



## OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**ANTONIO REYNOSO**

Brooklyn Borough President

### **City Council Committee on Education Hearing on the FY24 Preliminary Budget 3.15.23**

Good afternoon Chair Joseph and thank you for holding this hearing today. The office of the Brooklyn Borough President is here today advocating for families and students across Brooklyn and all of New York City. Our recommendations and priorities for the Department of Education (DOE) and School Construction Authority (SCA) budget for FY24 include continued adjustments and engagement around Fair Student Funding, expansion of 3K and Pre-K education, improved school safety oversight and further investment, and other programs our office hopes DOE will sustain.

#### **Fair Student Funding**

While we applaud the DOE for convening a variety of stakeholders in the Fair Student Funding Task Force, we believe the agency could have done more. Although multiple working sessions were open to the public, DOE failed to strategically target specific populations – including, critically, youth. The Task Force’s final report even references the lack of authentic partnership between adults and youth in this endeavor. We also urge DOE to reconsider the now-dropped fourth Task Force recommendation: increasing base foundation funding. It is unacceptable that the status quo only provides base funding in the amount of \$225,000 for a principal and secretary when we know firsthand that schools rely on many other administrative staff, including assistant principals, guidance counselors, and social workers.

With the Governor’s proposed State budget fully funding Foundation Aid as per the Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s lawsuit, it is NYC’s turn to close the achievement gap for schools – and it begins with how money is allocated.

#### **Expansion & Oversight of 3K & Pre-K Education**

Hearing directly from parents and community members, it is imperative that this administration commits to the expansion – and not reduction – of PreK and 3K programs across the city. Providing quality childcare that directly reflects community need is one of the many tools our city has at its disposal to increase equity. Prior to the pandemic, US Employers across the country lost an estimated \$12.7B due to the [impacts of childcare challenges](#). As the administration acknowledges in the *Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education*, parents of color are impacted the most. This report estimates that 375,000 parents left or downshifted their jobs because of lack of access to quality childcare during the pandemic.

Recognizing the need to baseline 3K funding, we hope the Council will champion the restored commitment to expand the total number of 3K seats to 60,000. We challenge the DOE to provide adequate outreach for seats that have yet to be filled in every neighborhood and to continue to expand preschool special education seats – as they did this past December with the creation of 800 seats. In addition, we particularly ask the DOE to refocus on expanding extended-day seats for families to align better with traditional work hours – reducing competition amongst providers and other institutions. We must also ensure that our childcare providers are paid on time and childcare workers are paid a livable wage.

### **Class Size**

Our office stands in support of NYS's class size bill and urges DOE to expedite a plan to meet this new mandate, and to do so with robust engagement with the community and the volunteer task force. With a projected 7,000 teachers needed to comply with the law, we hope DOE accounts for this need along with further funding for non-pedagogical support staff. Our office will continue to call upon our State partners to fund this mandate and help our city be fiscally sound while supporting our students and their developmental needs.

### **Safety**

Following the recent February PEP vote approving \$43M to install automatic door locking systems across DOE buildings, we urge the Council and DOE to be transparent and equitable throughout the installation process. The lack of transparency in the selection and prioritization of schools in the pilot has resulted in questions about the process. We hope that all 1,300 schools slated to receive this new technology receive them expeditiously and with fidelity. We applaud the rollout of Project Pivot and the approximately \$9M commitment; however, we note the lack of transparency around the ARPA project vendor service cost and the overall scoring of schools that received the SAM No.55 allocation. With a pilot operating since October, we hope the administration would also share adequate measures of success for these participating vendors. We hope to advocate for pilots such as this to be brought to scale, but with limited data, a \$9M commitment with limited accountability is concerning.

### **Additional Programs**

In order to further develop capacity and meet student needs, and to be responsive to the desires of prospective families seeking a public school education, we encourage DOE to build out some of its most sought-after programs. This includes developing more Dual Language & Bilingual education programs, especially considering the recent increase in migrant families. This expansion should be coupled with financial incentives to encourage more educators who speak a second language to become certified. Constituents also continue to ask for more D75 seats and programs for our special education students, such as ASD Nest and Horizon.

### **SCA**

With the City allocating \$380M in capital funding for air conditioning initiatives, there are continued gaps to properly servicing all schools. SCA's current designation of "instructional spaces" discounts other rooms utilized throughout the school building that are also essential to student learning, including libraries, gyms, dance rooms, and more. We ask that SCA revisit this designation to address potential loss of learning due to heat and equip spaces accordingly.

As our office continues to observe trends across Brooklyn communities, we encourage SCA to prioritize bringing new schools to overcrowded districts, such as District 15, where approximately 27 schools are over-utilized, and District 20, where approximately 40 schools are over-utilized.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working with the Council throughout the budget process to ensure that DOE and SCA have robust budgets to meet the city's needs across all their programs.