



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Testimony of Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña
on the Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Expense Budget
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

March 25, 2015

Good morning Chair Dromm and all the Members of the City Council Education Committee here today. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Mayor de Blasio's proposed Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Expense Budget as it relates to the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and our public schools. I am joined by Ray Orlando, DOE's Chief Financial Officer.

I would like to begin by thanking Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Education Committee Chair Danny Dromm, and all the Members of the City Council for your strong partnership and support over this past year. Together, we have truly made a difference in the lives of our school communities.

With your support, we have already advanced several key initiatives, including the historic implementation of Pre-K for All and after-school programs for middle school students.

With the \$294 million invested this year, our youngest learners are getting an early start, developing language and numbers skills that will serve as a strong foundation for academic success in approximately 1,700 NYC public schools, Early Childhood Centers, and charter schools. Next September, in the second year of our Pre-K for All expansion, we will provide a seat for every 4-year-old in the City. Families are excited about this opportunity: as of this past Monday, during the first week of enrollment, more than 37,000 families signed up for Pre-K for All.

Similarly, this year the City embarked on the largest-ever expansion of after-school offerings for middle school students. We are providing enriching programming for over 90,000 middle school students in traditional school settings and community-based centers across the City. Our after-schools not only help improve academic performance, they foster a sense of community at a critical time in a child's development.

Over the past 15 months, we have been working to transform the school system. We have implemented a number of reforms to improve instruction, streamline school support and accountability, and provide students with both the academic and non-academic supports to help them succeed. I would like to highlight some of our accomplishments.

Last year, we introduced the *Framework for Great Schools*, a bold, innovative, research-based capacity framework for guiding and measuring school quality. This framework identifies six essential elements necessary for continual school improvement: rigorous instruction, a supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective leadership, strong family-community ties, and a culture of continuous learning and trust.

To ensure that schools are receiving supports that are better aligned to the *Framework for Great Schools*, last fall we announced structural changes to the way that we will align support and



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supervision for our schools beginning in the 2015-2016 year. We are streamlining the school support system to create equity and more efficient lines of communication between our City's schools and families. In our new, geographically-based support structure, there are four core components—superintendents, Borough Field Support Centers (BFSC), Central divisions, and Affinity Groups.

Under this structure, superintendents will supervise, support, and advocate for schools in their district to ensure student achievement goals are met, and will work with the local community to support family engagement in the learning process. To facilitate these reforms, all district and high school superintendents had to reapply for their positions this summer in accordance with new criteria to ensure that all new superintendents have at least 10 years of pedagogic experience, including at least three as a principal. This rigorous process required them to have a demonstrated ability to raise student achievement as well as engage families.

We recently announced our seven new BFSC Directors. Each Director will manage a team of Deputies, who will collectively provide a set of integrated services to schools based on their individual needs, including: Teaching and Learning, Finance and Human Resources, Operations, Student Services, Special Education and English Language Learners (ELLs). Our goal is to provide differentiation at every level in order to create strong support for schools. The allocation of staff across each BFSC will be done according to school need to ensure equity across all geographic areas. For example, the Bronx BFSC may have more ELL specialists than another center in order to best serve its population. Brooklyn and Queens will have two BFSCs due to the higher number of students in each of those boroughs.

These structural changes will give us the tools we need to drive improvement across the system, and ultimately, help each child fulfill his or her potential as an active member of our City.

We are also targeting unprecedented resources to support our most challenged schools. We have created 128 new Community Schools, including in all Renewal Schools.

As part of this Administration's commitment to ensure that all of our students receive a quality education, regardless of their background, family income, or zip code, we recently identified 94 City schools as Renewal Schools. We are investing \$150 million in the School Renewal Program, a multi-year initiative to turnaround struggling schools. Over the next three years, we will work intensively with each Renewal School's community to establish clear goals, provide a core set of interventions, and hold them accountable for rapid improvement.

To oversee this effort, I have appointed Aimee Horowitz as Executive Superintendent of the School Renewal Program. Aimee brings to this role tremendous experience and a strong record of success in turning around struggling schools and raising student achievement. Most recently, she served as superintendent for Staten Island high schools and 14 Renewal Schools.

With Aimee's support and the support of her team of borough-based Directors of Renewal Schools, these schools will provide an extra hour each day of extended instruction and could offer additional



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after-school, weekend, and summer learning opportunities as needed. Moreover, each will receive additional resources for academic intervention and professional development to create a better learning environment for students. Each Renewal School will also transform into a Community School, knitting together new services that support both students and their families.

