted Budget included \$105 million to expand access to Pre-K outside of New York City allowing two thirds of four-year-olds to have access to a free full day Pre-K program throughout New York State. Unfortunately, the FY 23 Executive budget did not include any funding to further expand Pre-K in districts outside New York City where not all four-year olds do not have access to free, state funded programs. **UJA recommends including \$500 million in the enacted FY23 budget, which will be used to expand access to free Pre-K for all children**

in the state. This funding will ensure community-based programs, where more than half of state funded Pre-K programs are overseen, have the funding they require to provide high quality programs.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic highlighted educational inequalities across New York State. In many cases, families who could afford additional assistance or tutoring for their children could address these barriers, while others, who could not, struggled to provide the supports their children needed to benefit from virtual, sporadic in-person learning or any educational opportunities in the case of fee for service Pre-K programs. Access to free, high-quality Pre-K is one of the most effective educational strategies for addressing this inequality, it is also one of the best ways to ensure that parents and guardians can be part of the workforce-one of the main components of ensuring New York State remains on the path to economic recovery.

UJA also supports the inclusion of \$10 million to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers (RTACs) in all economic development regions across New York State. RTACs will support current Pre-K programs and assist districts expanding early childhood education options, including Pre-K. They also coordinate the efforts of school districts and community-based programs that focus on improving outcomes for children and families in early childhood education programs.

Preschool Special Education Programs

In recent years, the underfunding of 4410 preschools (special education preschools for children with disabilities) 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. The ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated the financial challenges facing 4410 preschools (for example programs are responsible to fund their own PPE needs) making it difficult for many of these programs to remain solvent. Due to the closure of multiple programs, many children with disabilities do not have access to services at special education preschools, despite being entitled to this specialized education. In New York City alone, there is a projected shortage of 900 seats in special education preschools in the spring of 2022.

UJA supports the 11% rate increase in FY 2023 for preschool special education programs proposed in the Executive Budget. This additional funding will ensure preschool special education programs can remain open during the upcoming fiscal year.

New York State must also take steps to support the long-term stability of preschool special education programs. **UJA supports the Board of Regents' recommendation that the Enacted Budget include \$1.72 million to design a new rate-setting methodology, allowing for stakeholder input, to update how payment is calculated for special needs preschools.**

Nonpublic School Funding

While continuing to grapple with unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, nonpublic schools have been able to provide safe, in-person instruction. However, nonpublic schools have spent millions of dollars complying with state-imposed health protocols to maintain teaching and learning, whether remote or in-person. Costs so far, have ranged between tens of thousands of dollars to upwards of millions of dollars (depending on school size) for expenses include but are not limited to: hiring additional staff, technology upgrades, ongoing school sanitizing, physical protective barriers and signage, personal protective equipment, air filtration system upgrades and the ongoing testing of students and faculty for Covid infections as well as data collection and reporting. It is critical that nonpublic schools be reimbursed for these expenses and provided additional current-year funding to cover ongoing Covid-related costs.

Although nonpublic schools have been eligible for some of the federal emergency Covid-relief programs, funds fall dramatically short of what is needed – and certainly far below the per/pupil level of support which has been made available to public schools. As the impact of Covid continues to unfold, we urge the legislature to provide Covid relief to nonpublic schools in parity to the public school community, including broadband access, mental health support and other subsidized supports. Additionally, the use of allocated funds to support the many needs of nonpublic schools, and most specifically installing and improving HVAC systems which are key in air quality control of airborne viruses such as Covid, were denied to nonpublic schools. As New York continues to make great strides in containing the spread of Covid, we urge the legislature to ensure that the health and safety of the nonpublic school community is not left behind and that all schools are provided equal resources simultaneously and fully reimbursed for the cost of Covid-related expenses.

Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal reflects a much more positive financial outlook than a year ago. This economic upswing therefore enables lawmakers to support the state's nonpublic schools in a way that will help them fill the financial and programmatic gaps exacerbated by the pandemic. UJA appreciates the proposed funding included in the FY 23 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.

