BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE
AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES

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JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING
In the Matter of the
2022-2023 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Virtual Hearing
Conducted Online via Zoom

January 26, 2022
9:35 a.m.

PRESIDING:

Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Assemblywoman Helene E. Weinstein
Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

PRESENT:

Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
Senate Finance Committee (RM)

Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

Assemblyman Michael Benedetto
Chair, Assembly Education Committee

Senator Shelley Mayer
Chair, Senate Education Committee

Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Chair, Assembly Committee on Libraries
and Education Technology

Senator Sean M. Ryan
Chair, Senate Committee on Libraries

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PRESENT: (Continued)

Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Chair, Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology

Senator John Liu
Chair, Senate Committee on New York City Education

Assemblywoman Deborah J. Glick

Assemblyman Michael Reilly

Senator Robert Jackson

Assemblyman Steven Otis

Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman

Assemblyman Harry B. Bronson

Assemblyman Josh Jensen

Senator James Tedisco

Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh

Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright

Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

Senator Samra Brouk

Assemblyman Erik M. Dilan

Senator Daniel G. Stec

Senator Gustavo Rivera

Assemblyman Michael Cusick

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Senator Diane J. Savino

Assemblywoman Inez E. Dickens

Senator Brad Hoylman

Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn

Assemblyman Jeffrion L. Aubry

Senator Pete Harckham

Assemblywoman Chantel Jackson

Assemblyman Ron Kim

Senator Leroy Comrie

Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner

Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski

Senator John W. Mannion

Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

Senator Patty Ritchie

Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes

Assemblyman Christopher S. Friend

Senator Sue Serino

Assemblywoman Nily Rozic

Senator Peter Oberacker

Assemblyman Al Taylor

Assemblywoman Amanda Septimo

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Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

Assemblyman Doug Smith

Assemblyman Kevin M. Byrne

Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou

Assemblyman Mike Lawler

Assemblyman William Conrad

Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

Assemblywoman Melissa Miller

Assemblyman David G. McDonough

Senator Andrew Gounardes

Assemblywoman Karen McMahon

Assemblyman William Colton

Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Assemblyman David I. Weprin

Senator Toby Stavisky

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CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Good morning. I am Helene Weinstein, chair of the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee and cochair of today's hearing.

And today we begin the second in a series of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal committees of the Legislature regarding the Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year '22-'23. Today the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee will hear testimony concerning the Governor's budget proposal for elementary and secondary education.

I'll now introduce the participating members from the Assembly, then I will turn it over to Senator Krueger, the cochair of this hearing, to introduce the Senate, and our respective rankers will introduce the members from their conference.

So we have with us Assemblyman Benedetto, chair of our Education Committee; Deborah Glick, chair of our Higher Ed Committee; Crystal Peoples-Stokes, the Majority Leader; Assemblywoman Bichotte

Hermelyn; Assemblyman Bronson; Assemblyman Conrad; Assemblyman Cusick; Assemblyman Dilan; Assemblywoman Hyndman; Assemblyman Kim; Assemblyman Otis; Assemblywoman Rozic; Assemblywoman Simon; and Assemblyman Zebrowski.

As other members join us, we will introduce them.

And I see Jennifer Lunsford is here also.

And Senator Krueger, would you like to introduce your colleagues?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

I'm seeing, so far this morning, Senator Gustavo Rivera; Senator Shelley Mayer, chair of Education; Senator Liu, chair of New York City Education; Senator John Mannion; Senator Pete Harckham; Senator Robert Jackson; Senator Samra Brouk; Senator Sean Ryan, chair of Libraries.

Let's see -- and if you don't mind, I'll just turn it over to Tom O'Mara, my ranker in Finance, to introduce members of

his conference.

SENATOR O'MARA: Good morning. Joining myself from the Minority side this morning is Senator Patty Ritchie. I assume we'll have some more when our Republican conference is over this morning.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Assemblyman Ra, would you like to introduce your colleagues, please.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Sure.

Good morning. We are joined by Josh Jensen, our ranker on Libraries, as well as Mr. Friend and Mr. Mike Lawler. And I expect our ranker on Education, Doug Smith, will be joining us shortly.

(Zoom interruption.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Robert Jackson, please mute.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Please -- you can self-mute yourself, so please do that. But we'd rather people handle that themselves.

We've also been joined by Assemblywoman Buttenschon and Assemblywoman Jackson.

So just before we go to the first witness, I just want to remind all the witnesses testifying today to keep your statement within the time limits so everyone can be afforded the opportunity to speak. It's even more important now that the hearings are virtual.

Just to go over the timelines for witnesses and then the members: All government entities will get 10 minutes to make an oral presentation. And we'll be starting in a few moments with the New York State Ed Commissioner, Betty Rosa. Then we'll proceed to hear testimony from other -- there will be an opportunity for members after the commissioner speaks to ask questions. We'll then proceed to testimony from other witnesses.

And the nongovernmental witnesses who have asked to testify here today will each have three minutes to make an oral

presentation. They'll mostly be in panels. And again, witnesses should be reminded to keep their time within the countdown clock, which will be in your screen. So we encourage you to keep it on the gallery view so you can see that clock.

Members also should keep an eye on the clock. Just to refresh members, the chairs of the committees relevant to the hearing get 10 minutes each to ask questions and receive answers. The ranking members of these committees will get five minutes each. All other members of the relevant committees, three minutes each. And the chairs can get a three-minute opportunity for a second.

And again, just want to remind everybody that the time is not just to ask the question; the time is to ask the question and receive your answer.

And with that, let us go to our first witness, New York State Education Department, Commissioner Betty A. Rosa. She'll be let in in a moment, I believe.

THE MODERATOR: She is here.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: May I begin?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, Commissioner. Yes, please.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: You're welcome.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you. Thank you. And good morning to everyone.

So good morning, Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer and Benedetto, and members of the Senate and Assembly here today.

I'm Dr. Betty Rosa, the Commissioner of Education. And I'm joined here by Executive Deputy Commissioner Sharon Cates-Williams; Senior Deputy Dr. Jim Baldwin; Chief Financial Officer Phyllis Morris; Assistant Commissioner Kathleen DeCataldo; and Senior Policy Advisor Dr. Laura Glass.

First and foremost, I want to thank Chancellor Young for his amazing leadership of the Board of Regents and the Department of Education, as well as the Regents who are watching today.

The Regents and the department have

two strategic priorities: First and foremost, creating equity for all students to prepare for college, careers and civic engagement regardless of background, zip code, first language or ability. And second, the implementing of a fundamental shift to a service-and-support-oriented approach to our statewide educational community.

To achieve both priorities, the department urgently needs the funding we requested to hire and maintain appropriate staffing levels. As most of you know, a strict hiring freeze since April 2020 -- that only was rescinded recently -- has made this extremely challenging.

To illustrate this point, I just want to point to the fact that the department's full-time equivalent, FTE staffing levels decreased from 3,200 FTEs in 2008 and '09 to 2,500 FTEs in 2021-'22, a decrease of 22 percent. During this time period the department's responsibilities have grown without funding for additional staff to address them.

In response to the Division of Budget's October 2021 call letter, the department requested 302 positions to rebuild our capacity. We are pleased that the Executive included funding for 134 of these positions, which is 44 percent of the positions requested. But, as we all know, additional resources are needed to support essential functions of the department such as information technology, human resources, curriculum and instruction, and facilities planning, among others.

The department is no stranger to meeting the needs of students across the state in the face of scarcity. However, at a time when funds are available, it is imperative that we receive the resources necessary to meet our responsibilities to our children and our communities.

Of course there are several proposals in the Executive Budget we are pleased with, including the continued phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula; full funding of all expense-based aids without changing

current-law aid formulas; an increase of $700,000 to expand the Readers Aid program; and much-needed capital funding for our three Nation Schools and our State Schools for the Deaf and Blind, a priority of the Regents.

There are also those areas that we would consider concerns. First, we oppose transferring administration of the over $1 billion federal and state child nutrition programs to the Department of Agriculture & Markets. There is no justification offered for doing such, and none exists.

At this time I just want to pause and say our landscape of education -- our schools, our districts -- have gone through such disruptions, as we know even this week. To add another major disruption and barrier to our landscape of educating in our communities would be quite difficult.

Second, while authorization to waive late building final cost reports and transportation contract penalties is welcome, the proposal does not even include funding to repay current claims, let alone older claims.

Districts will never receive the funding they're waiting for.

Finally, the proposal to create temporary permits for teachers and other school professionals and to authorize individuals holding expired certificates to be employed in a teaching or other professional capacity are considered quite challenging.

Finally, we request the Legislature support investments we requested to further ensure equity for all: The $1.6 million to translate department information and resources into languages other than English; $5 million to increase participation rates and diversity in teaching careers through successful teacher opportunity programs -- the TOC II program -- which is essential; $125 million to design a new tuition rate-setting methodology for preschool and school-age special education providers. And we must achieve enactment of the legislation passed unanimously by both houses to provide funding parity for the providers serving

these children.

Finally, I urge you to restore the $20 million cut to public library construction and provide an additional $11 million, per the Regents' request.

I extend gratitude to our staff, who have worked so hard every day, in the face of inadequate resources, on behalf of the students and the districts across New York. I share primary concerns as we continue to sustain the educational process and the physical and mental health, safety and well-being of our children and adults in our schools.

And for that, I thank you for listening to us today and I look forward to additional questions and any other materials we can provide to ensure that our voices are heard. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner.

We're going to go first to our chair of Education, Assemblyman Benedetto. And

then the -- oh, I see those raised hands there, people following instructions. So first we will go to Assemblyman Benedetto, and I will -- in the chat, members will be able to see the order of their testimony -- their question.

Assemblyman Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you very much, Chair Weinstein.

And good morning, Commissioner. How are you today?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Fine, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Okay, that's my first question. Okay.

Listen, you mention in your testimony about the transfer of the food nutrition program from SED to the Agriculture Department. Can you expand on that, you know, a bit? What are we talking about here? Is -- can the Department of Agriculture, right now as it stands, be able to handle this program and do it well?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, first

and foremost, I do want to share the fact that I was informed of this change and this transfer by Commissioner Ball, who called me right before the holidays. And so I have had amazing conversations with him in terms of addressing the issue of nutrition and expanding the program Farm-to-School, which is about a $1.5 million program, versus a $1.3 billion program.

So during that process, absolutely, we have been collaborating. He went with me to the Bronx to see an amazing program, the Green Machine program that really focuses on nutrition. We have been trying to really create synergy about some of the concerns and issues that we have and that we can expand on.

But at the same time, I have really reached out to try to understand the rationale for this decision. And not only just the rationale, but also to try to impart the fact that this is going to be extremely disruptive, and trying to share with the Chamber and others that when we make these

kinds of decisions, usually you want a person who is going to be part of the exchange to be part of the conversation.

I have no idea what the rationale is. I have no idea what the design is. And furthermore, I have no idea why this is being advanced without engaging in a thorough conversation and also with some serious planning around the implications and what the impact would be in our landscape of schooling and communities.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you, Commissioner.

Commissioner, you may have known about my bill that we passed late last session regarding the special ed schools -- the 4102 schools, the 853 schools -- and providing them with an increase in monies to better balance their salary rates to make them competitive and so forth.

Well, the Governor of course vetoed that but made a commitment that she will this year look into and do it, and supposedly she has, increasing the funding for these

schools.

However -- and that's great and it's wonderful and we're looking forward to that, that she keeps her commitment. And I know she will. But what's going to happen after this year? How do you see us in the state telling the 4201 schools, the 853 schools that they have worked, that the teachers are comparable to the teachers in the public schools of this state, and can we in effect do something to balance out our commitment and monies to these schools?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, let me start by saying that we are extremely grateful that it was -- on both houses it was a unanimous issue.

I think it is also -- the whole rate-setting methodology has to be looked at for the long term. I think that while we're extremely grateful about the 11 percent, we're extremely grateful about the commitment in terms of funding, we really have to look at the issue of parity and looking at the whole methodology system that's used long

term. So I think we really truly need, as I said in my testimony, we truly need a commitment to looking at this long term.

Again, I am hopeful -- and I'd like to turn to -- at this point I'd like to turn to our budget person, Phyllis Morris, to really go into just one example of the granular issue here in terms of what the implications are.

Phyllis?

NYSED CFO MORRIS: Thank you, Commissioner.

So the issue is that the current methodology has what's called a reconciliation process. So if the provider is unable to spend the full amount that their rate provides in a given school year, the under-spending is recovered.

So the -- while we, as the commissioner said, appreciate the 11 percent one-time increase in the trend factor for '22-'23, it's going to be very difficult for providers to spend up to -- you know, to spend $240 million kind of instantly in one

school year.

So what we would be looking for is elimination of the reconciliation process at a minimum for '22-'23, and ideally over a five-year period, which is an administrative proposal that the department has advanced, to give providers more time to manage the ups and downs -- enrollment fluctuations, one-time unanticipated costs -- and to have that five-year period be the bridge to a new methodology.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you very, very much.

Lastly, there is great concern in my conference for the learning disabled -- for screening, proper screening of the learning disabled before they enter school, at a very young age, to see if there are problems there. If we get those problems early enough and work on them, give them the proper services, that maybe we can, well, solve a lot of problems in the future.

And I credit my colleagues Assemblyman Carroll and Assemblywoman Simon for their

efforts in this area.

Commissioner, could you please give me your opinion here? Can we effectively use a screening process at such an early age for kids in, let's say, prekindergarten and kindergarten, and do it adequately and cheaply enough?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, let me start by both thanking, as you said, Assemblywoman Simon -- actually, I would add Brooks and Assemblyman Carroll.

As you know, we had an extensive conversation with a presentation on the whole screening process, particularly the early start process. One of the interesting conversations that came out of that -- and I think there's been extensive research done on this -- is that the issue of dyslexia in particular has really been one that has been studied in terms of connecting it to are young people ending in -- in the -- incarcerated in many situations due to the fact that many of them have really -- have had challenge and have not received the kinds

of resources along the way.

Screening at an early stage is really essential. Like we know that the whole issue of addressing the issue in the early part of our young children's education is vital. And not only that, but maintaining the screening as a way of creating the resources and the responses to addressing those issues early on, capturing them early on, so that we can really create an investment at the early phase of our children's education.

And so we're very committed to continuing this work, continuing to commit to looking at the screening process as a way of identifying the barriers and identifying the way that we can then match the resources, the educational resources that are needed to respond to our young people.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Commissioner, thank you very much. And to all my colleagues, I say thank you for putting up with the first questions. Okay? I'm 19 seconds early; let that be a lesson for everybody.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Just before I turn it to the Senate, we've been joined during the commissioner's remarks by Assemblywoman Seawright; Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre, chair of our Libraries Committee; Assemblywoman McMahon; Assemblyman Colton, and Assemblyman Weprin.

Senator Krueger, I turn it over to your Senate colleagues.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. I just also want to -- I believe we've been joined by Senator Sue Serino and Senator Pete Oberacker. I'm not sure -- I think that's who I'm seeing is new.

And we'll hand it first to the chair of our Education Committee, Senator Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you, Chair Krueger, and thank you, Chair Weinstein.

And Commissioner, a pleasure to see you and your staff. And I do have to start by thanking you for leadership in a very rocky time for schools, for students and

parents, teachers and staff, boards of education and superintendents.

You and I have been in constant contact, and I'm very appreciative of your responsiveness to myself and all my colleagues, both Democratic and Republican, in the Senate with issues within their districts. So thank you for your leadership on that.

The first question is about the -- I think it's 168 positions you requested that were not funded in the Governor's proposal. Do you have a breakdown that you could share -- not this minute, but with us -- of exactly what departments they would be in and what tasks they would do? Because I think there is widespread agreement that you need more support and more staff.

But do you have that? It's not reflected in detail in your testimony.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. And thank you for that question, because that is something that you have taken a leadership in asking us to make sure that not only do we

detail it, but also to have a rationale and an explanation of these individual positions.

So we will make that available right after our testimony. And it's something that we truly believe is needed in order to make our arguments about why we need these positions. So thank you.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. The second question is, you know, we all collectively fought hard to get not only additional Foundation Aid, with your leadership and now with Governor Hochul's leadership -- that we are finally getting there, we're incredibly appreciative. But districts also got a lot of money through the federal stimulus programs.

Have you done any analysis of whether, from your department's estimation, districts are using these funds appropriately? As you know, we did have a hearing on that early on. But I wonder what your perception is about whether the services are being provided that were intended with these funds.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. So

again, thank you for that question.

The work that we started, not only when -- of course, you know, when we first had the initial funding through CARES and then we went through CRRSA and of course ARP. We have been not only meeting with our stakeholders, our monthly meetings, we have been also meeting individually in small -- both DSs and our different regions, meeting with our superintendents. Part of this was to -- also we've been doing, and we'll share a little bit of this work that Phyllis has been doing in terms of -- and the staff in general -- looking at keeping in mind the cliff. Right? These are fundings that we're very concerned about how they're used --

(Zoom interruption.)

SENATOR LIU: Somebody unmute -- mute. Mute.

SENATOR MAYER: Whoever that is, please mute your --

SENATOR LIU: Tom, that's you. Tom O'Mara.

(Continued Zoom interruption.)

SENATOR LIU: Tom, you've got to unmute -- you've got to mute. Tom, MUTE.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So one of the things that -- to your point, knowing that the funding is essential, what was the design of these fundings in terms of not only our recovery process, rebuilding, our students' needs, specific -- both in terms of their mental health services, trauma, looking at our students' needs in terms of academic, and all the kinds of services that are very specific to our children, but also making sure that we have the resources that are used over a period of time that we all know that September 30th, 2024, cliff is real.

And so what we've tried to do is provide workshops, guidance, conversations, both on a small scale, on the larger scale. Also providing, through technical support, what are the one-shot deals that, you know, can provide in terms of usage of -- you know, we have also tried to express that while there are opportunities to use this in terms

of capital, that there are some pitfalls, right, when you're using them in that manner.

So our entire department, at different levels, whether it's been in terms of looking at if it's capital, if it's instruction, if it's personnel, we've tried to work with the field in designing their plan, making sure that they are working with their constituents, with their communities, and designing the kind of usage of these dollars, whether it's in technology, staffing, that really is going to be prudent and be used for what we would consider long-term and having the opportunity to also address the short-term issues.

But the one thing we do provide guidance in that we are concerned about is that because these are one -- you know, these are dollars that are now, that we don't want districts to become so -- to purchase items that need long-term maintenance, long-term support, and when that funding disappears, that -- you know, that districts have a problem.

I can also share with you by calling on our finance person, Phyllis Morris, who can you give you specifics of some of the webinars and some of the ways that we have been supporting the field, if you like.

SENATOR MAYER: Well, I want to get to my other question, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

SENATOR MAYER: So I look forward to that.

So school mental health continues to be a very pressing problem in every district, urban, suburban and rural. And we're all concerned about it. As you know, I fought for $10 million in the budget pre-COVID; I don't think any of that has gone out the door. I look forward to that. But on the Governor's ReCOVs proposal, which is a mental health proposal, do you have comments or thoughts about how effectively to maximize every asset we can for ensuring our kids deal with mental health issues as we come out of COVID?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. So

let me start -- you're absolutely right that the -- along with the response to our students' academic needs, there's so much trauma, there's so much social-emotional ways that we have to address.

So the Department of Health, I have to tell you that we -- we just did a recent convening, because we've realized that the idea of cross-agency work is essential. So we're working -- not only looking at it from our own department, but we're working with Commissioner Sullivan to really create that cross-agency work that is so essential to support our students' mental health. And we're looking at different ways that we can do this and -- you know, telepractice, we're looking at ways that we embed this idea of mental health services into our landscape, and the best ways, the most efficient ways of doing it.

I can also ask Jim to give you some specifics as well, if you like, Senator.

SENATOR MAYER: Sure. If it's quick.

(Laughter.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Senator.

One of the areas that we're focusing on is social-emotional learning. And that is really designed to help students develop the skills, the knowledge, the attitudes that they can carry forward to develop healthy relationships, to avoid risky behaviors. We know that drug use, violence, bullying, dropping out are all issues that our schools are dealing with. The department has supported districts in their efforts to provide additional social-emotional learning opportunities for our students.

And then in addition to that we have our program that would help support culturally responsive and sustaining education in our schools. And that really starts from the premise that we are welcoming students into our schools, and we are looking at the assets that they bring to the classroom, we're looking at the assets that they bring to the school, and we're building

an educational program for them around those experiences and those assets.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you very much. I will yield my remaining time. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to the Senate -- I'm sorry, Senator Krueger. So let's go to our Majority Leader. Yes, Crystal Peoples-Stokes, please, for questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And I certainly want to thank the chairwoman from the Senate as well, Senator Krueger.

An honor to see you, Commissioner. Thank you for being here this morning. It's good to see all my colleagues. I just have a couple of really quick questions.

One, I just want a confirmation on if it's in fact true that much of the basis of education, academic education, is provided during kindergarten through 4th grade. Is that a correct assumption?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm sorry, that most of --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: Most of the academic basis of education is provided K-4, and everything else that happens after that is kind of built on that foundation that young people receive at those grade levels, is the question.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: The -- it's like building a house. That foundation has to be solid. And when the foundation is built to be solid, it can really support as we go through our education.

So you're absolutely -- early childhood, that foundation is essential throughout --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: Okay. So -- and I actually concur. I just wanted to make sure because, you know, sometimes those of you who are in the field, you know these things a lot better than those of us who sit around and think we know what's right. So I wanted to confirm that.

And given that is a fact, would you say that your agency, State Education, spends considerably more amount of resources and

focus on early childhood education than you do on other grades? Or is it simultaneous across the board?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I would say -- well, you know that we spend -- we had the blue ribbon report that addressed the issue of early childhood. We clearly agree when you asked the question about the foundation.

But the foundation is the starting point. So you build on that foundation. And again, you know, having been a middle school and a high school principal, you see that -- you take the foundation and you really develop from the early childhood through the elementary, from the elementary, we begin to expand, extend the knowledge base.

So middle schools and high schools are just as important. And so that the continuum has to be looked at. Each segment is just as important, because you're -- it's building blocks. So you can't just build a strong foundation that's not there. You have to then move it, when you move them into middle

school, there are other aspects of middle school that are essential to build on. And then from middle school, of course, we know high school, and then getting them ready in terms of whether it's college readiness or getting them ready for college and career.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: So a lot of the data tells us, of recent, that most -- or a lot of young people who end up in high school, who actually end up graduating from high school, who are not college-ready. So somewhere along the line academically, the system that's supposed to provide them with this education failed.

And I don't know if you can actually determine whether that is something that happened in early childhood or middle grades or high school. But wherever it happened at, there needs to be a concerted focus on fixing that. I think that there are a number of, you know, SUNY and CUNY colleges that would acknowledge that, you know, K-12 is sending far too many students to college that are not prepared to be in college. And that is not a

very good return on the investment that we've put in for K-12.

And so I am appreciative that, you know, the Foundation Aid dollars are there. I'm appreciative that you're actually going to get access to additional positions, although I hope that those positions end up having some concerted focus on making sure that that foundational education is provided for everyone who attends schools in the State of New York.

And given that does not happen, what -- how are we ever going to hold somebody responsible for the fact that every year we spend more but every year we're not getting more?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, let me just say that obviously, you know, we try to isolate many of these issues in terms of looking at -- obviously we know that in society there are many, many, many issues that we grapple with, even in our educational space.

For example, we've had a tremendous

influx of young people coming to our country from places that -- right now we're placing students that have never even been to school and, you know, are coming from different places, different stages --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: You know what, Commissioner, I appreciate that. And you know I understand that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: And I appreciate the fact that we are in a position where we are the kind of country that welcomes new citizens here. I think it's an awesome thing.

But I represent a district of people where many of them have already been in this country, they were born in this country, and they're being -- going through a system of education where they've not properly been educated. I think it's easy enough to find a lot of reasons why that doesn't happen. I get it. But at some time, somebody has to be the professional in the room and say, This is what has to happen in order for this to

change. And I'm just trying to figure out who that professional in the room is going to be, and when are we going to hold them accountable for the massive investments that we make in education and not necessarily getting back the return.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So let me respond from -- you know, we obviously work with our local school districts, our local superintendents. Right? School boards hold the local superintendents responsible. So collectively, we have a commitment, an obligation to do this work.

Now, one of the things that I think is critical is that we look -- you know, we look at our societies and our different school districts, and as you know, even in the department, why do we have monitors in certain districts? Why do we have schools under review? Why do we have, you know, all of these different ways of looking at these situations at the local level? Because in many situations we do have school districts, we do have schools, we do have communities

where the results are not obviously what we want them to be. That is as a department, we are responsible to support the local educational endeavors and success.

Now, granted, I have to tell you I have some districts that we work with, but we don't have the final -- you know, superintendents are hired by school boards, and you know this. I'm not telling you anything you don't know. But -- and they hold their schools accountable. And we try to work under some very difficult situations because we don't -- we don't have the authority to hire and fire principals, superintendents --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: But -- life is hard, I get it. Can you just tell me who the person is in your agency that works with early childhood education? And then I'll reach out and speak with them later.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm sorry, who is the person that --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: The staff person that works in State Education

with early childhood education.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Oh, sure. We have --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: Who does that?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, I will send you several names of different people who work with childhood education, because it's not just one person. We have -- I'll not only send you that, but also how -- we will send you documentation of how we work with the various districts in this area.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEOPLES-STOKES: Okay. Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate you.

And thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to raise this issue.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Sure.

Before we turn it over to the Senate, I just want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Assemblyman Taylor, Assemblyman McDonough, and Assemblyman Byrne.

And now we go to Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much, Assemblywoman.

And our next questioner is Senator John Liu, chair of the --

SENATOR TEDISCO: Senator? Senator?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes?

SENATOR TEDISCO: This is Senator Jim Tedisco. I'm the ranker on Education in the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'll get to you. We'll get to you, Senator.

SENATOR TEDISCO: I've had some problems getting in today, I don't know what the problem was. Was there some dysfunction when we started the meeting?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: There's always something with Zoom, Jim.

So I will put you higher up on the list, but you still come after chairs.

So Senator John Liu, chair of the New York City Education Committee, next.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to assure Senator Tedisco that there was not a special Tedisco block on the Zoom entries.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Oh, I know, I know that.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I don't actually know if that's true, John Liu, but that's fine if you want to say that.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR LIU: In any event, I -- first of all, I want to thank the chairs for holding this important hearing. The budget, the education budget is by far the largest part of our state budget every single year. And along those veins, I want to thank my colleagues in our house, Senator Mayer and Senator Krueger, for advancing the Foundation Aid, the victory of which we celebrated last year.

My first question to our wonderful commissioner, Betty Rosa, is are we definitely on track for Foundation Aid to be fully phased in by next fiscal year?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. We are -- we are on track. And I'm going to ask Phyllis to give you some specifics, but I'm also looking to -- looking down the road

when we're fully -- you know, we fully have made our commitment, that we look at our current formula.

So Phyllis?

SENATOR LIU: Well, I -- I -- thank you, Commissioner. With all due respect, I don't need the specifics, I just wanted an assurance. Because we believe we're on track --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR LIU: -- but I wanted to make sure that you and the State Education Department still believe that we are on track to fully fund the Foundation Aid --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR LIU: -- by next year.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR LIU: Okay, great.

And then I also want to commend you for your comments about providing funding for our special education providers. We all know that it's lagged far behind. Senator Mannion had a great bill that we all supported. Unfortunately, the Governor had vetoed it,

but promised to address it in the state budget, which I believe she did, with the 11 percent increase.

But to Assembly Chair Benedetto's point, there needs to be an ongoing -- some kind of indexation, which you referenced in your testimony.

So my simple question to you is, does that require legislation or simply the appropriation of $1.25 million that you requested?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I think the appropriation.

But I also -- to -- you know, the statement that Phyllis made is critical as well. I am concerned about the $240 million. The spending in one year is going to be quite challenging.

So I think it's something that I'd like to work with -- you know, to work on. Because as I said, the 11 percent is welcome, I think the base is excellent. I just don't know -- I shouldn't say I don't know. We have had internal conversations about the

fact that this appropriation should be a -- five years. And this way -- I want the spending to be used with thoughtfulness and so that people are not looking to just rush --

SENATOR LIU: Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So if -- with all due respect, if I can have a specific conversation of what our concerns -- I think Phyllis alluded to some of them. We have been doing some extensive looking at this issue, and we will share that with you.

SENATOR LIU: Terrific.

So if there's any legislation that would help ensure that this funding remains appropriate and not lagged for so many years behind the rest of the education budget, please let us know. We would like to --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. Yeah. And I think our methodology -- we're going to need to correct the current method that's used. So that's why we were looking at the funding to do so. And we will include that in our response.

SENATOR LIU: All right. A couple of easy questions first.

Commissioner Rosa, I found your testimony interesting on a number of different levels. There was one statement that you made towards the beginning, I guess in your introductory remarks, that I just wanted to ask for some clarification on. You mentioned the word "equity," which these last couple of years, it's just become like a catch-all phrase for almost everything. And it's -- I will admit, it's hard for me to understand exactly what people are talking about whenever they will mention the word "equity" without more context.

So in your introductory comments you've mentioned the word "equity" as it relates to -- "equity for all students to prepare for college, careers and civic engagement, regardless of background, zip code, first language or ability." I understand the background. I understand zip code and first language. I'm not sure what that "ability" means. What is equity with

regard to ability?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So when we -- a lot of times we talk about disability, right?

SENATOR LIU: Okay. So that's what you mean --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah. So I like to think of -- I like to think about equity in terms of ability meaning that different children, different young adults have different talents.

SENATOR LIU: Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I like to focus on their abilities. I like to focus on their potential.

SENATOR LIU: Commissioner, I am completely clarified at this point.

You know, the word "ability" is also not necessarily just referring to students without disabilities or students with disabilities, but there's a continuing debate and discussion about whether, for example, students can learn at an accelerated pace relative to other students. So I thought

maybe that's what you might have been referring to. But I totally understand your clarification about students without disabilities.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And if I can just add one more element to that. For example, we have students whose talents may be in performing arts. Right? We have students whose talents may be very specific to the sciences and other areas. They may have an ability, a strength, if you will, in one area and not necessarily in another area.

So building on those building blocks to their abilities is, I truly believe, an education. We have in many cases one-size-fits-all, which in effect is something that we are trying to make sure that through our grad measures conversations, that we think about how do we meet the students where they are and how do we look at their talents and build on those talents. Because a lot of times students have certain talents and look at other students -- so in our system we value certain talents and we do

not value others. So equity for me, in terms of ability, is to really meet the students where they are and enhance those, support those, and make sure we celebrate those.

SENATOR LIU: If I understand your statements correctly, then I am in full agreement with you that there should be some recognition of ability or, as you say, talent in different areas of our public school system, whether they be in the performing arts or in the sciences, what some people might consider more traditional academic areas, versus performing arts or sports or things that people may consider less academic in nature.

So I think it's a good thing that we recognize the ability or talent of some students to excel along those lines.

My final question for you, Commissioner -- I know this is a topic we've been talking about for a long time, but we've got to keep talking about it because we need to get this stuff done. And that is that, you know, for a long time the

African-American community has been calling for curricula and educational requirements in public schools throughout the State of New York. As you are fully aware, the last couple of years has been terrible for the Asian-American community. We still face a huge amount of anti-Asian hate, even -- especially with the recent rise of Omicron, we also saw a severe uptick in anti-Asian attacks. And I think education and helping our future generations, including the current generation of schoolkids in our New York public schools, understand Asian-American history and our experience will help, you know, take away this perpetual foreigner syndrome and "model minority" myth that, you know, Assemblymembers Ron Kim and Yuh-Line Niou are fully, you know, advocating for to dispel those kinds of myths so that we can be treated as humans and we all face these kind of vicious attacks on the streets, in the subways, anywhere that we have seen throughout these last couple of years.

So we need to get the syllabi and the

requirements and the material out to our public schools.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And I totally agree. And which is why I think you know we've been having these conversations around different needs and trying to, through our culturally responsive way, creating resources so that we really -- the tapestry has to become obviously one that gives voice to the voiceless. And so I totally agree.

SENATOR LIU: I love you, Commissioner Rosa, I love Chancellor Young -- but I also love a schedule. So we need to get a timetable on this.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to our Higher Ed chair, Deborah Glick.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Thank you. It's good to see you, Commissioner.

And I know that I will have a chance to go over some of the higher ed issues at another table, so let me just ask you:

During this period of COVID, we believe that students have had significant learning loss. We had issues with graduation rates and with college readiness before the pandemic, but now many educators are very concerned about learning loss.

So I'm wondering what strategies are being discussed or considered in order to help students who are in high school to -- I'll get the phrase -- catch up in order to be ready to take this step into college. College admissions are down partly because students don't want to spend their lives on Zoom, they don't want to spend their resources to -- they want a college experience. But many students aren't going to be ready.

What plans are there? Are you thinking about summer school catch-ups or what?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So even before the -- you know, when we were looking at -- when we were at the -- if there's such a thing as pre-pandemic, one of the things

that I think in the department we have attempted various times is the issue of P-20, looking at the whole issue of P-20.

But within P-20, to your point, how do we create opportunities to create a continuum of what the needs are? And more than ever during the pandemic, not just because of learning loss but also because of the trauma, the social, the emotional, the helping students regain and feel the kind of support to get back on -- you know, excited about education, excited about, as you said, going to college, excited about -- even with work-related issues.

So part of -- this has been with us every single day. We have conversations, you know, in terms of not just the higher ed, how collectively we can make those transitions -- as recent as this week -- those transitions inviting, exciting again, even while we're going through this. What are the kinds of things beyond summer, extended? How do we look at time of -- you know, kids getting -- looking at projects and things that they can

get excited about so that it's not just adding more and looking at the negative of a loss, but rather what's the way that we can, as a system, support our young people to find a path, a way to engage with the learning process again? Because some of them really fell off in many ways.

So we want to really -- you know, I look back and I'm sure Senator Jackson is here. You know, I came from a middle school that was Monday through Friday from 7:30 in the morning till 10 p.m., and on Saturday it's till 6 p.m., because the kids could do projects. I think we have to look at how do we create expanded opportunities for our young people to regain, to really become very much involved again in looking at where these openings, these holes are, and how to fill them. And what are the ways that we can do that to support them doing that.

I've even had a conversation, just to give you one quick example --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Maybe -- maybe we could talk a little bit more about that

example -- you know, I only have a limited amount of time in which to ask and get answers.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Since you brought up the issue of the school buildings being open longer days, I certainly remember an after -- you know, a night school that provided a wide range of things to people in the community, whether they were children or not. And maybe that is something that we could have more of a discussion on at another time.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: But I'm wondering, there was a discussion earlier about early identification of students with various types of learning disabilities, whether it's dyslexia or some other learning disability. And I'm wondering what kind of -- since the systems are so large and so vast, what are the targeted response to those, identifying those students, and how do you bring them up to their grade level?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: And what is your time frame for doing that?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. Well -- and let me just clarify. The identification is not just for dyslexia or students that -- you know, every student -- many students need an EP, and educational plan. It's not just our special-needs students.

The screening process is just a way of finding early on, you know, what are the kinds of resources that we have to -- whether it's an English language learner, whether it's a student that may need some management skills on their study habits. I mean, they're just different -- the screening process helps -- for this particular screening process, that was dyslexia. But I think we have to look at how do we use the screening process early on to find the resources and align those resources with the specific needs.

To your point, some of this will be

extended-day. Some of this will be ways that we find project-based -- different ways of engaging our students. Some of our kids would go to mentors. That was a way of connecting with a particular -- you know, some of my middle schools would go to Project Lib {ph}, Morgan Stanley, and would have an experience with other individuals and business. And this was in middle school.

So I think that there are many practices that have been embedded. We just have not built capacity and expanded in many of these excellent practices that we need to expand. And what we've been doing with our superintendents is working on sharing these practices so that they take hold and we can -- you know, we can clearly help individual schools and individual school districts to really expand on some of these best practices.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: We have a new mayor in the largest school district in the state. The Governor recommends a reauthorization of mayoral control for four

years. I'm wondering what your experience was with the prior administration under mayoral control and what you think -- some of us think that perhaps we need a shorter timeline just to ensure that the new team is working appropriately.

And so I'm wondering how you feel about maybe a two- or three-year extension and whether you've had -- been engaged with the new DOE team, which I have to admit I've had more communication with in the last two weeks than I had in the last two years with the prior administration.

So I'm just wondering what your thoughts are about the largest school district and the changes that are underway with the new administration.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I think the mayoral control issue obviously is in your lane.

I do believe that -- and to your point, and I'm going to be very succinct with this, we have had amazing -- in a short period of time, amazing conversations with

the new administration, including the mayor's staff and the new chancellor. And while he's been specific about the backlog that has -- in terms of our impartial hearing officers and OATH and the backlog on this issue, they have been very responsive, they've asked for information, they have followed up. We even agreed to monthly meetings with both the mayor's office and the DOE.

So I will tell you, if the early start is any indication of where we can go, this has been incredible. So I've had similar experience, as you've indicated, with the new administration. It has been encouraging and, more importantly, they have followed through.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Well, thank you very much. And I'll see you next week. And I yield back my 15 seconds.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the Senate now, Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Oh, beforehand, we've been joined by Assemblyman Aubry and Assemblyman Reilly.

Thank you. To the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

All right, we go to Sean Ryan, the chair of the Libraries Committee.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you.

Thank you, Commissioner, for joining us here today. I think we're really fortunate to have you at the helm during the pandemic. It's not been easy. You've been in the hot seat. And, you know, it's been thankless. So I thank you for your good work.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

SENATOR RYAN: Thanks for your plug for the increase in the construction fund for libraries.

Do you have a sense, Commissioner, of the long-term capital needs for libraries? I know that the programs are oversubscribed every year, but I haven't been able to get a handle on how much we would need over, say, a decade to catch up. Do you?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Actually we've been doing some analysis, and we could

get that to you. Because this is -- you know, our connection with the library and the importance of the library, not just in terms of the funding -- as you know, last year, last January, around this time, we did some work in this area in terms of a virtual.

We know the importance of the library and the connection in terms of family and students and the joy and the ways that the library can expand and enrich the lives of our young children and our young adults.

So we will get that to you. I think internally we have been really looking at building a stronger way of messaging this narrative. As you know, we've put out a lot of -- in our both -- you know, in our parent newsletters and the way that we have been really focusing on that intersection and that connection.

But I can turn to Jim if you want, but I am more than glad to --

SENATOR RYAN: I'm happy just if you can just keep sharing information that you have.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. Okay.

SENATOR RYAN: And, you know, thank you also for the increase in Operating Aid, the first time that's been increased in many years.

I wanted to switch over to the three Native Schools in New York State. Very happy to see the capital allocation to them. There was also an allocation to higher educational -- looks like Associates in Educational Improvements. I noticed that it was budgeted for two people on that. You know, there are three schools and they're geographically spread out. So just ask you to, you know, keep an eye on that to see whether or not one personnel at each school is better, because they are spread all over, from Northern New York to Western New York to Central.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. And we're -- as you know, this was -- both the Regents -- we were very, very -- I would say, you know, we developed a strategy, we went to -- you know, the Regents got on board

immediately. We asked, for all three schools, what the funding looked like. We immediately responded because truly this whole idea of our Nation schools is extremely important to us.

So we will look out for the third position. And as I said, this is extremely important.

SENATOR RYAN: That's great. Thank you so much.

