



Education Council Consortium

Testimony for New York Senate and Assembly 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Elementary Education/Secondary Education

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Camille Casaretti
Education Policy Chair
Education Council Consortium

Honorable Senator and Assemblymembers Pretlow, Mayer, Liu, Benedetto, Krueger and respective members of the Senate and Assembly Committees, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the 2026 Education Budget.

My name is Camille Casaretti and I serve as the Chair of the Education Policy Committee of the Education Council Consortium (ECC). We are a grassroots group of parents, caregivers, advocates and community members who share the vision of a New York City public school system that is equitable, inclusive, antiracist and free of all forms of oppression and that provides an appropriate and humane education for all students in New York City. This testimony has been compiled by our Committee.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued focus on equity, accountability, and transparency in public education. As you consider this year's budget, we urge you to prioritize policies and funding structures that strengthen traditional public schools and ensure that State and City resources are aligned to meet the needs of New York City's most impacted students and families.

Charter School Accountability, Transparency, and Funding

We urge the Legislature to continue standing up for traditional public schools. We support efforts to create a comprehensive system of accountability and transparency for charter schools. Policies that require the NYCPS to either pay rent for charter schools or give up space in public school buildings, place significant strain on school communities—particularly as districts work to meet statutory class size requirements. These realities make clear that existing charter school laws must be revisited.

One of the greatest threats to public education in New York City is the idea that the City does not meaningfully control how much of its education budget (more than \$3 Billion in FY24 according to IBO¹)

¹ <https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/assets/ibo/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2025/2025-june-education-spending-report.pdf>



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is spent on a largely unregulated charter school sector, while lacking sufficient public insight into both academic outcomes and the diversion of public resources.

We call on State legislators to require regular, publicly available reporting from NYC Public Schools on:

- The distribution of charter schools across New York City;
- Charter enrollment compared to proposed seat need;
- Quarterly disenrollment and attrition rates;
- Suspension and expulsion data by charter, compared to local districts;
- IEP and English Language Learner enrollment compared to district prevalence;
- Rental reimbursements for Charter owned private space;
- A \$2.8 billion loss of charter school transitional aid from 2011 to 2023²;
- Outstanding and paid charter matching funds; and
- Space requested versus space actually used, in both district buildings and private facilities.

This data is essential for responsible fiscal oversight, informed policymaking, and community-based district planning.

Foundation Aid Formula

We appreciate the Legislature's efforts to update the Foundation Aid formula. Unfortunately, the revised formula resulted in New York City receiving more than \$300 million less than expected, largely because the Regional Cost Index for NYC was not updated. This outcome fails to reflect the true cost of educating students in the city.

We urge the Legislature to continue refining the formula by:

- Advancing automatic inflation adjustments and regional cost calibration mechanisms;
- Adding a Pupil Need Index weight for students in temporary housing and students in foster care; and
- Establishing an independent Education Finance Review Commission, modeled on the Regents' proposal, to conduct biennial reviews of Foundation Aid with meaningful stakeholder input.

Regional Cost Index and Funding

While it is true that NYC spends more per student in raw dollars than Syracuse, Rochester, Plattsburgh, or Buffalo, those numbers don't tell the full story.

- NYC's higher costs reflect labor and living price differences.
- Without strong RCI adjustments, school districts with higher underlying costs, like NYC, receive under-adjusted state aid relative to what it really costs to run schools.

² <https://edlawcenter.org/it-is-time-for-new-york-city-schools-to-receive-charter-school-transition-aid/>



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Teacher salaries are the largest district expense. NYC has the highest median teacher salary in the state - approximately \$90,000 per year. NYC median salaries can be substantially higher than many upstate districts before cost-of-living adjustments. RCI should reflect buying power, not just nominal pay. An adequate RCI needs to reflect the local labor market competition (teachers vs other professions), cost of living differences (especially housing) and recruitment and retention challenges. A quick look at average teacher salaries shows:

- Buffalo's median teacher salary is about \$80,707 per year - above the national average;
- Rochester's median teacher salary is around \$69, 360 per year but could range as low as \$52,500;
- Syracuse's median teacher salary is about \$69,030 per year, below the NY-Newark metro area national comparisons; and
- Plattsburgh's median teacher salary is around \$53, 834 per year.

