

Testimony to the Joint Education Committee
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To the esteemed members of the joint committee on education, my name is Ashara Baker, I am the New York State Director of the National Parents Union and the proud mom of a 3rd grader attending New York Public Schools. I stand before you today with a mix of frustration and unwavering resolve, compelled by the urgent need to address the critical condition of education in our state. The data, as presented in our National Parents Union latest report, does not lie: **New York is failing our children.**

For too long, long-standing inequities, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with vague policies and limited accountability, are jeopardizing the futures of generations of New York kids. We cannot afford to delay action any longer.

Our annual report outlines the stark reality of an antiquated New York education system, highlighting an increase in child poverty and barriers to economic mobility. As parents, we are not just pointing out problems; we are here with real, evidence-based solutions.

In 2023, only about 52% of 3rd through 8th-grade students in New York public schools were proficient in math, and approximately 48% were proficient in reading. The 2023 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data reveals that in Grade 4, 42% of all students are below basic in reading, and 34% are below basic in math. In Grade 8, 30% of all students are below basic in reading and 40% are below basic in math. This raises serious concerns about whether our students are adequately prepared for post-secondary success and economic mobility. While the state has made historic investments in foundation funding, professional development for teachers and a vague commitment to evidence based curriculum through the NY Board of Regents- there is still much to do to guarantee that every child across NY has access to a high quality public education that prepares them for a life of opportunity.

In the Big 5 school districts, proficiency rates are alarmingly low. For example, in Rochester, only 11% of 3rd-grade students are proficient in reading, and 14% are proficient in math. In Buffalo, 24% of 3rd graders are proficient in reading, and 23% are proficient in math. New York City has the highest proficiency rates in these districts, with 50% of 3rd graders proficient in reading, and 58% proficient in math. There are 64 school districts that have less than 10% of their elementary students proficient in math across the state.

As NPU NY, we recognize that families are facing real challenges across the state. Nearly one in five New York children live in poverty. This is a systemic failure demanding immediate and effective action and we are proud to see the Governor's budget include the Empire Tax Credit. Almost half of those children are in deep poverty, living in households with incomes 50% below the federal poverty line. This crisis is exacerbated by the fact that since 2021, child poverty has continued to decrease nationally but not in New York.

I am excited to report that we do in fact, have solutions to offer for the challenges that NY families and students face. We have examples from other states who created structures of high expectations and supports for schools. The states that have made progress with academic growth did so because they specifically allocated money to evidence based

programs like high impact tutoring, high quality instructional material and professional development opportunities for new and career teachers.

As a New Yorker, living in the greatest state in the nation, we owe it to kids and families to guarantee them a high quality public education. We owe it to our families to relieve them of economic stress and guarantee a pathway to propensity in the empire state.