You know, going to the pandemic and how we're trying to recover, in Buffalo in particular I have some concerns that prior to the pandemic we were seeing declining test scores for the 3-8 benchmarks. And then we also had a persistent absentee problem, which has just been made worse. Our superintendent recently questioned the validity and the reliability of the benchmark testing. So, you know, if we have the superintendent saying the tests aren't reliable, that really sends a message to the parents.

So my question is, how the heck are we going to benchmark in a district like this

then?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, what I would say is -- you know, the difficulty sometimes with this issue is that the test is reliable when it suits you to be reliable. And sometimes it's not reliable when it doesn't suit you to be reliable.

I think our consistent message has to be that the tests are used for a particular -- especially high-stakes tests. But there are other -- you know, we can't lose sight of the complexity and the importance of multiple ways that we assess our students.

SENATOR RYAN: There seemed to be an inference that the tests were somehow changed. No changes, right? Same vendor?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Correct.

I mean, I think -- I think what they may be speaking to is that during the last tests we did shorten the test. Perhaps maybe -- you know, I'm more than glad to speak to you offline to find out the specifics on this, and perhaps maybe even

speaking to the district. I'm not -- I'm not sure why, you know, why there would be some difficulty with this. Because as you know, we did a press release on this and then --

SENATOR RYAN: Yes.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. So --

SENATOR RYAN: So I'd like to keep it working and keep in touch if you have both those issues of the scores and also the attendance problems.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. Sure. And you and I usually have conversations and, you know, I'm always available too.

SENATOR RYAN: Yes, thank you. Thank you so much.

Now switching to a matter that you addressed earlier on the Farm-to-School program. We have fantastic examples that I'm familiar with in districts like Buffalo and Hamburg, where they really embraced these programs and they've had a great outcome. That, you know, they're proud of their outcomes, that the kids are more interested, they understand better where their food comes

from.

But it hasn't been widely received in districts around the state. I don't know why the number is just about 4 percent of the districts. And I know there is a proposal to move this to Ag & Markets. You know, I want to work with you and the Department of Education and Ag & Markets through this process, because I believe we all share the common goal of having more of our food dollars spent in New York State. And I think we have a good template to get there. But I don't know the impediments to it now.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So what I would say is as follows.

Obviously you know that the program, Farm-to-School, is about 47 to 50 schools, right, throughout. So it's a small program. It just recently went through an audit and evaluation, which we're more than glad -- you know, I'm sure they'll share it with you; we can share it with you.

We have recently in the past year built a partnership with Commissioner Ball to

really, truly begin to do the kind of work that he has been doing, and to expand on -- as you know, I think from our 1.3 there's about 750 -- you know, somewhere in the vicinity of 1.5 million, let's just use that number.

And so we have been very -- you know, obviously it's optional. We've been supportive, encouraging for individual districts to -- you know, to really become part of the conversation. My biggest concern is that to go from a program that is that size to the massive program where we have to deal with issues of student privacy, we have to deal with issues of -- we have a built-in system of administering the program. That is where I -- I have had the most amazing relationship. He came to the Bronx, we've built -- you know, conversations around, you know, other kinds of visits.

The relationship is one that needs to grow. The conversation of how we enhance the program that he currently has is another type of conversation. But I think there's been

some misunderstanding of how do you go from a small program without any conversation to a massive program that you will have to --

SENATOR RYAN: We'll continue to have conversations on this?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure, absolutely. Absolutely.

SENATOR RYAN: And I'll just close with, you know, every year the budget comes over and every year the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center, they always get a cut. Every single year.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR RYAN: Can never figure out why, Commissioner. So if you have the knowledge base of why we cut out those programs, you know, let me know, and we can work to make sure they don't get cut.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. Well, and I hope that the both -- you have been very gracious in restoring them, because I totally agree. I -- I will try to find out what the thinking is behind the cuts.

But again, as you know, the proposed budgets we get a very -- you know, we get a briefing on. We don't really sometimes understand the rationale, and I'm sure others would be able to help you understand as well. But we support both -- the restoration of both programs.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Weinstein.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to the Ways and Means ranker, Assemblyman Ed Ra, for five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

Just quickly, if I can acknowledge Assemblywoman Missy Miller has joined us as well.

Good morning, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Always good to see you. And I just want to quickly state something, and then I have some questions.

But I do want to express some frustration from yesterday. I don't necessarily blame the department. I think a lot of us were in a kind of "don't shoot the messenger" kind of situation, and certainly the department was. But a lot of confusion was -- happened yesterday, and I know that there was some information put out Monday night that said, you know, the mandate must be followed, and then yesterday the department said it should be followed, and that caused some confusion as well.

So I hope that, you know, as we come to some further resolution of this, whether through the courts or when this does expire, we can make sure clear information and directives go out to our districts. And certainly I think -- I think you know the tremendous respect I have for you as an educator and a leader, both during your tenure on the Board of Regents and at the department. So I just wanted to state that.

But I wanted to get into a topic that was brought up, and it's always music to my

ears, after 12 years of being on these budget hearings, when I hear chairs like Chair Benedetto and Shelley Mayer talk about 853 schools and 4201 schools. And, you know, good to see them high up on the witness list this year. But Ms. Morris did get into a little bit the reconciliation process and all of that.

And I'm just wondering -- you know, I know we have this statement, really, that this COLA is going to be there and it's great. And, you know, I think the point was made about that money in terms of the reconciliation process and all of that needing to happen in the long run.

But I guess my concern is, and I'm wondering your thoughts, on whether there should actually be, you know, Article 7 language in this budget to ensure that that happens. Something similar to the bill that was vetoed last year, to ensure there is parity for these schools in line with the increases we give to general public education each year.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, if I can take half a minute and respond to your first part, I really --

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Sure. Please.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So just my decision, along with conversations with the Department of Health, my decision was based on knowing schools, as you know, as a principal and superintendent. It is very difficult to have a situation where a decision is made and you throw the system into chaos.

So my position has always been to maintain the integrity and maintain the stability of our educational system. It is always going to be my priority. I do not believe that any decision that I made should really force any district -- I mean, I -- as I'm sure you did -- watched the confusion for parents, the confusion for students. We always want to maintain that stability. And the only way that we can do that is to keep -- you know, while all these other things are going around the school, maintain

what currently exists until such time as we can -- legally we can work it through. And that was our message about stability.

Having said that, to your second question -- to your first question, I truly believe, to your point, that we really -- parity is parity, and we really have to get to a point that we look at the current -- looking at the rate-setting methodology. We need to address that. Other than that, I think this is not going to -- while, you know, the base is better, you know, we can look at this over a period of time. I'd like to move beyond the one year.

And we're more than glad to be specific with the legislators in terms of our specific concerns about this. But at some point we truly have to get to correcting a methodology that -- you know it and we all know it -- has not worked.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes, absolutely. And, you know, I'd appreciate if your staff maybe could provide the details of that proposal --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: -- for the five years so that we have that window to finally correct this so that, going forward, these schools are on better financial footing. Because it's important. And as you know, with the pandemic, there were people not getting evaluated that needed these types of schools. And when everything is so dependent on, you know, that reconciliation process and, you know, pupil count, it certainly has an impact.

So thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the Senate now.

Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And we have come to Ranker Jim Tedisco, five minutes.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you, Senator.

Commissioner, I can't see you yet, but I hope they bring you up so I can be looking

at you on the screen here, you're not still looking at Senator Krueger. Oh, there you are. Okay, great.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for the wonderful service you've provided over the years as Regent, as the Regent leader, and now as the commissioner. We really appreciate your love of our children and education, something we share and I know many of my colleagues share.

The excitement is we've got full Foundation Aid geared up. It's something we all, many of us have been supporting, we know the importance of funding our educational system. Kids are our future, and their education is maybe the most huge part of their future in terms of their success. I think that's something we all agree upon.

But the concern I have, and I'll ask you about this, is we could have double the Foundation Aid, we could have triple the Foundation Aid, and I know it's been mentioned somewhat here, but if we don't use it in the most efficient and effective way to

bring those test scores up, to get those graduation rates in place, to make sure that they get the full extent of a great education, we fail. It's not only about the dollars, which we're going to receive and which they deserve, it's about creating parity and fairness along with that efficiency I initially talked about.

So what I think I want to ask you, first and foremost, is we know the funding's there and we've seen the budget that's been presented now. But over the years my concern, as someone who -- and I always say this tongue in cheek -- had a real job at one time, I was an educator, as you know, we've talked about that before.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR TEDISCO: For ten years I taught kids with learning challenges and I was special education instructor, got my degree from the College of St. Rose and Union College before that. My real concern is about maybe the lack of an understanding of diversity in the formula itself.

And could you address what your feelings are about the formula from the past and the formula now as we move towards Foundation Aid, and what you think we may be able to do? Because, Commissioner, I represent a very diverse district -- urban, rural and suburban. And some of them have the same -- many of the same needs, but many have different needs based on this environment that they're a part of, and high needs, low income, high wealth.

Can you tell what you feel about the formula the way it's been presented with the dollars we have in the budget this year as you've seen it?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So three parts to this. One is that the formula in statute has not been updated. Right? We know that.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Right.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And that's the thing that since its inception, it has been -- you know, my understanding is that you look at the 2000, you know, Census,

poverty.

So one of the concerns we have is that, you know, once we get past these three years and we've fully -- you know, we've gotten to the fully funded, I think we really need to drill down and look at the formula and the way it has been -- to your point, how it's been responsive or not to the various needs.

Now, the one thing I do want to say is that we have been, for years, in a financial challenging issue. Therefore, to many of the questions that have come up, while we have this time and place of funding, we are still going to be backfilling, not only in terms of learning loss, but we're going to be backfilling the fact that not every school has a nurse. Not every school has a library. Not every school has the kinds of resources, to some of the questions that have come up, that really create a comprehensive space and place for children to have the very, very best resources to really be successful.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Let me just break in

on that point that you made now.

So are you saying that the formula right now and in the past did not have the fairness and the parity that we should be moving towards in terms of some high-need districts? Because if you don't have those things, obviously you don't -- you have a need that other districts were able to overcome.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I think, you know, we have to look at the reality of the financial situation that we've been -- education has been in for -- you know, if we look at 2008, I'll go that far, that's when I joined the Board of Regents. And so we have -- you know, even the whole issue of how we have been financing our high-demanding, high-needs -- I mean, this is per -- looking at per student allocation and looking at needs is a formula that has to really be reevaluated and --

SENATOR TEDISCO: Let me move into one other area of the evaluation I'm talking about.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Time is -- the time has been up for some time.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry, yes, time has come. Sorry, Jim, you don't get another shot at the --

SENATOR TEDISCO: That was a fast five minutes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I know, it's amazing how quickly it goes. And I'm turning it over to Assemblywoman Weinstein.

SENATOR TEDISCO: Thank you, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We now go to our chair of Libraries, Kimberly Jean-Pierre, for 10 minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Good morning, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Good morning, and I want to thank you and your staff for working so hard and for providing

your testimony and for the relationship that we have and we continue to develop for school districts in my district.

I first want to ask you -- yesterday I sent a letter for the $15 million allocation for digital inclusion. Do you know if these funds have been released? And if not, when will they be released?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

Phyllis?

NYSED CFO MORRIS: Certainly.

So they're in -- correct, in the '21-'22 enacted budget there was a $15 million federal appropriation included for digital inclusion efforts. And our -- and the funding source for that initiative, to our understanding, has not yet been identified. So when we've made inquiries about that, that's the answer we've received, is that the funding source still needs to be identified.

So once the funding source is identified we will certainly move forward with implementation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: And do you anticipate a time frame?

NYSED CFO MORRIS: It really depends on when we're provided with the information about how the initiative is going to be funded.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay, I'll follow up.

NYSED CFO MORRIS: We'll move forward as quickly as we -- as we possibly can once that information is provided.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay.

And I know last year, Commissioner, I mentioned how important diversity is in our public schools. And I appreciate some of the conversations that you're having and things that you are doing for teacher diversity. It is so vital that our kids -- my daughter, who is in a predominantly white administrative school, that she has a teacher that looks like her and so many other children throughout the state.

So I look forward to working with you to ensure that we can have some plans and

roll out plans for teacher diversity. That's so important.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you. And thank you for your voice in this issue. And as you know, the Board of Regents collectively, Chancellor Young and all of us are committed -- you know, we're working very closely with NYSUT, we're working very closely with our higher ed, to ensure that the issue of teacher shortage, but particularly around diversity, is a priority.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: And I do want to also echo some of my colleagues who talked about how education is funded and we're utilizing the census numbers from 20 years ago. And we talk about particularly suburban school districts who, you know, we say that children should not be -- the quality of education should not depend on the zip code that you reside in. And there are kids who live four blocks, two blocks away from each other and are receiving different qualities of education because of how we fund

education.

So I would really like your input into seeing how we can change the formula and we can be more progressive and to ensure that children all across New York State, no matter what zip code you reside in -- because these are hardworking families that live in each and every zip code, that their children will have a fair chance.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you. And that's why we put that in our testimony, because we totally agree with you that we have to do a better job in that area.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Perfect. Thank you so much.

And I want to say if you can send -- as the Majority Leader mentioned, the early childhood education, if you can share the contents that you will be sharing with the Majority Leader with the Education Committee. Surely early childhood education is important to all of us, and we would like to make sure that we are working with the right people in the department.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much, Assemblywoman. I'm now going to jump to Senator Hoylman.

SENATOR HOYLMAN: Thank you, Chair Krueger, and to the Education chairs here. I really appreciate it.

It's good to see you, Commissioner. I just wanted to relay a quick story. My husband and I have an 11-year-old daughter. We found out only when she was in fourth grade that she is dyslexic. And we only found out by happenstance. It was, in fact, Assemblymember Bobby Carroll who helped identify the fact that our daughter had this severe reading disability.

And given the fact that estimates are up to 20 percent of school students are dyslexic, that's about 220,000 in New York City alone. While I appreciate your stating that screening at an early stage is essential, when are we going to start?

Again, my husband and I were fortunate in that I bumped into Bobby and was able to describe my daughter's symptoms. But an undiagnosed dyslexic student is failing. Because my daughter couldn't read, and we didn't know it.

So what can we do about it?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So that's a great question. And I know that -- I know that we have been trying to also work in a combination of early -- to your point, with our teacher training of understanding early on. By the way, there's even misunderstanding that -- you know, it used to be that people thought that dyslexia was specific to boys, right, young men, when in fact that is not -- there's so many -- I mean, information-wise we really have to do a better job. And --

SENATOR HOYLMAN: Thank you. Thank you. And then if I could just -- and I appreciate that. And I look forward to working with you and Assemblymember Carroll and Assemblymember Simon.

One more quick question is about a bill that a colleague of mine carries in connection with Holocaust education. Do you have a position on the Holocaust education requirement, given that studies show that a significant percentage of New York students aren't adequately receiving Holocaust education in our schools?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

SENATOR HOYLMAN: That's legislation carried by Senator Kaplan and Assemblymember Rozic.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah. And just so you know, we did provide last year specific information about what is in law, that is required. And we even had a conversation -- you know, we had agreed to obviously share the resources that we do use. I think there was a conversation around the possibility of even doing a survey, which we had no funding for, obviously, to try to find out how do we ensure that districts in fact -- what is required in law on -- they're addressing.

So it's a conversation that we're continuing to have. It's of interest to many around this issue, given not only the climate but definitely the need to -- you know, to make sure that it is happening.

So I will continue to -- I will share the information, and it's a conversation we will continue to have during this legislative session.

SENATOR HOYLMAN: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Weinstein.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. So I believe we go to Assemblyman Jensen, ranker on Libraries.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: I just want to start by getting your thoughts on the Executive not including State Ed's proposal for $16.2 million for Instructional Materials Aid, which would include Library Materials

Aid. I know State Ed proposed 16.2 and the proposed budgets were at 5.9.

What are your thoughts on that lack of -- that only 35 percent of what you're asking for?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, it's -- you know, like anything else, anytime you ask for something that you believe is essential and -- so, you know, it's disappointing. But we're hoping to try to work -- you know, to work with the legislators to try to address this issue.

And again, I can tell you some of the -- you know, I can ask Jim to address the issue of how we are hoping to elevate this conversation.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Sure, thank you, Commissioner.

This particular aid category is very important given what school districts are facing in terms of the funding cliff, in terms of the fact that the Smart Schools Bond Act is now almost fully committed and that much of the materials and equipment that was

purchased pursuant to that will age out. We also know that the availability of federal funding, COVID-related, has given school districts some additional capacity.

However, as with many of these issues, what we really need to be looking at is how do we create a reliable stream of funding to our school districts. And when we think about the implications of technology, we think about the implications of these various instructional materials, it was the feeling of the Board of Regents and the position of the commissioner that this was the level of aid that was required, and that that level of aid ought to be sustained and ought to increase as the need warrants.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you very much, Jim.

Long before I was elected -- not long before, but before I was elected --

(Zoom interruption.)

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Long before I was elected the Legislature put --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry. Everyone

please mute if you're not the one talking, thank you. Sorry.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: -- Love Your Library fund was created. Could you tell me if those funds have been collected, have they been distributed? And if so, how have they been distributed?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Jim, I'm going to go back to you because -- go ahead, Jim.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: I believe this would be a --

EX. DEP. CMMR. CATES-WILLIAMS: I was going to say actually, Commissioner, I will comment on that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes, go ahead.

EX. DEP. CMMR. CATES-WILLIAMS: Currently there is money in the account, and SED has been given -- has not been given the authority to spend the money. So the -- we continue to request it annually.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: So who would you need to get the permission from, from the

Executive or from the Legislature?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: DOB.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Okay, thank you.

Shifting gears a little bit, do you believe that there's been a lack of focus or priority on adult education and literacy work? I know there's a divide between upstate and New York City where upstate is really driven by volunteer-based organizations, and New York City it's by paid staff.

Should there be a greater focus paid, both budgetarily and support-wise, to make sure we're empowering especially the volunteer organizations to make sure that they can reach the targeted groups they should be reaching?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. And I know the time is limited, so I'm going to share with you, in terms of our adult literacy statewide, the specifics so that we can advocate to your point on a statewide basis.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you. I

appreciate the respect of the time, and I know I only have 30 seconds, so I just want to make this point. I don't really need a response.

But I certainly think it's worth focus for curriculum development, a greater focus on real-world skills --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: -- like financial literacy for our high-schoolers, middle-schoolers and elementary. So I really hope that you and your team at State Ed try to start focusing on making that a required course of curriculum. So thank you --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, just to answer quickly, the financial aid literacy -- by the way, this month on the On Board article I wrote a piece on financial literacy. And financial literacy is very much a part of the DEI framework.

So we are very focused on the importance of financial literacy across the board, not just, you know, for our high school students. It has been -- during our

conversations with our high school students during our task force, it was one of those key requested areas.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Well, there's a great bill that would push that further, so I look forward to that work.

Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Back to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. We're up to Senator John Mannion.

SENATOR MANNION: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Thank you, Commissioner, for your service to the children of this state. As I thanked you last year, those sentiments remain for sure.

I'm going to continue a conversation that was happening about the Foundation Aid formula with some of my colleagues, including Senator Tedisco. I know -- I couldn't be happier that we are going to fully fund Foundation Aid and we have a commitment to

it. But my concerns are that I represent districts like we've already heard about that are right next-door to other districts and they are at the wrong end of that funding formula, and continue to be, and it compounds the problems that exist in that district and the ability of those districts to retain and recruit teachers and other staff, because they're losing them.

So my question is, knowing that you have unfortunately several open positions within State Ed, and we need to fill those, is there currently actively a move towards reforming the Foundation Aid formula?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, the -- you know, in my testimony and what I said earlier was that we requested a 1.2 million to do a top-to-bottom Foundation Aid review, but the funding has not been provided.

So when you ask me, yes, we really have to look at a review of the formula and we have to really get an external support to do this in order to do a top-to-bottom review.

SENATOR MANNION: Thank you, Commissioner. So my follow-up question was going to be how can the Legislature help, and I think you have answered that question. Which is that we need to make sure that this is a priority, that we put it in our budget and we advocate aggressively for that. So I appreciate that.

Looking at the time, I'm going to jump to this question. It does have to do with the recommendation about the move regarding Ag & Markets. So my question is about the 4 percent of the schools in New York State that currently participate in the Farm-to-School program. Has State Ed conducted outreach to try to increase that number over time?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. And we have not only, as I shared earlier, my relationship with Commissioner Ball, but also Kathleen DeCataldo, who's on with us today, who oversees the entire program for Child Nutrition -- which includes of course, as you know, breakfast, snack, lunch -- has really,

really been engaged in advancing this issue and trying to not only -- trying to expand.

But we also have looked at, as I'm sure you have, you know, we looked at the audit that was done to try to figure out how do we support the kinds of things administratively, where there were some concerns, to also support the program as well.

So Kathleen, you may want to add something else too.

ASST. COMMISSIONER DECATALDO: Sure. Yes, commissioner. I would just add --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Just very briefly, please. Because we've run out of time.

ASST. COMMISSIONER DECATALDO: We've provided numerous trainings and worked closely with the Cornell Cooperative Extension folks. We meet with schools.

We think one of the keys is to make it easier to identify the products, if we're talking about the Farm-to-School 30 percent initiative.

So there are steps that can be taken. So thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblymember.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the Higher Ed ranker, Assemblyman Doug Smith, for five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Doug, you seem to have frozen. Do you -- if you can't unfreeze yourself, you may need to log out and log back in, in which case we can ...

Okay, I think, Assemblyman Ra, we're going to skip to the next Assemblymember, and then we'll come back to Doug.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I'll get in touch with him and see what's going on.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So let's go to Assemblyman Kim now for three minutes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Go ahead, Assemblymember Kim.

(Discussion off the record.)

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: All right, thank you, Chairwoman. Am I up?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Commissioner Rosa, you mentioned in your testimony that we need more funding to fully staff the department, and part of their funding is to properly administer language access mandates and support more instructional programming.

Do you have a sense of where we're falling short in providing language access and which communities are impacted?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

In a couple of areas we have been asking for a while for translations, right, something as simple as translated materials. There's a 1.6 -- or a request of trying to make sure that, you know, we have the materials so that we're reaching the various communities in areas that have the materials available. We have also asked for, for example, not only translation of parent materials, translations for communities.

The other area is in terms of looking at supporting -- one of the big things is our dual language programs. And, you know, we

try very, very hard, particularly in areas where we can offer dual language or we need to offer and hire bilingual teachers, where we need to hire the kinds of staffing that's going to -- you know, one of the barriers -- it's a strength, but it's a barrier, is the issue of language acquisition.

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay, great. Thank you. If you can provide more specifics, there'd be follow-up, maybe very --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Very good, thank you.

I want to just reemphasize Senator John Liu's point on bringing Asian-American curriculum to New York. As you already know, our schools play a large role in normalizing or dispelling certain stereotypes of Asian-Americans, and New York should be leading the country in systemically confronting rising hatred toward Asians.

Two states have already responded in recent weeks by directing their public schools to incorporate Asian-American history

in their curriculums. And I know you're aligned -- your values are aligned with us on this issue, Commissioner.

In addition to putting a time frame and a schedule, can we do something publicly to signal to all communities across this country that New York is taking anti-Asian hatred seriously?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. And we will work with you and others. And I know, just very briefly, Regent Chin, as you know, and our chancellor are very much committed to doing this.

ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. So we'll follow up with this, Commissioner.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And we go next to -- excuse me, I lost my own list. Ah, Senator Robert Jackson. How could I forget Senator Robert Jackson.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you, Madam

Chair. And Dr. Rosa, let me thank you for your service to the people and especially the children of New York State.

I have a couple of quick questions. I only have three minutes, so if you can be as precise as possible, I'd appreciate it.

DOE officials have said it's up to the commissioner to make the determination of how much funding is subject to the Contract for Excellence, CFE, requirements. Is this true? And if so, why hasn't the amount been raised?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm not -- well, I'm going to take this offline because I'm not exactly sure, you know, why they're saying that or what exactly that means. So I would be more than glad to have an offline conversation on this issue with you --

SENATOR JACKSON: Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: -- so we have clarification on it.

SENATOR JACKSON: All right, I appreciate that.

The second question I have is can you please share with us why pre-K was not

included in your state aid proposal? Was the funding allocated last year spent? Or do high-needs schools, districts still have waiting lists for pre-K? Can you give us a quick update?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. I'm going to turn to Phyllis on the finances.

Quickly, Phyllis.

NYSED CFO MORRIS: So what we had asked for in our state -- our non-state aid proposal was close to $2 million for staff for our Office of Early Learning to appropriately administer and monitor the almost $1 billion in pre-K funding we administer each year.

We did receive that funding in the Executive Budget, we're very pleased to see that. That was our focus.

But just to touch on the American Rescue Plan federal funding that was put in the '21-'22 for pre-K, it's for a three-year period. So '22-'23 will be the second year of that $210 million investment.

SENATOR JACKSON: Okay. A little

later is it possible we can get statistics on how many pre-Ks around the State of New York so that, you know, at least we know from last year? If you don't mind.

And again, my third question: Do we know how many public schools hired social workers, school psychologists, school nurses as a result of the additional funding? And I have bills on that in the State Senate.

So do you have any insight on that that you can give us from a rough perspective right now? I know you don't have the specific details at this particular moment.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: To be quite honest with you, no. We have a broader understanding of, you know, what we are encouraging and what we are asking districts to consider. But the specifics, I would have to -- but it's an internal question that, you know, we really truly are gathering, and we will share it with you.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you.

My last question is legitimate concerns have been raised about the lack of

secular education in many yeshivas, and an inquiry found that 26 out of the 28 schools investigated failed to meet the basic standards for a secular education.

What will you do to ensure children are receiving the proper instruction in English, math, science and social studies? And there's a bill on that also. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So very quickly, I know we ran out of time, we will provide -- as we have been having extensive conversations on it, we're bringing it to the March meeting -- the administrative information on -- we've been working for a year and a half on substantial equivalence and the specifics of it. And that has been shared with the cochairs, but I will make sure that you also receive a copy of it.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right, thank you. Assemblymember.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we're

going to go back now to Assemblyman Doug Smith, the ranker on Education.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

And good to see you, Commissioner, Take 2. You know, sorry about that, in this Zoom world. So it's so good to see you, and I just want to right out the gate say thank you so much for your help and meeting with me last year regarding the teacher certification process and this perhaps pending teacher shortage. I really appreciate that; the people in my district really appreciate that as well.

So that goes into my first question, because Governor Hochul announced a plan to address the teacher shortage. And as part of this plan, she's proposing increased funding to the State Ed Department to enhance the certification process. Do we know yet how the department might utilize the increased funding? And, you know, is it enough funding? Is this going to be helpful? And what can we kind of do to be more helpful?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. So there are three parts to this. So very quickly, because we only have -- we will make the information -- because we have been having internal conversations about the 11 positions, the 8.1 million, that we have the money, we just have never had the money to develop our -- you know, our system.

So I'm going to very quickly turn it over, just to give you a highlight from Laura Glass. Laura?

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: Hello.

So we original proposed $8 million, which is our carryover funds. The Executive Budget proposes $1.35 million, which actually coincides with the first year of what we would like to be a four-year plan. The first two years of that plan would be analysis and design, because it would take a long time to really think carefully about how do we automate TEACH to make certification more streamlined. And then the last two years would be the implementation process.

So we essentially got in the proposal

only the first year allocation of what we see as a four-year plan.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And the 8.1 million we already had, so --

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: Yup. These are all carryover funds that were generated from the application fees that we received through OTI.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Which were withheld, yeah, and finally given to us.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Okay, thank you, yeah, because I think that's something that we had previously discussed.

Now, the other thing I noticed that in the State of the State briefing book that Governor Hochul proposed a new program to assist paraprofessionals in the schools in obtaining a full teacher certification by offering financial assistance to cover the costs of tuition, books and fees at SUNY and CUNY.

Would paraprofessionals seeking a full-time teacher certification be eligible to attend the schools online, or would they

be required to attend these, you know, in person? Do we know that information yet?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Laura, I don't think -- no.

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: No, we haven't --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: No, we don't. But let me just say this.

The idea of a pipeline of paraprofessionals is amazing. So let me start there. It is absolutely something we support, and it's amazing. The devil's in the details. So we don't have those yet, but absolutely we would be willing to meet with you and others to really discuss how do you go from trying to do something like that and -- whether it's online, in person, or career kind of focus.

We would love to be a part of the conversation on how we do that. And so we're hopeful that we will have that opportunity.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: I really appreciate that. And I think, you know, your experience previously in the classroom and at

the building level as well I think is really helpful for that.

My last question is about digital equity, because this is something that schools across the state have brought up as a concern. So, you know, we know that students from low-income districts and students with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to learning loss from the lack of broadband infrastructure across the state and reduced special education services.

So have we been able to yet address the level of learning loss? I know that's been a -- you know, we've endeavored to find that. Do we have any information on that?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. So we have a whole -- as I shared earlier, we did a whole analysis on the whole digital equity issue, from not just the infrastructure, equipment, you know, looking at the -- you know, the opportunities also for professional development and usage in terms of our grant that we did get from the federal -- which was 19 million.

So what I would say is I will give you definite -- our outcomes of our digital analysis and also how we are asking districts to think about, given COVID and the platform, the digital platform and the extended use of it, and the investments that need to be made in order to take those learning lessons, as I call them, into that expanded learning process.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you so much, Commissioner. And I think I speak for all of us, I think you're doing a great job. So thank you for your help.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go now to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

I believe we are up to Senator Samra Brouk.

SENATOR BROUK: Yes, thank you. Good morning.

Good morning, Commissioner. Thank you for joining us again. It's good to see you.

My questions revolve specifically in

relation to mental health for our young people. And I know you may have answered this before, but I was in and out. Can you just remind me, has the $10 million for school mental health from last year's budget been disbursed to schools yet?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay, we did -- well, I think Phyllis -- Sharon? Phyllis?

NYSED CFO MORRIS: Yeah, the $10 million is administered by the Office of Mental Health, so we'd have to defer that question to OMH.

SENATOR BROUK: Got it. I'll keep that for next week. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: But there is a relationship, just so you know, with Commissioner Sullivan and her staff with our staff. We've been doing some cross-agency work. I did say that earlier.

SENATOR BROUK: Okay, got it. So I'll check in with them for certain.

One of my frustrations has been, as chair of Mental Health but also interested,

obviously, in our local education, is that all the way up to the surgeon general understands that we are in a crisis of mental health for our young people, that no matter, quite frankly, if we get all the math teachers, reading specialists, English language learner specialists, all the specialists we need for our students, if we don't care of their social and emotional well-being, it will all be for naught. They will not be able to learn, they have been traumatized.

So can you describe what other mechanisms there are for schools to take advantage of in order to better address this? And also, what are you going to do this year to better encourage our schools to spend this funding specifically on mental health?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So just -- so again, very quickly, we have been focused, along -- every one of our conversations, our workshops, have been the academics and the partner, equal partner, mental health, social-emotional. That has been critical.

We have encouraged schools in terms of their funding to make sure that these fundings are addressing those issues, whether it's affirming environment, whether expectations of how, you know, you Zoom in -- just like we're doing, we're talking about screening. You have to screen the -- you know, and have knowledge of the staff, knowing when students are in crisis and what are the services that you provide during that period of time.

So I think it's really helping us to look at, in the sphere of culturally responsive, what are the kinds of things that -- the climate of the school and the readiness and the -- you know, we have suicide, you know, issues that are going on right now. What are the signs, what are the things that we need to look for to address in schools? You know, the isolating --

(Zoom interruption.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: We will make -- we've done so much work on social-emotional and trauma, and we're trying

to do that cross, as I said, agency work in the convening that we've been doing. We're more than glad to share what we've been doing with the --

SENATOR BROUK: Thank you. I have zero questions left. My last quick just 10-second --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Nope, sorry, Samra --

SENATOR BROUK: That's all right.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- zero mark.

Thank you. Assemblywoman.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Niou now for three minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you so much for being with us, Commissioner.

I wanted to ask a couple of questions just -- I also wanted to say thank you to a couple of my colleagues because of the things that they were asking really kind of hit the target, I think, on the things that I'm very curious about. Senator Liu when, you know, he was talking about CFE, I really wanted to echo him on that.

When Senator Brad Hoylman was talking about, you know, the differences in whether or not early learning for folks with -- kids with dyslexia, et cetera, were very poignant to me because I am somebody on the spectrum and I was not diagnosed until I was an adult because there is very little help for young kids who are -- you know, it's very hard to screen, especially for autism, when you are a girl and there is, you know, generational, cultural things that -- you know, if you're also not an English first language person, there's a very difficult time for screening for young children.

And so I wanted to kind of bring that up as well and see what you guys were looking at for -- you know, for early screening for not just dyslexia but also for autism, for other, you know, learning disabilities that are very important for our children.

And I also -- so that's one question, I guess, and then the other is to echo Assemblymember Ron Kim on -- and John Liu on API education curriculum. Right now we would

be so far behind the -- New Jersey, Illinois and Wisconsin have already passed legislation on this, and so I wanted to echo their support because it's really important to our Asian-American community for our history in New York to also be learned.

And I also wanted to mention that, you know, we saw that many students were falling through the cracks during this epidemic when it came to lack of internet access, you know, echoing what our ranker was talking about, and we were trying to see -- I wanted to see if you had any programs to make up for that learning loss as well.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. Well, the extended programs as well as some of the other programs, the library and some of the other programs we support are being used to the extended.

What I would say is you've asked several questions. I am more than glad to meet with you personally and address some of these issues, because the issue of on the spectrum, particularly, as you said,

cultural -- you know, contextualized in a cultural type of situation, is very important. And I think that that is an issue that we constantly look at.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: The greening of our schools also is another --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Excuse me, Assemblywoman. The time has expired.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Oh, sorry, the time clock isn't on my screen, I apologize.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: We will meet with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Okay.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. The next speaker is Senator Reichlin-Melnick.

SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you so much, Commissioner, for joining us this morning. I really appreciate your work on behalf of our kids, and you have been incredibly attentive and responsive to me and to the needs of the students in our districts, particularly the East Ramapo School District. I just want to

thank you for that once again.

I wanted to ask you a question about the Foundation Aid formula. And now that, of course, we're phasing in Foundation Aid at the levels that it should have been all along, but really getting millions of dollars more to our schools, the formula is still using some very old census data and the Regional Cost Index is pretty out-of-date for the counties that I represent in Rockland and Westchester. The labor markets here are much closer to New York City and Long Island.

I'm wondering what would be your strategy to try to update this formula and really move it into the new decade in a way that's going to work for our districts?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, and that's why we said the department wants to look at that 1.2 million resource in order for us to do a deep dive into looking at this. Because you're absolutely right, it is outdated, it is not helpful, and so our request is that we hope we could get the funding so once and for all we can do this

work that is so needed.

SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: So you are actively planning to have the department work to try to propose some updates to the formula?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: We had actually made a request at the end of this -- you know, we've had this request made, so we're --

(Zoom interruption.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm sorry?

SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: I think that was coming from somebody else on the --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, so the Regents aid proposal, we made a request. Now, we know that -- we're trying to get -- let's get through the financial aid formula and then, you know, have this money so that we can take the deep dive and look at it collectively. And --

SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: I appreciate that. And particularly when you look, I hope considering an update to the data on English language learners, because

most of the districts in my area have seen a major growth in English language learners. Which is welcome, it means our communities are vibrant, they're growing, but we need the additional funding to support.

So my last question is really on the mental health front. Most people I talk to in schools, they are dealing with a mental health crisis. I know some of my colleagues have asked about this. Do you feel that there's more we can be doing to try to support schools and having enough counselors to provide mental health services for our students?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I think that given the funding, the current funding, we are really -- we're working very closely to make sure that as we look at this funding from -- you know, even the one-time funding in -- during this crisis is that we do make sure that our social workers are, you know, individuals that are going to make a difference in making sure that the mental health component, which is a huge component

during this time because of isolation, trauma and everything else that we all know our students have gone through -- that in fact, we've asked at every meeting we have, we talk to our superintendents, our stakeholders, that we support the idea that these two components really have to go hand in hand. And that even into the future that our schools are, you know, provided with the kinds of resources to ensure that the mental health component of our teaching is a -- dovetails the educational part.

SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblyman Conrad.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Hi, Commissioner.

Thank you, Chairs.

I want to talk about recruitment for a minute. I'm a big fan of the temporary licenses for pending professionals, the

paraprofessional work, the expired certificate work that's there, and of course the allowance for retired teachers and other staff to come back to the classroom. I think those are steps in the right direction.

Where is the conversation -- I'm going to put it in two parts for you. Where is the conversation about out-of-state licenses? I've got quite a few calls in my district from folk who are willing to come back to New York to deal with the teacher shortage.

And second, about diversity in teaching and teaching recruitment, what are the efforts right now -- and this is something I see as a burden -- to lower the costs or eliminate the costs of tests, fees, especially if somebody receives TAP or Pell? I just think about what it takes to become a teacher and the costs. You know, just the fees alone to get your fingerprints done, you know, the fees to take these tests -- you know, we talked about a four-year process earlier.

So I'm going to wrap it up in there,

is that what are we doing -- one, is there a conversation about out-of-state teacher licenses? And two, what are we doing to lower the costs? I heard about a four-year plan, but what I'm seeing right now in the classroom, this epidemic of teacher shortage is happening now.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. So the teacher shortage conversation is very comprehensive. It's not just from outer -- you know, recruiting from external, but it's also looking at what are the ways -- and as you know, the Regents have made all kinds of flexibility, whether it's eliminating the edTPA, whether it's, you know, the COVID, and trying to really get many of the barriers, as I call them, out of the way so that not only do we recruit -- the recruiting process is easier so that the submission is easier in TEACH, so that in fact we have opportunities for individuals who are even thinking about this, can really be welcome.

Very quickly, Laura or Jim, because I know you only have 50 seconds.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: I just want to -- let me address the temporary professional permits: Well-intended, ill-conceived, from our point of view. We believe it will end up adding complexity to an already complex system. We believe it puts a burden on the applicant to submit an attestation, under penalties of perjury, that they have completed the certification when in fact they may not know that.

Our experience with certification is that many, many of the applications that are submitted are deficient and what would end up happening, pursuant to this proposal, is that individuals could end up being employed by school districts when they are not appropriately certified and that, when they are informed of that, school districts will then have to terminate them and that will end up creating incredible disruptions throughout the educational system.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Just to add, we were not -- we have had no conversation when this came up, so --

ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: All right. Good to know. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

And I believe our next questioner is Sue Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Chairwoman.

And Commissioner, it's nice to see you.

You know, mental health is the hot topic of the day, and rightfully so, and I know I don't have to tell you that we were not adequately addressing the mental health issues way before the pandemic. But we are really reaching a crisis point. And when you look at the CDC's statistics for emergency room visits for children as young as 5 years old, it's simply jarring.

I've heard from parents who feel like they've hit a wall with mental health services and they don't know where to turn.

So my question is, what can we do

better to thread the needle between services in our schools and additional services and support that the students may need that go beyond the school day, as we all know?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I think that if -- I think prior to the pandemic, to your pandemic, we learned that the mental health -- a healthy child has to be -- you know, the whole issue of the whole child, right? It has to be a complete conversation around creating the kinds of support resources to support the child in terms of readiness, even for learning. Readiness for learning. You know, we think it's an automatic -- it's not. There's all kinds of barriers that get in the way.

