



**Joint Legislative Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget Proposal:
Elementary and Secondary Education**

Submitted Testimony by Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy at Children's Aid
Thursday, January 29th, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony about the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget: Elementary and Secondary Education.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. By offering a continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part time staff members serve over 36,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need, close to home.

In addition to direct service delivery, Children's Aid also engages in policy and advocacy work at all levels of government. Our policy priorities are informed by what we know works for children and families and by the persistent barriers our organization and staff encounter while serving the one in four New York City children living in poverty. To this end, Children's Aid is a member and supports the policy agendas of numerous state-level coalitions including the New York State Community Schools Network, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care.

While we appreciate the Governor's proposal to increase school aid, including a three percent increase in the Foundation Aid formula, we also know that further targeted interventions and intentional funding allocations are needed to close the gaps for our state's highest needs students. In New York City, only 37% of public school students in high-poverty neighborhoods are proficient in reading and math, a staggering twenty points below the proficiency rates of peers in higher-income areas.

We believe the state can close this opportunity gap through the following key investments:

1. **Enhanced categorical funding for community schools**, an evidence-based strategy that strengthens conditions for student learning and healthy development and addresses the root causes of chronic absenteeism.
2. **Revisions to the Foundation Aid formula** to better account for the distinct needs of students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, as well as the higher cost of living in New York City and other high-cost regions.
3. **Equitable facilities funding for charter school students**, including full rental assistance for New York City charter school students currently excluded from facilities support, to



ensure schools are not forced to divert instructional dollars to rent and that students are funded fairly regardless of school type.

Budget Recommendation 1 - Community Schools

Background:

As part of our counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life, Children's Aid has been operating community schools in partnership with New York City Public Schools for over 30 years. Across our 19 community schools, educators, families, students, and community partners work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. Each school has a full-time community school coordinator who works closely with school leadership to coordinate integrated, data-informed supports tailored to the needs of students and the broader school community.

Children's Aid community schools deliver programs and services across four core domains: academics; social-emotional development; health and wellness; and family and community engagement. This includes afterschool and summer programming, early childhood education, targeted academic supports, attendance interventions, school-based medical, dental, vision, and mental health care, family workshops, and more.

We have seen firsthand how the community school strategy addresses many of most pressing challenges our youth are facing, including alarming rates of chronic absenteeism, learning loss, mental and physical health issues, and food insecurity. Community school staff address these barriers by coordinating school-based supports that meet immediate needs while also employing tailored, data-driven interventions, such as success mentoring, to increase school engagement and attendance. Central to this work is building strong, trusting relationships with students and families.

These approaches produce meaningful results. Across all Children's Aid community schools, chronic absenteeism declined by an average of three percentage points in the most recent school year, with several schools achieving substantially greater gains. At PS 152, pairing previously chronically absent students with success mentors—who checked in daily, offered academic support and attendance incentives, and worked with families— led to an 18-percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism over a three-year period.

And, these results reflect broader research on Community Schools. A [2020 report](#) found that the strategy is associated with higher attendance and graduation rates, improved math achievement, fewer disciplinary incidents, and stronger student connectedness. During the pandemic, community schools also proved more resilient: a [recent analysis by NYPCS](#) found that Community Schools outperformed comparison schools across key measures over the last ten years including:

- Graduation rates grew 13.5 percentage points more than the citywide average (25.1 vs. 11.6)
- ELA proficiency grew 3.8 percentage points more than the citywide average (22.9 vs. 19.1)
- Math proficiency grew 8.2 points percentage points more than the citywide average (26.7 vs. 18.5)
- Chronic absenteeism grew at a slower rate than the citywide average (with community schools seeing an increase of 4.3 percentage point, less than half of the citywide average of 9.8)

Further, community schools deliver these high-impact outcomes at a fraction of the cost of downstream interventions. By improving academic achievement and addressing root causes such as food insecurity, unmet health needs, and housing instability, community schools reduce reliance on costly crisis-response systems. National studies show [returns of \\$10-14 for every dollar invested](#), and, in NYC, UFT data shows that a [\\$100,000 investment in a Community School Director can leverage more than \\$600,000 in services and grants](#)—making community schools a high-return, sustainable investment in student success.

Recommendation:

We believe that strengthening statewide support for and investment in the community school strategy promises to enhance academic opportunities for all young New Yorkers. To that end, we join the New York State Community Schools Network in urging the state to:

1. Dedicate \$25M to create and expand community schools statewide.

While we greatly appreciate the existing foundation aid set-aside, there is limited accountability in terms of how schools spend that funding. A new, dedicated funding stream for community schools would allow school districts, BOCES, and community partners to target and maximize investment in essential activities and interventions while complimenting the set-aside funds and allowing districts—especially those without dedicated resources—to implement and expand high-quality community schools We see this initial investment as a down payment on the \$100M necessary to adequately support community schools.

2. Provide \$6M for resource support networks

Dedicated support and technical assistance are also essential to the effective implementation of the community schools strategy. This additional investment would fund:

- \$3M— 20 counties to hire staff and purchase materials (\$150,000 each)
- \$3M— statewide coordination and technical assistance from the NYS Network for Youth Success, the CSN's backbone organization

Budget Recommendation 2 - Foundation Aid

Background:

We appreciate that since 2023, the State has fully funded the Foundation Aid formula — an achievement that took years of advocacy and commitment from the Legislature. We are also pleased that the Governor's proposed budget would once again fully fund Foundation Aid this year. However, while the formula is now fully funded, **the formula itself remains extremely outdated**. Several components rely on data that are nearly twenty years old—dating back to a time before some of today's students were even born—and it does not reflect the real costs or needs of today's schools and students.