In addition, each Renewal School will perform a needs assessment across all six elements of the *Framework for Great Schools* to identify key areas for additional resources, and develop a School Renewal Plan. Each school must meet the concrete milestones defined in its respective School Renewal Plan, as well as progress on targeted elements of the *Framework for Great Schools*.

The arts have the power to transform the academic, social, and emotional lives of our students, so we invested \$23 million to expand arts education; all students should have access to robust instruction in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts. This funding is being used to support certified arts teachers in low arts middle and high schools, and art programs provided in collaboration with cultural institutions and arts education organizations. These include arts partnership programs for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, professional development, resources for arts teachers, and workshops for families, among other initiatives. We also lifted the hiring freeze, which has resulted in an additional 300 certified arts educators working in our schools this year.

To address the needs of our ELLs, we will open 40 new Dual Language and 10 Transitional Bilingual Education Programs throughout the City next school year. Similarly, we are committed to expanding bilingual program options for ELLs. We will continue to support schools in offering new programs and strengthening existing programs across elementary, middle, and high school grades to meet the needs of each student and school community.

As part of our goal to ensure that NYC students are prepared for careers in the 21st century economy, we continue to strengthen our existing Career and Technical Education and Workforce Readiness programs to provide more work-based learning and paid internship opportunities for students. On Monday, we announced a \$3.2 million grant from the General Electric Foundation that will support an innovative CTE pilot program designed to strengthen teaching and learning practices at 10 schools. It will also support STEM training for 200 schools through brand-new multi-day STEM Institutes, as well as a STEM Inventory Project to identify and share strong STEM practices across DOE schools. One hundred schools will attend the first STEM Institute this spring, including six Renewal Schools that can leverage this experience to help drive improvement in teaching and student outcomes. I know Speaker Mark-Viverito and the Council share our commitment to this work, and I look forward to partnering with you to provide our students with even more opportunities.

With generous funding from the City Council, this year we have been able to provide additional restorative justice programming in our schools, and create approximately 100 new sports teams in small schools, which historically have not had many teams.

City Council funding has also enabled us to expand the universal lunch program to all 291 middle schools serving grades 6-8. The goals of the program are to improve the overall atmosphere and experience for students in our cafeterias, reduce the stigma of qualifying for free lunch, and encourage more students to eat healthy and nutritious meals in our schools. As part of this initiative, seven



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schools were selected to serve as pilots to continue to develop best practices to be models for the rest of the City. There has been a 6.4 percent increase in the lunch participation rate in the middle schools in this program. We are taking this year to encourage students to eat SchoolFood-prepared meals, and we are currently studying the cost implications of expanding the program.

The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget includes an allocation of approximately \$21.6 billion in operating funds and another \$5.5 billion for education-related pension and debt service funds. Our funding is a combination of City, State, and Federal dollars, with City tax levy dollars making up the largest share at 56 percent, State dollars at 38 percent, and Federal dollars at 6 percent. The Mayor's proposed budget continues to make unprecedented investments in education. The preliminary budget includes funding for the School Renewal Program, literacy intervention teams, language access services for limited English-speaking parents, and the installation of door alarms to help keep our youngest and most vulnerable students safe.

It is critical that we build students' literacy skills in the early years and provide them with a strong literacy foundation to have successful academic careers. DOE's Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support, in collaboration with our Division of Teaching and Learning, is developing a new literacy intervention program to improve collaboration between classroom teachers, reading specialists, school leadership, and next year in the BFSCs.

We recognize that families are key partners in achieving academic excellence for their children, and parent engagement continues to be a critical element embedded in all our reforms. As you are aware, Community Education Council Elections are underway. This year, we increased the number of applicants to serve on CECs by 561 for a total of 1,290, and I hope you will encourage all eligible parents to vote in the upcoming elections. Data from the Mayor's Preliminary Management Report show that parent-teacher conference attendance increased by 42 percent and phone consultations increased by eight percent compared to the same period last year.

As you are aware, since 2009 the State has not met its court-ordered obligations under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. In this school year alone, New York City public school students will be shortchanged some \$2.6 billion in State education funds. While we have been able to make critical investments in the school system, with adequate funding from the State we would be able to reduce class sizes as well as hire more arts teachers and guidance counselors.

While we are pleased with our progress, we know we have a lot of hard work ahead.

I look forward to my continued work with the City Council on behalf of our 1.1 million students and their families. Only through collaboration can we create a world-class education system in which every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.