City Funding Priorities - Why We Need a Robust Education Budget from the State

While much of New York City's education funding is allocated through the City budget, the State plays a critical role in ensuring stability, adequacy, and accountability. Without this critical funding the DOE struggles to support and sustain the programs and positions that serve our highest-need students and families, including:

- Fully funded Fair Student Funding;
- Childcare Birth-to-Five initiatives and the Family Childcare Network;
- Preschool special education evaluations;
- Workforce investment for daycare providers;
- Reading support services;
- School building accessibility;
- PSAL athletics and expanded high school afterschool programming;
- Baseline funding for:
 - restorative justice;
 - teacher recruitment;
 - arts programming;
 - high-impact tutoring;
 - immigrant family outreach;
 - services for students with disabilities through age 22; and,
 - Student Success Centers;
- Mental health services at School-Based Health Centers;
- Adequate funding for translation and interpretation services;
- DYCD-funded afterschool programming, including support for SchoolFood staff, nurses, and paraprofessionals; and
- Ensuring every middle and high school has a SAPIS counselor.



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School Governance and Mayoral Control

First and foremost, school governance is NOT a state budget issue, it's a policy issue.

We strongly urge the state legislature to work with the governor to remove the extension of mayoral control from the budget. We recognize that mayoral control was adopted with expectations of improved coordination, clear accountability, and accelerated decision-making within the nation's largest school system. However, after more than two decades of experience, these expectations did not materialize and it is clear that the current structure does not provide stability, accountability, transparency, or durable educational outcomes. The system needs a new structure for school governance.

Mayoral control introduces significant instability to New York City's schools. Because mayoral leadership can change every four years, long-term educational planning is routinely disrupted by shifts in political priorities, senior leadership, and policy direction. Educators and school communities are frequently required to pivot to new mandates before prior reforms have been fully implemented or evaluated, undermining continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making, while disregarding previously invested costs.

Proponents of mayoral control often point to accountability through a single elected official. In practice, however, this accountability is diffused. Education policy competes with many other mayoral responsibilities, and voters have limited ability to assess complex educational outcomes within the broader context of municipal governance.

The centralized nature of mayoral control also constrains stakeholder participation. Teachers, parents, and community members possess critical expertise about student needs and school operations, yet under the current structure their ability to influence policy is largely advisory. Unlike traditional or hybrid governance models that include independent boards with real authority, mayoral control limits opportunities for public deliberation and shared responsibility. And this effect is felt throughout the tiered system of governance, from the Panel for Educational Policy to Community Education Councils and District Leadership Teams to School Leadership Teams. Even when regulations are in place to enable shared governance in districts and schools, mayoral control often suppresses these bodies in favor of a top-down hierarchy. This is not only a problem of "engagement;" schools and the system as a whole cannot serve their communities without their communities' active involvement. This involvement is crucial to the academic, social, and long-term professional goals for students that parents, communities, and students themselves share.

Another structural concern is the mayor's veto power over the chancellor. Our educational system requires that the lead administrator have an understanding of pedagogy, child development, special education law, and school operations and proceed accordingly. Unfortunately, the chancellor as an educator with deep knowledge required to run the nation's largest school system is vulnerable to the mayor's political ambition. This relationship has often wreaked havoc on the management and policy development of our education system.



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Finally, centralized authority heightens the potential influence of well-resourced special interests. When decision-making power is concentrated, external actors—such as donors, advocacy organizations, or private entities—can exert disproportionate influence over policy and resource allocation. This raises legitimate concerns about transparency, equity, and the stewardship of public funds.

For these reasons, we urge the Legislature to view mayoral control not as a choice, but as a structure that must evolve. We support a governance model that balances executive coordination with shared decision-making, professional expertise, and meaningful public accountability.

