



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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February 29, 2020

Honorable Liz Krueger
New York State Senate
172 State Street, Capitol Building
Room 416 CAP
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Senator Krueger,

On behalf of the parents of District 3 Public Schools and my colleagues of Community Education Council, District 3 (CEC3), thank you for hosting this hearing about the New York State budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. It is an honor to testify today about conditions in public elementary, middle and secondary schools on the Upper West Side and Southern Harlem, a collection of thirty institutions that my colleagues and I represent.

CEC3 focuses on resource advocacy that makes a difference in our Manhattan public schools: to improve student outcomes and teach culturally responsible and relevant education, to take good care of our students in need, and to strengthen the bonds of schools and communities. Challenges are especially acute in Harlem where schools struggle to enroll students but teach a disproportionately high percentage of homeless students and students in temporary housing, English language learning students, and students with disabilities. To that end, my testimony focuses on the budget as these challenges relate to the Foundation Aid formula and increased budget allocations embedded in Governor Cuomo's proposed budget that substantially increases revenues to charter schools.

This week CEC3 passed two resolutions that expand on the details of school resourcing and charter schools, and they are included as part of my testimony. In addition to the main idea that we unequivocally support legislation that calls for the full funding of the Contracts for Excellence campaign as ordered by the New York State Supreme Court, and fervently oppose any increase in charter school funding, I want to highlight the unsustainable conditions that some District 3 schools and families navigate every day.

I participated in the Queens roundtable discussion about Foundation Aid in December and spoke about hardships at many of our schools in the northern portion of District 3, where standard resourcing through the Foundation Aid and Fair Student Funding is utterly failing our students. These

small schools, and others around the city, operate on a skeletal budget. They can't afford books, and librarians, literacy coaches, robust special education service providers and social workers. Many don't have after-school programs, and most do not have full time nurses.

Full funding of the Foundation Aid formula would not solve all of these challenges, but would, if sent directly to the schools, as UFT President Michael Mulgrew testified at the December budget hearing also recommended, go a long way to bring under-resourced schools closer to a sustainable operation.

CEC3 has also called on the Department of Education to move towards a funding formula defined by "Essential Operations" as a result of this disconnect that exists between the funds that are directed to a school relative to the outlays that must be met in order to successfully deliver a sound, basic education to all students. We welcome your support as we push for this change and urge you to propose full funding of the Foundation Aid formula.

On the Governor's proposed budget in charter schools, we ask that you oppose increased funding to charter school organizations. The privatization of public education can never be completely eradicated. Private companies have been making money off of our kids since public schools first appeared after the Civil War, and charitable spending by private organizations can make a huge difference.

The charter school sector, however, was never meant to be a separate school system but that's exactly what it's become. It continues to grow far beyond its intended 5% of a district's student population and in northern District 3, approximately 40% of families now opt for a charter school, not their zoned public school. It's no longer an experiment; it's an ungoverned, separate school system, and the wealth of some of the organizations exacerbates daily challenges for the schools around it. Success Academy, for example, teaches approximately 17,000 students in NYC schools, and reports receipts of \$347,367,304¹, representing \$20,422 per pupil. SACS also reports assets totaling \$223,265,465, another \$13,133 per pupil. Why would the state of New York allocate more funds to this organization? By comparison, a neighborhood school in Harlem with 443 students reports total receipts of \$5,200,107², a total of \$11,738 per pupil.

Another wealthy charter organization in Upper Manhattan, The Equity Project, whose funding comes from some of the same hedge fund billionaires as SACS, teaches only 597 students but reports receipts of \$16,736,917³, a total of \$28,035 per pupil. This organization also reports assets worth \$39,413,761, a total worth another \$66,019 per student. Some of the wealthiest private schools in New York City don't have endowments at this level, and taxpayers should not be responsible for increased resources sent to this school.

The CEC3 resolution on charter schools, a mirror of a resolution being passed by several other CECs as well as the ECC, specifies many of the bills you and your colleagues have drafted to level

¹ <https://www.guidestar.org/search/success-academy-charter-schools>

² <https://www.nycenet.edu/search/ps76-a-phillip-randolph-school>

³ <https://www.guidestar.org/search/the-equity-project-charter-school>

the playing field, and we thank you for this leadership. Charter school students and families are not the enemy of public schools. We must find a way to lift all children up, to help them navigate our world and reach their potential. But make no mistake, small community schools in many neighborhoods keep getting set up to fail through our funding mechanisms. Budget justice is needed now. A future generation of New Yorkers is counting on you.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Watkins
CEC3 President

cc: State Senator Brian Benjamin
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Senator Robert Jackson