



January 29, 2026

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To Members of the Joint Legislative Committee:

On behalf of the United Way of CNY, I am Laurie Black, Community Education Director and Program Director of the Book Buddies High Impact Tutoring Program. It is my honor to submit testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Education. Thank you to Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, Chair Mayer, Chair Benedetto, and distinguished members of the Legislature for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

The United Way of CNY is a nonprofit with the mission to ignite the spirit of community collaboration, giving, and civic engagement to improve lives in Central New York. **Book Buddies is a program of United Way of Central New York** that matches community volunteers with students in kindergarten through third grade for in-person, one-on-one literacy tutoring aimed at improving reading and literacy development. The program serves students in Syracuse City School District, working at six schools, serving over 600 students annually.

We write to you today to strongly support Governor Hochul's proposed \$9 million investment in High-Impact Tutoring (HIT) within the FY27 Executive Budget. We commend the Governor for recognizing that accelerating academic recovery requires evidence-based, scalable solutions. **To further amplify this impact, we respectfully urge the Legislature to allocate an additional \$1 million, bringing the total investment for HIT to \$10 million in the FY27 budget.** This comprehensive funding represents a critical step toward ensuring that students who have fallen behind in math and literacy receive the intensive, individualized support they need to succeed.

Research consistently shows that high-impact tutoring, defined as tutoring provided in small groups (ratios of 1:4 or less), at least three times per week, by consistent, trained tutors, is one of the most effective interventions for improving educational achievement.

At the United Way, we have seen the power of high impact tutoring firsthand. Over the past four school years, we have served over 1,940 students with one-on-one tutoring. Each year, our independent evaluator has found a clear association between Book Buddies participation and literacy skill development, particularly for kindergarten and first-grade students. Parents, students, volunteers, and school staff all reported highly positive views of BB, with 98% of surveyed parents rating the program as *excellent* or *good* and 93% of students saying the program had helped them with their reading. School staff members overwhelmingly agreed that the program supported the development of their students' literacy skills. Nearly all volunteers (99%) agreed that BB had a positive impact on students.

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We also want to acknowledge the leadership of the New York State High-Impact Tutoring Coalition and the many elected officials who have championed this issue. We are particularly grateful to Assembly Member Brian Cunningham and Senator Nathalia Fernandez, who have worked to build effective policies and funding to support high-impact tutoring throughout New York.

In closing, we urge the Legislature to increase the allocation for High-Impact Tutoring to \$10 million. Thank you for your time and your continued dedication to the students of New York State. We look forward to working with you throughout the budget process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Laurie Black

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