Health, Safety, & Security for Nonpublic Schools

Funding for the Nonpublic School Safety Equipment Grant Program (NPSE) has never been more critical as the program provides funds for at-risk institutions to prevent hate motivated violence, the latest example of the horrific incident at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas as well as to meet the ongoing challenges schools face with Covid in ensuring the health, safety and security of students, staff and community members who use school buildings. With families concerned about security, UJA is grateful to Governor Hochul for recommending a significant increase in funding, from \$15 million to \$45 million, for the NPSE program as well increasing the program's flexibility to enable schools to address an increasing array of health, safety and security challenges such as public health threats, remediation of hazardous conditions, and critical capital needs. Governor Hochul's recommended increase in support of NPSE will enable schools to more easily address their unmet needs and we urge the legislature to further add to its

support of the program. **UJA urges the legislature to include the increase in funding of \$45 million into the enacted budget.**

STEM Funding for Nonpublic Schools

UJA appreciates Governor Hochul recommending an increase in funding to support Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math education in our schools, from \$40 million to \$55 million. While this initiative has bolstered our schools' ability to offer rigorous STEM programs to better prepare students for competitive careers, it is clear that the demand for and rapid changes in STEM instruction is outpacing the state's support of the program. UJA asks that funding for the STEM reimbursement program increase this year. The importance of the STEM reimbursement program is evidenced by how many nonpublic schools have applied. By August 1, 2018, the state had received 1,800 applications totaling \$81 million, far beyond the current appropriation. **UJA urges increased support for the program toward \$100 million to meet current demand.**

EANS funding to GEERS

While the second and third stimulus packages included Covid relief funding for nonpublic schools, due to heavy restrictions including the limited time for procurement process placed on accessing the funds, much of the funding was and remains inaccessible by the schools. UJA is grateful that the Executive Budget authorizes any unobligated federal Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools funds to be used to reimburse nonpublic schools for allowable pandemic-related costs through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund.

MSR/CAP

UJA is grateful that that the Executive Budget maintains level funding of \$193 million available for Mandated Service Reimbursement (MSR) and the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP). **UJA urges the legislature to include \$193 million for MSR/CAP into the enacted budget.**

Adult Literacy Education (ALE)

ALE funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes and is one of the few state funding streams able to address the needs of lower-level learners. In New York State, there are 3.9 million individuals who lack their high school diploma, English language proficiency, or both.

UJA thanks the Governor for including \$7.8 million in ALE funding in the FY23 Executive budget for existing ALE programs, thus keeping ALE programs whole by providing level funding. UJA respectfully requests support for the investment of an additional \$15.6 million in ALE programs for a newly proposed ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund. This supplemental funding stream would be allocated to all programs currently receiving ALE funding, effectively tripling the funding for each contract. Increased investment in per-student funding in Adult Literacy Education, when strategically invested by programs in resources, services, and supports, will lead to greater outcomes and a wider range of impacts for adult literacy students, their families, and their communities. Proposed uses of this funding include: upgrading the program's own technology, internet, and digital access; upgrading the program's classroom facilities and infrastructure; increasing the number of full-time staff and teaching

positions and increasing the pay, benefits, and working conditions of teachers to achieve greater parity with K-12, and to cultivate a strong, stable adult education workforce.

Limited skills make it difficult for individuals to support their children in school, access health care, secure and maintain living-wage jobs, advocate for their rights as workers, and fully participate in the political process. The majority of adults in NYS with limited literacy skills are women and people of color; a majority are immigrants, including many who are undocumented; others are BIPOC who were born and raised in the US but do not have a high school level education. Many of these adults are currently on the frontlines of the pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities.

Adult literacy education is the key to economic security and social mobility. Median wages for adults with a high school diploma or its equivalent are 24% greater than for those without a diploma. Furthermore, higher levels of literacy are associated with greater health knowledge, more efficient use of healthcare services, and the ability to manage chronic health conditions and communicate with healthcare providers.

Over the past year, adult literacy programs have quickly and effectively pivoted to remote learning and support for their students, adapting class activities, providing information on the rapidly changing health crisis, and transforming programming to ensure that adult learners do not get left behind. Using online platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom, students are continuing to build their reading, writing, and math skills, preparing for their high school equivalency exams, and increasing their English conversational skills. Parents are being supported by their programs to take on a greater role in the education of their school-aged children, a role that has become critical during these times. The educational gains made over this time could prepare these adults to help restart the economy and ensure greater security for themselves and their families, rather than leaving them even more vulnerable and marginalized.

An investment of \$15.6 million in the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund would allow providers to better serve the over 5,600 New Yorkers enrolled in state funded ALE programs and UJA request the legislature's support.

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.