So I'm hoping that a huge lesson learned, to your point, is that mental health has to be a mega-component to our educational system. And that we do not lose sight of the importance of it but, more importantly, that we invest in this issue. And that we invest in the professionals that can identify -- early identification, can see the -- you

know, help our teachers see the signs. But also support young children as well as young adults in our educational system so that they can receive the counseling, the kinds of services that they need to continue to grow and develop, but more importantly to sustain and to be able to deal with the kinds of counseling services that keep them on track.

We have not done a good job in this arena. And if the pandemic has taught us anything, it's the idea that we truly have to make an investment in this issue.

SENATOR SERINO: Yes, thank you, Commissioner.

The other part of -- my other question is about hearing from parents of students who receive special education services. Wow. You know, I just met with a bunch of them last night, and it's heartbreaking. They feel like throughout the pandemic their students were simply an afterthought to the state. So they weren't able to access services or services went remote, making them no longer effective, and they feel like their

children are even further behind and lost through the cracks.

What can you do to assure these families that their students are a top priority as we work to help students get back on track in the wake of the pandemic?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. And so -- by the way, early on, even in our comprehensive plan to the schools, we made special ed the priority. We continue to have these conversations with district superintendents and others that special needs -- you know, my background being special ed, as some of you may know, really lends itself to the fact that we have to differentiate, we have to support, we've got to have the ways that we reach our young people -- and in-person, for many of our young people, is the modality that supports them. You know, they need to see, they need to have the differentiated support that they need.

So we have been in communication with our superintendents, with our different

stakeholders to ensure that special education, both from the perspective of in-school as well as the types of programs that are created to support our students -- we're having that conversation right now with New York City in terms of looking at their cap, which really has to address the needs of their students and the services that they need, related services as well as the program recommendation under FAPE.

SENATOR SERINO: Yeah, I'd like to follow up with you afterwards, because I'm having this issue in my district.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Weinstein.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, I just wanted -- before we go to the next member, who will be Alicia Hyndman, we've been joined a while ago by several Assemblymembers: Latoya Joyner, Amanda Septimo, and -- I

thought I -- maybe -- that may be it for some of the new members.

And now can we go to Assemblywoman Hyndman, please, for three minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chairs Weinstein and Krueger.

Chancellor, the last time I saw you was under much warmer circumstances. And I will just say I know you're dismayed at the Governor's budget regarding the certification process for teachers.

So how many vacancies do you have now in OTI? That is my first question. And how many -- you said SED disapproved over 2900 teacher certification applications in 2021. How many did you actually approve in 2021?

And how can you prioritize staffing in that department specifically because of the exodus of teachers -- not just in New York City but around the state -- when it comes to being in our classrooms, as teachers have an unfair burden or undue burden because of the work that they do post-COVID with our students?

And if you can tell us overall, what are the vacancies like in SED now that the hiring freeze I believe is over?

Those are my questions to you, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure. Sure.

So let me start with an -- just I'm going to ask Laura to get ready. But we did a chart, and we'll share it with you and others, of the 29,000 rejections, but there's 59 -- I mean, what's been processed. So we can share that chart specifically with you in terms of -- because we looked at this.

I'm going to go to Laura and Phyllis in terms of -- very quickly, in terms of our specific needs.

But to your point, the issue of the complex of not only looking at evaluating -- we also have the issue of the higher ed submitting transcripts. You know, and we're hoping that that whole issue with the transcripts can be -- you know, we're working on that as well. Sometimes that holds up the processing, you know, if the student hasn't

made payment and the university's holding up the transcript as well.

But with that, Laura?

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: Yes. So currently OTI has 60 -- at full capacity, 60 staff members. Within the last six months we've hired 11 staff members, and we still have nine vacancies left. And that's why we've requested $1.53 million in additional general funds in order to support 11 new staff members.

And of those 11 new staff members, eight positions would be to redesign OTI's management structure in order to streamline the certification process, and then another three positions --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Laura, how many -- is it 59 -- how many have we in the chart, quickly?

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: Oh, sure. Jumping to the chart, in terms of we -- that in 2021 we disapproved of the 29,000. We were issued 58,000. But there were another --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: My time is done.

SR. POLICY ADVISOR GLASS: Oh, okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I'll follow up with Jennifer Trowbridge to get the information.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes, absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Weinstein. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to the Senate.

I just wanted to also acknowledge Inez Dickens has joined us. Joined us a while ago, actually. Thank you.

Senator Krueger?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

We have quite a few Senators who I'm afraid I also didn't acknowledge. Let's see if we can try to slide them in as announced. Senator Andrew Gounardes, Senator Dan Stec, Senator Diane Savino, Senator Joe Addabbo. I think --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I see some

hands up.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's fine, hands up is good.

Let me see if I can just get this -- that's actually harder to see on the little boxes. Well, let's just go -- oh, I'm seeing Senator Leroy Comrie. Thank you so much.

And Senator Toby Stavisky, who joined us as our chair of Higher Ed, and we are giving Senator Stavisky the next round of questions. Thank you.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Okay?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Very, very briefly, let me just echo what my colleagues have said in terms of the Asian -- the importance of education in terms of recognizing the needs of the Asian community.

Several years ago the State Education Department really was very, very helpful to the Korean-American community, and I just want to thank you for doing that and giving guidance to school districts on a specific issue in Korean history, and that is the

distinction of co-naming the East Sea and the Sea of Japan. It's a very sensitive issue, and the SED handled it with great dexterity and sensitivity.

And I hope that in the future we will continue this, because we do have specific needs for the children -- and adults, quite frankly, in the Asian-American community.

I did that in a minute and a half. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much, Senator Stavisky.

Back to the Assembly. Let's see. Let me see if I can help figure out where we are on the Assembly list.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: I think it's up to me.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Based on the list in the chat.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Is it up to Mike Lawler?

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Very good, we're

going to call on Mike Lawler.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Commissioner, great to see you. I want to thank Senator Reichlin-Melnick for bringing up the Regional Cost Index. I certainly encourage him to carry my bill in the Senate that would change the Regional Cost Index for Rockland and Westchester counties and make it comparable to New York City and Long Island. Currently we are shortchanged significantly. This year alone, we would get $11 million more for Rockland County schools if the Regional Cost Index was changed.

So, Commissioner, I know you're a part-time resident of Rockland. You can certainly attest to the high taxes that we pay, second highest in the country. Changing the Regional Cost Index would certainly help with that. So I don't really think there's a need for a study, I really think it just needs to be changed and better reflect the fact that our labor costs are high. So I

certainly would ask you to work with me and others to make that change happen.

On the issue of curriculum, I have a bill to ensure that 9/11 is taught in our schools. Nobody in our primary and secondary school system today was born when 9/11 occurred. And so I really think that's something that should occur.

Also I know the Holocaust was brought up earlier. There's a bill in the Assembly to really ensure that the Holocaust is taught in our schools; I think that's necessary. And I think we really need to move forward with that legislation as well as my bill to ensure September 11th is taught in our schools.

And I would really implore you to get an audit of the curriculum done sooner than later. I think that needs to happen, and I think we need to have a better understanding of what actually is and is not being taught in our schools.

Finally, on the issue of East Ramapo, the monitors have been working very closely

with my office and my colleagues. We've been meeting with them quite frequently. But we've had this discussion, and I can't impress upon you enough that the challenges in this district are not going to change if we keep it the way it is.

The status quo is not working. Next year East Ramapo is going to have an influx of about 4100 new private-school students, 4100. That is going to have a big impact on the finances of the district, and I think it's really time that we look for a solution that separates the private-school system from the public school system. There's about 75 percent of the students are attending private-school now. It's unsustainable.

And I have put forward a bill to address that, to ensure that SED takes over the mandated services for the private-school community. And I really implore you to work with me on this, because what we're doing is not working anymore and we really need to change it, change the structure and get the private-school system out of the public

schools to ensure that all students get the services that they're entitled to.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I want to thank you, because we've started the conversation, as you know. And we will continue the conversation. So thank you for that.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go back to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Leroy Comrie. Senator Comrie, are you there?

SENATOR COMRIE: Yes, I'm here. Sorry, I was --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's okay.

SENATOR COMRIE: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, members.

I just wanted to ask the commissioner what are they doing to work on ensuring that there are opportunities to tie in social service agencies into the middle schools so that we can create more synergy with students

that need those extra services? And what is going to be done on a statewide basis to make that happen?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, in terms of -- as I stated earlier, we are -- you know, while we're working across the board, you know, the P-20 process, we also know that that middle school situation -- having been a middle school principal -- is essential. That is the probably that midpoint where we can, you know, make some adjustments to your point. And that is also a space that really needs a lot of -- back to the mental health -- support systems.

And also it's really -- one of the things that I know, and Senator Jackson will attest to this, having a middle school that has project-based, that has other opportunities for students and makes the connection to that middle school and makes the connections so that students have different outlets and shared in the kinds of situations that other types besides the academic, that they have opportunity to be,

you know, focused on clubs and other kinds of things. That's going to make a tremendous difference in the lives of children in terms of middle school and getting them also ready for high school.

So I think the investment in some of these key points of extended-day is critical, absolutely the way that we need to keep our students engaged and keep our students focused on building their own sense of worth and also, you know, their sense of taking interest in various different opportunities that they may not get during the regular school day.

SENATOR COMRIE: Thank you. I just want to get in one more question.

So how much money is allocated in the budget for extended-day programs at middle schools across the state?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, first of all, the school districts have their own specific budget. And so they work through in terms of how -- you know, with their own middle schools how and what kinds of

dollars --

SENATOR COMRIE: Unfortunately, if that budget is left to a principal to have to figure out their needs, it's not really fair to the principal when they have to hire senior teachers and other personnel.

I would hope that there is a specific budget targeted to middle schools for extended-day programs. I know my time is almost up, but I think that's a critical component of what we need to have throughout every school, actually, extended-day programs so that schools can stay open until 8 o'clock at night throughout the state. I think it would create a lot more preventative medicine that we would make sure that our 16-year-olds, by the time they get to 16, are productive as opposed to destructive.

So I would hope that that would happen. I'll look to try to make that happen in the budget.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

SENATOR COMRIE: I stayed in my -- a

little over my three minutes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much, Senator Comrie.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Otis is up next.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Hey, Commissioner, nice to see you. And I think everyone should hear that when school districts have problems and need help from SED, SED is there and you are there.

And we had one school district in my district that needed some help earlier this year or last year, and your team was great and exceptional, and we solved those problems.

So -- but my two questions, and I'll ask them both and then hit -- you can hit the answers, you have a very good initiative in terms of diversity education that you and Chancellor Young have pushed out to the school districts. And so what I'd love to hear is a status report on how school districts are either accepting and supporting

this or resisting the teaching of a fuller, more accurate sense of history and culture in our schools. An update on that would be great, and how we can be helpful.

And then the second sort of update question is on where are we on science and technology education, especially in the lower grades, but also there's some concern that maybe some of the middle school grades are walking away from something that's very important to the future of our learning and economy.

So those are my two questions, and I left you some time in the little time that I have to hit those topics. Thank you, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure, thank you. Thank you. Always a pleasure working with you.

Specifically to the DEI, I have to tell you we've been having many ongoing conversations and they have been well-received. It's been really, really -- and we will share with you some of the

meetings we've been having and some of the strategies that we've been using, whether it's through My Brother's Keeper, whether it's through some of the opportunities to engage with school districts and even some of their identified staff that's really invested in this process.

So we can give you much more granular detail on the whole DEI focus.

The second issue that you raised is we also have some extensive information on science and the information that you would want to see. And again, we're more than glad to share the importance of and how we continue to work in the area of technology and science and how it gets embedded and integrated into the regular curriculum.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you, Commissioner. We're very happy you're there. You do a great job.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very

much. I think I'm going to take my questions now. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you for all that you and your team do every day.

My first question is actually from a colleague who isn't on the committee, so asked me to follow up about Native American schools and that there are three, but only two saw significant funding in the Governor's budget and not the one in I believe the Oneida Nation.

So I'm just trying to get a clarification for her why there seems to be unequal treatment for that school.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So just to give you the -- the Oneida school got $6.1 million. So it was St. Regis Mohawk got 17, almost 18. Tuscarora got 11.7. So they all did receive.

They may be speaking to the issue of the additional staffing, because I think it was raised earlier about the two. And we will look at why -- because it's so widespread -- about the third position. So that may be the specific concern.

But the Regents' request was actually met. And we got the information directly from them.

So Jim, I think you may want to --

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Yeah, the capital needs that are reflected here came directly from the schools and the school districts that support them.

So the capital needs that were documented are fully met in the Executive Budget request and reflect what the Board of Regents requested.

The issue of staffing, there were two additional staff provided to the department. I think that there may be some concern that there should be a third person in order to have one person assigned to each of the schools.

Beyond the immediate capital needs, looking over the long haul we need to ensure that the Native American schools are treated the same way that other schools are treated. And because they are in this special classification, they're often not the

recipients of increases in aid, for any number of different reasons over time. That relates both to the instructional side and to the capital side.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So just for clarification that -- I believe that the Onondaga school requested 20 million and got 6.1 million.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I think -- I think there was a -- we worked very closely with them. There were numbers that were used initially, and we circled back to clarify those numbers. And so the numbers we submitted were the numbers that we did receive directly from the schools.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I'm going to encourage you offline to have a chat with both Senator Mannion and Senator May, who are both very concerned and don't believe that the schools' requests were met and that they're very concerned about that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I'll leave it to all of you to talk about after the

hearing. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I appreciate it.

So we're hearing a lot about the mental health concerns going on with the young people in our schools, and that's a universal. But it also seems clear to me that so much of it is correlated to the pandemic and what we did and didn't do.

Now, I'm not blaming any of us, because this was all, you know, "surprise," and then "surprise" again, and then "surprise" again. But since we are now almost seeing pandemic and the possibility of more variations as perhaps some of the new normal for our kids and for our schools, is there a way for the Department of Education to attempt to plan, to facilitate for what happens next, even though we're not 100 percent sure what exactly that next will look like?

So I'm talking about the ideas where there are plans set up in advance about, you know, at what point in a pandemic do you have

to shift to virtual learning, and will all the school districts know what that means, and how quickly they can then get those kids back into the classrooms when it's safe and making sure that there are clear thresholds for safety purposes for the kids going to school, for the staff working in the schools, you know, for planning to have the right equipment in storage and ready, including kid-size masks?

You know, I just feel like we jumped from crisis to crisis and we had no choice -- and again I'm certainly not blaming anyone in education or anyone in government. But now we've got a couple of years under our belt and I'm quite convinced that because of climate change and other factors, this isn't going to be a tale that we really put behind us. So do you think we can as a state come up with sort of a safety and education model that could work as we're dealing with the next version?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So first and foremost, just so you know, even at different

points we've taken lessons learned in having conversations with our stakeholders. We did, and we will share with you, we absolutely spoke to the Big 5, the superintendents, teachers. We've held virtual conversations about the critical issues of how to respond in a pandemic but even beyond that.

So, you know, in terms of readiness, in terms of being -- you know, prework in some of these issues: What do you need in place? What were the lessons learned? By the way, not just for students but for teachers and the adults in the school. And leadership, you know, wellness for leadership as well.

So looking at that whole conversation, we've done a great deal of work in terms of capturing -- because we do agree with you, this is a moment that we can't look back and not have learned what are some of the positive lessons, what are some of the specific needs in terms of talk about health and wellness, but also what are some of the things that we have to put in place.

And even with the issue of how we structure our time and lessons. We've learned an incredible lesson about the platform of extended -- the virtual, utilizing time, checking on students who, for example, may not be feeling well. How do you use that as a way of incorporating the student into that day so that they don't have to miss the lesson? How do you record?

I mean, there are so many incredible lessons learned, through the pandemic, of use of the technology but also use of connecting that we need to advance, to your point. We need to move forward into making it part of what we would call the new generation of schooling. And those lessons are extremely valuable. And we have been making sure that not only do we capture them, but we look at what has worked, what hasn't worked, and holding onto making sure that we reassess and take stock of what has not worked, so that, you know, we do create a readiness, if you will, platform.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. And I'll

just recommend -- the State Senate just confirmed a new head of Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services, a woman named Jackie Bray, who those of us from New York City know from her previous position in the City of New York where she was basically the secret weapon to get COVID response and test and trace and the items that were needed distributed citywide. And while there certainly are plenty of examples of how New York City also didn't get it all together in time, I really encourage SED to work with new Commissioner Bray, because I think she has a lot of great ideas to bring to the table for our school systems throughout the state. So that's just a recommendation.

A couple of my colleagues raised concerns around the evaluations of the yeshivas that flunk the tests, so to speak, but nothing's been done. I just want to add my voice to someone saying we all have to do better.

And maybe it's not just a group of yeshivas, maybe it is other schools in other

communities as well. But I know, as a Jewish American, when I see young Jewish children whose own communities are failing to make sure they get the quality education that they need, it actually angers me. And I have a secular Jewish district, but I hear from my constituents all the time how angry they are also that this is not being addressed.

So I am hoping that you and the Regents can come up with an appropriate answer, that we have so much respect for you and what you are doing for the state's education system.

With that, thank you very much, Commissioner Rosa.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

And just to assure you that we've been working very closely with CAC, the nonpubs, and we have had tremendous feedback from them in terms of developing our substantial equivalency materials. So -- and we're more than glad to share with you as well.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblywoman.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I believe that the Senate -- oh, no, we have a second round later. Sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So -- well, we have quite a few Assemblymembers --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, you do.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- on their first round. There are more of us.

Assemblywoman Lunsford.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you very much.

Commissioner, I'm going to ask a few issues right up front and then give you an opportunity to respond.

I want to express my thanks for you highlighting in your testimony the need for Library Construction Aid. Obviously that is an enormous cut, and our libraries have been essential in our COVID recovery. So I think that is a very important investment, particularly because we do see a 7 to 1 return on our investment in our libraries. So thank you for highlighting that.

And I want to add my voice to the chorus of my colleagues who are asking to ensure that we see parity in our budget for our 853 schools and our other schools that are providing very specialized services to our most complex and vulnerable students.

I now want to just touch on our school libraries. You know, many of our school libraries are the only place students have access to a library. And so many of our elementary schools don't have a library. So I'd like to hear what you have to say about putting money towards the construction of school libraries where we do not have any.

And to that extent, also the rate at which school libraries purchase materials is based on a 15-year-old rate that even at that time was based on a 1990s pricing structure. So I'd like to see an increase in that rate so our schools can meet the needs of our existing students.

I also want to go back to what Ranker Jensen was talking about with regards to adult literacy. The ELL funding, which was

in the budget and we don't have to fight for -- very exciting -- fails to capture tens of thousands of residents who are not workforce-ready: Stay-at-home parents, retirees, new Americans who need adult literacy services. And I'd like to hear if you have any thoughts on the need for additional lines of funding to capture that audience.

Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So first let me speak to the library issue as somebody that really put just about a library in every single one of my schools. Now, at some of them I did do through Robin Hood.

But I do have to tell you, it is essential. It is something that I absolutely would submit and say we need in every one of our schools. Very challenging financially, but it is an investment that we all have to get around to make sure that we support that.

You're right in terms of the upgrade. You know, I've been to Syracuse and different places where the library and the librarian

will say to me, or the media specialist, will say it is very, very challenging to restore. I mean, Jim and I visited a library that -- the place in Whitehall that the school lost their entire -- they preserved some books and we are, you know, donating and -- it is a major challenge.

So I know we're short on time. Jim, if you want to add anything else about the adult component.

But I will share with you some of my key concerns and perhaps proposals when it comes to libraries.

Jim.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Yeah, I mean we're -- I know the time is a factor. We're happy to work with you to provide you with information in terms of the adult learning piece.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes. We have specific information about adult learning. And creative ways that we can support that.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right. So

now, if you don't mind, I'll give it to our chair of Education, Shelley Mayer, for three-minute second round. And then I believe the Senate will be done.

Oh, I'm seeing another Senator's hand up. Excuse me. Let's shift to Senator Oberacker. Did not see that hand till right now.

Senator Oberacker, are you there?

SENATOR OBERACKER: I am here. And thank you. Can everybody hear me okay?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Dr. Rosa, thank you for your -- making things very clear today. I appreciate that. And, you know, I guess the thing with being the tail here, all -- most of the questions that I had have been answered and answered quite well.

What I would like to say to you and to ask is this. My district is very rural. And, you know, the rural challenges for schools we all -- have been laid out. I was glad to see funding levels have been increased for those schools in my district.

But one of the things I just ask is this. You know, as a businessman I'm used to numbers, I'm used to formulas to calculate and stuff. But, you know, when I look at the way that we calculate Foundation Aid, I have to say I think I would need to be a NASA rocket scientist to figure it out.

So my plea to you is, is there a way that we on the education side can actually make this easier to understand? My superintendents that I speak to, you know, on this are at times very confused and -- you know, I have two school districts that come to mind that are so close in all areas, yet the Foundation Aid is so different.

So if there's anything that we can do to simplify it, I would be forever -- and I'm sure my superintendents and most -- would be forever in your debt. Just to make it so that we understand it, you know -- understand it better.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I think the idea that we want to absolutely address this issue in the -- having an

investment to really change it is a start.

And then to your point, as my staff often hears me say, I want everything to be 7/11 and just simple. And, you know, let's not make it complicated. Let's make sure that everybody understands what it means when you say an allocation, an additional allocation, a weighted -- what does that mean? So absolutely to your point, we have to not only address the system itself, because the system is not helpful and it's old and it's based on old information, but more importantly, to really create a system that is transparent and that is, to your point, simple and transparent. That's what I would say.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Those are reassuring. And I'll use the words "music to my ears," Dr. Rosa.

So again, I thank you for your effort, I thank you for your job that you're doing. And I look forward to having that new formula in my hands here soon. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you

very much.

Assembly?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Good afternoon, Chairs. Good afternoon, Madam Commissioner. And thank you to your staff.

As young as I may look and seem, I've spent 16 years working in high schools, lastly as a high school social worker. So my passion lies of course in mental health. But I also want to ask, is there anything that we're doing specifically for school social workers with help with their continuing ed education credits?

I'm just going to ask all my questions really quickly and then you can go through them.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: And I know that when I was in schools, we did implicit bias training. I'm just wondering, is that something that is statewide, that is required statewide? And if not, what are your

thoughts on that?

I missed the part about the ag and the school food -- school meals, so I just want to know why that was switched and who made that decision.

And then what are we doing to properly detect and provide services for students with autism? I heard a lot about dyslexia, but as a proud aunt of a child with autism, I would love to hear what steps we are talking in that direction. There's a lot of complaints that our D75 schools are not prepared to deal with, you know, students who have autism. So I would like to hear of anything on that front.

And then I know you touched this a little bit, but I just need to know if there are specifics. And even if you can't answer it now, maybe we can meet later at a different time and talk about this. But what are we doing to recruit teachers of color, specifically Black male teachers, to look like our Black boys, because we are failing them. They are first to be expelled,

suspended, drop out, less likely to take advanced placement classes or IB classes. So I would love to hear what are we doing to recruit Black males specifically, teachers of color. And if we can't talk about that now, feel free to -- we can talk about it at any point. And thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So I know that I have staff taking notes.

On the recruitment I'm going to tie the recruitment to looking at African-American males. And you're absolutely right, it's one of those studies that's been done, you know, for young men of color and how they are overrepresented in suspensions and in other ways.

So what I would say is the major investment all of you have made is in My Brother's Keeper. Right? And that is an incredible, powerful way to take young men -- and young women now, they've joined -- and to really help them not only believe in themselves, but also they have mentors, we do all kinds of -- you know, whether it's

situations that we engage them in, in really finding their voice and being very much a part of civic agreement in a very positive kind of way. And we're hoping many of those will become our future teachers. So that is a pipeline that we're very much excited about.

Some of your other questions -- again, I know we're out of time. More than glad to be specific about the issue of social workers and the kind of training we support them with, and also the issue of beyond recruitment.

Autism. That is something that we as a department, we're working very closely with, you know, our school districts on how to support our young people, particularly to stay in less-restrictive environments and more-restrictive environments.

So more than glad to take all your questions and follow up.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And Commissioner Rosa, when you do that, if you could share that also with the Assembly Ways

and Means and Senator Krueger's office, so we can have those answers out to all of --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Oh, absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- the members for these important questions. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. I know our staff is taking notes to make sure that all my promises get delivered.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Great. Okay, we're now going to go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Okay, now I believe, to close for the Senate, second round, Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

Thank you, Commissioner. Quickly on two issues that have not been raised yet.

The Governor, I think we're all very pleased to see, included a provision on Building and Transportation Aid forgiveness, which has been a longstanding bone of contention between the Legislature and the prior Governor, and we're very happy to see that. She was vague in her description of

exactly which ones would be covered and which ones would not, and she used inadvertent error as I think the language.

Have you done an estimate of approximately how many districts would benefit by this and what the cost would be?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Phyllis is working on this.

But can I just clarify a key point in this? One of the concerns that we've had extensive conversations on is that we currently -- and as you know, we have the forgiveness, we're thrilled. The problem is is that, you know, there's no money in the queue. So how do you pay people back, right, in terms of -- you know, there are approximately -- we have made an analysis of the money. Approximately $288 million in claims in the queue -- and we can share this with you, Senator -- in the queue. Which means that over 17 years we have not -- we would have to back -- you know, we need extensive studying and staff to back-pay 17 years worth of payment.

Now, the good news is this year we didn't take anybody's money, you know, like Syracuse and some other places. So we don't have to deal with that, that's good news. We're ecstatic about it.

But, you know, our biggest issue is going to be if there's no money in the queue, how do you pay back?

SENATOR MAYER: I understand. So you need more money to do it, but you're supportive of the concept --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. Absolutely.

SENATOR MAYER: The second thing is Career and Technical Education. We didn't speak about that. Very important, I think, to many of us in the Legislature. There's not been a significant increase in many years.

What is your position on Career and Technical Education generally, and how much money should be added to ensure that we maximize CTE in every district throughout the state?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. So again, I'm now going to turn to Jim, but I'm going to tell you this. Very supportive of CTE. It is -- as a matter of fact, you know our Teacher of the Year is a CTE person. It's something our BOCES and our department is extremely committed to.

So Jim.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: All right thank you.

The Board of Regents had recommended that Special Services Aid be increased in order to support additional CTE. That was not included in the Executive Budget. The Board of Regents recommended that the salary cap that has been in place on BOCES instructional salaries for years be increased over a period of three years from its current $30,000 to $60,000. That was not included in the Executive Budget.

If we are serious about the availability of Career/Technical Education, those two items must be addressed in this budget.

In addition to that, we need to be considering the vehicles through which we're providing Career/Technical Education. Currently we leave it up to individual school districts to decide whether or not a student will be able to enroll in a Career/Technical Education program. We have ample evidence that there are many situations where parents and students are desirous of enrolling in these programs and they are not enrolling in them, they're not able to enroll in them.

SENATOR MAYER: I understand. And we look forward to working with you collectively on increasing CTE in many of these ways you've described. Thank you.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Right, thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

And now it's back to you, Assemblymember, for the remainder of your members.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, we go to Assemblywoman Buttenschon, three minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you very much, Chairs, for this opportunity, as well as Commissioner, I appreciate the support that you and your team provide as you're readily available during these challenging times.

I want to reconfirm many of the concerns that my colleagues have discussed -- mental health; a clear, appropriate plan of the transfer of the new child nutrition programs; special education needs, including the Rome School of the Deaf, which is in my district; career and tech, that was discussed; the hiring and training of your staff for the purpose of certifications; as well as I would appreciate all follow-up information that has been requested.

I have three questions. One is regarding the expanded opportunities that you testified regarding, or better known as after-school programs that are so much needed, as they interrelate with many of the issues we see. And I want to know if you feel these are appropriately funded, as my

districts are willing to take part in this and ensure the expansion could occur.

I have also heard from many of my school districts regarding unfunded mandates for -- the example they provide, due process in regards to the overlap of many federal mandates. And does SED have a strategic plan to look at these overlaps and how to overcome them for our districts?

Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So I'm going to start with OATH, because nobody has raised the issue and it's something we've been working on now for a couple of years. And as you know, the two bills, the IHO bill and the OATH bill were very essential, not only just for New York City, who's moving forward in terms of hiring full-time -- remember, a lot of the impartial hearing officers have been part-time. So this is -- we met with the commissioner of OATH to really advance the notion that we're going to have 45, 50 in order to clean up the backlog. So that's number one.

In terms of -- you're absolutely right, the funding that sometimes is needed in these particular situations and the due process proceeding, you know, one of the requests that's been made, even as simple as the burden of proof -- you know, I'm sure you've heard that as well, the shifting of the burden of proof and the fact that it's had -- what kind of an impact it has.

So, you know, I'd love to spend more time with you on sharing about OATH, sharing about that. And then your other one about extended -- the extended platform is something that major lesson learned with the pandemic. But I have to tell you while the federal funding is helping in that arena, we've got to do a better job in thinking of how we create a sustainability long-term for that kind of a response to the needs of our children.

While it's -- right now we're leaning on the federal funds and school districts are using that, we've got to really do a better job in how we integrate it and build it into

that process.

We're even having a conversation with the Commissioner of Health about the current guidance has a bit of an issue on page 3 -- I can tell you the exact page of the guidance -- and we are working with her, and she's very committed, which has been wonderful, very committed to working with us on the importance of our kids staying in school and having the opportunities of extended-day.

So we've -- you know, as I said, this is a very long-term issue for us, not just pandemic or not just being paid for by federal dollars. So thank you for the question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We'll go now to Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

And Commissioner, great to see you, and thank you for all the work you and your team are doing for our students, especially

in these difficult and ever-changing times. You know, and I especially want to thank you for being so very accessible and willing to talk, especially as we work to improve the Rochester City School District.

I'm going to make a couple of points, then I'm going to ask you two questions about the Rochester City School District.

First of all, I join the chorus on parity for our special-needs schools, and hopefully we can do something similar to the bill that got vetoed at the end of last year.

Second of all, capital funding has been instrumental in two of my libraries in the towns of Henrietta and Chili, and we need that to continue so other areas can benefit from improving their library facilities.

Regarding Rochester City School District, the first question -- I'll ask both, and then you can answer.

The first question relates to mental health. You know, we've received $197 million in ARPA funds, $39 million in additional Foundation Aid last year, another

$29 million coming up this year. And our students are not immune from the level of violence that's happening in our city streets -- indeed, they're tremendously impacted by that. Added is the adverse impact of COVID, the ongoing trauma of poverty, and much more.

You know, with this unprecedented level of funding -- and I know part of it's going to end -- the district still has made position eliminations, including social workers, and has reduced the RocRestorative team.

So my first question is, how can we get mental health professionals in our school buildings throughout the Rochester City School District? And how can SED partner with us to help focus on social and emotional well-being of our students, our staff people, and our families?

The second question -- and I don't want to put you on the spot here. But the second question is you and I and our community and our school district and NYSUT

and RTA, we've all been working very hard under the monitoring system, a system that I supported strongly and I continue to support. And you and I have spoken repeatedly. We've got to get this right for our kids. So my second question is, what lessons have we learned and what changes can we make?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So let me start with the last one, because I think the first one we can definitely speak offline. Because as you know, in your budget, the department -- we have guardrails in terms of the federal funding, just because of the nature of some of the issues with Rochester and the spending. So, I mean, I think you know that's specific to Rochester.

I think with the lessons learned, to the monitor, since, you know, that's the one -- you put me on the spot -- I'm going to answer, I think the one lesson I learned I would attribute to East Ramapo. Meaning that they have a finance -- they have two monitors. And while they have the veto

power, because they've been at this longer, they have a monitor for finance and a monitor for instruction. You know, sometimes when you try to just have one person be everything to everyone, it does become challenging and difficult.

So that would be one of the lessons that I would have a discussion with you about.

And then the second one I do believe that we have to really -- besides having the two monitors, I think Rochester, given the complexity and the needs and the size and everything else, I think that would be -- because that monitor with the finance would also deal with capital improvement, operational, you know. And it would really allow the current monitor, whose strength is really instruction, to really, truly focus on instruction.

So that would be the first lesson learned. And I can go into some of the other ones with you. And you and I have constant conversations even on weekends, so I'm more

than glad to --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, so --

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: There won't be a clock on the weekend.

(Laughter.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: This is true.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go next to Assemblywoman Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you. And thank you to our very dedicated Chairs Krueger and Weinstein.

Commissioner, as you know from your experience, it can be indeed essential for children to have access to mentoring. Given the vast talents of New York City private colleges and our CUNY and SUNY students, what can be done to ramp up the mentor/mentee programs beyond the teacher education programs that currently exist?

And then also I'd like to echo Senator Krueger in talking about the Hasidic yeshivas

and calling on the State Education Department to make it a top priority in getting a basic education.

So what can be done to ramp up the mentor and mentee programs?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm going to take half a second and answer the second one, because we do -- we can provide you with the work that we've been doing for the last two years on changing, you know, what was originally submitted for the substantial equivalency and share that with you. Because that's been work that we've done with the CAC, which is our team that performs that work, along with the involvement of looking at ways of evaluating and independent evaluations.

So there's a lot in that, in the document. So we will make that available to you, because a great deal of work has gone into that.

The second one, in terms of mentoring, Jim, go ahead. Because I think you're talking about from the higher ed perspective,

if I'm hearing you correctly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Well, besides the current teacher education programs that exist --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, the higher ed.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: -- and using CUNY, SUNY and our private college students to be mentor and mentees, yes.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, that's higher ed.

Jim?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: I think that really what it entails is taking a look at our system from a P-20 continuum.

We have a tendency to look at our educational system in silos, and one of the policy objectives of the commissioner and the Board of Regents is to begin looking at our educational system from pre-K, where the Legislature has made some very significant investments, through elementary, middle school and then into college, and building partnerships between those institutions of

higher education and our various school districts -- both the private side of higher education and the public side of higher education -- to enable us to tap into the resources that are available in those higher education institutions and to make them available to the pre-K through 12 system, and vice versa.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Okay, thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: We'll share with you the substantial -- that we are going to be advancing -- and by the way, we share those with the various groups, like Agudath Israel, we share them with PEARLS, we've shared them with -- I think you recently met with Yaffed, right, Jim?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Yes.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So we have been sharing the information, you know, pretty extensively. So more than glad to make that available to you.

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: We have made significant progress in terms of

the development of a recommendation that will go to the Board of Regents in March.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go now to Assemblywoman Bichotte Hermelyn, to be followed by Assemblyman Byrne, to be followed by Assemblywoman Simon.

(Pause.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Chair Weinstein, after the next person, is it possible --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, would you like a -- why don't you take a break now, because we're trying to find Assemblywoman --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay, thank you. Appreciate it.

(Discussion off the record; brief recess taken.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We're just taking a stretch-our-legs break.

Is Assemblywoman Bichotte Hermelyn here? She may have gone to -- so we'll continue with Assemblyman Byrne. Are you with us? Yeah, there you are, Kevin.

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: Give me one

second, please. I don't see this clock. I'm always like nervous about the time. There we go.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: If you go to the gallery view, you'll see it.

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: All right.

Thank you, Commissioner. I have long supported the concept of local control because I believe our smallest level of government has the most direct impact, the most access to our constituents, where we can really have a meaningful exchange of ideas. And I think that extends for our county governments, our villages, our town boards but also our school districts and school boards.

And there's a lot of concern that we hear about from concerned parents, but also in the news, about respecting that local control. You know, we hear about controversial and/or costly mandates, whether it's pandemic-related, like mandatory mask wearing. Or if it's about controversial curriculums, policies or frameworks.

You know, I do want to thank your office for responding back to a letter that I sent from colleagues and myself regarding several of the policy statements pertaining to DEI, because there is specific language that some of us have concerns about and object to. And you clarified, or your office clarified that there is no mandate for that in schools, which is very important, because I think previous statements and reports were perceived by others that there could have been. So clarifying that there is no mandate is important.

But this brings me to my larger point. There are issues that are inherently local, inherently local. And your office, it was recently reported, stated that it could withhold state aid for a specific school district that did not change or remove the mascot or the name. In Cambridge, it's the Indian.

Now, I don't represent Cambridge, but I live in Mahopac, or Ma-ho-pac. And I went to Carmel High School, which is in the same

town of Carmel. They're actually rivals with Mahopac. But I'm a homeowner in Mahopac now, or Ma-ho-pac. We are very proud of our history, the indigenous people that live there, and it's the Mahopac Indians. We don't even have an Indian mascot anymore; it's an M with an arrow through it.

And there are proposals that could have -- threaten that aid. I think that needs to be a locally decided decision. The people in that community, we have Indians on our fire trucks, it is part of the essence of the people that live there.

So I just want to ask, really simply, will you respect that local control and allow the school boards to keep those names?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I will always respect local control. But at the same time, this was a 310, so I -- I think you know this came to us.

There's been a history. For 20 years, this department has talked about some of the indigenous, you know, issues and things that have been used that really create, in many

situations, challenges and difficulty to the entire process of looking at -- as you know, many people have talked about what is used in terms of symbolism. Ball players, you know, franchises have looked at the issues of many situations that are considered and border on some racism and some issues of concern of the mascots that are used.

Now, while you say, you know, there are those that are very proud of some -- there are others that are not that have concerns about those. Which is why it came to me as a 310, which is a conversation.

We truly believe as a department that yes, there are local decisions. But, you know, in government we also have to make decisions that are -- you know, to your mask question, we have to maintain the integrity and sustaining -- let me just --

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: Commissioner, I'm sorry to interrupt. I know I'm out of time --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: -- let me just -- let me just answer --

(Overtalk.)

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: -- Mahopac stands for the Lake of the Great Serpent, and there are indigenous people that live in this community that want to keep that name. It is important to them. It's not just people that look like me, it's people that live there.

So I want to make sure that's considered. And that's extremely important to the people that live there and their history.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Right. And there are indigenous people who also have concerns. As you know, it's like the mask debate. You have people on both sides of the issue. But what we have to listen to is the science. The science is very clear. We have a commissioner who is an expert in the -- the Department of Health was established, and they have expertise in this area.

So I think that we have a responsibility to ensure that our districts are making decisions, even at the local level using the science and using -- making sure

that we have -- you know, we have the proper information to make those kinds of decisions.

Our issue of health and safety is so important that we want to ensure that it's done with fidelity and it's done with the experts. And we can hold a debate on the difference of whether to mask or not mask, but I would say that I rely on the Department of Health and I rely on the expert and I rely on the science as my partners to support my landscape, which is education, to ensure that what is happening is keeping our kids healthy and safe. And if mask -- which it is -- is an indicator of that process, then I will be an advocate for strongly supporting that.

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: Thank you, Commissioner. I believe we all want what's best for our kids --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We're -- I'm sorry, we're out of time.

ASSEMBLYMAN BYRNE: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. We're going to go to Assemblywoman Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

And thank you, Commissioner, for your fine work. And I'm very appreciative of your stamina, if nothing else today, and -- as well as the fine work that you're doing.

So I have a couple of points I wanted to make and ask you to address. First, you know, we heard from Senator Hoylman, we heard from Assemblymember Niou, we know Senator Brooks, the late diagnosis, the late catching of kids' special needs in one way or another. And that goes to early identification, whether it's a particular screening tool or something else. Because once we do that, then we will better be able to identify how children are learning and where their needs are.

Our fourth graders, 38 percent of our fourth graders are reading proficiently; 62 percent are not. We're missing the boat. They're not all dyslexic. So this goes to that issue of education, our teachers knowing what to look for, how they're trained, our professional development.

What pots of money do you have to look

at professional development, which is really more the kind of thing that you would fund, as opposed to, you know, within our schools of higher education?

