



**Testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education
by Marina Marcou-O'Malley, Co Executive Director,
Alliance for Quality Education**

Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, chairs Mayer and Benedetto, members of the joint budget hearing on education, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Marina Marcou-O'Malley. I am the co-executive director of the Alliance for Quality Education, a statewide coalition of community groups, dedicated to organizing low income Black, brown, and immigrant parents to advocate for the wellbeing of their children, starting at birth and throughout school years to graduation. We are committed to education for liberation, translating to racial, economic, and social justice for all.

The executive budget for FY 2027 includes funding increases in education that are welcome and necessary. It unfortunately does not include changes to the Foundation Aid formula that are also necessary.

We are pleased that the executive budget:

- **funds Foundation Aid at \$779 million, with the overall school aid increase at \$1.6 billion,**
- proposes a minimum increase of 1% for all school districts,
- and, after years of advocacy, there is an investment and proposed changes in pre-K aid that will make reaching universal levels for four year olds easier statewide.

There are also changes that the executive budget does not make, changes that must be enacted in the final budget so our public education system continues to make progress in the 21st century in a reality that is ever changing.

We would be remiss if we did not state that there is in fact a significant recognition that our public education system requires a strong early care and learning system; the two must absolutely

communicate with each other. Without a significant investment in the early years of a child's life, we are declining to maximize all the positive effects and forgo a return on investment like none other.¹

Foundation Aid

The amount of Foundation Aid proposed is approximately \$60 million² above what current law requires, with a guaranteed 1% increase for all school districts. We welcome this proposal and urge the legislature to go a step further in making changes to the formula that both the Rockefeller report on Foundation Aid made in 2024 as did the State Aid proposal of the State Board of Regents, which many advocates supported.

The State Board of Regents recommended this year a 2% increase for school districts adjusted by need. We believe that is the right approach for Foundation Aid. In addition, they proposed changes in the Foundation Aid formula to update the weighting for English Language Learners by increasing it to 0.60 from 0.40, and adding one at 0.12 to support school districts serving students experiencing homelessness. AQE fully supports these recommendations and urges you to include them in your proposal and in the final state budget. The Regents proposal adds another \$283 million to Foundation Aid.

We would strongly recommend that you also update the regional cost index (RCI). Last year's final budget included an upwards adjustment for the regional cost index value for Westchester county, a change that was necessary for the school districts in the county to receive an adequate amount of Foundation Aid. This year, you must adjust the RCI upward for all regions, starting with New York City, which was shortchanged by the changes in the poverty counts last year. New York City received \$319 million less of its Foundation Aid increase than was projected in the November 2024 publication of school aid by the State Education Department. This year, these proposed changes to the RCI statewide will bring a much needed increase across the board to address rising costs, mostly driven by inflation and the federal context.

The executive proposal includes a number of other initiatives that address the educational process. We recommend that you listen to what the experts say about these initiatives and fund them adequately. AQE believes that differentiation in instruction and giving educators the flexibility to do so, address all students' needs in a way that helps them thrive. When students see themselves reflected in the diversity of the educators and staff in their schools, they are more likely to feel welcomed, want to stay in school, and strive to do better. We support these initiatives.

Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Bill (A118/S134): Schools must use proven alternatives to suspension that correct misbehavior and keep students in the classroom. The state must invest in

¹ <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/press-release/what-does-research-really-say-about-preschool-effectiveness>

² <https://www.regents.nysed.gov/sites/regents/files/SA%20-%20Regents%20State%20Aid%20Proposal.pdf>

training for educators and school personnel, and ensure full Foundation Aid funding is in place to support the behavioral, emotional, and academic needs of all students. The Solutions Not Suspensions coalition is asking for \$50 million to be part of the budget to accompany the bill language and to ensure that students receive the services they need, instead of being pushed out.

NYC School Governance

An integral part of our work on equity is elevating the voices of parents and ensuring meaningful engagement in the education process, including school governance. AQE supports a clear and planned phase-out of Mayoral Control. Since Mayoral Control was enacted in New York City, every Mayor's leadership style has continuously shut out the voices of parents, students, teachers, and taxpayers, while causing shifts in the direction of the Department of Education so frequent that policy initiatives do not last long enough to be fully implemented or properly evaluated.

Specifically:

1. Establish Two-Year Transitional Extension of Mayoral Control

Provide a limited, two-year extension solely to allow a NYC-based commission to research, design, and plan for the implementation of a new, democratic school governance system.

2. Reduce the number of Mayoral appointees to the Panel for Education Policy (PEP) so they are not the majority, and then Repeal §2590-B.a.1.D

Currently, the Mayor appoints the Chancellor and 13 of 23 PEP members, ensuring near-automatic approval of policies regardless of evidence or community impact. 5 members are elected by CEC presidents and 5 are appointed by borough presidents. Reducing the number of Mayoral appointees to 9 (and total PEP members to 19) would move us towards a more balanced PEP that would require collaboration, elevate community voices, and ensure that decisions reflect student needs. Allow the PEP to select its own chair. A PEP no longer controlled by the mayor will be able to appoint its own chair, who has a mandate from the whole body, not only the mayor.

