



United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

Testimony of Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, before the 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Committee regarding the governor's proposed executive budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year

Good morning. My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). I thank both the Senate and Assembly for the opportunity to discuss the proposed executive budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year.

On behalf of the UFT's more than 200,000 members, I thank Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for their strong leadership. I also want to recognize 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 for their continued support and commitment to serving New Yorkers.

I would like to take this time to discuss Gov. Kathy Hochul's budget proposals and how they will affect education in New York City and across the state.

Fixing Tier 6

Without talented educators, our students cannot receive the high-quality education they deserve. A robust pension benefit is one of the surest ways that we can keep talented educators in the classroom and recruit new educators to the profession. However, Tier 6 pension benefit reductions are contributing to the teacher shortage in New York State.

As it stands, educators in Tier 6 must work until they are 63 years old to receive an unreduced pension. For the many educators who enter the profession at age 22, this means they will be in the classroom for 41 years. Being an educator is physically and emotionally demanding; we bring our full selves to school each day and give everything we have to our students. When they consider being in the classroom for over 40 years, educators may fear burnout, making this career path less desirable.

We cannot afford to lose any current or prospective educators, especially as we move toward full implementation of the state class size law in New York City schools. We must allow Tier 6 members to retire at age 55, with 30 years of service, without any reductions. 30 years in the classroom is a full career, and it must be acknowledged as such.

We are grateful to Gov. Kathy Hochul; Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie; Sen. Robert Jackson, chair of the Civil Service Committee;

and Assembly Member Stacey Pheffer Amato, chair of the Governmental Employees Committee, for supporting our past efforts to Fix Tier 6. Two years ago, 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. We could not have achieved either of these wins without close collaboration, and we are ready to work with you to make the retirement age 55.

Child Care

The high cost of child care has contributed heavily to the affordability crisis in New York City and across the state. The UFT applauds Gov. Hochul for her historic investment in universal child care for children under the age of five. We are grateful for her recognition that New York families deserve affordable, safe child care and that the provision of this care can be achieved only with the inclusion of home-based providers.

The UFT currently represents 8,000 home-based child care providers who play a critical role in our ability to offer care to families in their own neighborhoods. These providers also make it possible to offer culturally responsive care and nontraditional hours of care, which is crucial for parents who work hours other than 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Our home-based providers deserve good working conditions and fair, reliable compensation, which means getting paid according to their enrollment numbers rather than attendance numbers. The state previously made a commitment to pay providers for enrollment, and we request that it uphold this commitment this year and in the future.

To further ensure all families can access quality child care, the UFT recommends:

- Increasing the salaries for providers by recognizing their role as our children's first educators
- Phasing in the replacement of the market rate methodology with a model that captures the true cost of providing quality care
- Increasing the special needs rate by moving to a higher base rate and removing the 15% market rate cap
- Ensuring automatic rate adjustments for all care types and ensuring annual automatic renewal for special needs rates
- Increasing and automatically applying differential payment rates for families experiencing homelessness
- Increasing rates for nontraditional hours of care ([S4079/A1734](#) of 2024)
- Continuing to fund the Facilitated Enrollment Child Care Project
- Allowing home-based providers to own and operate multiple child care businesses

The UFT looks forward to partnering with Gov. Hochul, Mayor Mamdani and you all to fulfill the promise of truly universal child care and to ensure the successful rollout of 2-Care for families across New York City.

Foundation Aid

With the federal administration cutting funding to our highest-need students, the UFT stands ready to work with you all to protect our students and school communities. Protecting our students includes updating and fully funding the Foundation Aid formula to reflect the actual needs and costs of providing our children with an education in New York City. The current formula does not treat New York City students fairly. The changes made to the Foundation Aid formula as part of last year's budget agreement resulted in New York City receiving \$314 million less in aid than expected. This year, based on the executive budget, New York City is set to receive a smaller increase in Foundation Aid than we have in years. Without the adjustments we are requesting below, we anticipate that New York City students will again be shortchanged by hundreds of millions of dollars — and this is simply unacceptable.

Over the past two years, the state and the city have worked to address the affordability crisis faced by New Yorkers; we've provided record tax relief for parents and school meals for all students. However, providing these essential services for our students and families becomes increasingly difficult when the Foundation Aid formula does not account for the high needs and resources required to provide students with a sound basic education.