The other thing is the 4201 schools capital funding. As you know, I student-taught at a 4201 school, so they're close to my heart. One of them is near me in Brooklyn, the School for the Deaf, St. Francis de Sales. When that money was allocated, it seemed to be very uneven in the distribution, and the Executive Budget continues that pattern.

I'd like to sort of put a pin in the need for the fact that St. Francis de Sales' building is 100 years old and so is their boiler. And we need help better allocating the funds for the schools who are in really dire straits for that.

And then just a quick pin, and that is the OATH situation. I think I disagree with you on that. I do lay the blame for the entire fiasco, really, on the city schools. And I'm not going to bore you with that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, I will share -- so let me start with the OATH. I will share the latest, because we have -- the commitment of the OATH is really the full-time process versus the part-time process. And we'll share with you -- we'll share with you and have the conversation offline to -- you know, I welcome -- I welcome not only your thoughts on this and your experience on the OATH conversation.

The early screening, totally I agree with you that we have to do a better job, not only using screening and identification but also doing professional development, to your point. That without the professional development for teachers and for those who have the contact with our children for early recognition, that is essential.

You are -- you and I have talked about this. That is absolutely the work that has to dovetail. You've got to have the screening process, but you also have to have -- even before the -- you know, before the screening, the teachers and the

individuals that touch the lives of our children have to know what they're looking at, what they're looking for, and those key signals that signal that something needs to be addressed.

But also the fourth partner in this is the resources to do prevention, intervention, and clearly respond to the specific needs. And we will continue the conversation on the other issues.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you. I appreciate that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Bichotte Hermelyn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: Hello, Commissioner. Thank you for being here. Education remains one of the most important topics nationwide, especially as we're dealing with the pandemic.

As a former public school math teacher, I know how it is very important to be in a classroom with minimal resources, as well as a former special ed student with

English as a second language, from a Black and Caribbean immigrant household, there are issues again in the public school system regarding resources.

So with that said, I wanted to get a sense of community schools. I know the budget will maintain the level of funding; I think I saw $250 million. Are there any plans to expand community schools?

Also, I know there were talks about the Holocaust education, which I supported. I wanted to know if there were also any talks around Black history education being part of the curriculum, mandatory. So that.

And then lastly, I wanted to talk about the $5 million increase to -- that goes towards diversity, teacher diversity, and wanted to get a sense in terms of, you know, how many teachers of color do we have in the system, how will the program expand in terms of getting more teachers of color, and what's the overall percentage.

That's my question. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So let me

start with TOC, which is the one you're speaking about, the 5 million. I will get you the specifics of how many teachers have been a part of the program.

And the other part with TOC is, you know, it's not just looking at increasing the diversity but also increasing the diversity -- because my understanding is, and I'm just going to give you a general number, currently there are about, in TOC, 594, somewhere in there. We've graduated somewhere about 600. So you can see that there's a nice growth to TOC.

Just so you know, we did not get that funding. So we are asking to support that funding because we really do believe it's a successful program. The funding was I think distributed elsewhere. And we're hoping that this -- you know, this issue of expansion gets addressed. Because as you can see from the numbers, it is -- you know, it's a successful program.

Your other question about the issue of community schools, as somebody who was a

principal of a community school, I will speak to you offline. It is something I support because it has that extended day. And community schools are truly localized with health services, including mental health services. They have dental clinics, they have mental health services. So it's a model that I know firsthand, as a former principal of a community school in Washington Heights -- that not only works because it's open six days a week, with extended day, with clinics, with mental health services. So it is an incredible model that we really need to look as a model to invest in.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We're going to move to --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: And we'll see -- I think we had the Black history with --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman, the time has expired. The commissioner can send us answers to some of the other questions you haven't had an opportunity to respond to yet, and we'll share it with both

Assemblywoman Bichotte Hermelyn and the rest of the members who also would like to know the answers to those questions.

We next go to Assemblywoman Mitaynes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

I just want to echo what Senator Sue Serino said earlier about the families with special education children feeling that they're much more behind and feeling that they're an afterthought.

And also just want to chime in about Senator Liu and Assemblymembers Niou and Kim. I have a large, growing, vibrant Asian community in my district as well.

But so my question. The Governor's budget proposed to extend mayoral control for four years in New York City. The prior mayor's refusal to provide a remote option throughout last summer and the fall, even in the face of significant parent concern and the spread of Omicron, showed that there are instances where mayoral decisions overlook the unique needs of certain parents and families.

Do you believe in the long term parents and CECs should have an increased role in the governance process to address needs in a more localized, inclusive way that can accommodate different needs and different communities?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So that answer is absolutely. And I -- just so you know, with the prior administration, the remote model, I never removed it. I asked everybody in their plans, because -- you know, I said the pandemic is not over and you have communities that have been highly impacted by COVID-19 and now Omicron, so you have to have these opportunities to have conversations and localize some of these decisions.

So I truly do believe that, you know, parental voice and community voice has to be a part of the conversation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: What are some ways in which we can start empowering our CECs to be more involved in governance and decision-making processes?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Again, that's -- you know, that is a local decision. And the way that we've been working -- and we do have conversations, we invite the parents of New York City -- we just did a Bronx and a Manhattan recently on grad measures, and they were all -- you know, they were all very actively involved. The CECs, many of them participated.

So I would say that, you know, we have to continue to work -- and again, New York City has its own design because of mayoral control and the DOE, but we're more than glad to discuss with you ways that we can support and help to -- maybe in the new phase and this new mayor and this new -- which we've had recently, I will tell you, an incredible relationship -- ways of empowering and creating opportunities to hear their voices.

We would be more than glad to be there with you, shoulder to shoulder.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go now to Assemblywoman Walsh.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: Hi, thank you. Good afternoon, Commissioner.

So I've been trying to listen -- this was scheduled at the same time as session, so I've been kind of listening as best I can, and I hope that my question is not going to be repetitive.

From what I could hear today, we had a very far-ranging conversation about things like equity and diversity, mental health, the digital divide, teacher shortages, dyslexia, special education -- an issue that's very close and dear to my heart -- early screening, zero emission buses were in the budget -- you know, all of these are important issues, no question, in a normal year. But this is not a normal year. Last year was not a normal year. 2020 was certainly not a normal year.

My number-one concern, number-one priority, is learning loss. And not just because of the digital divide, but -- but just learning loss. Our kids -- has it been measured, can it be measured how far back our

kids have fallen back? And what is the plan for catching kids up? And what's in the budget to address that specifically?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. So the biggest, I would say, connection to learning loss is the federal dollars. And, you know, we've seen that with ARP. That is enormous. That is one of their -- like it's your priority? That is the federals' priority, the whole developing a plan. And by the way, these plans are developed at the local level. Developing these plans with communities' involvement about ways that the superintendents and the schools are addressing the issue of learning loss or academic and mental health and wellness recovery, which is part of the conversation we've been having.

So these conversations have been going on with our stakeholders, with our superintendents. It's the federal dollars that are being used to address those.

My biggest concern is that those dollars will fall off the cliff by

September 30, 2024, and we have to begin to think about what are the kinds of things that we embed into our extended day to ensure that this is part of the learning platform of schooling and not just to address the learning loss process.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: Commissioner, so it's federal dollars, it's local control as far as solution creation. Has the state been able to measure, through study, in terms of grade-level difference or anything to be able to quantify the degree of learning loss?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, we -- you know, we have not even given, as you know -- we didn't give -- last year we did, but we didn't give the tests in 20 -- you know, as you recall, we've gone through --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: Right.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And that's just one aspect of it.

The other aspect of it, as you know, is localized, the measurements that are used at the local level to assess not only the different grade bands but also as children

move through the system. As you know, some of our kids for the first time -- this was the first year attending school. And they didn't even have some of the earlier -- what we call earlier experiences getting ready for school.

So the -- but as far as study, no, we have no funding at this point to even think of -- so the data that we have, we're more than glad to share with you because it's data that's provided to us by the school districts, and it's data that we internally, because of our own interests, dissect, to inform our decision making and our work.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: I see my time has expired. Thank you, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to Assemblywoman Dickens, three minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Thank you, Chairs Weinstein and Krueger, and thank you, Commissioner, for your dedication and for staying here to listen to 90 people ask you

150 questions.

Mine is last week Advocates for Children released a report that said that in New York City preschool students with disabilities are being underserved by 3-K and pre-K for all and are being denied access to special education programs and services for which they supposedly are entitled to. More than 30,000 New York City preschoolers had IEPs during the 2019-'20 school year, but roughly a third of these students did not receive all the services that were mandated.

I'd like to know, because it's relative to the enrollment -- and the disparity seems to be based upon color, in receiving these special education services -- I'd like to know what are we going to do to change that. And about mental health. My colleagues had brought this up, but I really did not hear a concrete answer, if there is one, about addressing that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

So I'm going to ask Jim to jump in as well, because we've been doing a lot of work

with New York City in terms of the CAP. There is a CAP in New York City for special education in terms of compliance. We're more than glad to share that with you, because this has been -- this is our -- from an accountability perspective, this is how we monitor, we have ongoing conversations with New York City constantly to address the very issue that you raise about our students with special needs.

Jim?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Sure. Thank you, Commissioner.

Assemblywoman, we're really approaching the New York City Compliance Assurance Plan in three major areas. The first deals with preschool provision of public education. And in that case, we are working with the city to increase the number of evaluations and to make sure that they have -- that students and parents have access to those preschool special ed evaluation processes.

We have seen some progress made in

that respect in terms of the number of resources that have been made available for that preschool evaluation. There's been a lot of conversation here about early detection, and that's why we have an emphasis there.

We also have taken a look at school-age provision of free and appropriate public education. And here again, what it comes down to is availability of services. The New York City Department of Education is well aware of the fact that there needs to be expansion of those services on the ground so that they can be accessed by families and by students and that teachers working with families having have the appropriate kinds of supports available to them.

And then finally, we have the due process issues, which the commissioner has addressed throughout this hearing, where in effect the denial of due process over a period of years has been addressed with the recent memorandum of understanding that the commissioner has spearheaded with the

New York City Department of Education.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Thank you so much. My time is up. I'll get in touch with you individually. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. I have -- Commissioner, I have a question for you, and one that Assemblywoman Niou wasn't able to -- didn't have time to ask.

I wanted to know whether you think school districts are going to be in a position to deal with the Governor's -- or to meet the Governor's proposed mandate to move to zero-emission school buses by 2035 and what we in the Legislature need to -- should be doing to help get to that goal.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So again, one of those conversations we already started. Obviously we know it's 2027-2035. Obviously we know that there's an issue of it's much more expensive. You know, the buses are almost like three times as much. We know that there are issues of distance, right, for the rural schools.

We have been dissecting and analyzing this issue very, very closely in terms of what we believe -- you know, SED in principle, we think it's -- low-emission vehicles obviously is critical. Any legislation should recognize that the battery technology is -- you know, we've done some of this work, and it's got limitations. The range, it's got limitations. We clearly are very, very supportive.

But as I said, there's a great deal of work that has to be looked at in terms of the -- you know, the principle is good but once again, we've got to look at the details of what it implies. Especially when we come to my -- you know, my transportation person, Christina Coughlin, has really done a deep, really deep dive into this. And one of the concerns -- again, as we talked about, the cost is significant. The purchase, as we look at the aid, the aid ratio will require investments in electrical infrastructure.

So all I'm saying, all of these issues that we're looking at, we all collectively

need to fully understand as we move forward in this direction.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for that, and look forward to continuing to work with you on that.

Speaking of energy and infrastructure, one of the things that COVID has taught us is some of the dangers of our older school buildings -- the lack of air flow, spaces not large enough, the ventilation systems are old and costly, energy-wise.

Do you think we should be -- I assume you do feel that we should be trying to update and modernize this infrastructure. Are there plans that SED has done? Have you worked with school districts to try and assist them in how we move forward in this direction?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes. And I'm going to turn to Jim, because again this is another conversation we're having. As a matter of fact we had yesterday an extensive conversation about use of federal dollars -- which are allowed by the way, to support this

kind of work.

We're also looking at ventilations and materials that are used and how the Department of Health approves.

So we are very much intimately involved in this kind of work in looking at the fact that, to your point, the -- you know, the need for modernization is extensive, it's expensive, and it's one that we, you know, through Christina's shop -- which, by the way, has need of extensive support in terms of staffing -- has been doing an incredible job.

Jim?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER BALDWIN: Sure, I think that, you know, there has certainly been a focus in terms of the joint school construction boards to provide resources to the Big 5, some of the Big 5 cities, in terms of updating their facilities. The state's building aid ratios provide support to school districts generally in terms of those needs.

What we have seen is that many districts have made the decision to use some

of the federal funds that have been made available to them to undertake construction projects. The issue there is that those projects need to be completed by the end of September in 2024.

So there's no question that there are any variety of capital needs for school facilities. Some of them relate to technology. And I think, you know, one of the things we want to point out here is that there has been millions of dollars spent in terms of investments in technology platforms. The one thing that the commissioner and the Board of Regents wanted to make clear to school districts is that those investments need to be sustained. And when we issue guidance in terms of the capacity of school districts, they need to maintain the capacity to go remote if that's necessary. They need to be able to take advantage of the expanded capacity that those technology platforms provide in terms of extending opportunities to students.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you very

much. I think that is -- those are the only questions I have.

I want to just recognize Assemblyman Benedetto for three minutes, second round, to close up this portion of the hearing.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Commissioner, I applaud you for your stamina. You have been through an ordeal, and we're coming on four hours here. But just a couple of other questions I would like to ask and maybe clear up a few misconceptions that might be out there.

Much has been said in regards to a bill in the Assembly which has to do with the teaching of the Holocaust. Is this not the state law right now?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: And do you believe that the teachers of the State of New York are currently teaching about the Holocaust?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I believe that since it is -- you know, it definitely

is embedded in our standards work.

And we are very -- I mean, one of the things -- you know, I don't have, again -- and this is what I was talking about, the survey. I can't tell you that I have a universal sense that in fact it's being taught, other than I know that it's legally required, superintendents know this. It is understood that -- and that is not the only -- as you know.

But the fact of the matter is that we've done -- since our last conversation last year, we've done some informal inspections, kind of, to find out. And I do have to say -- and we will encourage -- we even sent out, as you know, we sent out materials, we put it out -- you know, we have the resources available. We will continue to encourage our school districts because this is -- to your point, it is required, it is in law. It must be taught. This is a nonnegotiable issue.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Yes. And under normal circumstances, Commissioner, who

would be empowered, who is supposed to check up to make sure that this is being done?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Again, this is the whole debate about local control. You have a superintendent. Right? You have school boards. You have -- the locals are -- curricula is at the local level. We have a law in place that says this must be taught. And we absolutely hold the districts accountable to make sure that this is taught.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: And lastly, to conclude here, if we pass a bill saying you must do this, could you consider that to be a costly mandate? And do you have the resources to do it?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: When you say a bill to pass -- but this is already in law.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Right. Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So I'm not sure -- I would have to see --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: To pass and check up on it all.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: In all things, I would have to see what the bill

entails. It's very hard to answer --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Okay. We won't dwell on it. Commissioner, thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So, Commissioner, we got you out before Tisha B'Av.

(Laughter.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I just corrected somebody on -- I'm trying to think during the Regents -- my husband, who's Jewish, called me up and said -- I forgot what the term was that it was used. And so, you know, one of our Regents used -- it wasn't bubbe-meise, it wasn't -- I'm trying to think of the -- it wasn't shvitzing, which probably that's how I'm feeling right now.

But at the end of the day, I said to my husband, What's the translation, you know, for the word? And he did. And I didn't let on. I said, My highest authority, sure that this is what it means.

But thank you.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for spending so much time with us and for all the work that you do in this role and the Regents do for the students in New York State.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we are appropriately going to dismiss you, and our next witness is going to be Chancellor David Banks, the chancellor of the New York City Department of Education.

It will just take a moment till he'll be -- oh, I just see him floating around the -- there he is.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Do you see me?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Good to see you again.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good to see you as well.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And you have up to 10 minutes for a presentation, and then we will move on to questions from the members of the Education and Libraries Committees.

So the floor is yours.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you. Thank you. So I'll say good afternoon, Senate and Assembly committee members. My name is David Banks, and I serve as the chancellor of the New York City Department of Education.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. And joining me today is Chief Financial Officer Lindsey Oates and other members of my leadership team, First Deputy Chancellor Dan Weisberg and Chief School Operations Officer Kevin Moran.

I come before you today on behalf of New York City's public schools and our students and their families.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the chairs and your colleagues in the New York State Legislature for your leadership during the pandemic and your commitment to building a better future for New York's children. The increased resources you have provided to our schools as Mayor Adams and I begin our new roles will

greatly strengthen our capacity to elevate New York City public schools.

Specifically, your advocacy when we needed it the most is leading to an increase in Foundation Aid of over a billion dollars to New York City alone, funding that will go directly to schools and benefit our students now and in the years to come. So thank you.

You also were instrumental in securing funding through the American Rescue Plan Act that will greatly help our school communities rebound from all the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Both the Foundation Aid increase and American Rescue Plan resources are enabling our new administration to hit the ground running. So again, we thank you for your help and your leadership on behalf of all of our students, families, teachers and staff.

Additionally, I'd like to publicly thank our extraordinary school communities, including our school leadership and support teams, families, parent and student leaders, early childhood providers, and school safety

officers. They have all performed incredible work supporting our students and operationalizing evolving plans to keep our schools open and safe. This continues to be a herculean effort during a global pandemic, and we are all grateful for their efforts. Our theme is to Stay Safe and Stay Open.

So my first three weeks as schools chancellor have been a whirlwind to say the least -- inspiring, exhilarating, and moving all at the same time. We've faced an upsurge in COVID cases with the Omicron variant, a snowstorm -- which, by the way, that did not close our doors -- and then the horrific fire in the Bronx that took the lives of eight young people. And throughout this period I have seen firsthand in schools across all five boroughs, including those that our lost children in the Bronx attended, how heroic our students, families and staff have been in facing up to these huge difficulties.

With respect to the Omicron surge, we understood that we needed to be both thoughtful and aggressive with our Stay Safe,

Stay Open plan to protect our students and staff while ensuring that our school buildings and classrooms would remain open. That effort included increasing in-school testing, distributing over 7 million rapid tests to students and staff -- including 1 million from the state, thanks to Governor Hochul's leadership -- providing KN95 masks to staff members, and changing our policies to more quickly respond to positive cases.

Because of our policy changes, when a positive case appears in a community, we immediately provide two rapid tests to every close contact with no delays, allowing us to safely stay open and isolate cases. That is in addition to our existing measures such as mandated vaccination for all staff; required daily health screenings for students, staff, and visitors; universal indoor masking; physical distancing; and ventilation maintenance and improvements, including two air purifiers in every classroom.

Opening our schools for in-person instruction this year was a critical task for

all the students who find sanctuary in our schools daily and for those who experience remote instruction to be a significant barrier to learning, especially our multilingual learners and our students with disabilities. Stay Safe, Stay Open is working. Our attendance rates have climbed from 65 percent when I took office to 87 percent this week; our staffing has stabilized; and the data continues to show that our schools remain the safest places to be in New York City.

So let me take a moment to say a few words about my own background and my vision for getting New York City schools to soar to a higher level.

First, as the son and brother of police officers, I want to acknowledge the officers who were fatally shot in Harlem last week, both of whom were products of our public schools. My heart breaks for them and their families, and I know deep down the pain that their families must be feeling.

I was born in Brooklyn and I grew up

attending New York City public schools and am proud to say that two of my adult children are teachers. Many educators had a profound impact on my life, and two in particular from my elementary school at P.S. 161 in Brooklyn especially shaped who I am today.

Mrs. Mertz, who was my fourth-grade teacher, showed her faith in me by writing on one of my composition papers that she fully expected I would author a book someday -- which turned out to be true. And Mrs. Mildred Scott, who taught me in the fourth and fifth grade, and she raised my consciousness and she inspired me with her lessons about Black history.

After graduating from Hillcrest High School in Queens, and then college, I worked as a school safety officer -- a lot of people don't know that. I was a school safety officer at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn before becoming a teacher and then an assistant principal. After that I was the founding principal of two schools: the Bronx School for Law, Government, and Justice, where I actually recruited my predecessor as

chancellor, Meisha Ross Porter. I hired her as a teacher, and she worked for me for several years.

And then, together with the civic organization 100 Black Men, we launched the Eagle Academy for Young Men in the Bronx. Eagle Academy was the first all-boys public school, public high school in New York City in almost 30 years when we opened our doors back in 2004. And we opened that school because we were examining the deep negative indicators -- the attendance, low graduation rates, high disciplinary rates, particularly for Black and Latinx boys.

And while a lot of people were writing articles about it and analyzing data, there wasn't a lot that was being done, and we decided to do something about that. And we were able to demonstrate that high-quality preparatory education for young men of color can in fact be provided in a public school setting.

Following the success of the Bronx school, I left to lead the Eagle Academy

Foundation, where we opened an Eagle Academy in every borough of New York City and one in Newark, New Jersey.

As an educator and a parent of four thriving adults, I believe with every fiber of my being that every young person is filled with brilliance, promise, and gifts. All children deserve a strong academic foundation that prepares them to graduate with an employable skill set. And equally important, they deserve the tools and support that's needed to be physically and emotionally healthy.

So to deliver on that mission for our students by creating and sustaining innovative, high-quality schools requires that we fully engage with the entire school community. The answers to how we improve the system can be found in the hearts and minds of our teachers, principals, children, families, elected officials, community partners and other stakeholders, including all of you. And with your partnership, we will ensure that the nation's largest school

system becomes the nation's best.

So let me briefly share with you what I consider to be the four pillars to improving our school system. Number one, scaling, sustaining, and restoring what works. That entails recognizing and raising awareness of excellence throughout the system while building the capacity of educators to share and expand the most promising and effective practices. So for example, I saw a phenomenal Career and Technical Education program recently at Thomas Edison High School in Queens. That school should serve as a model for other schools.

In the close to four weeks that I've been in office now, I have visited several schools. I visited P.S. 60 on Staten Island. You should see what they are doing with respect to social-emotional learning. They've got a sensory hallway that takes young people who are going through difficult and challenging emotional experiences and in real time are able to really help those young people solve for the issues that they're

dealing with.

And as I visited that school, I said every school in New York City should be aware of what this school is doing. And I intend to make that happen.

I visited Concourse Village Academy in the Bronx. And again, the social-emotional things that they're doing -- mindfulness, meditation, teaching young people how to center themselves at very young ages. It's the kind of thing that when we say what are we going to do in the midst of this pandemic, how do we find our way forward -- some of the best answers that we could hope for are actually happening already in some of our schools.

The second thing that I want to do is help our schools to reimagine how our students are learning in the first place. That includes providing a more holistic educational experience that centers on project-based learning and career readiness while incorporating a multicultural approach to teaching history, inspiring civic

engagement, and collaborating with community and corporate partners.

We should be using our experience with remote learning as a springboard to truly develop transformative ways of educating our children. This is a special moment in time. And if we use our technological tools the right way, I believe that we can fully transform how our teachers and how our children are experiencing school in the first place. And so it's right for a lot of workforce to do, and I can't wait to get at it.

The third thing is prioritizing wellness and its link to student success. That includes access to green spaces, high-quality nutrition, and comprehensive whole-child support for a broad range of each student's needs.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Chancellor, you know, I see that the 10 minutes is up. Could you just summarize? Because I know we have a number of members who have questions. Can you summarize some of the issues in your

prepared remarks on the state budget so that we can --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yup. Yup.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- so that our anxious members could start talking to you.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely. I'm sorry.

And so now just sort of very briefly to Governor Hochul's proposed budget, which I believe will greatly help us to achieve the goals I've described in New York City.

First, this budget upholds the state's previous commitment to continue the phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula, the state's largest education fund source. And this commitment enables us to maintain our school allocation formula, Fair Student Funding, at 100 percent for all schools. And we are extremely grateful that the Governor and the state are poised to continue sustaining this critical investment that will bring hundreds of millions of dollars more directly to our schools.

Thanks in large part to this State

Legislature, schools have historic levels of funding that have allowed for every school to have access to mental health support through a full-time social worker or a school-based mental health clinic, and for every high school to have access to PSAL athletic programming for the first time in the city's history.

Even more importantly, this budget extends mayoral accountability through 2026. And we are enormously appreciative of the leadership and advocacy of Governor Hochul and the entire State Legislature on this issue. For over 30 years I have served as an educator in the New York City school system in various capacities, including as a teacher and a principal, and I remember the previous system. And I can unequivocally say to you that mayoral accountability, while it's not perfect, it's the most successful and effective system of school governance that we can provide our students.

You need to look no further than our ability to fully open schools this month.

Because of mayoral accountability, we were able to act quickly and put in place the safety measures that were needed to safely open schools and welcome students back. We kept schools open because it's where children are safest and the best place for them to learn. This was the mayor's commitment from Day 1, and we were able to live up to it for the children of New York City.

The Governor's also announced, as part of this budget, that 4410 programs, which serve pre-K students with disabilities and whose rates are set by the state, will see a rate increase of 11 percent. And this sector has been a critical component of our early childhood education expansions, and this rate increase will strengthen our early childhood system in the long term. This investment goes a long way towards making our early childhood education programs truly universal, allowing children from every zip code to have a seat in a quality program. It is more than just a legal obligation, it's a moral one as well.

So finally, we know how devastating this pandemic has been to the mental health of our students. We're gratified to see a recognition in the Governor's budget of the need for greater investment in this area, requiring the New York State Education Department to create a grant program for student well-being and learning loss. A permanent state grant program would help to sustain this essential work in the years to come and keep resources directed toward supporting the whole child.

And so in conclusion, as we continue to navigate the countless challenges posed by COVID-19, the crisis has already clarified what needs to be done now and going forward to greatly improve how we serve our children. In many ways, areas of longstanding disagreement between the state and city are clearly giving way to a powerful consensus that I believe will make an enormous difference. So thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Chancellor. Thank you for being here. This

is the first time you're with us and hopefully we'll be seeing you not only at the hearings, but I know we'll be seeing you other times, as you've mentioned.

We're going to go to our Education chair, Assemblyman Benedetto, for 10 minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Mr. Chancellor, thank you very much for being here. And -- (audio muted).

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I can't hear you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Mike, you have to --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Unmute.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Unmute yourself, correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: I thought I did. I'm so sorry.

So at any rate, Mr. Chancellor, you've got a monster job ahead of you. It's not an envious position you're in, but I wish you well. And our job is to try to help you to the fullest extent possible, and we will try to do that.

Let me just tell you, one of the criticisms that I've heard in regards to school governance, mayoral control in particular, is about parental involvement and reaching out to parents and the importance of it. And maybe, under the school governance we have now, parents aren't properly addressed and heard. A quick comment on that.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, Chair Benedetto, I would say that you will not find any chancellor who is more committed to engaging parents than me.

It is part of my DNA. It is part of the work that I have done in my 30-plus years working in the system. I have done some transformative things even at the schools that I have worked at in terms of how we engage parents. I believe that that is one of my four pillars, is to be very intentional in engaging parents as true partners.

I don't believe in, you know, decisions being made and then we bring parents in as a photo op. I want parents

there at the beginning, helping us to co-construct policy for the DOE. And I'd ask that you hold me personally accountable for that, because that is how I have always led as a leader. That is what I will continue to do as a leader in my role here as chancellor.

I know there have been some things that have been done here at the department, I think to try to shore up our ability to work with parents and to give parent voices a greater impact. And you can rest assured that that is something that I will be doing. I have already been meeting with many of the parent groups to gain their best thoughts around what we should be doing, and I will continue to do that and expand on that for certain.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you. We've talked today, when Commissioner Rosa was here, in regards to early learning and before kids -- or as they're coming into the system, to do proper screenings on these children. And in particular, screening to see what their learning problems might be.

Your thoughts on that, sir.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Oh, absolutely.

Mayor Adams, as you know, has made this a major priority around -- particularly around dyslexia, but not simply dyslexia screening. But that was an issue that he talked about all throughout the campaign. And as he appointed me, he said, "I want that to be one of our major areas of focus."

And so I have met with many leaders in this space. Assemblymember Bobby Carroll, who is really one of the major voices and advocacy around dyslexia, he arranged for a trip for me to go to the Windward School. And it's a private school, but it's really the gold standard on how to address and deal with issues of dyslexia.

I've met with many other advocates around New York City. We're working very closely around the creation of a school specifically -- a public school that will be dedicated specifically for kids with dyslexia. Be the first time that we've had

it in New York City. And so you will hear, in the coming weeks, more about that new school where we're going to take our best and brightest, the most promising practices of how do we do diagnose and then how do we implement best practices for engaging young people in that space.

So it will be a new space for us. We're going to make some investments there. And it's one that I'm very, very excited about because they're so many of our young people.

And as the mayor always talks about, so many of the young folks who find themselves caught up in the criminal justice system were never diagnosed with dyslexia. And if we can identify that early and provide the proper interventions that they need, I think we can make a huge difference in helping those young people to have a promising future instead of just pushing them along in the school system and then they find themselves caught up in the criminal justice system.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you.

Listen, you've got -- no matter what happens here, you've got a short term to make an impact on the educational system in New York City. It might be four years, it might be eight years, who knows what it's going to be. But it's a limited amount of time. Do you really believe you can make changes and get results in the educational system that's going to convince people that boy, oh, boy, this guy did the job?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: With all due respect, I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe that. I've never done any job in my life that I didn't believe that I could accomplish the job.

And, you know, when we started out to do this work to try to help young men of color, many of them had given up on their own selves in a system that very often does not deliver for them, people said: Are you sure you can deliver on this? And as I sit here now, there's thousands of lives that we have so positively impacted.

And I absolutely believe that as big as the New York City public school system is, and often as unwieldy as it seems, I truly believe that we can turn it around. I believe that deeply. But I know that I can't do it by myself. That will happen because we are engaging in partnership with community leaders, parents, families, the students themselves.

You know, last week we had students from a host of schools around the city who walked out because they're just so concerned about issues of remote learning and just not feeling safe. I met with those student leaders. And they were surprised that, you know, three days later I actually convened them to meet with them. Because I want to hear what they have to say, and I want to take all that into consideration as we try to make the best decisions that we can make for the system.

And many of you even on this call, I've reached out to many of you because I'm trying to build relationships because you all

have your hand on the pulse of what's going on in your own districts and in your schools. We need to know that. And that's how I intend to continue to lead, in earnest and real and authentic partnership with leaders across the city. This is not a one-man show.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you.

And in conclusion here, my final question -- and I'm sure you're going to get it several times today. But let's talk about the mental health of our students as a result of the pandemic and as a result of just life in general. This was certainly an issue that was prime in people's minds more than two years ago. And it was prime in mine, in my mind, and I wanted to do something about it, and then the pandemic hit. And now it's even worse.

Do you have any specific mental health suggestions that the schools should be doing?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, first of all, over 75,000 educators have already been trained in trauma-responsive education. So there have been some efforts that have

already taken place to first of all make sure that our educators themselves are fully prepared to respond to the needs of our young people.

And we've already hired over 500 social workers this year, where every student now has access to social workers, counselors, or a school-based mental health clinic. Those are efforts which I think are going to make a huge difference.

But I will tell you, as somebody who was a school principal for 11 years, the most important thing that we can do is engaging our kids in positive relationships. That's how they respond the most. That teacher -- when you've got Mr. Benedetto or Ms. Jackson or Mr. Williams in the school, you know, they're not just teachers of content. They are very important people in the lives of our kids. That's what we mean when we say it's important for our kids to be back in school. Because the way that our kids are socialized and the way that they grow up naturally and normally, they need to be around their

friends and they need to be around caring adults.

So we're going to continue to do all that we need to do to fortify those kinds of relationships, number one.

But number two, as I also mentioned, as I've been visiting these schools around the city, you would be blown away by some of the innovation that the schools are doing themselves. Amazing work, even around social-emotional learning, how they're engaging their students.

What I want to do as chancellor is to create this office as an ecosystem of support. It's not enough for -- you know, if you've got one set of kids who are going to a great school that have figured out how to engage them from a social-emotional learning standpoint, that's great for those kids. But what about everybody else? I want to lift up those promising practices.

So if you think about this, Mr. Chair, you can -- we're going to build a system here where every teacher and every principal

across New York City can see the promising practices that everybody else is doing. So you're not working in isolation. Far too many of our schools work in isolation. And the answers that they're grappling with, some school has already figured that out on the other side of town, but they don't know.

And so that's how I see my role, is to lift up the work so that everybody -- you're going to be able to pick up your phone -- if you want to see the best practices for social-emotional learning, we will have a caption, and you can pick it up and you can follow it with those individual schools. That's where I'm spending my time, to try to build capacity for success.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Chancellor.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you and good luck, Chancellor Banks.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We're going to turn it over to the Senate and Senator

Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chancellor Banks. Welcome to your first Albany hearing.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So the Senate thought the New York City school system was so important we created our own committee to deal with it. And Senator John Liu is the chair of the New York City Education Committee, and he will be the first questioner of you.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Finance Chair. And you're right, New York City public schools are pretty darn important, and in fact it's the largest system in the entire country, so we have to give it a lot of attention.

I share Chair Benedetto's congratulations to you, Chancellor Banks. I think he wished you well in some form of expressing sympathies as well. So if he did that, I share those sympathies also, because it's a big job that you have jumped into and

fully embraced. And it's going to be a tough job, no question.

I appreciate the many conversations you and I have had long before you were even thinking of becoming chancellor, and of course since named schools chancellor for New York City. I also appreciate the tremendous amount of outreach that you and Mayor Adams have engaged in with the public as well as with many of my colleagues in government, both state, city and federal. So you hit the ground running on a number of issues.

We all have a limited amount of time, and I do have a few areas that I wanted to ask you some things about.

First, thank you for thanking us for the increase in Foundation Aid. It is something that we committed to last year. We're making the second installment this year. And I have every expectation that we'll follow through on the completion of the increase in annual school aid by next fiscal year.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

SENATOR LIU: As part of that, though -- and always happy to see the fantabulous Lindsey Oates there. You know what I'm going to ask you, Lindsey and Mr. Chancellor. Where is the Department of Education on the Fair Student Funding formula? That is now four years behind schedule. So we're sending you all this money, but we also expect that you be held accountable for that, and the money goes to the schools in New York City that need it the most.

So what's going on with the Fair Student Funding formula?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, since you called for our chief financial officer, who has been grappling with this for quite some time, I'm going to invoke her at this moment to lean in. You know, again, on some of this, I just got here, Senator, and I'm still getting my arms around a whole host of issues here at the department. But we're in good hands with our chief financial officer,

Lindsey Oates, and just ask that you don't --

SENATOR LIU: Thank you. Thank you, Chancellor Banks. I don't need a whole lot of detail here, I just need a date. A date.

NYC DOE CFO OATES: Good afternoon, Senator Liu. Nice to speak with you again.

So we used every penny of the Foundation Aid increase to raise the Fair Student Funding floor to 100 percent for all schools this past school year. So now for the first time ever, we are proud to say that all schools are 100 percent funded. This was an average increase of about $400,000 per school --

SENATOR LIU: We already went through that, Lindsey.

NYC DOE CFO OATES: I know.

SENATOR LIU: My question is, it's all -- all the schools are at 100 percent FSF. The problem is that the FSF formula is way obsolete, it's outdated. And it's not directing the funding appropriately to all the public schools. So the question is -- you know, this was supposed to have been done

in 2019. It's now 2022. When is that formula going to be updated?

NYC DOE CFO OATES: So as you know, our first priority was to fully fund the formula, and we're grateful to have the resources to do that.

We now have a brand-new leadership team here, obviously, and a new mayor, and we have started having conversations about that. It takes a while to do this well. And we want to be thoughtful about the engagement --

SENATOR LIU: No time frame in mind.

NYC DOE CFO OATES: We want to be thoughtful about engagement with all the advocates, parents, teachers --

SENATOR LIU: Let's start engaging all of them.

And a related question here. You know, for many years now, for an untold number of years, the New York State Department of Education, as backed by City Hall, has always been opposed to the Contract for Excellence. And nonetheless, the State Legislature has continued to push

this important priority.

So, you know, when the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit was determined by the courts, they did indicate that class sizes in New York City were a problem that was contributing to the lack of the state fulfilling its educational mandate for all schoolkids. And it doesn't seem like the Campaign for Fiscal Equity or the concept of smaller class sizes is being reflected in the Fair Student Funding formula. Or it doesn't seem like the Department of Education has made headway towards that goal of reducing class sizes even though, you know, we've been calling for it.

So is the DOE -- and maybe this is for Chancellor Banks. We need you to prioritize lowering class --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Got it. Got it. No, listen. Again -- and I wish -- and I don't like to do a dance to questions asked of me. But what I will say to you is that these are the first two items, and I'm sure there are going to be more that are

coming, that my response will have to be that I will absolutely get back to you, I'm going to delve into these and in short order.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you.

And related to that additional funding, you know, is the question of mayoral control. Congratulations to you and our new mayor for the Governor including a four-year extension in her budget. You know, what ultimately happens over the next few months remains to be seen because I know many of my colleagues in the State Legislature have concerns about what mayoral control has been about and the possibility of a four-year extension, which is, you know, longer than it has been for a long time.

I am very appreciative, Chancellor Banks, of you not even using the words "mayoral control." You used the term "mayoral accountability," which always, when Robert Jackson and I and many others were in the City Council back when Bloomberg first became mayor, he called it mayoral control, we always called it mayoral accountability.

But unfortunately in recent years it does seem much more like mayoral control, in the absence of anybody being able to provide input, especially schoolkid parents. And so we need more engagement -- you know, it's -- the last couple of years, even during the COVID crisis -- especially during the COVID crisis, we have had all of these Zoom meetings with hundreds of parents, 90-minute meetings, borough-wide, sometimes district-wide, the DOE comes on and for 60 minutes DOE officials pontificate. And then there's 30 minutes remaining for parents to ask maybe half a dozen questions, and then the other 200 parents waiting to speak or ask questions are hung up on.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right.

SENATOR LIU: So I hope that you will turn the page on this playbook straight out of George Orwell that the previous administration had been following and really engage the parents in what is needed for our kids.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Senator, I thank you so much for that. And you will see a very different approach to how we work. I didn't come here to be a DOE bureaucrat and to give a bunch of pat answers and to meet with parents and do a lot of talking but actually say nothing.

That is not who I am. I don't move that way, I don't lead that way. I lead in a very authentic way, and I cut to the chase. And I want the parents to know that I hear them, I see them, I respect them. Truly, I am one of them. I'm a product of this New York State public school system. And I don't see myself as sitting in control over anybody. I want to do this with them. That's why I call it -- but like I said, there's no system that is a perfect system.

But having been a teacher and an AP and a principal over the years, and having seen what the old system looked like, where no one was held accountable because everybody -- every borough president, everybody had a stake. The mayor didn't have enough sway so

when you needed to make real hard decisions, the public couldn't hold anybody accountable.

So while I think this system certainly has its own flaws, I think it's the best that I've seen. And I just want you to know, working with me, you're going to have a very different approach.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you. And to your comments, which I truly appreciate, they suggest that perhaps some changes are actually necessary in the current system of mayoral accountability to make sure that there is more accountability and that parents have more input.

So I look forward to figuring out what changes can be made if mayoral accountability, as under the current system, is extended.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Certainly open to those conversations for sure. Thank you.

SENATOR LIU: I've got one more minute, and then I'll get you with a second round later.