As an interim step, while the Legislature engages educators, families, and community stakeholders in designing a more stable and inclusive governance framework, we recommend a short extension of the current system with targeted reforms, including:

- Reducing the number of mayoral appointees to the Panel for Education Policy without reducing the number of non-mayoral appointees, so that the mayoral appointees would constitute the minority; and
- Providing that the mayor does not appoint the majority of PEP members, repeal Education Law §2590-B.a.1.D to allow PEP members to select their own Chair.

These changes would strengthen independence, restore public trust, and promote more durable educational policy without sacrificing coordination or operational continuity.

School Governance Comparisons to Other Large Urban School Districts

New York City is often described as uniquely large and complex, and therefore in need of a highly centralized governance structure. However, experience in other large urban districts demonstrates that scale does not require exclusive mayoral control.

Several of the nation's largest school systems operate under hybrid or independent governance models that balance executive coordination with public accountability and professional expertise:

- **Los Angeles Unified School District**, the second-largest district in the country, is governed by an independently elected school board that hires and evaluates the superintendent. Despite serving a vast and diverse student population, the district maintains continuity across mayoral administrations while preserving formal avenues for community input and public oversight.
- **Chicago Public Schools**, often cited as a comparator for New York City, has recently moved away from full mayoral control toward a hybrid system that includes an elected school board. This transition reflects recognition that long-term stability, transparency, and public trust are better served by shared governance rather than centralized political control.
- **Houston Independent School District**, one of the largest districts in the country, is governed by an elected board, even while operating within a large metropolitan area. Although the district has



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faced challenges, governance reforms have focused on strengthening board capacity and accountability—not eliminating public participation.

- **Miami-Dade County Public Schools**, the fourth-largest district nationally, is overseen by an elected school board and superintendent, demonstrating that large-scale systems can function with democratic governance structures that include community representation.

These districts illustrate that effective governance in large urban systems is not dependent on mayoral control, but rather on clear roles, professional expertise, transparency, and continuity. In fact, models that distribute authority across independent boards and professional leadership often provide greater insulation from political cycles and allow reforms the time necessary to succeed.

New York City does not need to replicate another district's model. However, these examples demonstrate that alternatives to full mayoral control exist at scale—and that governance structures can be designed to support stability, accountability, and meaningful stakeholder participation without sacrificing efficiency.

For this reason, we urge the Legislature to approach mayoral control as a policy choice that can evolve, rather than a fixed necessity; and to engage educators, families, and communities in designing a governance framework that reflects best practices from across the country while meeting the unique needs of New York City students and families.

Why School Governance Should Be Kept Out of Budget Negotiations

School governance is a structural policy decision, unrelated to the state budget, and should be evaluated on its own merits, not negotiated as part of an annual budget process. Budget negotiations are, by design, fast-paced, time-constrained, and focused on closing fiscal gaps. Decisions on school governance, by contrast, shape the educational system for years—often decades—and require deliberation, public engagement, and careful analysis.

Budget negotiations limit transparency and public participation. When governance changes are embedded in budget bills, they are often negotiated behind closed doors and passed under deadline pressure. This restricts meaningful input from educators, parents, students, and communities who are most affected by these decisions and undermines public trust in the outcome. Furthermore, the use of school governance as leverage in fiscal negotiations creates a dynamic where structural decisions are made to secure short-term budget agreements rather than to improve long-term educational outcomes. This risks trading stability and accountability for expediency.

We are well aware that governance changes require time for evaluation and implementation planning. Alterations to school governance can affect accountability structures, labor relations, community engagement, and operational authority. These impacts cannot be responsibly assessed within the compressed timeline of budget negotiations, nor can they be implemented effectively without a thoughtful transition process.



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Importantly, keeping governance out of the budget process preserves the Legislature's oversight role. Stand-alone legislation allows for hearings, amendments, and deliberation across committees, ensuring that governance decisions are subject to rigorous review rather than rushed approval. This approach strengthens accountability and results in more durable policy.

For these reasons, school governance should be addressed through separate, transparent legislation with robust stakeholder engagement—rather than as part of budget negotiations driven by fiscal timelines and political pressure. Doing so protects students, educators, and communities while upholding sound legislative process.

Thank you for your time to review this testimony, and for your continued commitment to New York's public school students, educators, and families. We look forward to working with you throughout the 2026 legislative session.