

Assembly Budget Hearing Testimony

Thank you, Chair and members of the Assembly, for the opportunity to testify today. I am Lasana Tunica-El, Sr. Deputy Director of Campaigns at Educators for Excellence-New York. E4E-NY is a teacher-led organization with over 18,000 members across NYC, working to ensure that educators' voices are at the center of the policies that impact their classrooms, profession, and students.

We sincerely appreciate your sustained leadership on education and your continued commitment to ensuring that New York students and educators are equipped to succeed. We also appreciate the Governor's focus this year on key issues affecting students and families, including early childhood care, mental health, and expanding academic support. As the Assembly considers the Executive Budget and moves toward a final state budget, we respectfully offer our perspective on how targeted investments aligned with key legislative priorities can help advance outcomes for students across New York.

1. Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction: Aligning Policy + Funding

Literacy instruction lies at the heart of academic success. Bills like **A78 (Carroll)** and **A3937 (Simon)** take critical steps toward ensuring that literacy programming across the state is evidence-based and aligned with state standards, and that teacher preparation includes structured, explicit approaches proven to improve reading outcomes.

Governor Hochul's Executive Budget includes some investments that touch on these issues, including **\$9 million for literacy and math tutoring in high-need districts** and **\$2 million for math instructional training**, which signals a recognition of academic achievement challenges. Additionally, the budget proposes a **\$779 million (3%) increase in Foundation Aid**, and funding for statewide library and learning resources, which support educational access more broadly.

However, the scope of existing investments is not yet sufficient to deliver on the scale of literacy reform embedded in A78 and A3937. Specifically:

- Professional learning tied to **evidence-based literacy instruction** remains underfunded. To ensure true implementation, we recommend **\$20 million for job-embedded professional learning** that focuses on evidence-based reading instruction, particularly in high-need districts where teacher supports are most critical.
- State policy and legislative leadership must be paired with **funding for high-quality, evidence-aligned instructional materials**. We recommend **\$15 million to support districts in adopting and scaling high-quality literacy curricula aligned to the science of**

reading.

- To support teacher preparation aligned to evidence-based literacy, we recommend **\$26 million** to strengthen alignment between teacher preparation programs and state standards on structured literacy.

2. Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline: Recruitment, Retention & Diversity

Bolstering the educator workforce is essential not just for literacy instruction but for the entire K-12 system. Too many districts, particularly those serving historically underrepresented and high-need student populations, continue to experience shortages of qualified teachers, especially bilingual educators.

Legislation such as **A5777 (Hyndman)** and **A334 (Cruz)** would establish paid, practice-based pathways to recruit and retain underrepresented and bilingual teachers—an investment in both equity and teacher workforce stability.

The Governor's priorities, as reflected in the Executive Budget and her State of the State messaging, include supporting the workforce broadly. For example, continued efforts to expand access to early childhood education and Universal Pre-K (with substantial child care investments) are indirectly tied to the teacher pipeline by expanding early learning opportunities and potentially increasing the demand for qualified early childhood educators. In 2026 the Governor's agenda includes **\$4.5 billion in childcare and pre-K expansion** efforts statewide, including *advancing universal Pre-K access and expanding childcare subsidies*.

But direct investment in educator preparation remains limited at the state level. To make the workforce pipeline a durable state priority, the Assembly should consider:

- Providing **start-up funding for the Underrepresented Teachers of Tomorrow program (A5777)** and **Bilingual Teachers of Tomorrow program (A334)** to establish paid teacher residency and apprenticeship pathways.
- Aligning these investments with recruitment incentives, retention bonuses, and targeted support in *hard-to-staff districts*, maximizing impact on teacher supply and student outcomes.

These programs will expand the pathway into teaching for historically underrepresented groups and bilingual educators, helping close staffing gaps and better reflecting the diversity of New York's students.

3. Educator Diversity: Structural Supports & Data-Driven Decision Making

A diverse educator workforce strengthens outcomes for students of all backgrounds.

The task force established under **A.5247/S.2505 (Solages/Brisport & companion)** would provide a comprehensive, data-driven examination of barriers to recruiting, retaining, and supporting a diverse educator workforce in New York.

Although this initiative does not require the same scale of funding as instructional or workforce pipeline investments, it does require adequate support for research, planning, stakeholder engagement, and reporting. Providing funding for the task force will ensure that legislators and the State Education Department have actionable data to inform future policies and investments.

We encourage the Assembly to support a modest appropriation dedicated to:

- Staffing and operations of the educator diversity task force.
- Collection and analysis of data around hiring, layoffs, retention, and preparation pathways by race, language, subject area, and region.

This aligns with broader Assembly goals around equity, inclusion, and evidence-based policymaking.

4. Connecting Literacy & Workforce Priorities With Hochul's Educational Agenda

Governor Hochul's State of the State and Executive Budget demonstrate commitment to education through **historic school aid increases, expansion of pre-K and child care services, tutoring programs, and mental health supports**. These investments are welcome, but they are **broad**, and many lack an explicit connection to evidence-based instructional improvement and teacher workforce development.

For example:

- The Executive Budget proposes a **\$779 million increase to fully fund Foundation Aid and \$9 million for literacy and math tutoring** targeted to high-need districts.
- The Governor's broader agenda includes mental health expansions and educational infrastructure supports, as well as universal pre-K and childcare expansions.

Yet the specific instructional and workforce supports called for in A78, A3937, A5777, and A334 are not meaningfully reflected in current state funding. The Assembly has an opportunity to strengthen these connections by:

- **Directing a portion of the increased Foundation Aid toward evidence-based instructional supports**, such as sustained professional learning and curriculum adoption resources.
- **Reallocating or augmenting tutoring and instructional support funds** so that evidence-based literacy becomes a central investment focus, not a secondary add-on.
- **Connecting preschool and childcare expansions with workforce pathways** that prepare and incentivize educators to serve in early education and K-12 classrooms—creating continuity in the educational pipeline.

This integrated approach would bridge policy priorities across state Executive and Legislative branches, translating broad support for education into concrete, measurable action that directly improves teaching and learning.

Closing: A Collaborative Path Forward

In closing, we appreciate the progress we have seen in the Governor's proposed budget and in the Assembly's ongoing leadership. But we also recognize that achieving excellence and equity in New York's public schools requires aligning policy with purposeful investment. Supporting A78, A3937, A5777, A334, and A5247/S2505 with corresponding budget investments will accelerate literacy achievement, strengthen teacher preparation and diversity, and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for all students.

We look forward to working with the Assembly throughout this budget process to ensure that families, educators, and communities across New York are well-served by the final state budget. Thank you for your time and consideration.