

Written Testimony to the New York State Joint Legislative Hearing Elementary/Secondary Education

Teach For America New York

January 29, 2026

To the esteemed members of the New York State Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education:

My name is Imani Hope and I proudly serve as the Senior Managing Director of Alumni and Community Affairs at Teach For America New York. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on an urgent issue for our state: ensuring that **EVERY** child has access to the academic support and resources they need to succeed.

Teach For America New York has been a presence in education and leadership development for over 35 years. Our very first corps members stepped into classrooms in 1990, and since then, we have grown into a network of over 7,000 alumni who are leading, living, and thriving across the state. Our alumni are founders of schools, nonprofit organizations, and EdTech companies. They are elected officials and healthcare professionals, and many of them continue to teach students in the classroom every day. Most importantly, they are strong advocates for access to high-quality education and opportunities for all children as they prepare for their futures.

I am excited and encouraged by Governor Hochul's Executive Budget and the proposed funding to support several education initiatives critical to student success. Funding for initiatives such as a statewide expansion of Universal Pre-K, significant increases in school aid over the next 5 years, and funding to deliver training to educators on instructional best practices for numeracy and evidence-based math instruction. Teach For America New York has prioritized math achievement in our 2030 goal, which aims to double 8th-grade math achievement in the communities we serve by 2030. We see these investments as essential for enhancing student learning and success in math, which is a crucial factor in achieving future economic growth.

Although New York has made significant investments in public education, data show that many students—particularly in elementary grades—are not mastering essential math skills. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified long-standing inequities, but it did not create them. Today, across New York State, significant numbers of students remain below grade level in math, limiting not only their immediate academic progress but also their long-term opportunities.

Middle school math achievement is a critical inflection point. Research consistently shows that middle-grade math proficiency is a strong predictor of later access to higher-level math, high school graduation, and economic mobility. When students fall behind in math in the early grades, the gaps compound over time. Addressing this challenge requires not only strong core instruction, but also targeted, evidence-based interventions that meet students where they are and accelerate their learning.

Teach For America New York is proud to partner with schools and communities across the state to help meet this need through Teach For America Ignite, a national tutoring fellowship designed to deliver high-impact, small-group tutoring to students who need it most.

Ignite places trained tutors—college students, community members, and aspiring educators—into classrooms to provide consistent, data-driven math tutoring aligned to grade-level standards. Tutors work with students multiple times per week in small groups, focusing on both remediation of unfinished learning and acceleration toward grade-level mastery. This approach is intentionally designed to enhance classroom instruction and provide teachers with additional support.

High-impact tutoring is one of the most well-researched and effective interventions for improving math outcomes, particularly for elementary students. Ignite reflects the core elements of this research: regular sessions during the school day, small group sizes, alignment with classroom content, and ongoing training and coaching for tutors. Importantly, Ignite also builds a pipeline of future educators and civic leaders who gain firsthand experience supporting students in New York's public schools.

For students, Ignite provides individualized attention and confidence-building relationships. For schools, it offers a cost-effective way to expand instructional capacity without adding strain to already stretched educators.

As the State considers how best to deploy resources to address unfinished learning and improve math outcomes, we urge you to prioritize and sustain investments in evidence-based strategies like high-impact tutoring. Programs such as Teach For America Ignite are not a silver bullet—but they are a proven, practical tool that can help close gaps now while longer-term systems reforms continue.

New York's children cannot afford to wait. By making intentional policy choices and continuing to invest in effective solutions, we can guarantee that every elementary student has the strong math foundation needed for lifelong success.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to New York's students and families. Teach For America New York stands ready to continue partnering with the State, districts, and communities to advance educational opportunity and excellence.

Respectfully submitted,

Imani Hope
Senior Managing Director of Alumni and Community Affairs, Teach For America New York