



United Federation of Teachers

A Union of Professionals

Testimony of Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, before the 2025 Joint Legislative Budget Committee regarding the governor’s proposed executive budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year

Good morning. My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). I want to thank both the Senate and the Assembly for this opportunity to discuss the proposed executive budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year and share our perspective on key initiatives.

On behalf of the more than 190,000 UFT members, I want to recognize Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for their strong leadership. I also want to recognize the support, guidance and commitment of their colleagues Senate Finance Chair Liz Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Chair J. Gary Pretlow, Senate Education Chair Shelley Mayer, Senate New York City Education Chair John Liu, and Assembly Education Chair Michael Benedetto.

I appreciate the opportunity to address Governor Kathy Hochul’s budget proposals and how they will affect education in New York.

Updating the Foundation Aid Formula

With the incoming federal administration threatening to cut funding to our highest-need students, the UFT stands ready to work with Gov. Hochul and the New York State Legislature to protect our students and school communities. We applaud the increase in state aid allocated to both New York City and New York State in the fiscal year 2025-26 executive budget. This increase in funding is critical as NYC strives to comply with the class-size law. In the past few weeks, the UFT has been reviewing over 750 class-size applications for funding submitted by schools with space to implement the class-size law. This bump in state aid will be used to hire additional teachers and set up additional classrooms that NYC district public schools need to lower class sizes.

Despite this increase in funding, we still must fix the Foundation Aid formula to ensure high-need schools get the necessary resources this year and in the future. As the UFT has said, the Foundation Aid formula is the cornerstone of how we fund New York’s schools, but in the years since 2007, the formula itself has not been updated, and it is now failing to provide our students with the education they deserve. The Rockefeller Institute for Government’s report on Foundation Aid included some promising recommendations on how to update the formula. However, it also included some highly problematic recommendations and omitted other critically important issues altogether.

The UFT is concerned that:

- The report failed to mention the inclusion of funding for students in temporary housing and foster care and for New York City’s class-size law.
- The report suggested a reduction in the number of years that English language learners (ELLs) are funded in schools and in the amount of funding per ELL.

- The report suggested the use of the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program to measure students in poverty, but this measure severely undercounts the number of students with economic needs. We know that census data systemically leaves out certain populations, such as students in temporary housing and foster care.
- The report also suggested the use of the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT) to create a new, locally specific regional cost index. The CWIFT does not accurately measure the costs in each district, as it is based on teacher salary schedules.

In addition to the specific aspects of the report mentioned above, we caution against arbitrarily selecting recommendations within the report to implement. As the report itself says, it has provided a menu of reforms but does not account for the impact of implementing those reforms all at once.

The UFT recommends a deeper dive into how to fix the Foundation Aid formula as well as the following updates and improvements to the formula:

- Include earmarked funds in the Foundation Aid formula for the implementation of the class-size law in New York City.
- Add weights to increase funding for the full range of high-need students, including those in poverty, temporary housing, foster care, all types of special education and English language learners.
- Update the formula to account for variations by region in the cost of education, including inflation, housing costs and teacher salaries.

Fixing Tier 6

We want to thank Gov. Kathy Hochul; Sen. Robert Jackson, chair of the Civil Service Committee; and Assembly Member Stacey Pheffer Amato, chair of the Governmental Employees Committee, for supporting our efforts to Fix Tier 6. As part of last year’s budget, we won a change to the final average salary calculation for Tier 6 members that will result in a higher pension benefit upon retirement. In 2022, Tier 6 vesting dropped from 10 to five years, guaranteeing a pension benefit for 85,000 Tier 6 members. These successes have been a result of our ongoing collaboration.

Keeping talented educators in the classroom and recruiting new educators is more important than ever. That is why the UFT asks that this year’s state budget build on previous work and allow Tier 6 members to retire at age 55 after 30 years of service.

Investing in the Education and Health Care Workforce

New York City and State are facing potentially crippling staffing shortages in health care and education. New York estimates it will need 180,000 teachers over the next decade and almost 40,000 more nurses by 2030. New York City was short over 1,400 paraprofessionals, educators who work with the most vulnerable students, this school year. We need to create a comprehensive strategy to address these shortages.

Investing in Career and Technical Education (CTE) is one way to address this crisis as these programs expand our state’s workforce. Additionally, NYC CTE programs are narrowing the racial achievement gap. In 2013, the gap between graduation rates of Black and white students in CTE

programs was 10.8%. By 2023, the gap between graduation rates of Black and white students in CTE programs had closed.¹

The UFT supports:

- Increasing the \$3,900/pupil funding cap in the Special Services Aid.
- Expanding funding to allow 9th-grade students to participate.
- Incentivizing colleges and industries to provide hands-on CTE experiences for high schoolers.
- Supporting a recruitment and retention campaign in partnership with the state to promote teaching and nursing as desirable careers.

We also want to create access to a career ladder for current workers.

The UFT supports:

- Increasing the starting salaries of our lowest-salaried workers.
- Providing and/or promoting financial incentives for qualified candidates to become paraprofessionals, teachers and orderlies.
- Creating tuition-free master's degree programs at CUNY and SUNY in education and nursing.
- Supporting Gov. Hochul's proposal to cover the tuition for those who enroll in associate degree programs in nursing, teaching, technology and other fields.