The UFT recommends the following adjustments to the Foundation Aid formula to ensure that it treats New York City students fairly:

- Updating the Regional Cost Index to reflect the high costs of education in NYC ([S8125/A9049](#))
- Increasing the weight for the highest-need English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) without reducing funding for more advanced ELLs and SWDs
- Adding a weight for students who are in foster care or experiencing homelessness ([S8139/A9048](#))

New Revenue

As we face federal funding deficits and the increasingly high cost of living in New York, it is critical that this year's budget find new sources of sustainable revenue from the ultrawealthy. To ensure that New York is a state in which everyone can thrive, we must maintain and expand the quality of its public services.

The UFT stands with NYSUT in calling for the state to:

- Increase New York's top tax rates for those earning over \$5 million by 1%
- Increase the corporate tax rate by 1.9% for corporations with over \$5 million in profits
- Capture New York's fair share of federal taxes avoided by multinational corporations that shift profits to foreign tax havens

These reforms are overwhelmingly supported by the public and would generate approximately \$5 billion in revenue for the state to invest in child care, education, workforce development, transportation and housing.

Charter Schools

Charter schools continue to use space that public schools need to serve their students and to comply with New York City's class size law. Over the past year, every single school in the city told us what they needed to lower class sizes for their students, and hundreds of schools reported that they needed more space to comply. In the last two years, over 750 public schools have applied for class size funding, with many finding creative ways to repurpose spaces in their buildings to create more instructional space. However, some schools have reported that the co-located charter schools in their buildings occupy space they need, making class size compliance more challenging. This year we anticipate an even higher volume of applications, and reaching our compliance targets will require even more classroom space.

This is why the UFT is asking that the state no longer require the district to offer space in public school buildings to charters if the space is needed to lower that school's class sizes. We also ask that the state limit charter school grade-level expansions ([S527/A6891](#)), stop using public funds to pay for private facility space rented by charters ([S423/NSA](#)), eliminate charters targeting newly constructed buildings to avoid the co-location community hearing process ([S1423/NSA](#)) and make the Board of Regents the sole authorizer in the state ([S77/A6112](#)). The UFT also suggests that the state pass the Transparency and Accountability Act ([A6884/NSA](#)) to prevent charters from openly exploiting loopholes for financial gain and operating without financial transparency.

Finally, as the federal government attacks public education across the country, we must stand strong. We need to protect our public schools by preventing the federal voucher program from coming to New York State.

Invest in the Education and Health Care Workforce

New York City and State are facing ongoing staffing shortages in education and health care. New York estimates it will need 180,000 teachers over the next decade; 97% of hospitals reported a nursing shortage last year; and for years, New York City has been short

thousands of paraprofessionals, educators who work with the most vulnerable students.¹ We need to create a comprehensive strategy to address these shortages, similar to the one used to hire over 3,500 teachers in New York City this school year as part of the effort to reduce class sizes.

Investing in an expansion of career and technical education (CTE) for these professions and others is one way to address this crisis as these programs expand our state's workforce.

The UFT supports:

- Fully funding last year's increase to special services aid, including the addition of 9th grade
- Creating clear career advancement pathways for LPNs to obtain their master's degree, to build out the pathway for high school students to complete nursing programs
- Incentivizing colleges and industries to provide hands-on CTE experiences for high schoolers
- Developing a statewide recruitment and retention campaign to promote teaching and nursing as desirable careers

We also want a career ladder for current workers. To do this, the UFT supports:

- Increasing the starting salaries of our lowest salaried workers
- Providing and 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 building upon the New York Opportunity Promise scholarship to also cover the tuition for those who enroll in associate degree programs in nursing, even when that individual has previously obtained a post-secondary degree (covering individuals pursuing a new career path to nursing)
- Supporting the expansion of teacher apprenticeship programs to provide more opportunities for paraprofessionals and substitutes to become full-time teachers, especially in shortage areas such as special education

Nurses

The Federation of Nurses/UFT has been at the forefront of enforcing the safe staffing laws that we and other unions fought to enact. For the 16,000 nurses we represent across New

¹ <https://www.chwsny.org/commentary-new-york-needs-more-community-health-workers-heres-how-to-expand-their-ranks/>

York State, safe staffing is integral to their ability to do their jobs and provide comprehensive care. Despite these laws, hospitals like NYU Langone Hospital–Brooklyn continue to disregard safe staffing ratios. Through our most recent contract, we won about \$1 million worth of back pay for nurses forced to work short-staffed shifts and created an expedited arbitration process to ensure these nurses are compensated in a timely manner. However, we ask that the state continue to enforce safe staffing laws so that we aren't forced to go to arbitration in the first place. We also ask that the state continue to support transparency surrounding attrition and nurse vacancies, thus making it easier to properly staff hospitals.