But speaking of parental input, we have been getting a huge amount of input from parents, as legislators. And a very big question that's been asked by a lot of parents out there is what's happening with the G&T programs. De Blasio thought that he got rid of it, we never believed it, Mayor Adams spoke about increasing and expanding G&T programs, and now the deadline has been passed. Parents are wondering what's going on.

So I think, you know, I've made it very clear that I believe there is a place for accelerated learning in New York City public schools. It's been there for decades, for generations. I feel like you believe the same thing. But my question is what's going on with accelerated learning in New York City and the G&T programs?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely looking at this.

Well, first of all, the mayor -- and I, right -- are fully committed to expanding opportunities for accelerated learning. So

you should just know that. So the details of what we have to do or put in place will be coming in the coming days. So we came in already stating to everyone that we are not cutting back on Gifted and Talented, we intend to expand Gifted and Talented programming.

And when I ask the question, Is there some reason why we don't have more Gifted and Talented seats, what's the -- what am I missing, there was no clear answer to that question. So we have this scarcity model where there are a handful of seats and we've got our parents at each other's throats over -- fighting over a handful of seats.

My goal -- and I've spoken to, you know, elected officials and community members all across the city who have said, you know, We want Gifted and Talented in our district. And --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Chancellor, I have to cut you off. I think more people will ask you about Gifted and Talented and you'll have a second shot at that. But we

have to focus on the clock, unfortunately.

And the Assemblymember has asked me to call on Assemblymembers as she ran to another meeting briefly. And so the next Assemblymember is Ranker Ra for five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair Krueger.

Good afternoon, Chancellor. Congratulations. Welcome on behalf of a fellow St. John's Law grad. So --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Heyyy. All right.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Nice win the other night for the basketball team, so I'm happy about that.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right. That's right.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: So I'm from the east side of the Nassau-Queens border, but I'm in Western Nassau and Franklin Square, so not too far from the city. But I did want to ask about an issue that has impacted an academic institution that does border within my district. That's the Henry Viscardi School,

which is a 4201 school for both physically disabled individuals.

And the last couple of school years, back with the reopening in 2020 and then this past fall, there was a delay in providing transportation to these students. And I know that, you know, this all predates you, but I do want to ask, you know, what planning is going on to ensure this isn't a problem as we get into the next school year.

There was, to my understanding, a delay in providing busing for these students for about the first two weeks of the school year. There was, you know, some accommodation that was attempted to be made through, you know, MetroCards and maybe Uber-type arrangements, but many of these children are disabled, have medical needs, and that is not really a viable option to getting them to school. And as a result, you know, they were missing instruction.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Yeah. First of all, I appreciate the question. And I don't -- this is the first

I'm hearing of it. I'm not so familiar with the school per se. But we do have our director of operations here, Kevin Moran, and I'd like to ask Kevin if he can be unmuted so that he can -- you know, to the extent that he's aware -- respond to that question.

CHIEF SCHOOL OPS OFFICER MORAN: Yes. Very much appreciate the question and an opportunity to provide clarity here.

This summer, like none other, was a challenge to restart the busing industry proper. And so we had to adhere to one day, one start day. So the couple of hundred schools that started early knew in advance that if they started early, we wouldn't be ready to deliver transportation on that set day.

We service 3,000 schools and programs across the city and the surrounding counties and states. We let folks know early going into April/May that our calendar system was locked, but we had to start in unison as a system for operability purposes on the first day of the DOE schedule.

That will not happen this year. We've taken a lot of efforts to help recruit and work with companies on staffing models to make sure we have the full fleet running. On a daily basis we run over 99 percent of our routes effectively. And we're definitely going to stay on top of this to make sure those private schools that start prior to the school year for the DOE, that we get those services delivered.

I'm happy to follow up with you on any specific concerns offline.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Great. Thank you, Mr. Moran. Thank you, Chancellor. And all the best to you as you begin your tenure.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. And our next questioner will be Senator Shelley Mayer, the chair of our Education Committee.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

Nice to see you, Chancellor. Congratulations again.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good to see

you.

SENATOR MAYER: It's nice to reconnect after 30 years.

One subject that Senator Liu and I heard a great deal about for the last year and a half from New York City parents was parents of special ed kids whose IEPs were frankly not complied with during COVID.

Recognizing the challenges, I wonder what is your approach to -- as we move forward still in COVID, how are we going to ensure that these IEPs for individual kids, as you know, with individualized issues, are addressed by the district -- by the city and DOE?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: So I will tell you, one of the things that as I came here, Senator Mayer, that was expressed to me in a huge way was just how fundamentally broken the special education system here has been. The first person that really brought it to my attention was the head of UFT, Michael Mulgrew, who I talk to on a regular basis, who said: You'd better get your arms

around this thing or you're just going to get taken over and have a federal monitor put on it.

And so, you know, I'm a firm believer that all of our students with disabilities deserve a high-quality education. Again, this is a source of focus also from the mayor. But we have been meeting with a whole host of people around how to fix this. We just recently met with Dr. Rosa, as well as Chancellor Young.

We have hired a host of new attorneys who are helping us, first of all, just to deal with the backlog of cases. And together with what we're doing over at OATH, we think the combination is really going to help us just, first of all, try to catch up, number one.

And so I think we're on a very significant path in doing that. I think Dr. Rosa in her earlier testimony also alluded to the fact that we've already made very significant progress in doing that.

What my direction has been to our team

here is that I'm not interested in just figuring out how to catch up. I want to make sure that we get out in front of this issue and that we are providing the kinds of services that our young people need and deserve and we are supposed to deliver to them, by law.

And so if you just give me a little bit more time to get out in front of this. But we're engaging all of the right people who are asking all the right questions, and it's becoming a lot clearer to me. But the system here has been broken, to be very clear, and it is my intention certainly to get out in front of it and then fix it.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. Very good to hear. And, you know, very much appreciate your sense of urgency and intensity about fixing these problems.

Secondly, on sort of your approach to a longer school day -- and not necessarily solely academic, but schools being open a longer period of time, with wraparound and other services. I mean, I think my New York

City colleagues can attest that those either community schools or longer-school-day schools provide a range of opportunities for our kids that they don't have otherwise.

And I wonder if you have plans to expand that model.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, so I think that first of all, you know, expanding some of the community school work is something that is a priority for us. Those wraparound services are built into the model.

But even for those schools that don't get the designation as community schools, we're certainly going to be looking at how do we expand on these investments to create, you know, more opportunities for young people after school. You know, when I was at Eagle Academy, we had Saturday school. How do we use our time more wisely in the summer?

In fact, these are things that we have to do when people ask us the question around learning loss. Well, the way we're going to catch up is by making better use of all of the time that we have. But that doesn't

necessarily mean -- in fact that doesn't mean that we're looking for all of our teachers to work until 6 or 7 o'clock. We want to engage the community-based organizations. And there are hundreds of CBOs all across New York City, if not thousands, who are anxious to be involved and to be more engaged in our schools. Many of them are already in our schools providing all kinds of services.

And we think that if we are strategic in how we bring them all together for maximum impact -- so what does that mean? That means that there are some districts that have an even greater need than others, where our kids have fallen behind further than others. If you look at some of the districts in East New York, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, I mean, they're crying out for real help.

So we want to target our resources and investments to those kids who are the furthest behind as a result of this pandemic. And it will mean engaging, as I like to call it, the village. You know, there's lots of other groups who have been working for

decades with young people who bring a very different context and relationship to kids than their teachers do in school. And so we want to make sure that all of that is in place, Senator.

So that's a huge part of the announcements that you'll see. Some of these will be things that you hear from the mayor as part of his 100-Day Plan. There will be a whole host of announcements that relate to the Department of Education and the work that we're doing. So I don't want to get out in front of the mayor, but just to say that it is a priority for us. We see it, we recognize it, we understand that if we don't make better use of our time, our kids will never catch up -- and we don't intend to see that happen.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

Lastly, and it's not to be answered today, but we did have a hearing earlier this year on how districts across the state, including the City of New York, were using their ARP and additional Foundation Aid

money.

At some point could we get a breakdown of the -- like you mentioned 500 social workers were hired, which is fantastic. You know, if you and Lindsey and your team can provide us a detailed breakdown of who was hired, what -- where they are being placed, that will be very helpful, I think, to our overall analysis of how --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely. Will do. We've got a pretty comprehensive breakdown already. We may have to fine-tune a couple of things and we'll get that out to you and the other members in short order.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. And thank you for -- you know, I mean Senator Liu is fantastic, and Senator Jackson, my New York City colleagues leading the charge here. I'm just sort of from the sidelines here, weighing in on their behalf.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I appreciate you and I appreciate your leadership. And thank you on a personal level for when I was a young attorney working

at the Attorney General's office and the kind of leadership that you provided in that office, and I thank you.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

And everyone who knows Shelley Mayer knows that she doesn't really just sit on the sidelines, just FYI.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So next to Assemblywoman Deborah Glick, chair of the Higher Ed Committee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Good afternoon, chancellor. It's good to see you again.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you. Good to see you as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: A couple of questions.

Around the high school application, it was a very complicated and challenging process and I often said that if my parents had to deal with that, I'm not sure I would have gone to high school.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: So I'm wondering what changes or what information can you provide to parents ahead of time to make that an easier process. And the follow-up to that is, at the time we were told that people had to select any -- up to 12 schools and that they would likely get, you know, in one of their top three or four. And I asked what the percentage was of students who got into their top six choices or their lower six choices. I never got an answer.

But I'd like to understand what you're going to do about making that a more -- just improving the process for our families, and what do you envision in terms of making choices and how -- you know, I was told an algorithm, you know, runs things. Which is fine if you're trying to be blind on some screens, but it doesn't work if nobody is getting into the schools of their choices.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right. Right.

Well, you know what that -- this office itself offers a prime example of how

we should be engaging parents. And so I will make sure that this is one of the -- and I'm glad you raise it, because in the last several months that I've actually been talking to parents and families and elected officials, no one has raised this as a particular issue, but I think you are absolutely right.

It's a complex, convoluted process. It needs to be made much more user-friendly. And it's one that I can certainly engage with parents in doing. And so I will certainly take that up and try to learn more about how are parents experiencing this process and try to hear it directly from them, even suggestions on what we could do to improve.

So I will certainly make sure that will be on my to-do list.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: And I guess I would like to get from someone what did happen in the last round in terms of what percentage of students got into the top six of their choices or the bottom six. Because I think that might help us understand whether

or not families are actually being served well in terms of where they want their kids to go to school.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's a very interesting notion. And my team is taking note of every one of these requests that are coming in, and we will certainly get back to you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Obviously kids need a safe space in which to learn. And we have a relatively new middle school in my district -- beautiful. It's a beautiful school. And the School Construction Authority under then -- now First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo did an unbelievable job.

But I've heard from some folks that that school has a number of problems in terms of, you know, regular issues with -- I don't want to term it violence, but some sort of disruptions.

And so I guess that is a key concern that even in a -- you know, I went to a school in Queens that -- my middle school, my

junior high was an old wreck, so you could understand why kids might not feel like they were valued. But this is a beautiful school, and still there are problems. So it's not only the environment. Something's happening.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: You know what, you're so on point with that, Madam Chair, because one of the things we don't talk a lot about that happened during this pandemic, you know, we say that there's social-emotional issues that we need to deal with. But what I have found in talking to principals all over the city, they said our kids came back different when they got back to school. There was loss at a level that I don't think many of the school personnel were fully prepared to deal with.

The organization of school and being in school with your friends, being around those teachers, as I said earlier, who matter to you, who give you a hug when you need it, who give you the encouragement when you need it, who admonish you when you need it -- all of these things are critically important to

their overall development. And when you suspend that for a year, a year and a half, two years that so many of our kids have actually been out of that process -- it's not like they were just at home. They were also subjected to a lot of other negative influences that have played out. That's the reason why we've seen, as the kids came back to school, a rash of bad behavior, kids bringing weapons to school who had never brought weapons to school before. There was a loss that happened, and a lot of negative stuff got there to take its place.

So it's going to take us a little while to turn that around. That's why we keep saying the best thing that could possibly happen for our kids is for them to be back in school, to get used to the organization of school, to get used to building on those relationships again. They matter. They matter deeply. And I know that, as somebody who was in the school for so many years.

And so these are things that it's hard

to navigate this from the chancellor's seat. What we have to do is make sure at the school level that we're giving them all the help and the support that they need to provide everything that our kids need.

And so we'll continue to push on that. I think you're going to continue to see things getting better.

The day before Christmas, the holidays, we had 63 percent attendance. Yesterday we had almost 87 percent. Our kids are coming back. A lot of our teachers who have been out, they're coming back. There's been a steady upward climb that would -- you know, as we're seeing a lot of the cases, the Omicron, I think we're -- you know, fingers crossed, I think we're starting to move to the other side. And there's nothing better that could happen for our kids than to see this steady pace moving and we're seeing them steadily coming back and getting back into the normalization process that they so richly need.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: You mentioned

the school that would focus on dyslexia. I believe it's the school that we fought for in my district just off of Houston Street. So I hope that there is a commitment, because NYU, which has the property but out of the ULURP is required to turn it over, has asked or offered that they -- the School Construction Authority an extension.

So I'm concerned (a) about the school not getting shunted aside and (b) NYU absolving itself of its responsibility to relocate the supermarket that's there. So it's a neighborhood thing, and we don't want people fighting over schools and supermarkets, we want both. And the school is really important. So I hope that you'll be talking with the School Construction Authority to ensure that they -- they may have signed off on the extension, but that they will not take that as a back-burner issue.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I agree. And we're all over that. I can certainly be back in touch with you around the status of

that. And -- but just know that I don't -- the mayor -- this is a priority for the mayor. He wants to see a school that would help kids who are suffering from dyslexia, that we would have that in every borough in New York City.

And so that is the goal. That's where we ultimately hope to be. Again, as I said, I don't want to preempt some of his announcements, but just you all know that he's on record as saying this is critically important to him and to his administration, and I'm doing everything that I can to make sure that we implement. So stay tuned in the coming weeks and months ahead.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: My last comment is about community schools. I think that's what they're called now, but when I was growing up in Queens Village, the high school across the street was just open at night and they did all sorts of things. So it was a lot of enrichment, kids could play in the gym. I took a class in the gym. My sister took a painting class with a neighbor.

With that I think we have a hard asset, and we really need to make better use of them.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Right. Right. Right.

So I will tell you that, first of all, community schools is a proven, effective model for supporting students in need and improved academic outcomes for students.

Last year we were able to announce an expansion of community schools programming directly targeting neighborhoods most significantly impacted by COVID. And thanks to further resources we received from the federal government, we're able to expand even further and are in the process of creating over 100 new community schools across the city.

So we recognize the critical importance of community schools and the wraparound services that they provide, particularly in moments like this. And so the work is still happening, we're still moving on it, we're doing everything we can

to deliver as many as we can.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chancellor.

Next up is Senator Robert Jackson. If you don't know him, you haven't really been working on schools in New York. Right?

(Laughter.)

SENATOR JACKSON: Chancellor, let me welcome you and your staff. Unfortunately, I only have three minutes, so I'm going to move pretty quickly and I hope that you can respond as quickly so I can ask as many questions as I can within the three minutes.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes, sir.

SENATOR JACKSON: And the first one is, is it correct that New York City spends an average of about $200 million more per year on charter schools? Can you speak to the growing costs? Are there any actions that the state can take to help curb the ballooning costs to publicly funded, privately managed charter schools?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I will tell you that that is one that I'm

probably going to have to get back to you on, Senator. I've got some recent reports in terms of, you know, what those numbers actually look like. And there's been some concerns from a host of elected officials who have reached out.

So if you give me a couple of days, I'll be able to get back to you for sure.

SENATOR JACKSON: Sure. Thank you.

And so DOE holds its Contract for Excellence public input sessions, which are required by the law, after the school year has begun in the fall or the winter, not submitting its CFE for approval until late winter/early spring, long after these funds have already been allocated and spent.

Will you commit to holding Contract for Excellence hearings and asking for public comments on your proposed plans before the DOE and school budgets have been finalized? And in fact --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely.

SENATOR JACKSON: -- there's legislation -- thank you, I heard you say

"absolutely." There is legislation that I'm sponsoring, along with an Assemblymember, and unfortunately the name is not listed here right now.

So I appreciate you saying "absolutely," because that's important overall.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes, it is.

SENATOR JACKSON: And then, to move on, Commissioner Rosa, Dr. Betty Rosa said that you and the Mayor Adams administration have been engaging with the State Education Department, when asked about mayoral control. And John is right, we figure it's mayoral accountability, that's what it is. We don't want anyone to control us, let me just say that.

Yet school communities are not happy. You've heard that earlier, with a former colleague saying that.

Would you support a restructuring of the Panel for Educational Policy so parents have a legitimate say in the policies affecting their students?

And there's a bill on that, and so we will get you the bill, S4466 -- I am the sponsor -- which talks about who has the authority to place certain people in certain capacities on the Panel for Educational Policy.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Senator, listen, I'm always open to having conversations on all of these issues. And if you want to help to convene a group that we can certainly talk about this, I'm certainly open to doing that.

But just please know that fundamentally I do believe that mayoral accountability -- and we can talk about what the tweaks might look like. But anything that I think that removes the teeth from it, where it says mayoral accountability but you really don't have the authority to move things, is something that does concern me.

And you know, you and I have been around a long time and seen what the old system looked like. And I would want to do anything that I could not to go back to the

old system where no one was really in charge and we saw a level of corruption. Which was what actually sparked the pendulum to move to the other side.

And so I'm certainly open to having these conversations, but I stand firmly with the mayor on really giving the mayor -- holding the mayor ultimately accountable, and through his chancellor to help to deliver.

Now, that being said, you know, as I said earlier, I'm a person who absolutely firmly engages with community. That's who I am. And I would want to continue to do that. And so -- but certainly look forward to engaging with anybody that you would convene. Count me -- I'll be there.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you, Chancellor.

And then the state allocates money yearly for reimbursing private school tuitions for higher-need students with severe developmental and intellectual disabilities from public schools that cannot be served. The slow reimbursement process has had many

schools on the verge of closing their doors. Will you commit to addressing the slow release of funds to schools supporting families that cannot be served by DOE?

And I know, you know, based on everything that I know, your response will be to -- it's yes, is that correct?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, my response is yes, I'm going to do everything I can. That's part of what I said earlier, that that system has been broken fundamentally. And I'm going to do everything I can to try and fix it. And the issue you raise is one of the biggest parts around how it is in fact broken.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you, Chancellor. I have two more questions, but my time is up.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Nope. Sorry, your time is up, Robert Jackson, and I'm passing it back to the Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Rozic now.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROZIC: Thank you so

much, Chancellor, for being here. I really appreciate you being accessible. I respect your expansive experience and especially your authenticity.

As you know, I represent Districts 25 and 26 in Eastern Queens. I loved your shout out to Hillcrest High School and Thomas Edison. I went to Townsend Harris High School, not so far down Parsons Boulevard. And I sincerely appreciate your commitment to restoring what works, as a pillar. I think that's really important to do that.

And I have a specific question about restoring an essential program in my district. The Townsend Harris High School-Queens College Bridge Program is a 34-year program that places seniors in a year-long humanities course, along with two elective classes at Queens College. It allows students to experience a portion of their senior year in a college setting and earn 12 free credits. This is crucial for a school where a majority of the students are economically disadvantaged.

I'm a product of this program, so we know that it works. But thousands of others have gone through it as well. The perspective administration ended the contract for one reason or another -- I'm not sure -- but prior to that, it was renewed every five years in five-year increments. Last year -- or I guess this year it's continued without DOE's financial support after the school pooled its internal funding. And the State Legislature, through the leadership of Chair Weinstein, provided emergency school aid.

The school will be unable to sustain the program beyond this year. Would you commit to restoring the program and the contract?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I will certainly commit to meeting with you to discuss it in further detail. I would like to do that sooner rather than later, so I learn more about it, what it actually is. It sounds like an amazing program. Why it went away I have no idea, other than the fact that

I know politically, when you get a new mayor, you get a new chancellor, a lot of times the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater.

That's one of the reasons why the mayor and I have said that we are committed to what works, whether we created it or not. If it's good programming for kids and families, we want to continue good programming. And so that's what our commitment is toward.

But the specifics on this individual program, love to learn more. It probably goes without saying to my staff, but I'm sure they're keeping a record of all of these requests, because it is my intention to get back to you timely, to follow up, and I want to talk to you directly so I understand a little bit more about what it is, and perhaps even do a visit and walk it with you so I can even learn more deeply about the success of the program.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROZIC: We'll have you anytime. Thanks.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I look

forward to it. Thank you again.

And, you know, you mentioned Hillcrest High School. I'm going to visit Hillcrest High School tomorrow morning, where I graduated from, the Class of 1980. I have not stepped foot back in that building in 42 years. I'm terribly excited to go back.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROZIC: Well, we love to have you in Queens, so --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROZIC: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we go back to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And we are joined by Senator Gounardes.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Thank you, Chair Krueger.

Hello, Chancellor Banks. Good to see you again.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good to see you as well.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: You know, with all

this talk of high school, I'd just be remiss to say, you know, Fort Hamilton High School in Bay Ridge, where not only our Attorney General and Treasury Secretary but yours truly also graduated from -- phenomenal educational institution.

I have two questions. Number one, you spoke quite a bit about mental health in some of your earlier exchanges with other members, and I know this has been a big focus, especially in the pandemic. We're talking about money being allocated to mental health, counselors, social workers, et cetera.

I'd like to drill down with you a little bit more about specific training to address about student suicides. It's an issue that I think it doesn't -- it probably gets caught up in the larger mental health space. I had a family in my district whose child unfortunately took their own life, from a public school.

It seems like, from the little I've been able to kind of piece together, there's some inconsistency in terms of the types of

support services and trainings we offer to faculty, to staff, to administrators specifically around identifying suicide awareness and trying to intervene in those instances. So this goes beyond just general trauma training and general mental health awareness.

I don't know if you have any thoughts or things you can say about that specifically, but I'd love to spend some more time with you after this hearing as well to drill down on student suicide prevention, which I think is a very important problem.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I would love to follow up with you more and learn more about that as well.

You know, that's a critically important issue, and not one that I've had a lot of experience with. You know, over my years as being a principal in the school system, I actually had one of the students -- I still think about it, in a way. But we have a picture and plaque of him up still at the Eagle Academy. And I never saw it

coming. I never saw it coming.

And so a level of training that raises awareness on those signs are critically important. And I believe we've got people here at the DOE who are activated in that space. So I want to take some time to learn a little bit more myself and would love to meet with you and discuss it in more detail.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Great. And I think your reaction is exactly the reaction that many of us have. We never see it coming. But the science and the research actually shows that we can see it coming in a lot of ways, we're just not trained and conditioned to spot those things. So we should definitely talk more about it.

I want to switch gears a little bit. There was a lot of discussion with the previous panelist about the issues with the New York City special education. You touched on special ed briefly in your comments as well.

One of the big challenges that we have with families in my district is they are

waiting years to get their reimbursements from the city. I'm talking two, three, four years. I have one family that is in personal debt, $400,000, because they have not gotten responses from the city three and a half years going in terms of what they are owed by the DOE for their child's special ed placement.

So you've inherited a mess. I'm not going to hold you accountable to that right now. But to have a working family have to take out personal loans, nearly $400,000, just to be able to provide for their child's individualized education is a crime. And I hope and I earnestly hope that we can actually make some headway here, because no family should have to live through that type of trauma.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right. I completely agree. And this is one of the priorities that we have here. Walking in the door, I was told that this system was kind of broken top to bottom. And so it's got to be fully revamped.

My goal is that, you know, parents ought not have to go out and take major loans to get the services that they need. That we should be in a position, as the Department of Education, to be in front of that curve and to be able to do the proper assessment up front and then to be able to provide those services.

And in the cases where we can't and we've got to make, you know, supplemental payments to help and support, people shouldn't have to wait years in order to do that. So that's -- those are just the vestiges of a broken system, and it's going to take us a little while to get out in front of it, but the signal has already been given here that this is a priority of mine. And I've heard it from so many people, various aspects of the special education initiative.

So for anybody that has more questions, just please know I'm working on it, I'm doing the best that I can. It's going to take a little while to get out in front of it. But that's what we intend to

do.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Thank you very much, Chancellor.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chancellor. Thank you, Senator.

Assembly, back to you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We are going next to Assemblywoman Bichotte Hermelyn.

Are you here now?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: Yes, I am.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: Great. Thank you so much.

Thank you, Chancellor Banks, for being here. I'm really excited to see you, and thank you --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you, Assemblyperson. Good to see you as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: And thank you for your testimony and being here answering all these questions.

You know, we all know your commitment in building and growing and investing in our

children's future. I like that you're expanding community schools, which is very important, with all the wraparound services that are needed in our community. Also reinstating and expanding Gifted and Talent is very important to me as well.

I know you talk about Brownsville and East New York, but don't forget Flatbush. Flatbush is the highest Caribbean Black immigrant population, and we have a lot of English language learners, with {inaudible} and Haitian Creole being the top language spoken. And we have a high poverty level as well.

My question -- I have two questions. The question is about childcare. Childcare is a major priority for the city's recovery, and the mayor has mentioned that this is a priority for his administration. Has the Department of Education developed any plans for expanding access to childcare? That's question number one.

And question number two is around MWBE. As you know, the Department of

Education has one of the largest procurement budgets for minority and women-owned business enterprises to certainly take advantage of. However, the threshold is very low. We've spent a lot of time passing bills, landmark bills that would help lift those barriers, but we're feeling that DOE is still putting some barriers there that's not allowing MWBEs to get their fair share of government contracts. So childcare.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yup. So let me start with the second one first. That is a big priority of ours. You know, MWBEs in a -- DOE has a $38 million budget when you include all the pensions and everything else. Six percent of what we do in spending goes to MWBEs. Just on its face, that's a shame. In fact, the amount of funding that is spent with Black-owned businesses is less than 1 percent.

And so when you think about that, in a system with so many Black and brown children, but contracted dollars do not go to Black and brown businesses. And what we have found is

that there are some systematic things that are happening here that prevent that from happening. And I know you have all seen it as well, through your leadership.

And so I have appointed a chief diversity officer here whose primary focus is going to be about uncovering why that is and helping to implement change in the system. And so, again, stay tuned for that. We've made that a priority of our work and our administration.

And secondly, the issue around childcare. I'm going to ask that they would unmute Dan Weisberg. Dan is our first deputy chancellor and has his hand on a whole host of key issues for me, and spent some time here at the DOE before, several years, when Joel Klein was the chancellor, and I'm thrilled to have him here as my first deputy chancellor.

Dan, if you could speak to the issue around childcare that the Assemblymember raised.

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG:

Absolutely. Thank you so much, Chancellor.

Thank you, Assemblymember. This is obviously --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Dan?

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes, ma'am.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Dan, just because the clock is out, I'm going to actually ask you to chat with the Assemblymember offline or hope that somebody else will ask you the same question, because I think there are a lot of people who do want to hear the answer.

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But I've got to be the bad guy with the clock, sorry.

And I'm going to call Senator Joe Addabbo next. (No response.)

Are you there with us, Joe? See, it's always when they've just disappeared on you.

SENATOR ADDABBO: There we go. Hello, everyone.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: There you go. All right.

SENATOR ADDABBO: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I want to thank all my colleagues in both houses, obviously, for their time.

And Chancellor, again, thank you very much. And I do apologize because I'm trying to juggle here. But again, I want to thank you and I look forward to working with you. And I want to echo the sentiments of my colleagues.

I do have to apologize if I did miss this, because in your initial testimony you mentioned about career readiness. And I think just in the throes of the pandemic, as you look at a post-pandemic era, you know, looking at jobs, you're going to have to train individuals to have careers. So I am really interested in the budgetary process as it relates to possibly career opportunities in education, so technical education. If you can expand on that. And again, I apologize if it's already been touched on, but expand on technical education opportunities.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I

appreciate that, Senator. Thank you so much. And it's very timely. I didn't delve into it, I just kind of mentioned it. So this gives me a different opportunity.

This is going to be a north star for this administration. Creating more career and technical education opportunities, more pathways to career success, is going to be a hallmark of our work here. We are graduating far too many of our kids who graduate with a high school diploma and don't know how to do a lot of stuff. They don't have industry certifications where they can go right into the workforce if they choose. And all the studies show us that if you provide those opportunities for kids when they're in high school, even those who go to college do better in college.

And we have a little feedback; I'm not sure where that's coming from. But I hope everybody can hear me.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: If everyone would mute other than Joe Addabbo and the chancellor.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: So I know the clock is running, so I'll keep going.

So just -- and we intend to engage corporate partners, philanthropists in this space as well. This is going to be a very big deal. You will hear the mayor making a major announcement about this in the coming months as we get geared up for the next school year. It is going to have implications not just for our kids but for our teachers as well.

For far too many of our teachers, they don't have a clear enough understanding of the workforce opportunities that we're supposed to be preparing our kids for. Many of them don't know what it means to work at Google or Microsoft or anything. And so we're looking at professional development opportunities for our teachers as well. I think it will be very exciting for them. As smart and as hardworking as our teachers are, this is an opportunity for them to expand their experiences so they can reinforce what's happening in our schools.

I mentioned that I visited Thomas Edison High School out in Queens. There's P-TECH in Brooklyn. There are so many amazing places. And so even if there are not more career and technical schools, which there will be, we want to bring more career and technical education experiences and opportunities to many more of our schools so our kids understand why they're going to school in the first place.

I like to say, Senator, that my job is to make sure that when they graduate, they can get off of Mommy and Daddy's payroll and take steps on a pathway to the middle class. That's what our schools ought to be producing.

That is what the corporate leaders are pleading with us -- they say, Give us kids who graduate from these schools in New York City who we can employ, who have an employable skill set and a real post-secondary plan. We've not done nearly as good a job in doing that. I intend to change that.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And Assemblymember Weinstein has asked me to continue on her behalf with the Assembly call-out, and the next Assemblyperson is Yuh-Line Niou.

Hi, Yuh-Line.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Hi. Hi, Liz.

Thank you, Chancellor, for taking the time today to be with all of us. I know that I love going after Senator Jackson or Senator John Liu because they ask all of the questions I want to ask in quick succession.

So I'm going to just follow up with a couple of things. I wanted to talk a little bit about the segregation within some of our schools and our school districts. And, you know, we have seen that school choice is often affected by after-school programming in some of our schools. You know, title schools have after-school programs.

Is there -- would you support universal after-school?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well,

listen. Conceptually I absolutely support it. But we're going to look at -- we're going to look at the budget more deeply and see where we can make it happen. Whether or not we'll be able to do that for every single school across the entire system, I'm not sure just yet.

But that was a huge part of the success of the work that I did before I came here. And I recognized it for what it means and the importance that it can have and the difference it can make in the lives of kids, and particularly in light of this pandemic, what we're dealing with. So addressing learning loss, but beyond learning loss just the expansion of opportunities for our kids.

So we're going to look at that very clearly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: I think it would very clearly help with the learning loss that we've experienced throughout the city during this pandemic. Folks who have disabilities, people who, you know, have had a difficult time remote learning, I think it's very

crucial.

We are also experiencing also a lot of teacher and staff shortages. What is your plan for recruitment?

And also I wanted to kind of also talk really quickly about the fact that we have had, you know, a very difficult time, you know, with -- you mentioned that the students walked out, staff walked out, teachers have walked out. I just -- I wonder, you know, how you are responding to the concerns of our parents, teachers and students right now.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So two parts, right?

So the teacher staffing issue, first of all, just in the short term, there have been real challenges in our staffing. And since I've gotten here, I think we've been able to kind of hold the line. We staffed up with -- you know, increased our sub pool for teachers, as well as paraprofessionals, enough which allowed us to continue to keep our schools open. I'm very proud of all the work that went into doing that. So that's

one.

But I think in the larger perspective, you know, we're hearing about lots of our teachers who may be retiring. A lot of teachers are feeling a sense of burnout. You know, and my job really is to bring a level of joy back to teaching. And teachers who came into this business because they really love -- they love kids and they love to teach, and have found far too often that it's not fun anymore, that their hands were tied, that we spend so much time just preparing kids to take standardized exams.

I mean, these are the things that the teachers say to me. And that all the reasons why they wanted to be teachers, that the system has not fully supported that and helped to nurture that. And I want it to change. And so there's a lot of work that we have to do.

And we've got to recruit more teachers and new teachers to come into the system, and we'll be working to do that as well. I'm still getting my hands around a lot of these

issues, and I think you'll see in the coming days announcements that come from us that speak to those kinds of issues. So that was the teacher recruitment.

And the other one is about, you know, the fears and concerns that people do have. And they've been legitimate concerns. And a lot of those concerns really happen as a result of, you know, what we see on a continual basis in the media. But what I have found is what the science is telling us -- and we said we need to follow the science -- is that our kids are actually safer in schools.

It seems counterintuitive. Right? "I'm concerned about this variant, I'm going to keep my child home." Well, the data is telling us that your child is more susceptible to getting it if he stays home than if he or she actually comes to school. And I'm sure that has a lot to do with the fact that -- you know, all of the things that we've put in place to mitigate for this issue, from the masks to the -- all our

teachers are vaccinated, to the air purifiers.

Because when parents say "I'm keeping my child home," a lot of times they're not just in the house all day, they're moving around the apartment building that they may be in, they've still got other people coming and going and visiting. Most of our students who are diagnosed as positive, it didn't happen in school.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Chancellor, again, I have to cut you off, I'm sorry.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'm sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Keep one eye on that clock up there.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'm sorry, I didn't get a chance to fully answer the question.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I know. I know. This is a challenge to operate this way.

Our next Senator is Senator Leroy Comrie. Are you with us, Leroy?

SENATOR COMRIE: I am here. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair for making sure

I was on time. And I want to thank you and the chairs for putting these hearings together.

And I want to congratulate and acknowledge Chancellor Banks. I want to thank you for taking on this challenge, and I want to do everything I can to make sure that you're successful in your time and tenure as chancellor.

And I just wanted to just ask you a couple of questions regarding things that we've talked about over time. I'll just get right to it.

Teacher attendance. How are we doing with teacher attendance? And what can we do to increase the levels of teacher attendance? Because you were just talking about that children are safer in the buildings, but are the teachers reflecting that in their attendance, and do they feel safe coming into the building?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: You know what, I'm going to -- thank you so much for that, Senator. And I appreciate the

relationship that we've had over the many years.

Let me pitch that to our first deputy, Dan Weisberg. He's been staying on top of those numbers, not only student attendance but how we're doing with respect to our teachers as well.

Dan?

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Thank you, Chancellor. And good to see you, Senator.

Just to give you a little bit of data, our teacher attendance at this point is just about back to where it typically is. Now, as the chancellor said, we were dealing with some very significant staff shortages. But just to give you a sense, it has dropped by about half.

The number of substitutes we needed has dropped by about half in the about last 16 days or so. And the requests we get for teacher subs is just about -- it's just a couple of percentage points higher than it was before Omicron. So it was a very

significant challenge for us in keeping the schools open. Teachers and principals and support staff did an amazing, heroic job to make that possible. But we are back to close to where we were before Omicron in terms of staffing at this point.

SENATOR COMRIE: Thank you. And I would want to follow up on that.

But I just -- my second question is wraparound programs. You talked earlier about the fact that dyslexia is a real issue. But we also know that with a lot of our children, a lot of them have never been tested, their eyes have never been tested, their blood pressure's never been tested.

With wraparound programs, what are we going to do to not just test for dyslexia, but to make sure that all of our children, once they're entering the public school system, can get a thorough check for the basics to make sure that they can actually see, that they can hear, and that they are physically able to get through a class day?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Absolutely.

We're looking at that as -- not only looking at that, we're engaging in that as we speak. There are a whole host of screeners that will cover multiple issues. And so we've got a team of folks here who are exploring all of those right now.

Our goal is as we go into the next school year, Senator, to be able to have a whole host of these things addressed, announced, and to begin the implementation on. So that is certainly one.

SENATOR COMRIE: I look forward to working with you on both of those issues on -- with wraparound programs.

And I just want to mention really quickly that school districts like 29, which has one of the longest commute times in the city, a la Staten Island, used to have mandatory after-school programs in each school. And I want to see that happen in this budget.

And it used to happen back in -- back, you know, 10 years ago when I was 23. But we need to make sure that it happens on a

citywide basis for the longest commute times in the city, where we can have our programs in all of the schools that last until at least 8 o'clock at night. Some of the schools need to be open late.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Senator, I'm a big believer in --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm going to cut you off before you even get to answer, Chancellor.

Although if Senator Leroy Comrie just said "10 years ago when I was 23," I think we should --

(Overtalk.)

SENATOR COMRIE: Oh, you heard that?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I did hear that. So thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Let's see that birth certificate.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Dickens now.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Thank you so

much, Chair.

And thank you so much, Chancellor, for coming and reintroducing yourself.

As you know, I've been a strong supporter of the Eagle Academy, and as such I have -- my observation has been that part of its success has been mentorship and a standard learning curve by grade, neither of which we really have in New York City schools.

Do you think that that is true? And if so, can it be implemented?

The second question is about the behavioral health crisis that our children are in. It can't be overstated. Families are facing challenging times and landscapes to access behavioral health services. Is there going to be a line in the budget that will reinstitute and bring about behavioral health services that after this pandemic we need so bad?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, thank you so much. And you know, you and I go back many, many years, and I appreciate your --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Don't tell them. Don't tell them.

(Laughter.)

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: But I thank you. And yes, you know, we are going to be committed to a very holistic level of support for our kids, you know, from mentoring. And a lot of our teachers need continued training into these behavioral supports.

But we're going to engage community organizations. There are many community organizations that have been doing amazing work -- small ones, even, who have not received much in the way of support to expand on that work. And those are the things that we're looking at as well.

So we're going to be committed to getting these things right. And part of the way in which we're going to do it is I intend to reorganize this Department of Education. And so you'll be hearing about how we're going to be doing business very differently here. And the goal, the overarching goal is to streamline, essentially, and to ensure

that we're pushing more of our resources closer to where the action is. And that's in our schools, between our teachers and our kids and our principals.

So every move that I'm making here is really about how to make sure that that is where the resources are actually going. We will not transform the Department of Education from the top down. It won't happen. We'll only play around on the margins. If we're going to really reform it and transform it -- which is why I'm here -- it is going to happen from the bottom up. And so all the efforts that I'm making are meant to do that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Pardon me, Chancellor, but does that include the behavioral health services that are badly needed?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's exactly what I'm trying to get at. Absolutely, that's right. Yup.

And so what that means is I'm not necessarily saying I'm going to pick one

organization and say we're going to do this for every school across the city. The best ideas of how to address even the behavioral issues come from the schools themselves. They're the ones that know the kids best. And our job here is to provide the resources and the supports for them to make that happen.

So that is one of many issues that are going to be part of the new way in which we're moving.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Thank you. My time is up. And thank you so much, Chancellor.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Back to the Senate then.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And our next Senator is Diane Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Chancellor Banks, good to see you. Congratulations on your new role. I am

incredibly pleased by your choice as chancellor. I'm happy to see the team you're putting together. I'm thrilled that you've brought on board the team that's with you and you've also brought on board former Councilman Mark Treyger, the chair of the Education Committee. He will be an invaluable asset to the team. As you know, he was instrumental in making sure that there will be a social worker in every school as the city rolls them out. That will be part of the mental health services.