Last year, limited changes to the Foundation Aid formula resulted in New York City Public Schools receiving \$314 million less than they would have under the prior formula. This shortfall was driven largely by the adoption of a new poverty weight without corresponding updates to other critical components—most notably, the Regional Cost Index. The revised poverty measure relies on the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, or SAIPE, which identifies low-income students using a uniform federal poverty threshold—currently \$32,150 for a family of four. Because SAIPE measures poverty the same way across all districts, the Foundation Aid formula is intended to rely on the Regional Cost Index to adjust for regional differences in wages and operating costs. Yet the RCI has not been updated since 2006. Implementing a new poverty measure without a modernized RCI systematically underfunds low-income students in high-cost districts like New York City, undermining the core purpose of Foundation Aid.

New York City Public schools serve hundreds of thousands of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students experiencing homelessness and/or in the foster care system, and students living in poverty. At a time when needs are growing, NYC schools should not be losing funding—especially funding that is meant to close gaps for the State's highest needs students.

Recommendations:

We join the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEf) in urging the Legislature to make two critical changes this year that would better reflect student needs and the true cost of education in New York City.

1. Update the Regional Cost Index (RCI)

The Regional Cost Index is intended to account for differences in costs across New York State. Educators and staff must be paid more in New York City simply to afford to live here, and the cost of services, supplies, and operations is significantly higher than in many other parts of the State. However, the Foundation Aid formula still relies on RCI values from 2006—nearly twenty years old. Using cost data that outdated fails to reflect today's economic reality, particularly in New York City, where housing and labor costs have risen dramatically. The State should update

the Regional Cost Index to reflect current costs, rather than continuing to rely on data that no longer reflects real-world conditions.

2. Add a Per-Pupil Weight for Students Experiencing Homelessness and Students in Foster Care

Students who are homeless and students in foster care face unique and significant barriers to academic success, yet the Foundation Aid formula provides no additional funding to support their distinct needs. In New York City, more than 154,000 students experience homelessness, and approximately 6,700 students are in foster care each year. Data show that more than half of NYC students experiencing homelessness are chronically absent, and one in eight students living in shelter drops out of high school—more than three times the dropout rate of students living in permanent housing. Adding per-pupil weights for students who are homeless and students in foster care would help ensure districts receive the resources needed to provide targeted supports and improve student outcomes.

Budget Recommendation 3 – Rental Assistance for Charter Schools

Background:

As part of its network of 19 community schools, Children's Aid has operated Children's Aid College Prep Charter School (CACPCS) in the South Bronx since 2012. CACPCS serves 590 students in grades K-8, 87% of whom qualify for free and reduced lunch and 25% of whom are multilingual learners. CACPCS prepares students for success in middle school, high school, college, and life by combining rigorous academics with comprehensive health, mental health, and social-emotional supports. The school serves as a safe, engaging community hub where students' holistic development is prioritized through strong instructional programs, co-teaching models, targeted academic interventions, and the Life Coaching Program—an evidence-based strategy that provides individualized guidance, mentoring, and family supports.

CACPCS has demonstrated measurable success in supporting students who face significant barriers to educational attainment. Over the past five years, math proficiency among students in grades 3–8 has increased by 14 points, and ELA proficiency has grown by 11 points. Chronic absenteeism among students most at risk declined by 12 percentage points over a three-year period, while participation in afterschool and summer enrichment programs consistently exceeds 85% annually, supporting both academic growth and social-emotional development. Importantly, students experiencing homelessness or living in shelter achieve promotion and retention rates that surpass citywide averages for similar populations, reflecting the critical role of holistic supports in enabling academic and personal success. These outcomes illustrate that when schools can fully invest in both instruction and wraparound services, students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

These successes highlight the importance of ensuring that schools like CACPCS have the resources to sustain and expand evidence-based programs. One of the most significant barriers to doing so is the lack of equitable facilities funding, which forces schools to divert limited per-pupil dollars to rent rather than instruction and student supports. Addressing this gap is essential to maintaining the academic and social gains that students at CACPCS and similar schools have achieved.

Recommendation: Pass Rental Assistance for All Legislation

Despite the progress of the 2014 Facilities Access Law, approximately 26,000 New York City charter school students across more than 80 campuses remain ineligible for co-location or rental assistance. Without this support, schools must divert a significant portion of per-pupil funding to cover rent, reducing resources available for the very programs that drive these positive outcomes.

The proposed Rental Assistance for All bill (S5797/A85), introduced by Senator Luis Sepúlveda and Assemblymember John Zaccaro, would provide partial funding in the 2026–27 school year and phase in full facilities support over five years. For CACPCS and similar schools, rental assistance is not merely an equity issue—it directly enables schools to sustain evidence-based programs that improve attendance, proficiency, and engagement for high-need students. At an initial cost of \$19 million to the State, this legislation represents a modest but high-impact investment to ensure all public school students in New York City are funded fairly, and that successful models like CACPCS can continue to thrive.

Closing

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York State Legislature for its ongoing commitment to New York's youth and families. Providing students with the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential is not only the right thing to do—it is essential for the future of our state. Investing in schools as hubs of coordinated, holistic programs and supports is a proven way to help young people thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these critical issues on behalf of children and families in New York State. Please feel free to contact Annie Nelson, Policy Analyst, at anelson@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.