To continue to support nurses, the UFT asks that the state:

- Enforce safe staffing laws at hospitals across the state
- Ensure hospitals provide the appropriate level of security for the physical safety of personnel, including nurses, both inside the building and off-site caring for patients
- Support nurses negotiating with private hospitals
- Support transparency surrounding the attrition and vacancy rates of nurses
- Support adequate training for the newest nurses and place them in lower-intensity units for their first year of work
- Support preventative mental health care for nurses
- Ensure there is a nurse in every school building ([S6779/A8377](#))
- End mandatory overtime for homecare workers ([S7994/A8615](#))

UFT Teacher Center

The UFT Teacher Center empowers educators through professional development tailored to their unique needs. The Teacher Center has 189 sites and 203 site coaches embedded in schools across NYC. Last year, we provided seminars for more than 341,000 parents, educators and principals, amounting to 126,000 hours of transformative professional development.

Additionally, over the past two years, the Teacher Center has played an integral part in the rollout of the NYC Reads/Reading for All initiative. We have had coaches in schools year-round, providing implementation support to teachers as they navigate new curricula and helping them dig deeper into units, lessons and assessments with online and in-person support. We have also expressed concern to the DOE about the initial rollout of the NYC Solves curriculum, noting the need to ensure that students have the background knowledge to access the curriculum and that teachers have the flexibility to modify it to meet their students' needs.

A critical component of all Teacher Center support centers on analyzing student work to inform and adjust instruction. We guide teachers in examining student responses, misconceptions, and solution strategies to identify trends in understanding and gaps in learning. This analysis drives instructional decisions such as selecting follow-up tasks, determining when to revisit or extend concepts, planning targeted questioning, and adjusting pacing or scaffolds. By grounding instructional choices in authentic student evidence, teachers are better positioned to respond to student thinking and maintain high cognitive demand while ensuring access for all learners. We have reached out to the new mayor and chancellor to offer our assistance in developing a math curriculum and professional development that is better tailored to New York City's students' needs. We are also eager and ready to partner with Gov. Hochul and the state to provide this type of professional development and curriculum support as they fulfill their commitment to training educators in instructional best practices for numeracy and evidence-based math instruction this year.

This year we are asking the Legislature to:

- Provide level funding for Teacher Centers statewide at \$21.4 million
- Build on the progress made with the science of reading by funding one-on-one demonstration math coaching by teachers for teachers in the classroom to support evidence-based math instruction this year

With this support, we will continue to both expand our curriculum work and to continue ensuring that educators who work with students with disabilities and English language learners receive the guidance they need to make these resources available to their students. 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

The 39 community schools that United Community Schools (UCS) operates provide extended learning time, educator support, community and family engagement, and health and wellness visits for over 18,000 students and families. In addition to improving test scores and helping students earn more credits, UCS schools address the holistic needs of every child.

UCS schools also improve attendance rates, which is particularly important as chronic absenteeism and low attendance have become more prevalent in the past few years. The increased focus on improving attendance across the state is incredibly important, and our community schools and UCS stand ready to help expand the practices that have allowed them to address these issues in New York City and elsewhere. Our union's UCS team also benefits from its collaboration with other UFT programs that have shown a positive effect on absenteeism. These include our strong advocacy for expanded career and technical

education opportunities (as noted above), as well as the work we have done to support our immigrant families and students as they face current federal threats to their right to a public education.

We ask that the state provide a grant of \$4 million to sustain this network of community schools and allocate an additional \$5 million to provide expanded statewide technical assistance and support in UCS schools. We also ask for \$100 million in categorical aid to expand the number of community schools in the state.

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.

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 continuing our collaboration with the Legislature this year to ensure all our students receive what they need to excel. Thank you.