Nurses

NYU Langone Hospital–Brooklyn and hospitals across the state are refusing to abide by the safe staffing legislation that the Federation of Nurses/UFT and other unions fought so hard to enact. Safe staffing is integral to our nurses' abilities to do their jobs. We ask that the state enforce the safe staffing laws at NYU Langone Hospital–Brooklyn and hospitals across the state. We also ask that the state continue to support transparency surrounding attrition and vacancy rates of nurses, thus making it easier to properly staff hospitals.

The UFT also supports:

- Nurses negotiating with private hospitals.
- Adequate training for the newest nurses and the placement of them in lower-intensity units for their first year of work.
- Preventative mental health care for nurses.

Teacher Center

The UFT Teacher Center accelerates learning and empowers educators through embedded professional development tailored to each school's unique needs. The demand for Teacher Centers has skyrocketed in recent years, with the number of school-based sites rising 81% from 115 sites in the 2020–21 school year to 208 sites embedded in schools across New York City today. In 2023-24 alone, over 300,000 participants — educators, principals and parents — attended Teacher Center seminars and received over 120,000 hours of transformative professional learning.

This year, we are asking the Legislature to fund Teacher Centers statewide at \$40 million to ensure we will be able to grow our capacity to serve the diverse needs of school communities. We will

¹ Graduation Results, <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/graduation-results>, (2013 & 2023).

continue to expand and extend our support to educators who work with students with disabilities and English language learners. We will also increase our ability to offer dedicated instructional coaches to districts and to provide mentoring support to new teachers as they develop their professional expertise.

United Community Schools

Our United Community Schools (UCS) provide critical support for students and families. UCS schools focus on much more than just academics. They also focus on educator support, extended learning time, health and wellness, community engagement, academic support, and parent and family engagement. The 39 schools that UCS operates in New York City and Albany improve outcomes for over 19,000 families, leading to higher test scores, better attendance and more credits earned. They also have coordinated over 25,000 health and wellness visits just this year. To sustain this network of community schools, we ask that the state provide a grant of \$4 million, as well as an additional \$5 million to provide statewide technical assistance and support in UCS schools.

Charter Schools

Charter schools continue to take up space that public schools need to serve their students and to comply with New York City's class-size law. This is why the UFT asks that the state end the requirement that the district offer space in public school buildings to charters when that space is needed to lower that school's class sizes. We also ask that the state limit charter school grade-level expansions (S527), stop using public funds to pay for private facility space rented by charters (S423) and make the Board of Regents the sole authorizer in the state (S77).

Additionally, charters lack financial transparency and openly exploit loopholes for financial gain, which is why the UFT is asking that the state pass the charter school Transparency and Accountability Act (S4466/A4458 of 2024).

Child Care

We applaud Gov. Hochul's investment in and commitment to strengthening and increasing access to child care in New York. We support several of her proposals in this year's executive budget, including:

- The \$110 million Child Care Construction Fund and the creation of a substitute pool.
- The transition to a cost estimation model — and away from the market rate model — to provide funds to child care providers based on the true cost of care.
- Payment for enrollment instead of attendance.
- Increased differential payment rate for homeless and nontraditional hours of care (S4079/A1734 of 2024).
- Continued support and funding for the Facilitated Enrollment Child Care Project.

Cell Phones

We support Gov. Hochul's proposal to create distraction-free K-12 schools. The educators of New York City have been clear that they support a ban on student cell phones so long as they are not the first line of enforcement, enforcement is consistent and fair, schools have emergency contact lines

set up for parents and school districts, not individual schools, pay for the cost. We consider the \$13.5 million proposed by the governor an excellent starting point. We will work with the governor and our legislative partners to ensure school districts can cover the cost.

Housing

New York's leaders cannot afford to go another year without taking action on our state's housing crisis. Students and their families and educators all face steep rent increases, evictions and no affordable homeownership opportunities. To combat this, we must strengthen tenant protections, fund the Housing Access Voucher Program, and create new workforce housing in the public sector.

Generating New Revenue

We commend Gov. Hochul for her focus on and dedication to affordability and her extension of the millionaires' tax. The UFT has long called for additional sources of revenue to support education, the creation of workforce housing in the public sector and other vital community services. We believe the generation of new revenue will be more important than ever as we enter into a new federal administration.

We stand with NYSUT and other unions in saying this year's budget must find new sources of revenue to address New York's growing affordability crisis while maintaining the quality of its public services.

The UFT supports the following revenue raisers:

- Increase New York's top tax rates for those earning over \$5 million and over \$25 million by 0.5%.
- Increase the corporate tax rate by 1.75% and make these changes permanent.

These are not new proposals. In fact, the NYS Senate and Assembly proposed these very reforms in each of their one-house budgets last year. These small reforms would generate up to \$3 billion for the state to invest in education, workforce development, child care, transportation and housing.

Closing

Once again, thank you to all the members of the Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means, Senate Education, New York City Education and Assembly Education committees for hosting today's K-12 education budget hearing. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Legislature this year to ensure all our students receive what they need to excel. Thank you.