I'm not going to ask you to repeat a lot of the things that you've already been asked. Your commitment to reforming the DOE from the bottom up I think is incredibly important, because we all know we spend an extraordinary amount of money and it's not all finding its way to the classroom and to the children. So I think it's really important that we do a deep dive.

I want to plug a couple of things. You're going to hear later from the UFT. There are two models I think that have been

really important in helping children: The community learning schools and the Positive Learning Collaborative. In certain schools they are incredibly important in helping reform some of the student behavioral problems.

So let's work with them, they work. Community learning schools have been game-changing just the way the Eagle Academy has been for young men on Staten Island.

And I want to talk a little bit about something that I think Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn talked about, early childhood.

Where are we with the expansion of 3-K? UPK has been amazing, the 3-K would help close the gap for access to childcare for a lot of parents. Where are we with that?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, first of all, I just named a new deputy chancellor in charge of early childhood education. That's exactly what they're looking at right now. That's also an area that is in need of

very significant change, and that's why I brought her here, to help us to do that.

But the expansion of UPK is one that we're looking at. We know it's an expensive proposition, that's for sure, but it's one that we're looking at. And certainly hopefully in the coming weeks I'll have a lot more information to say than I'm just looking into these things.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: But again, I've just gotten here for a very short period of time. But it is on our agenda.

SENATOR SAVINO: And finally, on the issue of the extension of school governance, I support the four-year extension. I don't think we should be holding it hostage the way it's been done in the past.

However, one issue does come up every time we consider the extension of mayoral control. It is parental involvement. Parents don't feel that they have sufficient input into the way the New York City school system operates. So I would strongly urge

that we find a way to expand parental involvement, whether it's through the Panel for Educational Policy, whether it's more through the CECs, or just listening to parents. They have been through a lot.

I don't -- you know, I sometimes say I am my own constituent. I don't have any children, but I hear from parents all the time that they don't feel that they have a say in their children's education in as meaningful a way as they would like.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I agree. I agree.

SENATOR SAVINO: I'd take that to heart.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I am taking it to heart, and I intend to move on that. I certainly don't expect the people to say that while I'm here. I'm not going to make policy decisions unless parents are involved and engaged. I don't want to be the one that says I made a decision, now we're going to have a community tour to find out what parents think, after you've already made the

decision. That's not what we're going to do here.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you. And good luck.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to Assemblyman Kim, Ron Kim now.

(No response.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Ron, are you here? Why don't we skip him, then, for the moment.

I see Jo Anne Simon, who is next. why don't you go now, Jo Anne, while we find Ron.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay, great.

Well, thank you, Chancellor. Hopefully you will not be here as long as the state commissioner. We hope. But thank you, and best of luck. I'm looking forward to working with you closely.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: You know, I read your testimony and I noticed you testified about the four pillars to improving our

school system, and I would say among those needs to be the five pillars of reading. As a former president of New York's Dyslexia Association and a special educator myself, this is very important. I was a teacher of the deaf, which is a very low-incidence disability. Dyslexia, as you know, is much more high-incidence. But it really goes to the way we teach our teachers how to teach reading.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: The ability of our teachers to even know what it is that they're looking at when students are struggling, and the fact that we're missing so many students. I just passed today my bill to screen people who are going into institutions -- incarceration institutions, for reading. And hopefully we'll get that through the Senate.

I would love to chat with you at some point about some conversations I had with Frank Macchiarola, who was the chancellor

when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, about how it is they messed it up. So I think that might be helpful to you in looking at repairing the special education system.

I want to -- I'm very glad to hear about your talking about changing of teaching kids how to read. And I want to know how you're planning to use the influx of funding to ensure that every classroom is using a literacy curriculum that's culturally responsive and grounded in the science of reading.

So I ask that question, but I also want to just point out to you that there is a charter school for kids with dyslexia in Staten Island that I helped them get going a few years ago, and it's a charter school because DOE would not allow them to do a regular public school. But it's a great school, so I encourage you to take a look at that.

And also, in your career and technical education, visit the Harbor School. It's a

great model as well.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, let me just say on a couple of fronts, with your last point, the Harbor School, I have visited, I will go visit them again. They're part of the Urban Assembly network of schools. I was the original Urban Assembly principal at the school -- the Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice. I know the folks there, I know their leadership, and I know the great work that they do. I totally agree with you.

More fundamentally, the notion of the science of reading is something that we're looking at in a very significant way. That will be a huge part of what we do. And it should have been written into my pillars, because it's part of how I see the reimagining of the school experience, what we call Bright Starts. If you don't have the bright start, it's difficult to have the bold future.

And there's a reason why the mayor says 65 percent of Black and brown kids never

achieve proficiency in the Department of Education. That's because fundamentally the way we are teaching our kids to read is fundamentally flawed. And so they get behind from the very beginning, and they never catch up.

And so I would love to continue the conversation. I'd love to come and visit with you and learn so much from you. You know, Frank Macchiarola was one of my heroes as well. And I appreciate you invoking his name and all the great work that he did, even when he sat in this seat.

And so thank you, and we're going to continue to press forward in making sure that our kids know how to read by no later than the third grade. If we don't do that, everything else will just -- it's an uphill battle.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Can I just invite you to Dyslexia Awareness Day at the Capitol, May 10th. You're welcome to join us. Thank you.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I'd love to. Love to.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Chancellor.

We go now to Rebecca Seawright. Assemblywoman?

Oh, wait, I'm sorry -- do you have --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, that's okay. I'll just be left. Sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I didn't realize you still had a Senator. So why don't we go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Hi, Chancellor. We already had a chance to chat the other night.

I just wanted to follow through on a question that was asked by an Assemblywoman earlier and you were going to have Dan Weisberg answer, and I had to rudely cut him off before he could give us the answer. So can we rewind and let me use a little of my time to let him explain what you were going to ask him to explain.

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yeah,

I'm happy to, Madam Chair. And I believe that we were talking childcare and 3-K.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes.

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: And as the chancellor said, as the mayor has said, this is a huge priority for us. And it is an interagency priority, I just want to point out. One of the mandates for the mayor and the chancellor is to do a really good job of coordinating between agencies. So we certainly don't want to pretend that the Department of Education is solely leading in this area, but we certainly do have an important role in 3-K.

And as I think probably everybody appearing knows, we've opened about 45,000 3-K seats. There are 3-K seats in every district. And that's a really big accomplishment, but it is not universal as yet. And so one of the things we are grappling with now is how to create a universal and sustainable, financially sustainable program and a program -- as the chancellor said, we're working now with our

brand-new colleague, the deputy chancellor for early childhood education, Dr. Kara Ahmed, who is terrific. I hope you get a chance to meet with her as well -- but how to not just create a financially sustainable model but a model that is universally high quality, in a system where, as all of you know, we have many different providers.

And so we don't have that plan for you here, but please be assured that we've got a working group on that. We will be absolutely engaging, as the chancellor says, with all the community advocates and members and stakeholders on this, to figure out how to do this quickly but also to do it in a sustainable and high-quality --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And I applaud this goal, and I just want to emphasize how important I think it is that we don't get siloed into Department of Education is doing this, and the daycare world is over there doing that. Because what we found even with pre-K rolled out is that we actually lost daycare centers and the workers all moved to

SED because you were paying more -- and I'm always happy to see people being paid more and getting more training to be better educators. But especially as we move 3-K and we recognize that families need to have full-day programs otherwise it doesn't meet their need for quality childcare while they go to work, we really need not to get caught up in I'm the schools and I do this over here, you know, and you overlap with ACS over there or you might overlap with HRA over there if your childcare is being paid that way. And I know my Senate colleagues and I are very interested in exploring universal childcare models, and they have to be blended without any kind of siloing.

So I'm glad you have someone new coming on, Chancellor, to specialize in this, but I just urge you to coordinate citywide with everybody else who has a piece, so to speak, of early childcare.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes. We will.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So that you're

not competing with each other, ironically, for the same funds, the same kids, the same teachers when everybody just wants a seamless system that will work for them.

You talked about, Chancellor, how the schools are the safest place and that's what families are learning. And yet I get issues raised all the time still from parents that their schools don't have the proper masks in child sizes for the kids when they come to school. And that even though the city did seem to spend a healthy amount of money on air purifiers, a bunch of them weren't even HEPA-filtered air purifiers.

So I'm wondering whether you are looking at whether the city perhaps didn't get the right equipment or are making sure that we've actually got the safer environments that we're promising parents.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's a great point. And the person who's leading that effort for us, if you'd unmute him, is Kevin Moran. He's our lead here on all of our operations work.

Kevin, if you could please respond to that inquiry.

CHIEF SCHOOL OPS OFFICER MORAN: Absolutely. And thank you, Senator.

I do want to echo a previous point on your previously testimony about Commissioner Bray. It was -- one of the first calls I got leading into the school reopening process the weekend before January 3rd was from Jackie, to ensure that we had the test kits that we needed to reopen and stay open. Since then, myself and my team were on loading docks for three straight weeks, Saturdays, Sundays, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day. We got 7 million kits out to schools. And I thank her, and I thank our team, interagency team at DCAS, here, OEM and other partners here in the city.

As relates to the HEPA nomenclature, we have air purifiers in every single classroom. We have two, as the chancellor stated previously. But these units exceed the HEPA rating. And I want to be clear, it may be nomenclature, but I'm happy to meet

with you offline and kind of go through the product specs and all of the evaluative measures that went into those products and why we chose them.

For the duration of the pandemic, the end of December, beginning of January aside, our schools stayed less than 1 percent positive in terms of infections. So they were exceedingly safe.

As it relates to the last 28 days, you saw the city at 31 percent positivity, and the last seven days it's 12 percent positivity in our schools. Actually the seven days citywide was 12, and the last seven days was 2.4 in our schools.

And so the schools have always stayed less than. You know, we hit a peak in the beginning of January, on the 10th, where we had 14,000 cases called into our sit room. As of last night, it was 1,752 cases. So we did hit the Omicron surge. It hit my family, as I've got public school kids that got it, myself, a former public school teacher, had gotten it. But, you know, the city has

bounced back. We are in safe environments. The KN95 masks, we distributed 2 million of those. They are invaluable to schools. Custodians have a 30-day supply.

K95 and N95, the most restrictive masks, do limit the amount of infectious aerosols that could get in, but they're also form-fitted. And they require a bit of due diligence, and so tolerability is at issue here, and if it fits perfectly over the nose, bent on the cheeks, so that it is form-fitted.

We are looking with schools -- we do have kid-size surgical masks, which they certainly could double if necessary. Or if parents want the K95 -- again, more restrictive -- we can provide that to them. And we'll look to see if any school has a sizing issue; we can follow up directly with the school. But if you have any, happy to follow up.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. I'm going to give back my minutes.

Assemblywoman Weinstein.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. So now we will go to Assemblywoman Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Chancellor, I've watched in the past your success with the Eagle Academy and the mentoring program. So my question, from your experience, you know, it can be indeed essential for children to have access to monitoring. Given the vast talents of our CUNY and SUNY college students and our private college students, what could we do to ramp up our mentor/mentee programs beyond the teacher education programs that currently exist?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's a great, great question. I understand there are some efforts that have already been done in that space, in the relationship with CUNY. And so we're going to look at how we can expand on that.

Some of it has been done through the My Brother's Keeper initiative that's been here. But even beyond MBK, just helping all

of our kids, right, to be able to have some college students who can intercede in their lives and help point them in the right direction, it's been a huge part of the success that we've had, and it's a big part of what I intend to do. And scaling up that initiative is something that we could do across the system.

So, you know, I spent so much of my time, as I got here, just really focused on COVID and keeping the schools open. We're just now starting to be able to really lean into the bigger vision of why we're here and what we really want to try and do. So I think you'll continue to hear more about those efforts in the coming days and weeks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: It looks like I have a little bit of time left. Thank you. I just have one quick question.

How is attendance being recorded during COVID for middle and high school students since there's not a remote option?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Dan can probably speak to that. He stays on top of

all of that attendance stuff on a daily basis. Dan?

FIRST DEP. CHANCELLOR WEISBERG: Yes, thanks, Chancellor. And thanks, Assemblywoman.

We are taking attendance in our schools, in our middle and high schools, the same methods as pre-pandemic. Some have online systems that are digital systems they use. Some are still doing it with bubble sheets and so forth. They get recorded at the school level.

We do, just to point out, for students who have to be at home because they test positive and are participating remotely, they can be marked present. There is a code for that. I don't know if that's where your question was going, Assemblymember, but that does exist.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Back to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator John Liu for a three-minute second round.

SENATOR LIU: Three? I thought it was five.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Nope, three minutes. Talk fast.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair. I better not waste any more time.

Chancellor Banks, see, I told you it was going to be a good party.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR LIU: You know, in the three minutes or less that I have with you, I want to talk a little bit about some choices you made in the past. Good choices, in my opinion. Like a quarter century ago, you started a school which then became a series of schools, the famed Eagle Academies.

And I believe you started it because you saw that the public school system was failing a lot of the kids, particularly young Black men in communities throughout the city. And so you started this academy, and it has proven to be a tremendous success.

The choice that I want to ask you about, though, is that, you know, we have lots of charter schools who claim that public schools are failing kids, particularly in Black and brown communities, and therefore there have to be more charter schools. But my recollection is that you specifically chose not to pursue the charter school route.

Is there anything you can talk about to guide us in our decisions going forward?

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: So, first of all, Eagle Academy was started by -- together with myself and the 100 Black Men organization. It's an organization that was started by people like former Mayor David Dinkins and Congressman Charlie Rangel. They started it almost 60 years ago.

And probably the most important effort that they've ever undertaken was the creation of the Eagle Academies, to really respond to the needs of so many young men of color who find themselves all too often just hopeless and feeling like they're in a system that doesn't care about them. And we showed up to

say that we care and we're going to help you get to the finish line.

And I'm very, very proud of the work that we've done. Still a long way to go, but very proud of the work that we've done.

With respect to the reason why, you know, at the high school level charter schools really only represent I think a little more than 2 percent of the schools that we have. And yet -- and we said if -- we wanted to make sure and to demonstrate that you can have innovation, creativity in the traditional public school system. It was not a knock on charter schools, it was simply to say that at the end of the day most of our students are still going to traditional public schools.

So if we're not lifting up models within the traditional public school system, we're missing the point. We cannot charter our way out of this educational morass. We cannot.

And so I am not against charter schools. You know, the mayor and I are all

about scaling excellence wherever it happens to be. That's what we are all about. But when we made the decision to create Eagle, we made it intentionally because we wanted to show that you could make a difference with an innovative model that's a traditional public school. And that's what we've done.

SENATOR LIU: Very interesting. Thank you so much, Mr. Chancellor.

And thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Hyndman first.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

Chancellor Banks, it's really good to see you in this role.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Good to see you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: It's been a long journey from Southeast Queens, and look where we both are. And -- {inaudible}

(Laughter.)

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: That's right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: So I understand -- you know, when I came into public schools, all I knew was the Bloomberg model and mayoral control, and so I really -- it has a lot to do with who's in office.

And the pledge that you and Mayor Adams have made about community first and working from the ground up really resonates with a lot of the constituents in Southeast Queens. We have a lot of community orgs that are really poised to make sure that we realize that the education of the whole child involves all of us. So thank you for that.

I understand that you are now reinterviewing superintendents. I think that's commendable. Because as you've said, you've had all the jobs, from school safety to where you are now, and a real perspective of what you're looking for for the superintendents to lead our schools.

So to that question, is there

consideration of downsizing some of the administrative staff? And I'm specifically talking about the creation that the former chancellor made -- not Chancellor Porter, but the creation of the executive superintendents. The view from a lot of us is that we could really use some of those monies and some more leadership in our districts, as opposed to it being top down. What is the conversation around that?

And also when it comes to the ECF fund for the building of additional school sites, is that something that any of your deputies are siting for new school sites and working especially in some of our more crowded Queens communities, working with ECF to build schools, especially in those overcrowded areas that we have in Queens?

Thank you.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Well, I certainly appreciate you and thank you for your support over the many years. And I'm absolutely a proud product of District 29 and Southeast Queens. So thank you for that.

So I would say that what I am committed to -- and there have been some things that have been reported in the papers that I have not formally announced. But what I am committed to is to streamlining the Department of Education with an emphasis on ensuring that the funds and the resources get to where they are needed most, and that is in our schools. That is what I'm committed to.

You will be hearing more about my plans to do just that. Again, in the coming days and weeks there will be significant announcements that will be made by me, there will be other announcements that will be jointly made between the mayor and myself. But just know that that's where we're going, is to a place that will provide a level of efficiency and to demonstrate our priorities through streamlined services and effective communication for our parents and our families.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We now go to Assemblywoman Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Good

afternoon, Chancellor. I just want to say thank you for coming to my district at the beginning of the year as you started your new term. We visited Concourse Village Elementary.

I guess you are aware that I want to plug CTE schools. Academy for Careers in Television and Film, that is a school that I was a social worker in. CTE schools work. community schools work. Okay? I just want to say that CS 55 is a community school and is doing amazing work in the Bronx.

And just so you know, your former school is also in my district -- Law, Government and Justice -- so please come with me to visit and we'll make sure to make a great impact on those students.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: I know you know that Black male teachers make a difference. And I just want to know from you how are we getting more male teachers, Black male teachers, into our schools, working with our young people? And what are we doing

about financial literacy?

So those are my two things. Oh, and I know that you have your superintendents and your executive superintendents reapplying, but I have to say that executive Superintendent Tobias does an amazing job in the Bronx and the families are very appreciative -- myself included -- are very appreciative of the work that she has done. So I just want to say that.

But financial literacy and Black male teachers.

(Laughter.)

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I appreciate that, Assemblymember. Appreciate you and would love to go and visit my original school where I was a principal. The Bronx School for Law, Government and Justice is near and dear to my heart. Let's do that together. So we'll get that on the calendar.

And when we visited Concourse Village, we also visited P17X, which is a District 75 school. And they were extremely happy because they said that they're generally

overlooked. And in this administration we want to make sure that they're not overlooked. And so I want to continue to make sure that we lift them up as well.

Part of this whole reimagining of how we want to do school is about financial literacy. It's about making sure that our kids understand what the world of work looks like, how they can take care of themselves. We should be ashamed if we're graduating kids who don't even know how to open up a bank account. You know, we should be ashamed if we're graduating kids who -- and we're giving them a high school diploma from public schools and they have no idea what a State Senator does or an Assemblyperson does. And I will tell you, most of our students have no clue.

And yet we've made, in New York City, an over $300,000 investment, from the time they were in pre-K all the way through 12th grade. They don't have skills to get a job and step into industry, which is crying out for them. Many of them -- many who we send

to college come back home within a year or two and don't even have the college degree to pay off the debt that they've accumulated. They're not actively engaged as citizens. We lament the fact that all across America so many Americans don't even get engaged and vote, they don't take their rightful place in this American society.

And I am a firm believer that that is because we don't -- we don't build that muscle in the pre-K to 12 space. There should be student government in every single school -- every elementary, middle and high school. If we want to have standardization in our schools, we should at least make sure that every one of our kids goes to one of your town halls before they graduate, to understand what it is that you do.

How does government work, and how does it affect their lives? I'm not talking about just a civics class, I'm talking about civic experiences that make a difference, workforce opportunities that make a difference. Otherwise what we're doing is we're playing

around at school. And we send kids to school and when it's all said and done, they don't know a whole lot.

I'm committed to doing much better in that space. That's the reason I came here. I didn't come here to play around to just be the chancellor. I came here to try to help kids have a much more meaningful impact and experience in school so they understand why do they go to school in the first place.

There's a reason why so many of our kids are disengaged, because we're not providing them with the right school experience that makes school meaningful and relevant in their lives. And that's on us. And I'm putting that on me. But I'm going to need all of you to help me to create a brand-new school experience for our kids. Otherwise we can just continue to play around in the margins, we get the math scores to go up a couple of points, ELA scores to go up a couple of points.

But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a transformational school

experience where young people come out very different and can take their rightful place in society. That's what I'm committed to.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Chancellor. We have one last Assemblymember, because it's almost time for -- or past dismissal time. We have Mike Reilly, Assemblyman Mike Reilly will be the last questioner here.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: My new friend.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chancellor, great to see you again. It was a pleasure to talk to you earlier in the week.

I actually -- I wanted to talk about some of the things that we were just discussing by the other members. We mentioned behavioral health. And we had this conversation, but I wanted to once again put it on the radar about the OORS system, the Online Occurrence Reporting System, and the ability or the lack thereof of when students

move from elementary school to middle school to high school, where the administrators and the teachers in that new school don't have the information that they can give the supports for. So we're able to have that monitoring where we can offer the supports.

And I want to be clear, this isn't for -- necessarily for discipline actions, this is for us to provide supports for those students who need it. And that gap I think sometimes leaves too much open there, and that's where we might miss something where we could have offered that support.

So I'm hoping that -- you know, in the prior administration I mentioned it as well. But, you know, I'm very confident in our conversations, and hearing my fellow colleagues here talk about it, I think this is a chance where we can close that gap.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I appreciate that. And based on the conversation we had a few days ago, I'm going to follow up on it -- we're already following up on those things and we're going to get

back to you on that.

But I just want to more comprehensively as well, Assemblyperson, here's where I'm trying to go. I want to create a very different experience -- we spend a lot of time talking about attendance. We spend a lot of time talking about disciplinary issues and how are we going to respond. If you create a very different school experience for kids and teachers, it' transforming. You don't have to spend so much time and money on attendance issues. You don't have to chase kids down and get them to come to school. They'll be running to school.

But if we continue to do what we do, which I call the routinization of school, if you sit next to an average middle school kid or a high school kid and say, What are you working on?, they say: I'm doing my work. "Doing my work" is code for I don't know, none of this stuff is impactful. I'm just going through the routine because I have to. I'm supposed to go to school and I've got

to -- the teachers say I'm supposed to follow the assignments. I have no idea what this means, I have no idea where it's supposed to lead, I have no idea why I'm doing it, but I'm just trying to be a good kid and do what I'm told. I want to --

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: You set them busywork.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Yeah, I want to create a different experience. I want kids to know about the possibilities for themselves. And they see -- if the kids get a chance for it, it becomes an "aha" moment. And if they know why they're going to school, they move very differently.

That's where I'm trying to go. And I'm going to look to engage all of you in helping us to do that.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: I love the point that you made about showing the students, you know, how to write a check, things like that, knowing their government -- you know, so many adults don't even know the representatives and what they do at the state level, city

level and federal level.

One thing I was thinking about as you were talking about that --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: You're muted. You muted yourself.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: You muted, and we didn't do it.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay --

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: I appreciate you, Assemblyman. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Time is up.

So, Chancellor, I want to thank you on behalf of Senator Krueger, myself, and all of the colleagues for the time you've been able to spend with us today. We know this is just part of the beginning or a continuation of the communications that we're going to have, working together to make sure our schools are the best -- the city schools are the best they can be.

NYC DOE CHANCELLOR BANKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for

being here.

And for members, we are going to go to our third witness for today. We're going to go to Panel A: The United Federation of Teachers, UFT, Michael Mulgrew is here, and New York State United Teachers, NYSUT, Andrew Pallotta, president, is here. Michael we all know is the president of the UFT.

So, gentlemen, I know you've been briefed, but it's been a while, so just if we can -- we've had your testimony, it was circulated to the members. If we can have you do a short presentation, three minutes, and then we will move on to the members, many of whom have questions they'd like to -- and issues to discuss with you.

So Michael, if you want to begin.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Do you want me to start, or Andy?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Well, you decide. Which one of you wants to go?

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: I'll start.

Thank you, Michael.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Thank you and good afternoon, almost good evening. So Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Weinstein, honorable members of the Legislature and distinguished staff, I'm Andy Pallotta, president of New York State United Teachers. thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My written testimony, you have it, and it details NYSUT's priorities for this year and our response to the Executive Budget.

With my short time today I will discuss what schools truly need. We had a NYSUT Future Forward Task Force last summer to explore how to support our schools, our public schools, and keep them as the center of every community. We heard stories from the folks that were on this task force of how A-plus students withered under the stress of remote learning. How our youngest students struggled to grasp the skills needed for in-person learning. How mental health professionals, burdened by the heavy load of so many folks in their responsibility areas,

didn't have the capacity to do any proactive work necessary during this crisis.

We also heard about long-standing issues. Too many students coming to school hungry but aren't eligible for school meals. We heard about families with the stigma of having to apply for meal assistance. Some older siblings juggled the academics with the family responsibilities. And of course everyone looking at the looming threat of receivership and the overemphasis on flawed standardized testing that drives some schools to excess over boosting test scores rather than students' needs.

But we also heard many stories of hope. And this is the first year that I've been testifying where we don't have a dark cloud over us. I want to thank you for the work you did to begin the phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula. And this year we need to further do transformation for our schools. We dedicate funding to expand the number of community schools, and that is crucial. We need new laws to set minimum

staffing levels so there's a social worker, a school psychologist, a counselor, a nurse in every school. We heard that earlier this morning from Commissioner Rosa.

We want funding, funding to support prospective teachers, particularly teachers of color. And let's return to the joy of learning by repealing that receivership and removing the punitive consequences of the standardized tests.

I just want to be on record with one more ask this year: To help us make sure that all school staff, from teachers to nurses to bus drivers, receive the respect that they deserve. It's been a hard two years -- and, as we all know, a hard decade before that. But our educators do what they do best, and of course respect is more than just saying thank you; we have some real solutions. So I think we can all agree they have earned it.

With that, I'll turn it over to Michael Mulgrew.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Well, thank you,

Andy. And excuse me if there's a little noise in the background.

(Ongoing dog barking.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: No problem.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: I want to thank you all, first and foremost, for supporting us throughout these last two years. It's been very difficult, to say the least. And I want to again applaud all the school communities -- the staff, the teachers, the guidance counselors and all the phenomenal work they have done in New York City. We have led the way on how to keep schools safe.

But as we're hopefully getting to the end of this pandemic, we know that there's been -- an untold amount of damage has been done, not just to the adults but, more importantly, to all of the students in our school system. We applaud what the Executive has put forth in terms of funding for our schools because we need it. We need a lot of funding because there's a lot of work now that has to be done, more than ever before.

Support -- and as you heard Andrew

Pallotta say, nurses, guidance counselors, social workers in every school would absolutely be something that would be pivotal to help us in what we're dealing with at this moment.

In terms of our programs, United Community Schools and Teacher Centers, I want to thank the members of both the Assembly and the Senate who have been going to the community schools of the United Federation of Teachers, as well as the Teacher Centers. Let's just say every year we talk about Teacher Centers, but now actually seeing what is going on in so many of our schools I think is so important for the Legislature to understand that this is a pivotal role that gets played inside of our schools.

Career and Technical Education. I know now in all of the conversations I've had with both the Governor and both houses of the Legislature, it is time for New York State to really put together a comprehensive, holistic plan on how to do economic development, workforce development and career and

technical education. And we look forward to doing those things.

On charter schools, all I'm going to say is can we please finally have some transparency and equity. That's what we've been asking for for years. Enough of the game playing. Many of the school districts, with the formula that was passed years ago, are about to get slammed in terms of aid that will be taken away from the public schools and given to the charter schools.

Mayoral control, I know I'm going to get asked this question. The position of this union is very simple: We do not support going back to school boards. We do support mayoral control, but not the version we have. I think it is clear now that we have irrefutable evidence that a system that gives absolute power leads to bad results for the children. And we've seen this over and over, this is not new for us. We've been doing our testimony up here for years, telling you all the same thing.

And parents have continually -- no

matter how many promises have been made, every year in this testimony the parents of New York City have been cut out. They do not have a voice. Yet every year we hear about these promises.

But overall it really has to be about what we've all been trying to do is getting through this pandemic. And the money that is sent from you needs to get to the schools. The money needs to get to the classroom. I cannot emphasize this enough. You do your jobs and you send money to the school districts, and I know you want to make sure that that money actually lands up inside of classrooms, inside of school buildings. That's where the funding should be. That's where the work happens.

So I look forward with working with all three branches of our New York State government this year in the legislative process.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So we're going to go for questions first to our Education chair, Assemblyman

Benedetto. There he is. Three minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here. Certainly we appreciate it. And congratulations to you, and more so to your members, okay, for what they've done over these last years. They have performed underneath very difficult circumstances, and it's truly appreciated by the Assembly. And we acknowledge everything they've done.

Just quickly, a couple of questions. A lot of talk has been given over the last several years about diversity in education and diversity of teaching. Can you both just speak on that, and what have your unions done to actually help that along?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Andy, you can start.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Okay. So at NYSUT we have a fantastic program called Take a Look at Teaching, where we encourage our locals around the state to grow their own -- so having students that are already in the schools get interested in teaching, and bring

them in.

I was recently in Yonkers and the superintendent brought us to classrooms in a local high school, and almost every teacher that he introduced us to was from Yonkers. Right? Even the principal was from Yonkers and had gone through the system. So we see it around the state.

We're also talking about the residency programs, just trying to encourage folks to get into the profession -- it is a great profession. We know that the alternative teacher certification programs can also help. So there are a lot of ways of doing this.

A friend of mine who was a paraprofessional in the Bronx for many years just became a teacher. It took a long time. The classes were not available to him in the school that he was going to, so it took a long time. We would love to see ways of making that happen faster.

And a lot of the folks that were in here were diverse, they were from diverse backgrounds, and it was encouraging to see

that.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you very much, Mr. Pallotta.

I only have a few seconds left. Very quickly, I have a lot of confidence in you guys and in your teachers and so on. You know the law in the State of New York. I presume the teachers know the law in the State of New York. Do your teachers teach what is written in the law?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: In terms of the curriculum?

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: In terms of the curriculum, sure. And what should be taught in the schools.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: In the curriculum that the school supplies them, New York City has been teaching cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity for years. We didn't need a political movement. We take great pride in the fact that we are the most diverse school system in the entire country, we believe probably in the entire world.

And the way to engage students is to

actually engage them in what they know, which is their culture. And that means a lot of training for the teachers, and we have had no issues whatsoever in terms of getting our teachers open to all sorts of different training. And these are programs we have been doing for years. As well as --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Mr. Mulgrew, thank you. That's basically what I wanted to know.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We're going to go to the Senate. Senator Krueger?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much, and good afternoon, gentlemen.

We're going to start with Senator Shelley Mayer, the chair of our Education Committee.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you both for being here, and thank you to your members. And I hope you convey I think the collective sense of all of us in the Legislature that in

an incredible time, they have really done extraordinarily well. I'm glad you talked about respect. And I'm hopeful with this Governor we're going to see increased respect for all in the school world.

One question for you, Mr. Mulgrew. You made the point, and I think we share it, that the money we fought for needs to get to the classroom. We tried to build in some accounting mechanisms, both for Foundation Aid and for American Rescue Plan. Frankly, I don't think we got quite as good as we wanted.

What would be your proposal to make us have some confidence that all this money we fought for is actually getting into a classroom?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: It's a tough -- it's tough because usually when the state sends the money they like to send the money in a block to the school district. It's more difficult to send it to specifically target for program. But if you target for program, then you can -- it's much easier to audit to

see that the money was actually being used for what you -- what the intent, when you voted for the budget, is.

And that's really the way this thing -- that's a better way to do it. It's more difficult where the school district will always say, Just send us the money.

But at the same time, and especially here in New York City, we see billions of dollars -- and I'm very happy with the new mayor and the new chancellor saying enough is enough, the money has to get into the classroom. So what we're looking forward to is to seeing the more we can do with that, and the better off we will all be if the money actually -- the majority of the money goes into the classroom. That is the purpose.

SENATOR MAYER: Well, that was our intent and we've built in more than just sending the money to the district. We wanted to know how many social workers, how many guidance counselors.

And we look forward to continuing to

push districts to get that money into those places where we know it will benefit kids.

So in my limited time I want to ask about receivership, Andy, generally. What is the -- you know, this receivership is a long-standing problem that we have institutionalized in law. Do you have a view about whether we should just sort of start again on the concept of schools that need particular help and get out of the receivership model?

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Right. The whole concept behind receivership was punitive. Right? So it was punishing schools that were going through difficult times. So yes, a repeal of this law would make a lot of sense. And then to turn it around to providing the helps that are needed in those schools.

So yes, doing away with this, starting over again and providing the necessary tools, like community schools. We have been yelling from the rooftops about providing community schools throughout the state. And yes, there is money in the budget for community schools;

we're asking for more so that we can replicate what has been working, like in New York City, like in Albany, like in Rome, New York.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you for your --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go back to the Assembly, and next we have Assemblywoman Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. To Andy and to Michael, thank you both for your work. It's been a while since I've seen you both. I am a former UFT member, paid my dues regularly. Grateful to be here and represent social workers and teachers alike.

And I just want to know -- I have a few questions. I just want to know how can we at the state assist with the United Community Schools?

I want to know what have you guys done

to help social workers obtain their continuing ed credits, either it be financial or bring the trainings to the schools, like whatever it is.

And then how can we like encourage more teachers and staff to get involved politically? Because their voice needs to be heard. Like you guys know I understand what it means to be one of them, because I was. But a lot of the members may not. So I would love to see more engagement from them.

So how can we help you with the United Community Schools? What are we doing to help social workers with their continuing ed credits? And how can we get more people involved?

And community schools work, work, and they work. Just so you guys --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: They work. We're very proud of our United Community Schools. You know, I was out in Queens on Saturday. Why? Because when we do a vaccination clinic at a United Community School, we get 300 students. That's not normal. Most times

you see -- I won't name other agencies -- they put up their vaccination clinics and they get nowhere near that number. Why? Because we're part of the community, and we do outreach and we talk to the parents and we do all of those things.

That's the whole basis of everything we do with United Community Schools. It's not what you would call a normal community school model. We want to be part of the community.

So now the UFT's United Community Schools is now working with a school in Albany. So we're now -- we have a school in Albany that we're working with, and we're seeing great results already. And it's really been quite -- a lot of fun and a lot of energy.

But that takes work. So what we really need to do is that's a program we know that works. So how do you take that program and make it available to the entire state? Now, we'd be more than happy to help people learn how to do that work, to train what is

known as a school facilitator, to get that person in place, and then to really work at digging in and becoming part of the actual community.

In terms of the social workers, as you know, this is a constant challenge. Last year we had funding from the state and the City Council. We had a really hard time just filling the slots that we were able to get both entities to fund.

So now it comes down to, all right, now it's more to me about how do we streamline the process for people who want to become social workers, people who may already be teachers or be in an another role inside of a school system. We should be able to streamline the process, working with higher ed, and say you don't have to start all over again -- they already do not have to. But there should be an easier way to do this, because there's a need there. There's a real need there.

And in terms of political activity, there's a difference between political

activity for political purposes, ideological purposes, and political activity for the profession of public education. And, you know, we have a lot of political activity but a lot of it -- you know, a lot of our allowed political activity is ideological.

But the thing is, the same thing you're talking about is what we struggle with. We want folks to understand that when teachers talk about testing, then they were out in droves and fought back against testing that was being used wrongly. Things that they know are actually going to be wrong inside of a school, or things they're going to do. But that takes an education process. And it's really about having folks like you talk about how you now can make a difference, because you do. And it's really important.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senator, do you have anybody else?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We do indeed. We have Senator Liu, the New York City Education Committee chair.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Michael, and thank you, Andrew, for joining us every year, faithfully. And thank you for all your members doing the great work they do.

You're well aware that last year in New York City and in parts of the state, as the new school year rolled around in September, that there was no remote option in New York City and some parts of New York State. And notwithstanding the de Blasio administration's refusal to provide that remote option, many of us felt that it was needed, if only because large proportions of parents were keeping their kids out of school.

And then of course we saw the same thing happen again after the Christmas break last -- earlier this month with the rise of Omicron.

So you're aware that I have legislation pending in the Senate that would require at least New York City, if not other major cities, to provide this remote option in times of emergency pandemics.

My question is would your members be ready, willing and able to engage in this remote learning option as a mandate when there is an ongoing pandemic?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Yes. We already have mandates in New York City where people -- there's remote learning happening every day in New York City. But not a remote -- but there's no remote option.

So we do remote because of students that are in quarantine or in isolation, so there is remote teaching going on each and every day. And every teacher in New York City this year at the beginning of the school year had to set up their entire digital classroom for whenever they need to go remote.

I think we have to stop thinking of it as a pandemic issue and start thinking of it as how do you build better system, really, into the school system as a whole. That will take more long-term planning.

So in terms of your question, we do this already. Some of it's mandated if a

student has -- is in quarantine. We have other options for students who are not coming to school. We're working on some things right now with the new chancellor. But I think, long term, I think it's important, especially for large school systems like ours, that we do have some sort of a digital school, a digital academy. Not online, because most people think of this as a higher ed issue. It's not that type of education, it really isn't. We've learned so much about this.

But I think it's important if we try to build those things, because there was a subset of students who were not doing well before the pandemic but then did well during the pandemic because it was remote. So I think that we have to look at this.

And I do agree with you, we pushed really hard that we would set up a remote system for this school year, with criteria to keep it limited. Because the one thing that people have to realize is the only way we're going to fix the problems we're facing with

the majority of our children is when they actually come to school. The writing deficiencies are through the roof. First graders have never had formal education. Ninth graders, this is the first time they've been in school since sixth grade. Just think of the complexity of these challenges.

So right now we need to have some flexibility for remote, but at the same time the only way to fix this problem is bringing them in.

SENATOR LIU: I appreciate that, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: John and Michael, I need to cut this off.

SENATOR LIU: Yeah, I understand, Madam Chair. I just want to say in 10 seconds that I appreciate Michael's comments about mayoral control, that the UFT does not oppose mayoral control but there needs to be strict mechanisms for input and it can't be a dictatorship.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assemblymember.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to Assemblyman Ed Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

Michael, Andy, good to see you guys.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Good to see you.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I just wanted to get a little bit further into something, you know, that's kind of in the same area as what Chair Mayer was talking to you about in that same section of Future Forward, and that's about the alternative assessment and graduation requirements.

I mean, I know this is not a new topic, it's one we've discussed for many years. But if you could kind of elaborate on -- I mean, maybe this is an opportunity -- I know a lot of people have talked about, you know, this being an opportunity to look at new things. And I hope people are realizing that, you know, canceling high-stakes tests when we've needed to the last couple of years, the sky hasn't fallen. Maybe we're --

maybe we can realize that there are other assessments and better-quality assessments that we can come up with that provide more opportunity for our students.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Andy, you want to start that?

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Yeah.

One hundred percent agree with you: The high-stakes testing takes the educators' eyes off of what needs to be done, which is meeting the needs of the children. Right? So that's why the repeal of receivership is so important.

Having in-person education of course is the best way. And a part of that is bridging the digital divide. We've had -- folks have all kinds of experiences when we spoke about the remote learning. Throughout the state, everyone is having different experiences, some of them not good, right, because they couldn't even sign on, the students. So we know what needs to be done.

We also want to say when it comes to things like charter schools, that the SUNY

Charter Institute okaying charters when communities are fighting them fully is ludicrous. When the commissioner says no and the SUNY Institute says yes, we have to address that this year. And we fully support your bill, Senator Liu.

So we have a lot of work ahead of us. We also know that the emphasis on high-stakes testing is a waste of time, especially now.

Michael?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Well, for us the -- we're having conversations now, and I'm very happy that the State Education commissioner, Betty Rosa, is having a task force to look at what we want to do for graduation requirements.