3. Establish transparent oversight and accountability

Implement strong, independent oversight – including an Independent Inspector General and Ombudsperson – to review governance decisions and prevent financial mismanagement, abuse of power, and corruption.

4. Increase Student Representation: Students must have meaningful leadership positions and representation in education policy decisions that affect their futures. Change the state law to authorize high school juniors and seniors to vote on City-Wide Education Councils and PEP, and ensure they have independent support and mentorship to develop their leadership. Increase the pool of eligible students and create a democratic process for youth to vote on who should represent them in governance bodies. NYCPS should subsequently create more transparency and support by creating a centralized folder for notes, documents, timelines, and agendas. NYCPS should also provide mentorship support connecting youth to an adult mentor and a contracted and qualified CBO, ensuring at least one meeting with each student prior to each PEP meeting and vote.

Lastly, the NYC school governance issue does not belong in the budget process. We urge you to decouple the renewal process from the state budget and prevent it from being used as a bargaining chip. We support reauthorization of the mayoral control for two years, with the aforementioned changes and a plan, including creation of a commission in NYC to create such a plan, to create a more democratic system.

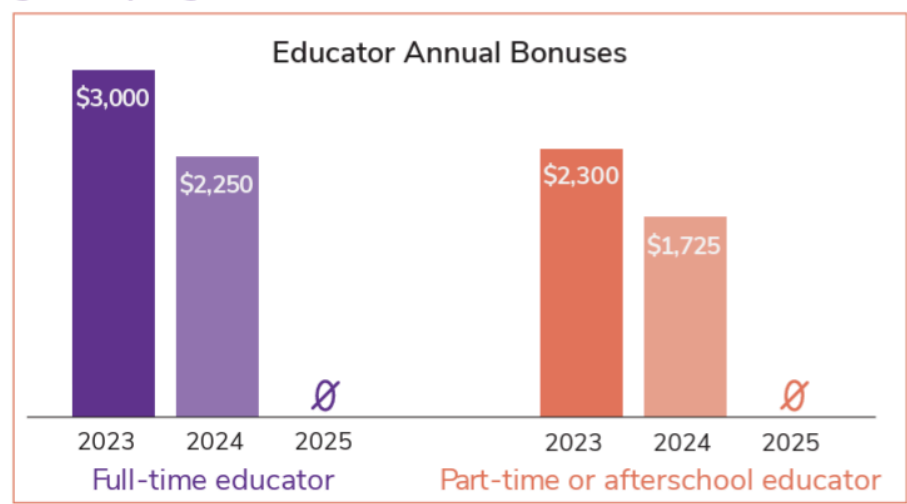
End Jim Crow Education in East Ramapo: The state budget must incorporate reforms from Bill A10407/S09833 to empower public school families, repair crumbling infrastructure, hire bilingual educators, ensure access to quality classroom instruction and materials, and end the systemic racism embedded in its school governance and finances.

Pre-Kindergarten and Child Care

Early childhood education is the foundation of our education system. We believe that pre-Kindergarten should be universal and free, open to all three- and four-year-olds that want to attend. We believe that child care should be universal to all children, regardless of immigration status. And, we believe that either system will not succeed if we do not pay educators not only a living wage, but a thriving one that is comparable to that of their K-12 counterparts.

Ensure that the executive proposal for Pre-K Expansion statewide is enacted and ensure that early educators are paid adequately

2025: New York ended child care workforce retention grants program



Source: New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Guidance Document: Workforce Retention Grant Additional Award. (2024); Solicitation of Interest (SOI), Workforce Retention Grant Program. (2023).

The executive budget includes a \$431 million increase for UPK aid for 2026-27 school year, as well as funding to fill in the gaps for pre-K for three-year-olds in NYC, for a total of \$561 million for pre-K. The proposal includes raising rates for all school districts to \$10,000 per child or their selected Foundation Aid per pupil amount, whichever is higher. We are in support of this proposal and encourage you to adopt it. As the report we published in the fall with our partners at The Children’s Agenda, indexing pre-K rates to Foundation Aid and ensuring that districts with means add their local contribution is necessary to sustain the universal pre-K system.

In addition, school districts that contract with community-based organizations (CBOs) to administer the pre-K program do not provide an adequate amount for teachers to be paid a thriving wage, condemning the teachers that work for these CBOs to poverty wages. Ensure equitable distribution of pre-K funding to community-based organizations and family child care programs to ensure continuity of learning for children that honors families' choices. This is where the pre-K system and the child care system intersect. These CBOs, regardless of setting, center, or residential setting, offer pre-K but also have infant and toddler programs. The educators working in these settings do not make enough to make ends meet, which, in turn, forces them out of the field. As a result, many programs do not operate at capacity because of staff shortages. This is why you should be supportive of a permanent workforce compensation fund to provide a wage supplement to all early educators. The executive budget includes NO funding for the early childhood workforce.

