

**Testimony re: Budget Hearing – Elementary & Secondary Education**

Submitted to:

New York State Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Submitted by:

Tydie Abreu, Policy Analyst at Hispanic Federation and  
LEAD Coalition, a Project Powered by Hispanic Federation

January 26, 2022

Thank you, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and all other committee members, for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Tydie Abreu and I am the policy analyst for Hispanic Federation (HF); a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through programs and legislative advocacy. HF's testimony is also informed by the Latino Education Advocacy Directors (LEAD) Coalition, which consists of leading educational advocacy organizations committed to improving Latinx academic outcomes and opportunities in New York State. Created by the Hispanic Federation, the coalition works to highlight and address the educational needs of Latinx students in the following ways: identifying and supporting effective practice; public policy advocacy and research; and the advancement of a shared educational agenda.

I am here to advocate for Latinx students in New York, who are struggling to face the challenges that COVID-19 has posed to their learning and mental health. As we go into the third year of a global pandemic, we must ensure that students have not only the academic supports to ensure their success, but the non-academic supports that will enable their overall achievement and wellness. The pandemic resulted in a teacher shortage that has impacted school resources and a mental health crisis that has gravely impacted students' socio-emotional wellness. A new governor in this year's legislative session presents a unique opportunity to tackle policies we have yet to address or implement and to make significant investments in our education system to meet the direst needs of our children.

**High-Impact Investments for Latinx and Underserved Students:**

A crucial factor in student success is ensuring that faculty and staff are supported and have the necessary resources to carry out day-to-day activities. We are incredibly pleased to see that the executive budget includes fully funded foundation aid and investments to increase the teacher workforce. While these changes are a huge step in the right direction there is still much work to be done. Latinx students, Multilingual learners, students from mixed status families, and underserved students are still experiencing exacerbated inequities further magnified by the pandemic. Schools need significant funding to address the socio-emotional needs of students, to amplify opportunities for postsecondary and career readiness, and provide supports for multilingual learners and parent engagement. The legislature can ensure these investments are clearly appropriated in the adopted budget.

### **Investments for Parent Engagement**

In a survey conducted by the Hispanic Federation, we found over 60% of both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Hispanic parents believe there is a need for better communication from schools. Academic success does not stop in the classroom. It is critical that there are added resources for parent engagement and bridging the gaps for immigrant families and multilingual families as well. An added stressor for students who come from multilingual families is having to translate and communicate the assignments and announcements given by schools. Investments that enable schools to bolster their methods to reach families, particularly undocumented and mixed-status families who historically have been fearful to reach out for support is critical. Acknowledging and supporting the various demographics of families in each school will serve both the student and school by seeing better academic performance and student outcomes. Additionally, since “snow days” will be replaced with virtual learning, indicating that remote instruction is here to stay, it is crucial for parents to be meaningfully engaged in their children’s education. Parent engagement can only be possible with linguistically relevant supports that consider English language barriers that may prevent parents from helping their students academically.

### **Supports for Multilingual Learners (MLLs)/English Language Learners (ELLs) and Bilingual Teachers**



Supports for multilingual learners is another crucial investment. After English, Spanish is the second most spoken language in New York according to the 2020 Census. Failing to invest in multilingual learners will neglect an entire population of students. Additional investments in the state budget can ensure schools provide the additional materials, services, and faculty Multilingual Learners (MLLs) and English Language Learners (ELLs) need for academic success and college and career readiness. This includes consistent culturally competent interpretation/translation services. A recent data report from the State Education Department highlights that the state experienced a nearly 10% increase in Multilingual Learners over a three-year period. <sup>1</sup>To support these students, it is imperative for New York State to invest in a diverse teacher workforce to meet the needs of multilingual learners. Having more bilingual teachers and instructors willing to assist these students can provide them with alternative learning methods and ways to measure their academic progress. Intentional investments for MLLs/ELLs can provide schools the opportunity for additional professional learning to address the specific needs of MLLs/ELLs, including content in home languages. This lends to added parental engagement activities in English and in students' home languages, giving parents guidance on effective strategies to support their children's learning in and out of school.

### **Mental Health/Socio-Emotional Supports**

We commend the many legislators that support legislation to address the mental health needs of students. It is equally important for this commitment to be delineated in the state budget. As the pandemic continues, the intensity of long-term trauma is still prevalent for many students, but specially for Latinx and underserved students. At this point, it is urgent for the state to invest in hiring more staff support and focus on trauma-informed mental health workers for schools. Additionally, the appropriations must ensure that mental health counselors are trained in culturally relevant and linguistically diverse practices that meets the needs of our students. Schools must prioritize the immediate and long-term needs of students' mental health. The legislature can facilitate these support systems by prioritizing funding for bilingual counselors and/or professionals that address trauma-based needs and are culturally engaged within the

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/nysed\\_ell\\_mll\\_data-report\\_2018-2019-a.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/nysed_ell_mll_data-report_2018-2019-a.pdf)



communities. Access to mental health services and supporting students' social/emotional wellness improves the odds for children to succeed. This can also make a difference in long-term goals for youth to graduate from high school and have access to postsecondary and career opportunities.

### **College & Career Readiness:**

The mental and economic effects of the pandemic can be detrimental to students' goals to pursue higher education or careers that achieve economic stability. Before the pandemic, Latinx students were driving college enrollment numbers. Two years after the pandemic, this is no longer the case. The executive budget lacks bold investments in college and career readiness to ensure equitable learning that can bridge the achievement gap. Direct supports to enhance postsecondary attainment and access to career exploration/pathways are essential to ensure continued success after high school graduation. To mitigate lost post-secondary opportunities, school administrators, counselors, and educators must collaborate to support students at greater capacities and guide students' transition to college and career. Now more than ever, postsecondary and career readiness is interconnected with economic vitality, and we must ensure that as we move closer to a post-COVID-19 world, our students are presented with more opportunities for advancement. Redesigned courses create more clarity on pathways that lead to thriving careers. Integrating work-based learning supports through students' earlier years in middle and high school is also consequential for the long-term success for our students. The legislature should display their supports for these decisive investments in the budget.

In summation, the New York State Executive budget includes incredible investments in education, but there is still so much room for improvement. The Legislature must address these gaps in the budget and include supports for Latinx and underserved students by making investments that provide access to mental health/socio-emotional supports, increase parent engagement, expand supports for Multilingual Learners and English Language Learners, and improve resources to guide students towards fulfilling postsecondary and career opportunities. I thank you for your time and reemphasize the imperative to prioritize these investments and welcome any opportunities for partnership.