The key here is everyone has to remember what we need to do is come up with a system where a student can demonstrate mastery of a subject. Now, is the best way to do that sitting for a Regents, or is there another way that a student can demonstrate mastery? And that's really the question that we are now debating and discussing as

educators, because we know there are other ways for students to demonstrate mastery. And that's really what our goal is, is to try to actually give every student the ability or the chance to show us that they completely understand the subject they have been taught. And there should be more ways to do that than just sitting for a test.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, gentlemen.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry, the Senate is here, and we have Senator Leroy Comrie.

SENATOR COMRIE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, gentlemen.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Good afternoon.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Afternoon.

SENATOR COMRIE: Happy New Year.

I want to ask you the same two questions I asked the chancellor and Commissioner Rosa.

Number one, on teacher attendance, how can we improve teacher attendance and teacher

retention? What do you think the tools are to make that happen?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: On the attendance? Get rid of the pandemic. That's been the biggest driver --

SENATOR COMRIE: In light of the fact that we will never get rid of the pandemic, what do you think --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Well, I hope that's not true.

SENATOR COMRIE: I'm being pessimistic only because I think that we're going to have to deal with some kind of crisis or medical issue or unfortunately --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: That's fair.

SENATOR COMRIE: And I think pre-preparation is key to that.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: So overall teacher attendance right now in the City of New York is above 90 percent, especially if you take the COVID issues out of it. Remember, a lot of our attendance now is forced absence, which is our problem.

But let's say we get past that. The

real issue becomes about how do you make a school a supportive environment. For me, in New York City one of our big issues has always been that the Department of Education is not there to help us, it's there to hinder us. And that adds to the stress levels and the frustration, which then adds to attendance issues.

But I'm hoping with the new chancellor and the new mayor -- we're hearing a lot of things about the Department of Education is supposed to be there to help the people doing the work with the children. So to me, that will be a big issue.

But Andy, you can really talk about the retention issues we're having, not just in New York City but across the entire state.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: There has been a shortage of people going into this profession for years. And if you remember, the previous administration in the Governor's office used to just talk about what was wrong with education in this state. So he had started the whole movement away from people saying,

okay, you know what would be a great thing, my child going into teaching. So we lost a lot of good people because of that narrative.

This Governor has taken a whole different tack towards that, so it's much more positive. And there's a lot of competition for folks that are in this world right now; why should they go into teaching? Well, it's the best profession that there is. I did it for almost 25 years. And I'll go back to what the Assemblymember spoke about before about social workers. I worked in a school where when we hired the social workers that were needed, it turned the school around.

So we know from our own facts that schools can turn around and that social workers and meeting the needs of the students right then and there is most important.

SENATOR COMRIE: I've got 10 seconds and I got another question, I'm sorry.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Okay.

SENATOR COMRIE: The need for wraparound programs and pretesting for

children have become more important than ever. Can you tell us what you're going to do to help make sure that the Department of Education can do the wraparound programs for students to do their pretesting and also to make sure that there are schools that are open late at night in the long-distance neighborhoods such as the Northern Bronx and Staten Island and Queens where --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Answer quickly, please, because we're at zero.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Okay. We support, both at the state level and the city level, extending, opening the school at all times for children to have access to it. It's clear -- there's no argument, there's no debate -- the school now is the center of the community and the center of what we need to do in terms of developing the children to be what we all want, which is successful in life.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Thank you for being concise.

Assembly.

(Pause.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Helene, you have the next one. Let me see who's on your list.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I thought I -- okay, I must have been muted.

Alicia Hyndman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

Michael and Andrew, it's really great to see you. And please --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Ditto.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: -- convey to your members thank you for showing up for work, thank you for navigating our children through this pandemic. My daughter is a sixth grader; her teachers show up. I ask her every day, and she's like, They're all there. And I know it's been tough, but please relay that to your members.

I tried teaching in Bushwick high school and I didn't last long. It's a really tough task, and I commend you all.

So I don't have any community schools in District 29 so, Michael, I would really

love your assistance in making sure --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Let's go!

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: -- we get one for those wraparound services. I know all about community schools, I know the work that Karen has done on behalf of UFT for our community schools, and would really like to see one land successfully in Southeast Queens, particularly in my district.

To -- for the Teacher Centers, I know that we have a couple that opened up. I know it's a real bonus to have and to support our teachers while they navigate this pandemic, but I also want to say when it comes to the CTE schools, with the technology and the requirements of CTEs, we know that $3900 per pupil is not enough.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: No.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: If we're talking about college and career readiness, we're not talking enough about the career readiness. So for the State of New York we need to make sure that's increased.

I know that Betty Rosa has done a lot

of work around that, particularly in New York City, but we always, I think, sometimes forget about the Big 5 school districts. I know Andrew can speak to that.

So my question is, how many more Teacher Centers do you feel you need in order for the city to be whole, Michael, as far as the city is concerned and our boroughs?

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Our goal would be to give every school access to a Teacher Center. We don't need to actually have a Teacher Center in every school. We would like that, but right now our goal is that we would hope that we would put one Teacher Center in a building and maybe have three or four buildings coordinate around it.

So at that point you would need basically somewhere around 600 Teacher Centers total, so we'd need approximately 400 more.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Listen, it's a lot of work. But you see the importance of it when you go into the school and you're seeing

more and more.

We've had so many Teacher Centers get opened this year because they want to embed the professional development at the school. Remember, it's not just about professional development for the teacher. We do so much work now with the community. We teach the parents. We train the parents on all sorts of different things that they need, and how to help their child.

So there's a -- you know, we're very happy that Teacher Centers are starting to expand in New York City once again. But as we're expanding, we're seeing more and more that there's more schools who keep asking us that they want them, and there's only so far we can go with the funding we currently get from the State of New York.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: And at least this year we have a place where we're starting with funding. We don't have to start from zero again like we have so many other years.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Exactly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. Thank

you, that's my time. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Back to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And Senator Robert Jackson.

SENATOR JACKSON: Good afternoon. How you doing, Mike and Andy.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: How you doing, Robert.

SENATOR JACKSON: I'm doing well, thank you. I'm here with Senator Cordell Cleare, and we are making sure that we have the opportunity to hear what you have to say and ask a couple of questions before we drive down to the 32nd Precinct for a vigil about 6:30. So we're going to be moving pretty quick.

I got three quick questions. The Executive is proposing $2 million to school districts to support programs designed to improve school climate. If this investment is included in the enacted budget, will you support my and Assemblymember Nolan's

legislation, the School Solutions, Not Suspensions, to help to end the school-to-prison pipeline in New York? And I assume that the answer is yes, but I need --

MR. MULGREW: Right. But we already do a lot -- I know you're aware of our Positive Learning Collaborative, which is exactly what -- it was designed for the same reason. And we already run that in a couple of hundred schools right now.

So we'll support anything that's going to help us change school climate as long as it's embedded and it's -- there's a one-time up-front investment, but then can be sustained at a minimal cost. So that's the criteria for us. When we're in a budget like we are right now, we keep telling folks: Look at something that has an up-front cost but then minimal investment to keep it going. That is the criteria we're looking at.

SENATOR JACKSON: So, Andrew, I assume your answer is similar to that. Mike was speaking for both you and him, is that correct?

MR. PALLOTTA: Right. We are working with our coalition partners throughout the state to work on school climate. So this has been something coming for a very long time, and working with folks from around the state to improve that in every corner of the state -- New York City, Buffalo, Long Island.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you.

I have another bill -- but we ask, do you know how many public schools hired social workers, school psychologists as a result of the additional funding so far? Have you seen an increase in that? I believe the answer is yes, but I want to know --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Yes.

SENATOR JACKSON: -- as the leader of, one, the New York City union and then obviously Andrew for the statewide union. Because there's a bill that would require every school to have a social worker, a psychologist, a nurse in order to meet the needs of our students.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: We -- but this is where I'm going to tell you we're running

into the problem of staffing. We need a better way to get people a social worker's license or certificate.

There are people who want to do it, but it's going to take a while. So they should be able to -- I completely support that bill. But what we've seen now in New York City -- because it was both the state and the City Council who invested heavily into social workers. And we have not filled all of the funded slots that we have. And it's not because we haven't been trying. It's just that there is -- we need to come up with a program that might incentivize people but also make it easier for them to get into the -- a critical element of what we're all dealing with right now in schools, which is the need for social workers.

MR. PALLOTTA: And along the same lines, Senator, last year we thanked you for the million dollars that the Legislature provided for NYSUT to do implicit bias training. And we have trained hundreds of our local leaders throughout the state on

this. So of course we have another ask in this year's budget for that.

It has been powerful the things that people see and the change that's brought about by the union itself doing this training.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you. I know my time is up. Michael, I went to the Teacher Center at 133rd Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Teacher Center all the way.

MR. MULGREW: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I think we were just planning one in your district right now, so.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. So we go to Assemblyman Lawler.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Mike and Andy, good to see you again. Thank you for the work that you're doing on behalf of your members.

My sister-in-law is a teacher in one of my local school districts. She's also in

the union leadership there. So I know how hard all of your members work and the impact that they have on the lives of our students every day. So I thank you for that.

MR. MULGREW: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Obviously we're all happy to see, you know, the continued increase in Foundation Aid for our districts. I brought it up last year: I do have a bill, A4648, that I hope, Andy, you certainly will look at and support. It would increase the Regional Cost Index for Rockland and Westchester counties to match Long Island and New York City to ensure that our schools in Rockland County and Westchester are fully funded and getting the support that they deserve for the Regional Cost Index and our labor costs, which are significant at times, given our region. So that's something that I just want to bring to your attention.

East Ramapo, I had a discussion earlier today with Commissioner Rosa on that. The reality is there's going to be 4100 new students attending private schools next year,

and that is going to have, you know, significant growth in the district again.

And it's something that we have to be realistic about, that nearly 75 percent of the students attending East Ramapo are attending private schools, and the current construct is not working. And there are significant challenges. And the objective needs to be to ensure that all students, regardless of whether they attend a public or private school, are getting the services they need. But obviously it can't be at the expense of the public schools.

And so I've proposed legislation to have SED take over mandated services for the private schools in East Ramapo specifically. And I would strongly encourage you to look at that legislation. And I'd be happy to discuss it with you offline.

The thing that I do want to ask you a question about, both of you, if you could, is really just the role of parents in their children's education. Obviously there's been so much back and forth nationwide with

respect to curriculum, with respect to mask mandates, with respect to vaccine mandates. I'm just curious really how you both view the role of parents in education and what abilities they should have when it comes to issues of curriculum and/or, you know, mandates on their children.

Obviously I represent an area where it's controlled by school boards, not mayoral control, so there is a little bit of a difference. But just curious your take on that.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Well, right off the bat, when it came to the mask mandate, we supported the mask mandate.

We also want to know when things will change, so we put out a statement just the other day saying we are happy with the mandate in effect now, but we would love to see from the health experts when we can get on the off ramp from these mask mandates.

And of course we support having parents involved in their children's education the entire time that they are in

school. It is crucial. The partnership -- and Michael spoke about it throughout New York City too -- it's crucial throughout the state that the parents are a big partner with the educators, with the students.

So -- and I appreciate your support for our members. Thank you.

MR. MULGREW: In terms of the role of parents itself, it's a crucial partnership, as Andy has said. But I think what we're all dealing with right now on the political spectrum is so many things have become politicized, especially around the schools. Is that healthy for a school? Probably not.

Curriculum. Let's just take curriculum. New York State is a standard state. That means we set standards and then each school system, each school district, is responsible for supplying the teacher with the curriculum that meet the standards. But inside of these standards there has to be a sensitivity towards all cultures. And we've done that without turning it into what we've seen in different parts of the country. And

I'm hoping New York State and New York City can continue to do that.

But, you know, for Andy and I, we've lived through the teacher-bashing years and everything else, and the testing and the standardized tests, and we've seen everything in our industry try to -- we've seen it from the angles where people have politicized it. Now as we're in the pandemic, once again we're in the middle of all of so many of the political fights where we just always say: We talk to our independent medical experts, we let them guide us, and we're trying to stay out of the craziness that goes around all of this. But at the same time, we cannot educate the children of this state without the parents as partners.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thank you for your answers.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to Assemblywoman Niou.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Hello, Mr. Mulgrew.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: How are you?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: I'm good. Thank you so much for being here today and spending so much time with us.

I had a question for you about -- you know, I'm assuming, since you were listening and you had referred to it, what our new chancellor was talking about when I had asked him a question about teacher retention. I was wondering -- you know, I'm sure you have some ideas about what would actually be successful in helping with teacher recruitment and retention on top of the Teacher Centers.

MR. MULGREW: Yeah, this is -- you know it's an issue that the whole country now has to grapple with. It's just -- there's no way around it. You think about, as I just said before, there was years of teacher bashing. Then we went into complete accountability, which meant test scores and more paperwork and not actual time spent with students. And then we get hit with a pandemic. You couldn't get -- you know, it's

a trifecta of horrible things that affect our profession.

So it's really now time to say, All right, let's break glass. What do we need to do? It's got to be about how we train teachers. That's in higher ed. We're going to have to get everybody comfortable with that, how we look at how we compensate teachers. And then at the same time make sure that all school systems, that the bureaucracy of the school system is there -- because bureaucracy is not always a bad word. It becomes a bad word when it stops things from happening. But the bureaucracy's focus at all times must be on supporting the teacher.

And those first three to five years are pivotal. And you see it -- we have certain schools in New York City where the retention is so high, you walk into the school and you know why. Because --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Harbor School.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Our Harbor

School.

MR. MULGREW: All right. And there's other schools. Because it's a complete support system that the school has built for people coming into our profession. But that's not -- we don't have that everywhere.

So really it's about reimagining the whole profession from when you're training them all the way through their inception and then throughout their careers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: We also saw that, you know, at the Harbor School, for example, the principal actually gave up his own office for a Teacher Center. That was really awesome. But we shouldn't be making that -- that's not the norm, right.

So our state definitely needs to really fund Teacher Centers because it really is a huge valuable asset to making it so that we can get teachers to want to stay, and have the support that they need. It's an all around, wraparound service.

You know, you had mentioned also, you know, the imbalance with charter school

funding and -- versus our public school funding. And I wanted to kind of see your thoughts on -- I guess give you the rest of the time to really kind of talk about why this disparity is so important to not have.

MR. MULGREW: Because everyone likes to use the word "equity." Well, where's the equity? Let's stop playing with the numbers and let's just say -- you know, put the actual things down there.

New York City, in the charter formula per student, there's already a facilities number inside of it. In New York City the charter schools are getting that number and then getting an additional facilities number on top of that. And then there's a thousand dollars per pupil for tuition assistance. These are ridiculous numbers.

And now, this year, look at the formula -- it's not just affecting New York but so many -- New York City, but so many of the other districts in our state. They're -- you know, the local school district has to pick up so much more of the funding for the

charter school. And it's just got to stop. You know, enough is enough already. We had years of games being played with this, and it was all because of political influence and not based off of if you truly want equity, let's do it the right way. Everyone gets the same amount per student, period, end of story, and there's transparency.

I mean, you know, everyone says yes when I say these things, but then it never gets done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you.

MR. PALLOTTA: And that's why there's a John Liu bill right there to fight this. This is a great bill. Because in Central Islip, when the community fought back against the charter school, SUNY didn't listen to them. In Wyandanch, they didn't listen to them. And there was no respect for SED or the commissioner.

So it's ludicrous that they don't have the same transparency requirements as a public school. And I hope this year we can

take care of that.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. And we're going to move on. We still have a number of Assemblymembers, and then we only have 34 more witnesses after you finish.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Okay.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Hold us to 90 seconds.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: It's an all-nighter we're doing.

Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

And Andy and Michael, thank you and all of your members for what you've done over these difficult almost two years now.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: You know, we owe you a debt of gratitude, and all of the teachers that you represent.

You know, I want to focus a little bit on Rochester and the city school district in Rochester, but put it in terms of your Future

Forward, Andy, where you talked about public schools being the center of communities, you talked about making sure we focus on students' social and emotional needs and racial justice.

And, you know, frankly we're in a moment of time right now, a moment of time where we have additional funding that we can use for education. We have a society and communities that are truly facing racial injustice. And we have COVID. With all the bad things, it's forced us to reevaluate what's really important to us.

So my question is this. Given that moment of time -- we have the additional funding, et cetera -- given that moment of time, how do we scale up community schools in the Rochester City School District? You know, we have a couple of good ones but, you know, those wraparound services through community schools and the sense of neighborhood and the sense of community is so vitally important. How do we do that in Rochester?

MR. PALLOTTA: First off, I want to thank you for the work that you did as dean of the delegation in Rochester. It was fantastic working with you and everyone from the region.

We did get some good things done, and it brought the community together. It was a very enjoyable experience. But we also know that Rochester now doesn't have an austerity problem, they have a problem where they have so much in the bank they have to spend it. So the social workers -- there are hundreds of millions of dollars sitting there and we fought for it, you fought for it, and I'm hoping that they're spending that money on the social workers fighting the racial injustice in the schools.

And how do we get more community schools? Well, part of our program this year is to get a hundred million more into community schools. I know there's money in the budget. But what we're saying is it has worked in certain places like New York, like in Rome, New York. So replicate it. Put the

money in so we can have folks that are knowledgeable on how to run a community school, and have them all over the place. This seems to be a model that will change a system. And Rochester is the one that really needs to have an infusion of great minds that can really move that city school system.

So yes, the teachers are working hard, the administrators are working hard. I saw a lot of cooperation when we were there for some of the meetings. And we also saw the students with broken hearts when they lost their teachers and administrators and paraprofessionals not too long ago. I mean, it brought you to tears to see what they were going through.

Now there's money. Let's make sure that we put even more into the community school model. And the united schools that Michael is talking about, if that's the way to do it, let's get them to bring this model not just to Albany but to Rochester too and any other region of the state that needs this.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you, Andy.

We'll go now to Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: Hello. Hi, Michael. Hi, Andy. It's good to see you guys here. Thank you again so much for all that you're doing and all your members are doing for us, for our children.

I did have a couple of questions. For one, I know you talked about the -- your charter school issue regarding that the aid went from 51.5 million to 100 million and the increase of per-pupil funding was increased by 4.7 percent. So I agree with you, I do feel that it's unjust, particularly for many reasons. Obviously one is the transparency and accountability.

However, I am disappointed that UFT has not been adopting the Bichotte-Jackson bill, which is also a transparency and accountability bill. We've had this before the other bill was introduced. So I will reiterate, it's A3598, S1972. And that is

the original transparency and accountability charter school bill, Bichotte-Jackson. So please take a look at it --

PRESIDENT MULGREW: We'll take a look at it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: -- and help promote it.

I also want to just make the point that even with, you know, some of these schools that are just acquiring real estate for like 105 million -- I think Success Academy acquired about $105 million in South Bronx -- you have a lot of the smaller ones that are not even being included in this whole mix. And the smaller ones are typically run by Black and brown-run charter schools. And there's an issue -- there's an issue even within the umbrella of charter schools of disparity. So that's something that, you know, we need to talk about as well.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Yeah. Yeah.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: But my question really revolves around what you

talked about around mayoral control. You wanted to see some changes -- and I was in and out, so I don't know if you actually stated what kind of changes that you would like to see within the four-year interim of mayoral control, and how would you like parents to be more involved in the education system.

MR. MULGREW: Well, so to deal with the parent issue -- because you hear the same thing I hear about parents have always been shut out, despite year after year of testimony up here by mayors and chancellors that they're going to do it different and they're going to keep the parents in and they're going to let the parents in. It doesn't happen.

That's because of the basic structure that we're the only school system that has a mayoral control system that's absolute power. The only one. The other school systems that have mayoral control do not have that.

So this whole argument that if we change it's no longer mayoral control is

ridiculous. Because there's many school systems across the country that have mayoral control, but nobody has gone as far as to give absolute power to one office -- and that's what we have in New York City. So for the parents, it could be something as simple as adding two more seats to the PEP, the Panel for Educational -- PEP. I can't remember. The PEP. We call it the PEP.

MR. PALLOTTA: Policy.

MR. MULGREW: Policy, educational policy, right. The PEP.

So if you add two seats and you say that those two seats must be filled from elected CEC representatives, right at that point they're independent.

The fact that, you know, we've been against this mayoral control for as long as I've been president. The two mayors before this one, every time that anybody voted against them, they removed them from the panel. It wasn't just the first one, it's the second one did the same thing. So it really gets to be a little bit ridiculous.

And we're really working really well with this mayor, and the chancellor. But I've heard them say that, you know, if we can't convince people that we have a really good idea, then maybe we shouldn't do it. And that's really what we're looking for. We do not -- nobody wants to go back to the school boards. That I talked to. Nobody.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you, Michael.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have two more Assemblymembers. First, Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon, and then our Higher Ed chair Deborah Glick will close out this panel.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Well, thank you. And thank you both, Andy and Mike, for all of the work you're doing and for your members. It's so critical.

And I do want to say, you know, I was one of those people who sent the letter saying we need to look at the possibility of doing some things remotely in order to figure

out which end is up kind of thing. But like my granddaughter went back to school, and it was like life-altering for her to go back to school, it was just so important.

So a couple of things. You talked about testing and demonstrating mastery of subject matter. And, you know, I'm a Performance Standards Consortium fan myself, so I always like to raise that. But I'm concerned because, you know, the reason we do annual testing is the federal No Child Left Behind, which then became ESSA. And how are we going to try and strategize around not having a federal mandate to give these tests? Because that is really the problem. It makes everybody crazy at the state level, but the fact that we have to give certain tests is a federal mandate.

And then just one thing I want to just mention, I don't know -- it's not necessarily your -- it's not under your control, certainly. But I was pleased to see that the new chancellor did not at least overtly lump special ed in with ELL students. Because

those students have often very, very different needs. Although students may have both of those needs.

But, you know, the students are shortchanged when you try and lump them together. So that's -- I don't know if you agree with that or not.

MR. MULGREW: Yes, I agree with that. The last statement, absolutely agree with it. New York City has more languages inside of it than any other school system. And just the basic things you have to start with is when a child -- when we have a newcomer, it's did they receive formal education in their country. You know, we have to start with that basic.

And everybody makes assumptions, and they're just not true. And there's no assumption to be made about a country, because it depends on what part of the country you were raised in.

And then if a child did not have access to formal education and, say, they're a teenager, are we going to mislabel them as

being special needs when we don't -- because they haven't had any formal education? It's quite complicated, the work that we do with the ELL population. And New York City is constantly struggling with it because of the challenge of the numbers and the different countries that we bring all of our students from.

So, I mean, we have a lot of people who are working on this. But, you know, there needs to be -- something different has to go -- we can't do the "one size fits all" that a lot of school systems can do. We can't do that.

And the special needs population -- New York City is under a corrective action plan from the State Education Department. And it should be under a corrective action plan. But things need to get better. And they did not get better up until the end of December, they were actually getting worse. Just basic compliance as well as the backlog of cases and all the other things. And the Department of Education felt that it was

their job to hide compliance issues rather than just -- there's a very simple question with compliance: Is the child getting their service? It's really that simple.

Is the child getting the service? If the answer is yes, you're in compliance. If the answer is no, you're not in compliance. And it's not supposed to be, oh, here's a rationalization why we're not in compliance. It's supposed to be no, it's your responsibility to do something now to get that child their services.

It really gets ridiculous when you think about all of the stuff that has gone on over there. But we've been working with the State Education Department, and the new chancellor and mayor have spoken about this publicly. So we are hopeful.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: And the testing issue with the feds, any plans to deal with that?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. So we're going to send it back to the Senate, to Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I was just writing you a note that I'd be happy to go after all the Assemblymembers. But now that you've called on me --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I called on you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's okay. thank you very much, Helene.

I just really want to thank both of you. You know, everybody does understand, no matter where you're elected, pretty much the most important issue that constituents bring to you over and over again is the quality of education for their children, because that's what they care about. And so, you know, people get hot under the collar, everybody likes to point fingers and blame somebody else. And I just want to say I think one of the lessons all of us have learned during COVID -- we've all of us made mistakes because we didn't know what we were doing and we were trying to come up with answers literally day by day -- was how extraordinarily hard the work is that

teachers in our schools, and principals, and everyone else who works in our schools does.

And even though there are lots of things that fell by the wayside and we haven't really figured out totally, I think that this was an extraordinary opportunity where people started to think through more new innovative things that can work when you're not under the pressure of 25 percent COVID rates.

And so I am hoping that you will work with us as we move forward to understand, one, how we all need to be better prepared for the next time -- because I fear there will be a next time -- but then also that there were new opportunities, I think, for us to make our schools even better and address the needs of the teachers and principals and parents and children by actually using some of the new technology and some of the new ideas that we never would have even imagined trying.

So I'm hoping that to some degree we can all think-tank that together statewide as

we move forward. And I think that the new Regents actually are very interested in doing that. And we heard from the chancellor of New York City earlier who seems basically to be open to the things that work. And I think that's exactly what both of you gentlemen, on behalf of your members, want also. We want models that work for our kids.

So I'm not asking you to answer necessarily now, I'm just asking you, you know, to help everyone think through what were the good and bad lessons learned and how do we take the good from it going forward.

MR. MULGREW: Thank you. We appreciate that. We're actually quite excited. If we can finally get through the damn thing, we're quite excited about some of the things that we've learned. And there was some good that came out of this in terms of really looking at different ways of engaging students.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I think so too.

MR. PALLOTTA: We saw it throughout the state when we went to certain districts,

and I'll highlight White Plains was one of the districts we went to, where the superintendent, the union, the parents, students, all on the same page. And doing great things.

So we know that in those difficult times, people were able to come together. Right? And this is what we've seen pretty much all over the state.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you both.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Now we go to Assemblywoman Glick.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Thank you. It's good to see you both.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Nice to see you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: And thank you on behalf of all of the teachers and school staff for everything that you've done through this extraordinary time.

Let me just ask you quickly, we've talked about the social-emotional learning. The flip side of that is disruptions and disruptive behavior. And, you know, I'm very concerned about -- and have been -- about

safety in the schools. It used to be bullying. Sort of, you know, it's expanded into actually, you know, more acting out.

And I'm wondering what the experience has been of teachers in dealing with this and what other supports they may have or need that we should be thinking about as we go forward with the budget.

MR. MULGREW: I'm going to do this quick because I know Andy wants to talk about that statewide.

The first couple of weeks of September were good and then we started to see the manifestation of the bad behavior, of acting out and different things of that nature.

Our Member Assistance Program at the union, we had to add more personnel into it and it's still completely overwhelmed. Thankfully we have a lot of people who volunteer, psychologists and social workers who volunteer and do groups, group counseling for the teachers.

It's tough what everyone's going through. And when you go into a school, you

have the adults and the children all in one place, being greatly affected, and now being put back into a school where they're rigidly following all of the rules of COVID still. So it's not the best scenario in terms of trying to work through the social-emotional aspects. Challenges, really. They're challenges, because there's been so much harm that has been done.

So the teachers are -- this is going to -- we're going to need to put more supports in for teachers. And whether that's an expansion of member assistance programs for teachers, that would be one way to do it. But we have to do something.

But I know Andy would like to speak about that, to what's gone on throughout the state.

MR. PALLOTTA: Thank you, Michael.

So we're working on creating at NYSUT a member assistance program which I believe will have a great impact.

We've seen the behaviors that you're talking about. We also know that during this

time the critical shortage in staffing has created even more problems. Right? So in some districts you couldn't get bus drivers, right, because they were out sick. And then if you got the bus drivers you didn't have the paraprofessionals, or you had the teachers absent and you couldn't get substitutes. So we had one crisis after another with getting enough staff to actually run a school.

So we saw it during the height of COVID, and we also now look forward to these numbers -- we're seeing them drop, we're encouraged by that drop, but we also know that we could be back there again.

So we appreciate what the Governor has done with some of the streamlining, the money that's in the budget on training for bus drivers. It was a really critical time during this last surge that there were shortages everywhere.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GLICK: Thank you.

MR. MULGREW: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have one

Assemblymember left to close out, Mike Reilly, who seems to be our finisher on this hearing.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Reilly, you're the finisher.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm sorry, I had to pull over and make sure that I got into a good spot before I hit my button.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: I actually wanted to -- you know, I was listening to the entire testimony. And Michael and Andrew, thank you so much for doing this and sharing.

But mayoral control is something that when -- Michael, when you brought it up, it really struck home. Because as you know, as a former member of the CEC 31, I advocated for several years on this front.

One issue that you mentioned that really strikes a nerve with me every time is being able to remove a member at any time, the appointing authority. And, you know, I understand my colleagues in the

Legislature -- I spoke about this last year when they tried to add the letter that they have to send saying why they removed a member.

I think it doesn't go far enough to have a checks and balances, because you can still remove them regardless of sending the letter. I think there has to be a point where we say they can only be removed for good cause. Or just cause.

And, you know, one of the things that I speak about -- and I have legislation on it. But it's about having the PEP vote on the member being removed. And I think that could be a chance. And especially adding that extra parent that some have been advocating about for over a decade.

So I appreciate the take on that. But what do you think about that, about adding more accountability on removing a --

MR. MULGREW: Yeah, I think that's something that has to be looked at because whether you do a fixed term and then say once someone is appointed, unless there's just

cause, that member cannot be removed from the panel by the person or the entity that appointed them. Something along those lines.

Because -- and in New York City, and at the state level, everybody keeps saying, well, if you change anything, it's not mayoral control. It's just not true. People, I'll give you the book. It's just not true. There's all different versions of mayoral control. We're the only city who gave absolute power to one office. The only city that did it this way.

So it's just -- and the parents -- and I don't believe any of the mayors have went out and said, I'm going to silence parents' voice. But it happened. And it happens over and over. Why? Because in the end you're running a city, there's all sorts of other things going on. The Department of Education has parents all the time. They have this huge bureaucracy. In the end, it's just easy to say, all right, I'll have a meeting but I'm not going to do anything for you. Therefore, you're silencing the parents'

voice.

So just put in something that changes that dynamic. And I think, you know, fixed terms with only a just cause for removal would help that.

And also I think it's time that we put two parent members on the panel that are voted for by the parents. You would have been eligible to be one of the parents who could have been put on the panel, voted on. I think it's time that we do that. Because that's the way that people will stop ignoring the parents. So there will be parents who are there because they're elected representatives of the parents of New York City, not a parent who's been appointed by a political -- or an elected official.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: Thank you, Michael. Thank you, guys.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Get home safe.

ASSEMBLYMAN REILLY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you.

(Pause.)

PRESIDENT MULGREW: I guess we're

done?

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Thanks, bye.

(Overtalk.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: No, don't go yet. Don't go. I believe we have a late starter, Assemblyman Smith, our ranker on Education, for three minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: I've been with the hearing the entire time. I had some tech issues up in Albany, and then I had to run back to Long Island -- but it may shock everybody, I made it back to Long Island, to my desk before I had to --

(Overtalk.)

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: That's impressive.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: So thank you for the time. I've been listening the entire time, so I appreciate a lot of the comments. And I like asking questions last because a lot of the issues have already been addressed.

So two issues that I wanted to see if

you could weigh in on, both of you. And again, thank you for joining us.

Obviously we're looking at the possibility -- well, the very real possibility of a teacher shortage crisis. This is something that I've been talking to Betty Rosa about, Dr. Betty Rosa. She's done, I think, a good job trying to address this.

What do you think we could be doing to engage people to -- you know, we've had an issue of burnout, as you mentioned, for the anti-teacher sentiment and then the accountability, or over-accountability, and now we have this pandemic -- to get people to take this on as their second career?

And I speak as somebody who was in the classroom. You know, I think we need to get people as that second career.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Andy?

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Assemblymember, I'll tell you my story. I worked for Chase Manhattan Bank and was looking to make a difference. Right? And at 25 years old,

left the bank, became a teacher, and loved it all along.

So this is something where there is a great need. And there is so much that can be done by a teacher in this society. So we need to get that message out there. And I believe that now, with the Governor that we have and the Legislature that we have, the commissioner, the chancellors, we have all positive emotions about being a teacher now. It's not what it used to be when we had the previous Governor. So that in itself turns things around.

And then we have to take off from their plates the busywork, things that are meaningless. And the waste of time preparing for tests that don't adequately assess children. So I think -- I want to give time to Michael so I'm going to pass it off to him. Go ahead, Michael.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: The intrinsic value or intrinsic compensation that you get from teaching is immeasurable. I still believe that there are many people in our

society who have those same values. But the profession itself has gone through some -- quite a bit of turmoil, and a lot of people who even try to get into the profession, they leave very quickly because they say, This is not what I ever thought it was going to be.

Number one exit interview -- the number one issues on the exit interview are, one, it's a much more difficult profession than I thought. Two, there's no one here to support me, all they do is keep making me do busywork. That's the piece that has to change. So in terms of how we train and then what we're asking our schools to do.

Just think about every time there's another accountability measure passed, whether it's at the federal level, the state level, or even at a school district level. It's just added on paperwork to a teacher. That's all it ever becomes, added-on paperwork --

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you both, and thank you for joining us on that. I agree with you all heartily.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So I believe we are finished with this panel.

PRESIDENT MULGREW: Are we finished? Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Now everybody could wave goodbye.

MR. PALLOTTA: Thank you.

MR. MULGREW: Thank you. Have a good rest of the session.

PRESIDENT PALLOTTA: Have a great evening. Appreciate all you're doing.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

As the sun starts to set in Albany, we go on to Panel B, which is the Conference of Big 5 School Districts, actually along with Mount Vernon. So we have the Conference of Big 5 School Districts, Jennifer Pyle, executive director; Syracuse City School District, Jaime Alicia, superintendent; Kriner Cash, superintendent, Buffalo Public Schools; Lesli Myers-Small, superintendent, Rochester City School District; Yonkers

Public Schools, Edwin Quezada, superintendent; Albany City School District, Kaweeda Adams, superintendent; Mount Vernon City School District, Kenneth Hamilton, superintendent.

So each of these witnesses will have three minutes. I really encourage you to please stay to the three-minute mark. The clock should be in the upper left-hand corner. And once you have all presented, we will then call on some Assemblymembers to ask questions.

But if you can go in that order, that would be best.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We might even be willing to call in a few Senators also.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Oh, of course. I'm sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry too, I'm just --

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Legislators will be --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You know, this is

Day 2, and it's another long one.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: The legislators will be asking questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Assemblywoman Weinstein.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So Jennifer, are you here to start?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: Sure. Sure. Yes, sorry about that.

So as you all know, I serve as executive director of the Conference of Big 5 School Districts. We actually represent Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, Albany, Mount Vernon, and Utica city school districts. Thank you for allowing us to testify today and for your steadfast commitment to serving the needs of urban education in New York State.

I also want to take a moment to thank you for your extraordinary efforts resulting in the Foundation Aid phase-in and receipt of the federal resources necessary to enable our school districts to meet pressing COVID-related needs.

We're pleased that the Executive Budget maintains the Foundation Aid phase-in and provides full funding for expense-based aids. We're also grateful for the inclusion of the $100 million in funding under the proposed Recover from School program to support critical social-emotional issues and learning loss.

We continue to have serious concerns with regard to the current charter school funding system. Charter school expansion in saturated school districts must be limited, and enhanced accountability measures applied to ensure that enrollment accurately reflects district-pupil demographics.

Furthermore, the New York State Board of Regents must be given the final say when it comes to approval of new or expansion of existing charter schools. All too often SUNY has failed to adequately review applications and continues to exploit loopholes in the current statute.

Our school districts operate some of the most innovative and successful CTE

programs in the state, and we're continuing to grow these programs. We ask you to increase the Special Services Aid per-pupil formula-based funding cap and to expand it to capture students beginning in Grade 9.

The Big 5 school districts appreciate the Governor's ongoing commitment to funding pre-kindergarten programs. However, the funding levels have not been adjusted to reflect the actual costs. The state must commit to fully funding pre-kindergarten for high-need urban school districts.

Each of our school districts provide valuable health services to their students. Unfortunately, funding for these services has been frozen for many years. We urge you to provide additional targeted school health funding for all member districts to assist them with increased demands.

We support the Governor's inclusion of the retiree earning waiver extension and ask you to ensure this is incorporated in the final budget. This will provide school districts with another avenue by which to

pursue filling vacancies in many shortage areas.

We applaud the Governor for proposing the long-overdue comprehensive solution to Building Aid and Transportation Aid penalties. School districts should not be penalized for clerical errors.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the New York State Education Department, Chancellor Young and Commissioner Rosa for their unwavering commitment to supporting our school districts throughout the pandemic. We urge you to reject the Governor's proposal to shift the responsibility for the child nutrition programs from the State Education Department to Agriculture and Markets. This change would up-end a program that's exceptionally well run and create unnecessary confusion and strain for school districts.

Thank you again for this opportunity. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks, and remain available to answer any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

If you can just go on in order. So Syracuse, can we go next?

SYRACUSE SUPERINTENDENT ALICEA: Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I am Jaime Alicea. I have the privilege of serving the students, families and staff in the City of Syracuse. And I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Executive Budget and the potential impact it will have on the students in the Big 5 school districts, and especially on the students in Syracuse.

First, I want to say thank you. I want to take a moment to really commend you and thank you for securing over $150 million in federal stimulus funding for Syracuse and for your statutory commitment to fully fund Foundation Aid. The Legislature deserves tremendous credit for your efforts to deliver and allocate unprecedented financial support to schools during the pandemic.

I can tell you that in Syracuse we have used this funding to add counselors at

all the elementary schools. We added more social workers and social worker assistants. We also hired teachers and teacher assistants and open reading and math intervention classrooms in all our elementary and middle schools.

As a result of your commitment to fund public education, the children of the Syracuse city school district are underway to academic recovery and success. So thank you for believing in our kids and showing your support with financial resources long term.

Please understand that the increased needs of children post-pandemic will continue long after the stimulus funds have expired. Therefore, your continued financial support is crucial and needed.

There's some areas that I would like to talk to you about. One is the funding cliff. I remain deeply concerned about the funding cliff looming once the federal stimulus funds have been exhausted. Syracuse has no ability to generate local revenue, given our fiscal dependency on the city.

Student needs for academic and social-emotional supports will not dwindle when funds expire. Again, thank you for putting students first.

I would like for you to use the funding formula to provide aid to our students with special needs, ELL students, and our students living in extreme poverty by utilizing updated census data and poverty measures, weighting ELL students and increasing weighting on special-needs students.

Also, in the area of healthcare, nurses are essential to the daily operation of our schools and should be properly funded as an expense-based aid. The current funding rate has been flat for more than a decade. I recommend a student-to-nurse ratio of 300 to 1, which will double the amount of nurses in our schools.

I know my time is running out. And for Career and Technical Education, we have talked in the past about including funding for ninth-grade students participating in our

CTE program.

So thank you for the opportunity of sharing this information with you today.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Now we'll hear from Buffalo.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: Yes, good afternoon, colleagues. Thank you for taking the time to hear our testimonies from the Big 5 school districts.

We certainly support, applaud and appreciate the Governor's budget proposals. I want to echo what my colleague from Syracuse said; the Buffalo city school district is pleased to support Governor Hochul's signature education proposals, including and especially the 2.1 billion increase in education funding, the continued phase-in of the Foundation Aid, full funding of current statutory formulas, pandemic-related responses, and several new or expanded grant programs. Those will assist the Buffalo City School District tremendously.

Our health services grant was

mentioned by Jennifer Pyle. We would like to see a specific $3 million increase in our health services allocation, bringing the total to $8.3 million. This of course will help us with the escalating costs of health-related services, which were climbing before pandemic and now are really at a level that is compromising services for our students.