Need Robust Investments in Child Care and Early Education Workforce³:

Early education or child care educators are among the lowest paid workers of the care economy, earning less than 97% of other professions in New York.⁴ Early care and learning programs have closed because they cannot sustain themselves. Now the governor is correctly making an investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides a voucher or subsidy to all families that have children 0-13 and meet all the requirements, but if investments in the workforce are not made, even families that have vouchers will not be able to find anyone to provide the care. **The early education and child care workforce needs a \$1.2 billion investment this year in a permanent wage supplement fund. Until there is more investment in the workforce, there will not be enough programs to accommodate eligible families.**

In New York's 2026-2027 Budget, We Call on New York Leaders to Make the Following Investments in Child Care⁵ and Pre-K:

Build upon the Governor's strong child care proposals by providing ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers rates adequate to pay the workforce a thriving wage. (\$1.2B)

- Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income (S.5533 (Brisport)/A.492 (Hevesi); and
- Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.

Adopt the Governor's proposed \$1.2B recurring investment in New York's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists.

³<https://scaany.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Workforce-2026-one-pager-Schuyler-Center.pdf>

⁴ <https://rockinst.org/blog/five-things-to-know-about-the-care-workforce/>

⁵ <https://www.ageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/NYS-Child-Care-for-All.pdf>

- To end the enrollment closures and waitlists for CCAP currently in place in more than 30 counties around the state, this funding must be ongoing, not one-time, because demand for CCAP is steadily growing. Counties must be assured the new level of funding will continue to be confident they can accept new CCAP families, and families must be able to rely on ongoing support to balance their family budgets. Furthermore, the funds must be distributed to counties in an equitable manner, and without delay.
- New York City's Administration for Children's Services has shared a \$1.2B increased budget need in order to continue to maintain a steady caseload and prevent attrition.
- Trends in enrollment and the closure status of more than 30 counties outside New York City suggest that counties outside New York City need \$500M to meet growing demand for child care.

Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest \$60M to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal, and are treated not as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care.

- We welcome and support the Governor's plan to make participation in these models available to all without means testing, and urge that they are also free from immigration status and work reporting requirements. The models should be administered like pre-K, available to all, with minimal enrollment requirements.
- All modalities of care – including center and home-based child care providers – must be able to participate in these models.
- Two models the Empire State Campaign for Child Care recommends are: **community eligibility projects**, making child care fully free and available to all families with children in communities where a significant number of families with low income reside. And **capped-fee projects** where all families in a project community could access child care through this project at a cost of \$100 a week (\$20/day). Under both models, participating families would not be subject to income, work, or immigration status tests.

Raising Revenues⁶

AQE is a proud member of the Invest In Our New York campaign. We have a slate of bills that raise more than enough revenue to fund all of the priorities you hear today and throughout all the budget hearings. Due to the OBBBA, New York is losing up to \$23 billion per year in federal funding, while New York's millionaires are set to benefit from a [\\$12 billion federal tax cut annually](#). A [recent Siena](#) poll on raising taxes on the ultra-wealthy⁷ found overwhelming support across the state among voters and taxpayers.⁸ The governor has said it herself: millionaires and billionaires are not leaving the state; everyday New Yorkers are leaving, because they cannot afford to live here.

⁶ <https://www.investinourny.org/2026agenda>

⁷ <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2025/11/new-poll-shows-taxing-rich-very-popular/409252/>

⁸ <https://scri.siena.edu/2024/01/05/67-of-new-york-voters-support-raising-taxes-on-profitable-corporations-and-highest-5-of-earners/>

By implementing tax proposals such as the capital gains tax ([S.1439 Rivera/A.676-Kim](#)), a bill that raises approximately \$12 billion annually and all the other measures mentioned above, New York can fully fund Foundation Aid, give thriving wages to the child care workforce and expand capacity across the state, and still have money to fund wages for home care workers and hospitals. If New York implemented the corporate tax bill ([S.953 Hoylman/A.1971-Kelles-Shrestha](#)), which raises \$7 billion annually, it could fund an ambitious housing plan. And, to be clear, the state already has money; these options only provide more.

There are other revenue-raising options as well that would collectively raise tens of billions of dollars annually. Passing these very modest taxes on highly-profitable corporations and ultra-wealthy individuals has the power to transform our state and fill federal funding cuts, including a \$13 billion dollar cut to our healthcare system. We know that the legislature deeply values equality and justice for all people, of all classes, races, genders, and communities. We have the opportunity to actually deliver on that dream, ensuring that children have homes and great schools, that everyone has a thriving wage, and that no one wants for the bare minimum like food or healthcare. Passing these taxes will also transform our budget system, moving from a stop-gap budgeting system that struggles from year to year and where many of our legislative champions have to fight annually for limited grant program funding for things like literacy initiatives, to one where we have more than enough revenue to meet the needs of our people and ensure fairness in our system of taxation. The ultra-wealthy and multi-billion dollar corporations do not need more giveaways and tax breaks, but the 95% of us who live outside that world need justice and investment. You have a choice here: to show where the state's priorities lie and do it in a way that invests in our New York, in our future.