Our Special Services Aid -- this is important, I'll succinctly state it -- increase the per-pupil cap under Special Services Aid and expand the funding to cover ninth-grade students participating in CTE programs. Ninth grade. We have some extraordinary and innovative CTE programs. We want to include this cost to reach ninth-grade students.

Pre-kindergarten programs, increase funding for pre-kindergarten programs to reduce the local share cost and allow us to expeditiously expand to 3-year-old programming. We're really getting into what we call prenatal to post-secondary education.

We see that whole continuum as our responsibility, and we want to now expand to 3-year-old programming.

Jennifer Pyle explained the charter school tuition and charter school requests that we have and that we share with our other Big 5 colleagues. These requests are already being championed by many of our legislators, and so I won't need to go into those deeply with you. But simply, the charter school reimbursement fund at 100 percent in the current year -- the proliferation of startup charters in Buffalo, for example, are mainly in the pre-K or K-8 space, and we don't need them here. There's no evidence of need here. So we want the Board of Regents to authorize the charter schools going forward.

And then we want to make sure that when a school does close, that an independent receiver comes in and makes sure that all the assets come back to the public school district so that we can continue to support re-enrolled children.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So now we will go to Rochester.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: I am Dr. Lesli Myers-Small, superintendent of the Rochester City School District. It's an honor to have the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Executive Budget on our district.

Rochester is one of the highest-needs school districts in New York State. We serve almost 24,000 students, of which 22 percent are students with disabilities and 4,000 are English language learners.

We have been actively working to address concerns around school safety and social-emotional health, as we have experienced an increase in acts of school violence. Sadly, 11 students died as a result of gun violence, and far too many of our students experience trauma.

As we continue to grapple with this, we are addressing academic achievement. We are working with multiple stakeholders in our efforts to become a high-performing school

district. Indicators of success indicate greater access to diverse programming, increasing graduation rates and improving school performance indicators.

I am proud to report that our fiscal strength is improving. We were able to forego the need for our revenue anticipation note in '21-'22. The district's Moody's and S&P ratings moved from negative to stable.

Despite this, the Fitch rating for Monroe County was reduced, given the saturation of charter schools. Which brings me to the district's priorities relative to the Executive Budget.

Moratorium on charter schools. That's been mentioned. We found approximately $105 million to support nearly 7,000 students in 14 charter schools. Three additional schools will be opening next year. We ask that the state act in saturated school districts such as ours.

Targeting funds for mental health and school climate. The district's school health services funding has not kept pace with

students' mental health needs and social-emotional needs. Additionally, we are asking for school health services reimbursements to meet the needs created by COVID.

Addressing teacher, nurse and certificated staff shortages. One way to mitigate this issue is to extend the waiver of the $35,000 retiree earning cap.

We are asking the state to fund full-day pre-K programs at 100 percent for high-needs school districts. We cannot afford to shoulder the unplanned expenditure of preschool special education students at a cost of $20,000 per student.

We are also requesting additional funding that is equitable for our ELL students, as they have significant academic and emotional needs.

The impact of the proposal to amend Transportation Aid from actual expenditures to formula-based aid will have significant fiscal implications for our district. It is vital that this remains aligned to actual

expenditures.

In closing, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your support of the Rochester City School District. I value our partnership as we work together to ensure our scholars receive the best opportunities for a high-quality education.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Rochester, we thank you.

I have taken over ever so briefly for our chairwoman. And so we will go on to Yonkers.

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: Good afternoon, distinguished legislators. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you part of my testimony respectfully submitted on behalf of the Yonkers Public Schools.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to you for the tremendous support that you have provided throughout the years for the City of Yonkers and the Yonkers Public Schools. This support is perhaps best reflected in the chart found on page 1 of my

testimony. From 2014 to today, the Legislature has increased Yonkers' Foundation Aid by 78.5 million. During that same period, our students' on-time graduation rate has soared to 90.7 percent, an increase of 15 percentage points since 2014.

With your support and the support received from the American Rescue Plan, the district has not only enhanced our community school model, but also exponentially increased the wraparound services that we offer to our students and their families. Clearly investment matters, consistency in leadership matters, and we thank you.

Since 2014, I have been speaking to you about sustainable solutions for student success. This is the year to set the conditions for sustainable recurring revenue to be allocated to our schools. To that end, Yonkers is asking you to consider some salient recommendations to address the structural fiscal challenge impacting the school district. If these recommendations are adopted, your investment will produce

sustainable solutions for Yonkers student access next year and for decades to come.

Please consider increasing Yonkers' pre-K universal allocation from 20 million to 30 million, as well as increasing the numbers of seats for 3-year-olds from 136 to 225; guaranteeing free access to internet for all children living in poverty across our state; increasing Yonkers' Textbook, Software and Library materials allocation to $5 million. Increasing our health services allocation from 1.2 to 7.8 million dollars, and including Grade 9 students statewide in the CTE allocation. Yonkers has 1300 Grade 9 students taking CTE courses. Increasing Yonkers' VLT allocation from 19.6 million to 25 million. Increasing Yonkers Academic Enhancements Aid from 17 million to 22 million, and increasing funding allocations for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

These recommendations have the potential to generate over 30 million in recurrent sustainable revenue for Yonkers

public schools.

And finally, allow me to underscore the importance of addressing Yonkers' critical infrastructure needs. This is the year to appropriate equitable funding to address our aging infrastructure: Change Yonkers' reimbursement from 73.5 to 90 percent, and appropriate a block grant of 100 million to rectify the safety concerns in our schools and to begin constructing two additional new schools.

I thank you for your time, and have a good evening.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, and now we move on to Albany.

ALBANY SUPERINTENDENT ADAMS: Good evening. My name is Kaweeda Adams, and I'm the superintendent for the City School District of Albany.

I begin by saying thank you for your advocacy, support and follow-through regarding the continued phase-in of our Foundation Aid funding. This increase in Foundation Aid enables us to fulfill our

commitment to the social and emotional mental health supports that our students need and deserve. We know that this work is critical, as was evident through our stakeholder survey conducted last spring. Our Foundation Aid is enabling us to increase our social and emotional staffing positions, approximately 18 positions, within two years, this year and next year, to include school nurses, social workers, school psychologists, behavioral specialists, and guidance counselors.

In addition, we thank you for your continued support of our community schools model so that we are able to meet the needs of our at-risk communities with the built-in clinics and on-site wraparound services for our families.

As you know, Albany is a resettlement city, and our community and our school district experienced significant growth in our refugee and immigrant population. Through October of this current school year, we welcomed 230 new ELL students to our district, 100 more than the previous year.

Your continued support and commitment to Foundation Aid funding in part supports our ELL population, and it enables us to restore and expand our Albany International Center, designed to meet the needs of our ELL students in Grades 6 through 12 and now Grades K through 5.

We would be remiss if we did not take the time to acknowledge the work of Assemblymember Pat Fahy and Senator Robert Jackson regarding their sponsorship of the child safety zone legislation. We are so appreciative of the legislators and Governor Hochul for supporting this state's Transportation Law, which expands the criteria for child safety zones.

Finally, we will continue our advocacy for the state to address the charter school concerns already shared by my colleagues. In addition, we continue our advocacy for the state to update the funding formula for pre-kindergarten in a more equitable manner. This is incredibly important for Albany and districts like Albany, who were early

adopters of full-day pre-kindergarten. Our district invests over a million dollars from our local budget to bridge that gap.

Currently we experience about a 39 percent staffing turnover rate, which has been consistent over the last three years. Districts have challenges delivering early childhood curriculum respectful of culturally responsive teaching and learning best practices, certification of faculty and staff, facilitating comprehensive salaries, providing summer programs, and offering training opportunities to address the social-emotional learning of our pre-K students.

We strongly advocate for raising the pre-K funding for school districts that were early implementers of the full-day kindergarten, in order to align with more recent funding streams in order to support the foundation of our youngest learners.

Again, we thank you for your unending support and advocacy for equitable opportunities for all of our students.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So Mount Vernon, Kenneth Hamilton.

THE MODERATOR: We seem to be missing Superintendent Hamilton. If --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, so --

THE MODERATOR: -- they come back, we will certainly let you know.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So then we're ready to go to member questions. And I think we'd like to actually start with the Senate, Senator Krueger, and your Education chair.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Very good. Happy to do that.

Shelley Mayer, our Education chair.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you, Senator Krueger. And thank you to these fantastic leaders of the Big 5 and beyond for making it through an incredibly challenging time. A special shout out to my own superintendent, Dr. Quezada, on behalf of myself and the Majority Leader, who is on her way driving back from Albany.

But, you know, Yonkers has managed to stay open for a good deal of this time, which is one of my questions. I only have a little bit of time. Let me direct them to you, Dr. Quezada first.

What are the things that schools like Yonkers or your colleagues need in order to stay open during these challenging times, presuming we're going to have more challenges in the days ahead?

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: Well, first of all, thank you, Senator. You have been a champion of this work and you know that we love you here in Yonkers.

And for us to remain open, first of all, we need consistency as it relates to the message that is given to us as superintendents. We certainly need the continuous support that came from the Governor with additional testing. And we just need the commitment of everyone. This is about creating conditions for students and believing that it is the best place for them to be in school, there is no choice as it

relates to being in school.

So it is about consistency, it's about financial support, it's about having the right message at all times.

SENATOR MAYER: Secondly -- and a number of your colleagues have mentioned this -- for those of you who adopted full-day pre-K before our expansion of it last year, and it was previously a grant-funded program which you applied for and there was a limited pool of money, how has it been inadequate to meet the needs of your 4-year-olds?

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: Well, here in Yonkers, we have a full-day pre-K for every student that chooses to come to our school in pre-K. The total cost is about $21 million. Right now the appropriation is only about $13 million. So the district is absorbing about $8 million, and it's very similar to my sister district here.

So certainly fully funding universal pre-K and 3-year-olds in our CBO is the way to go with our young people.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. Yeah,

we're very supportive of that.

None of you mentioned, I don't think, the lack of internet capacity for all your students, which we know -- maybe to Dr. Quezada -- during the height of COVID has been a really substantial challenge.

Do you have specific recommendations -- I know there are products out there, a number of districts have made arrangements with providers. What is your view about how we can solve this problem so that every one of your kids has access in the event there's remote learning?

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: Well, access to the internet for all families living below the poverty level must be a responsibility of the State of New York.

And in addition to that, it's about establishing very strong relationships with the companies that are supposed to provide the services and ensuring that they create the conditions for internet access to come to all parts of our cities.

We know that they know how to do it.

With 4G and 5G, there's no reason why -- every place in all of our big cities should have access to internet right now.

So our state delegation, our Governor, should come together with the companies responsible for providing internet and saying this is a prerequisite of being in our public schools.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you very much.

And thank you to all of you. I'm sorry I didn't get more time with each of you, but thank you so much.

SYRACUSE SUPERINTENDENT ALICEA: Can I just make one quick comment? I would like for the Smart Schools Bond Act to be considered for one more round. That was the funding that we used to provide our students with the technology and with the hotspots for them to be connected.

So it would be great if there's another round for the smart schools bond act so we can continue to buy more technology for our students.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you,

Superintendent Alicea. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So now we go to the Assembly Education chair, Assemblyman Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Superintendents, thank you all for being here today. Thank you for waiting such a long time. It's just a long day, and you are to be commended just for sitting around so long. But you don't have to sit around up in Albany, you can be back in your own districts, and that's a good thing.

Listen, I'll ask you all your opinion. I do have a bill before me, and this bill basically it calls on amending the Education Law for requiring a psychologist in elementary, intermediate, middle, junior high schools and senior high schools. And I think that also goes for social workers. I want your opinion. Is this workable?

ALBANY SUPERINTENDENT ADAMS: I'll jump in, because that's one of the things that we've looked at here in the City School District of Albany.

We recognize that there's a lot of social-emotional needs of our children, and so we have invested in our school psychologists and all of those wraparound services because we realize that, number one, even pre-COVID there was a need in all of our schools for those services. COVID has only exacerbated some of the issues that our students are facing, which means that while we may have been, you know, one-to-one at every school, it's not enough to have only one school psychologist or one school nurse or one counselor or one social worker, because the needs are so great.

And so we also know that we have to assist our families. And so I think that absolutely that is the way to go. Because yes, we can consequence the behavior so when we see all of these different behaviors that are happening, we can consequence the behavior. But if we don't have the wraparound services from our school psychologists, social workers, behavioral specialists to get to the root cause of that

behavior, that behavior will never change.

And so --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: I'm going to cut you off. I understand.

Other superintendents, you got something for me?

UNIDENTIFIED PANEL MEMBER: Answer, yes.

SEVERAL PANELISTS: Yes.

SYRACUSE SUPERINTENDENT ALICEA: We need to work closely with the colleges and universities. It is hard to find psychologists in Central New York, so we need to do something with the colleges so they can provide more incentive to get more people in the field.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: And in addition to that --

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: So basically you're telling me that you would love to do this, maybe it might be done, but we need some assistance here from the higher ed sector.

SEVERAL PANELISTS: Yes, absolutely.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: We also need the financial support to be able to have these psychologists in our schools. And in addition to that, there are phenomenal community-based organizations providing support in social-emotional. We need to take advantage of their services, because they also understand the community very well.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: That's not what this bill is talking about, but I appreciate what you're saying. Thank you. Thank you.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: I just want to add that absolutely any type of additional mental health support is important, but I would be remiss if I didn't add the importance of these practitioners being culturally relevant serving the students that we are responsible for in our respective districts.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Point well taken.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go back to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's me, hi.

We're going to now go to Senator John Liu.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just have a question for Jennifer, actually. In your testimony you mentioned that SUNY exploits certain loopholes in the chartering of -- or in the approval of charter school applications. What does that mean?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: First, we're wholly supportive of your bill and grateful that you've advanced it.

Second, we're concerned that they've provided extensions that we believe go far and above what the law allows. They've done so with little notice, as you know. In fact, last year in the middle of the pandemic, it was two days before Christmas, they held some sort of emergency meeting.

And furthermore, we don't believe that they give the proper consideration and, you know, take the time to review applicants to

the extent the Board of Regents does. We know the Board of Regents' hands are tied with regard to disallowing some of the schools that we think should be under further consideration. But again, we don't believe SUNY should be in the business of authorizing charter schools for K-12.

SENATOR LIU: Well, Jennifer, as you may know, there are major editorial boards in New York who cite the New York State charter school application approval process as being a model for the nation to follow. And that model would be this kind of a duopoly of charter authorization entities, that being the Regents as well as the SUNY board.

What do you say to them who -- what do you say to the supporters of the SUNY chartering process that say this is a model for the rest of the country to emulate?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: We would strongly disagree. And we've -- and I'm sure my superintendents could speak to this as well. We have longstanding concerns, and we've expressed them repeatedly with regard

to the process they follow. Frankly, when we've done our analysis and looked at who they've turned down, they are few and far between. And so clearly we don't think they should be in the business.

And frankly I don't -- I would question the literature out there that would indicate that they have the expertise or knowledge to be approving charter schools, again, for K-12 in New York State.

SENATOR LIU: And explain briefly why these charter schools -- and I think a couple of your superintendents referred to this. How does that direct money away from the schools that your superintendents are responsible for running?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: So I mean again, even when you've reached a saturation point, as several of our school districts have, and some schools outside of our districts, they're still -- you're having them pulling kids from a few classrooms here, there, different buildings. You can't reduce your overhead costs. At this point in time

it's doing serious damage to the traditional public schools.

And again, we are fully supportive of school choice and providing parents with those options. But in districts such as Buffalo, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse, the saturation point has been reached, and we believe someone needs to intervene before further damage is done. And in many cases these schools are not outperforming the traditional public schools. And furthermore, they're not under the scrutiny and they don't have to exist under the same rules that the traditional public schools do.

SENATOR LIU: All right, thanks very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

And thank you, all of the superintendents and Jennifer, for all the work you've been doing in these very, very difficult times with COVID and the

manifestation of mental health problems and trauma and other things that our students and their families are facing.

I'm going to direct my questions to Dr. Lesli Myers-Small. Superintendent Myers-Small, thank you for being here. Great seeing you. I know we speak on a regular basis. I'm going to ask you three questions, so let's try to get through them quickly.

Charter schools. What's the real impact on the Rochester public school system because of the saturation of charter schools in Rochester?

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: Thank you, Assemblyman Bronson, and very good to see you.

As I mentioned in my testimony, 105 million of our budget goes towards charter schools, approximately, so that takes away from expenses and things that we could do with our schools.

Additionally, as I mentioned, 7,000 students right now participate in charter schools, and we have another three that are

starting in September, so that just continues to add to the declining enrollment that is in the Rochester City School District -- certainly not completely contributes, but it does contribute. Our district would be over 30,000 students without having charter schools. So it impacts enrollment and our budget.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. Great, thank you.

Second question, you mentioned targeted funds for mental health and school climate, and we just had a discussion regarding more psychologists in schools, social workers, other mental and behavioral health professionals in our school buildings.

Some folks have testified today, not only in this panel but in other areas, about the utilization of the additional Foundation Aid to help them hire mental health professionals in their schools. What's the barrier in having the City of Rochester School District do the same?

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: So I do

want to share that in Cursa we have about 2.1 million dedicated to social-emotional, which is certainly curriculum and additional special staffing, and then another 22 million, which represents 10 percent of ARP, to have additional counselors, Pathways to Peace, which is a youth intervention program, social workers, increasing RocRestorative.

The issue is that we're in a staffing shortage and a staffing crisis. And so we are grateful to New York State Education Department for approving our ARP, so we will go out and look. But we are competing with every other single district in Monroe County, certainly probably Syracuse and Buffalo as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. I have some mental health bills that will hopefully help that shortage.

Last question -- and we only have 10 seconds -- just really briefly, how can we scale up community schools in the city school district?

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: Oh. Certainly being -- a couple of things. We've got to look at the transportation, because that often becomes problematic, and rearranging that.

We also need to look at school zones and being able to configure not only elementary but secondary schools so we can loop that together and then align the appropriate resources in the City of Rochester and the county.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Dr. Myers-Small. Greatly appreciate it.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: And just quickly, thank you, to you and Senator Cooney and the delegation for our third phase of facilities modernization. We appreciate that.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: You're welcome.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: And your advocacy, significant advocacy.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Krueger, do you have any --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We do, we have a

couple more Senators.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, so to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Sean Ryan. Sean? I see you, but I don't hear you. Oh, there you are.

SENATOR RYAN: It took a while, but I did come off.

Thank you, each of the superintendents, for the tremendous challenges that you've faced during the pandemic and that you continue to face. And while we're fighting the pandemic, we also have an influx of refugee and immigrant children. You know, that's a challenge. Yet we know that's how we grow our communities.

And hopefully, with the infusion of Foundation Aid and federal money, that we're able to meet those challenges head-on. No one's saying it's easy, but I'm very happy with how the districts are handling this. But I did want to acknowledge your very, very hard positions that each of you have been in over the last two years.

And to go to my home district, Superintendent Cash, very good to see you. Happy to work with you on some of the charter school issues that you discussed. You know, we've got some problems there, but we are going to fix them. I think there's a mood now to fix them, especially the receiver bill. It seems like something that we just have to get done.

So I wanted to ask you, you know, three quick questions, or three questions -- and if we can keep it quick, because we're on a timeline. Are most kids who have special education services, are they back into the schools in Buffalo?

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: In person?

SENATOR RYAN: Yes.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: Yes. The majority are.

SENATOR RYAN: Is everything on track at School 84, which is a very special place? Are the kids all back there?

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: Yes.

SENATOR RYAN: Okay, that's very good to hear.

And then, you know, attendance has always been something of concern to me before the pandemic, and now since the pandemic it's even gotten tougher. And the numbers aren't really that encouraging. But can you tell me quickly the efforts you're making to try to get the attendance back up during this time period?

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: Yes.

I do want to say that in Black and brown communities, which we are a majority minority district, there is this incredible challenge of many of our families not trusting the safety of schools to fight the COVID virus effectively. So they're afraid to send their children in. They say that they don't intend to send their children in as long as there is this rapidly spreading virus, Omicron in particular.

So that's a challenge for us. It's not just neglect, this is a position. So what we're trying to do is to continue to do

outreach services, we hold vaccination clinics every week in our community schools, and we've been able to gradually get hundreds and hundreds more people from our communities vaccinated. Because there's a resistance to get vaccinated as well in communities of color.

So with all of our efforts to vaccinate, to test, to use the rapid tests that have been distributed to our districts from the Governor, we're trying to continue to keep the narrative that, look, school is the best place to be. Send your child to us, they need our services, and we need to have our eyes on them every day. So we just continue to try to message it and get it out through all media and communication vehicles that we have available to us.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

I'm going to have to cut you off there, Sean.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Back to the Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Right. We go to Assemblywoman Septimo.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEPTIMO: Hi, there. I will be brief. Thank you all so much for being here and for waiting and for being patient with us in this long process.

My question is also for Jennifer. Just about charter schools, you've mentioned wanting to see increased accountability. You'd also mentioned that charter schools get to -- don't exist in the same set of rules and without the same level of scrutiny.

So I'd love to hear some of your ideas, with as much specificity as you have available, in how we sort of create more of a balance to make sure that we're maintaining school choice but also sort of working to balance the scales some.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: I mean, two areas in particular I would point to would be the demographic issue, that the law is very weak in the area with regard to ensuring that their pupil demographics adequately mirror the traditional public schools in the

district of location.

The second piece that I think was mentioned by Senator Ryan a bit ago relates to the dissolution -- and I know Senator Liu referenced this as well. The process that's currently in existence does not adequately ensure that the resources go back to where they belong, which is to where the kids are going.

And when the law was changed several years ago we were confident that we had addressed that so that these funds wouldn't be distributed -- in some cases they were going to other charter schools and, you know, golden parachutes.

But it's incredibly problematic that they have again exploited loopholes with regard to what they do with their funds when they're moving toward dissolution. And frankly there is no teeth in the law so that the State Education Department has any ability to adequately manage those resources.

So those would be two pieces that we would hope could be addressed this session to

address some of the disparities that currently exist. Because -- and the third thing I would point to that's somewhat linked to the dissolution issue is the fact that they have no caps on reserves. And in some cases we have charter schools that have 50, 100, 150 percent of their annual operating budget sitting in reserves.

We understand in certain cases they're more vulnerable or they may be planning for major capital construction, but we think it's unreasonable that we continue to siphon public funds off and send them on when you're sitting on 100 percent, when you know full well if any of our districts came anywhere close to that, there would be severe consequences. So ...

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEPTIMO: Thank you so much.

And there's 25 seconds if anybody else wants to pipe in. But if not, thank you. All right. I'll pass it back to you, Helene. thank you.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: Let me

just say -- I want to be clear. We're not against charter schools. I'm for good schools. And we really support good charter schools. But they're not all good --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEPTIMO: No, a hundred percent.

BUFFALO SUPERINTENDENT CASH: And until they have something to do, we need to do something about that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEPTIMO: No, thank you. And that's why the question is really how do we strike the balance between the two, fairness and school choice.

So thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Turn it back to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Samra Brouk.

SENATOR BROUK: Thank you so much. My question is for of course my superintendent here, Dr. Lesli Myers-Small. It's so good to see you again. Thank you for always representing Rochester and our city school district so well.

I want to share -- no one will be surprised, as chair of Mental Health, that this is about mental health again. I want to share with you a letter that I received, it's sitting on my desk right now, from a high school student talking to me about how he's not sure how to help his friends who have now taken to drinking almost every day just to get through the day because it's been so hard for the last two years. And he somehow found my name to reach out to as a plea for help.

And I think this is not unlike what we hear -- we heard you talk about it, Superintendent, about the uptick in violence in our schools here in Rochester and across the state. I truly believe that those are a direct result of unmet mental health needs in our students, and that is where we should be putting not just school resources but citywide and statewide resources as well.

So you mentioned, because my colleague Assemblyman Bronson asked, you mentioned that you did get approval for federal funding to be used on mental health providers to

properly meet the needs of your students -- of our students. Can you tell me, how many openings do you still need to fill? You mentioned that you haven't been able to fill all these openings. How many have you filled, and how many have yet to be filled?

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: I just want to make sure, Senator Brouk, that you're just solely referring to mental health. Correct?

SENATOR BROUK: Yes. Yes.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: So we currently -- of our current staffing, we have two school counselor openings, two social worker openings, and six school psychologists. And, I'll just add, 77 classroom teachers. So even though they're not mental health providers, they do provide supports of consistency for our scholars. But within the ARP that was just approved, we need 16 additional school counselors, five additional social workers, and 11 full-time youth intervention aides through Pathways or something similar like that.

So we do have a lot of openings. I am reaching out to our local colleges and universities -- Roberts, St. John Fisher, U of R, et cetera -- but so are all the other Monroe County districts.

SENATOR BROUK: And how many do we currently employ for RCSD? How many social workers.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: For social workers? Let me just -- 31 seconds or less. I can send that to you. I do have that, but --

SENATOR BROUK: Okay. Wonderful, you can follow up on that.

And then the last question, in your 18 seconds, is we know that there's a shortage of staff for social workers all over the state and the country. What can the state do to help with this?

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: The shortage of social workers? A few things. I think certainly it comes back to us really encouraging that pipeline and getting students to consider that to be a viable

option and an important option.

Also just working very closely with our higher education partners to really find out who is involved and who is participating in those programs, so that we can make that information more quickly and more readily available for school districts.

And even in the case of school psychologists, they have an opportunity to do that school internship, that school psychologist internship to encourage them to consider an urban environment. But I find sometimes that some of our recent graduates shy away from urban education because of certainly some of the unique challenges. So really helping to normalize and encouraging or even giving incentives for recent graduates to consider working in an urban environment. Because our scholars, as the rest of the Big 5 would chime in, are incredible, amazing and resilient.

And I do have that sheet, Senator Brouk, so I can send that to you by school.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We now call

upon Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you, Chairs. Thank you to all the superintendents, Executive Director Pyle.

I have the honor to represent the Utica School District within my Assembly district, and most recently we've had many meetings with community partners which enthusiastically -- the Utica superintendent, as well as his leadership teams -- have attended the meetings. This morning Commissioner Rosa discussed opportunity programs, which I better define -- obviously, with my age -- as after-school programs.

So I would ask what you see as far as the funding, is there enough funding that we are placing within the budgets to ensure that those after-school programs can be clearly supported? I know that education has taken on so many roles, and I sincerely appreciate those. And after-school has become a must-have with the various situations that we are seeing within our communities, to ensure that our children not only can enhance their

education but be in a safe environment, which you always provide. So I would just ask if that's being considered.

And secondly, many of my colleagues -- I just want to reconfirm the mental health concerns that I applaud all the hard efforts that you have put forward, as well as the various programs in diversity that support our students. Thank you.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PYLE: Would one of our superintendents like to address the challenges and the successes of after-school? I know there are some unique situations this year.

ROCHESTER SUPT. MYERS-SMALL: I can start from Rochester.

Certainly transportation, as you know, has been problematic in the shortage of having drivers for our respective districts. And so we have been working hard just to ensure that school is covered. And so when you add just the extra layer of having transportation for either before- or after-school programming, it's just become

problematic.

But we know that extending the day and providing additional opportunities for our young people is certainly important, and we think all of the efforts that have been made to help to mitigate transportation -- but in Rochester, that really is the largest barrier for us as far as being able to transport scholars home before or after school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you.

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: And the other concern is also associated with staffing for the after-school programs. You know, our teachers, our administrators, they are also experiencing the same social-emotional challenges that our students are experiencing, so at the end of the day they are -- there are responsibilities that they need to address, and that includes their own self-care.

So to stay an extra hour to provide support might not be something that they want to do. So certainly we have to spend a great deal of time supporting our staff, supporting

our teachers, and creating conditions for them to want to be in school further to support our students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. That concludes the number of questions.

Just to people to note that Kenneth Hamilton, superintendent of Mount Vernon School District, had to leave, so he will not be testifying as part of this. He will not be testifying, but he did submit written testimony that has been shared with the members.

So we're going to move on to the next panel. First I just want to thank all of you for the work you do in your respective school districts. We know this past time with COVID has been difficult and continues, and by being virtual we've not taken too much of your day away from all the good work that you're doing in your home cities. Thank you.

MULTIPLE PANELISTS: Thank you.

YONKERS SUPERINTENDENT QUEZADA: Thank

you for giving us the opportunity.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next is Panel C, the 4201 Schools Association, Dr. Bernadette Kappen, cochair, and the Coalition of Special Act Schools, Stephen Beovich, vice president.

The 853 Schools Coalition is not testifying at this hearing, so they've been removed from the panel.

So we have the two panelists here. So if you can begin, Dr. Kappen.

DR. KAPPEN: Thank you so much. I really appreciate the opportunity to present on behalf of the 4201 Schools Association, and we'll start off by thanking the Legislature and the Executive for all of the support they give us all the time.

As you know, in the Governor's budget we were level-funded this year, and we were appreciative of that. In looking at what we need going forward, looking at the Foundation Aid that will be going to the

school districts and other monies for other special ed, we would be respectfully asking for a 5.8 percent increase.

I would say, just so you know, our schools were open during the pandemic. We met our COVID needs for the students, and the staff were there every day to help the students. So I think that in order to continue in that vein, we definitely need that kind of support to be able to grow our programs and meet the needs of the children and their families.

The Executive Budget also included another $30 million for the Capital Grant Program, and we're extremely appreciative of that. And I just have to let you know how important that is -- so many schools are struggling, one of our schools right now is really in a desperate situation for a boiler, so these monies are really needed for the future.

We also ask for approval for a fiscal reserve fund that we might be able to use for emergencies, planning, and also for adapting

to the needs of the students. Certainly the extra support and the fiscal reserve would help us with unmet needs.

We currently know that there are unmet needs for children that are deaf/blind that need intervenors in the schools as well as children that are blind and children that are deaf, they're medically fragile, that need additional services in order to participate in school. And this is truly an unmet need, that the 4201 schools -- we can meet those needs if there was adequate funding for the schools who would support that.

We also are asking for your support with the workforce investment. Our kids are appropriately meeting their needs because of the wonderful teachers that we have. We're in direct competition with the local school districts, and we often lose our teachers because our salaries are so much lower. So we would be asking for $30 million over a three-year period of time to have some equity in the salaries for our staff.

And finally, continuing support for

reliable transportation. And I know that many of you have supported us in the past two years in making sure that the DOE has provided transportation for the students -- the problem being that sometimes they want us to follow their schedule rather than ours. So we hope that that can happen.

And just a quick closing. I always like to leave with you a quote. This is from Matty Stepanik {ph}, a 13-year-old child who had muscular dystrophy, and he said "Unity is strength. When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved." And that is what I see with the 4201 Association with the Legislature and with the schools, that we work together to meet the needs of the students.

So thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Stephen?

MR. BEOVICH: Hi, and good evening.

First of all, I just want to thank the Senate and Assembly for including the ability for our schools to have the fiscal reserve

fund in last year's budget. Giving us the ability to now have a level of fiscal security going forward is going to make a huge difference. So thank you again.

I would also like to thank Governor Hochul for including the 11 percent growth rate in tuition for special education providers in this year's budget. However, I did want to make the Legislature aware that currently, due to rate-setting methodology, no special education provider will see their growth rate in tuition at the beginning of the next fiscal year, and very few will see the growth rate at all.

As a matter of fact, no special education provider has received the 4 percent promised in this year's budget because, as of today, the rate-setting methodology for the current fiscal year has not been released.

Annually the State Education Department proposes to the Division of Budget the inclusion of an interim-plus rate which would ensure that approved growth rates are being applied to tuition rates at the

beginning of fiscal year. Every year this is rejected and schools do not receive the funds they desperately need that have already been approved in the budget.

There are schools that have not received any growth -- speaking for Special Acts, any growth dating back to 2011, because of complications with the rate reconciliation process. But the Governor is ready to invest $240 million in special education programs next year.

I am asking that there is an assurance that all providers receive their funds by having the 11 percent tuition growth automatically added to the tuition rate on July 1st. Without this being put in place, many of the schools that serve the state's neediest and most vulnerable students will not see any additional funds next year.

If $240 million is approved, $240 million should be disbursed. Please help stop technicalities from keeping funds from these schools, which directly affects the services that we can provide our

students.

I also must ask that the 18.42 percent state share for CFC placements outside of the New York City not be eliminated as proposed by the Governor. The school districts rely on these funds to send their neediest students to our programs. The enrollment in our programs over the past two years, when the state share was temporarily eliminated, has dropped. Students are getting to our programs later, which delays getting them the intensive services they need.

Please do not include the Governor's proposal in your final budget. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, and thank you both for staying within your time limits.

We'll start with the chair of the Assembly's Education Committee, Assemblyman Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you very much, Chairwoman Weinstein.

Listen, we made an attempt this year

to get a bill passed. It was vetoed. But, if nothing else, we have raised a dialogue, a very important dialogue here that we seem to have a commitment from this Governor to work things out. And for first time since I have been around, I see hope coming down the tunnel.

If you want to talk, if so -- that's all I'm going to say on this. I will continue to work on solutions to having a funding stream that is equitable and -- it's bad to everybody.

And, like I say, I'm glad we've begun the dialogue. Good luck, everyone.

DR. KAPPEN: Thank you.

MR. BEOVICH: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Thanks.

And it's a pleasure to see you, Dr. Kappen, and to see you, Mr. Beovich. And I agree with my colleague here: We moved the ball down the field, or whatever the sports analogy is, last year, but we're not quite

there yet.

Two questions for each of you. First place, on the Special Act issue that you did not see the 4 percent, which was already approved theoretically by DOB, but you used the words "it was not released." Is that true for all the Special Acts, that none of you have seen the 4 percent -- notwithstanding the additional 7 percent, which is great, but you haven't seen anything? You have seen no rate increase?

MR. BEOVICH: No. And that's not only for Special Acts, it's probably for all special education providers, because the rate-setting methodology hasn't been released for this year yet. So no.

And the issue that brings us -- we might get that money in April or May, for the ones who do get a rate. And then if we don't spend all of that money by June, then the money goes away. And it really -- you know, being as -- trying to be fiscally responsible for our district, I'm not spending that money until we know that we're going to get that

money. So it really does cause an issue.

SENATOR MAYER: Yes. Okay.

The second thing is the reduction in referrals to your school and others, you're suggesting in your testimony, is somewhat related to the shifting of the state share back to the municipalities. And I think a lot of your students come from the City of New York.

Is it your experience that the City of New York referred fewer students to your school, notwithstanding what they might need individually, because of their having to pick up a greater percentage of the cost?

MR. BEOVICH: Well, I could say a lot of our students in my district are residential. We do have a small share of day students. And we're down probably about 15 percent in our day student population, so -- and that seems across the board, where I can't say that the hit is crippling, but it's definitely noticeable.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. But you're suggesting that that hit is in part due to

this change in reimbursement obligations?

MR. BEOVICH: That's -- yes.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay.

MR. BEOVICH: That's what we have been told by other districts, that it's at least a factor when they are making the decision.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. And then, Dr. Kappen, I very much appreciate your note about the incremental salary increase that's needed for your school -- that I know, having been to your school and seen it firsthand, you're great teachers.

What's the approximate difference in salary between someone that you hire for one of your classes and what they would get in the New York City public schools?

DR. KAPPEN: I think it varies on the salary scale between entry and exit. But we know what happens in the past. You could walk out of our school and someone could make $15,000 to $20,000 more than we pay them.

And they have to leave for certain life circumstances. I can think of a really wonderful teacher we had here that got

divorced, she was on her own, and she's someone who's continued to be connected to us. And even when we have activities here, she comes. But she had to make that decision for herself.

SENATOR MAYER: Yes, understood. And something we actually have to address.

But thank you very much, both of you. And thank you for your work with these kids that we all care deeply about.

DR. KAPPEN: Thanks so much.

MR. BEOVICH: Thank you, Senator Mayer.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

Dr. Kappen, great to see you, as always. And good to see you, Mr. Beovich. It's kind of cool for me -- me and Mr. Beovich go way back to our youth.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: So it's cool to see you on here. Thanks for being here.

MR. BEOVICH: You too.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: So earlier during the State Education Department's presentation, they made that exact point with regard to the reconciliation process and the fact that getting those funds later on are -- you know, it's going to be a challenge to spend them, and obviously that compounds a problem.

And they suggested that they have a proposal to potentially kind of put the reconciliation process aside for the next -- for at least this year, but potentially for five years while we finally actually fix the structural problem. I assume that would be something that your association would be supportive of?

MR. BEOVICH: Yeah, it's 100 percent. They have talked to us about how it would be a five-year time period instead of one year, and that would be definitely helpful for us.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. Thank you.

And Dr. Kappan, you stated it well, some of the continuing issues, and certainly, you know, I remain very supportive of getting you guys parity, just like the 853s and the

Special Acts, with the increases that are given to our public schools.

I had an opportunity earlier today to do a virtual meeting with the new president from Viscardi and a student named Hunter who is a senior who's planning to go into mechanical engineering. It's just always great to hear about the students' experiences at the 4201 schools.

But one of the main points they were making to me is exactly what you were -- what you concluded with, which is, you know, staff retention. And if there's not that increase in resources, you know, the inability to be on par with surrounding educational institutions.

But through this time, have -- I mean, has that been exacerbated by the pandemic, or have you guys been kind of -- I know you said students have been in. So has it been stable or has it gone up or down in terms of losing staff?

DR. KAPPEN: We've lost a few people, really related to the mandates for the

vaccine, two folks that chose not to be vaccinated. But we've been fairly stable.

I think the real plus at our schools, the people that work with us, they love the children. And they go above and beyond what's needed. And that's wonderful, but they should also be compensated for that. I think that that's what happens, that they stay on, and then like this woman I was mentioning, maybe something occurs in their life and they have to move.

But we have wonderful people that work with the children, and that's why they're successful.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: You absolutely do. Thank you.

DR. KAPPEN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Sue Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you, Dr. Kappen, and Mr. Beovich, for being here today. You know, your teachers do God's work. And I have to

tell you, I was on the phone with a parent today -- and, Mr. Beovich, you spoke about this, the CSE placement. And if they go away, like I don't know what some of these parents will do. So it's just devastating.

MR. BEOVICH: I'll say I probably understated it when -- you know, with Senator Mayer. But the more -- maybe my district was only 10 to 15 percent, but there are other districts that are hitting -- that it's hitting a lot more, and they know a lot more of -- their sense is a lot further down, and the CSEs are telling them that it is because of, you know, that they're -- of the cost share going away.

SENATOR SERINO: Well, we definitely need that program. So we will advocate for it, too.

But I just had a question for you. Because in addition to, you know, salaries, of course -- you know, it is always about money -- what else can we do like to help recruit and retain teachers? Are there other things that you can suggest to us that maybe

we are not doing?

DR. KAPPEN: I was thinking in the Governor's State of the State she talked about, you know, retention and recruitment and working with paraprofessionals. I do think that that's one way to really help there.

Again, we have people that have worked with us for a number of years that are paraprofessionals, and I think if we can try encourage folks to move ahead in those areas, it would be helpful.

And again, I think for the colleges and the universities to keep these programs, this is not necessarily a New York State problem. Because we are fortunate here, in the area of blindness, that there is Dominican College and Hunter College that provides teacher prep. But across the country, this has been a huge issue for organizations that are looking for staff, that the colleges and the universities don't provide the programs because they feel there aren't enough children to be served.

And this is something -- there are a group of us that are working on this right now. It is called the Cogswell Macy Act, and one of the areas there is looking at getting the proper child count by state and by nation, because we know that there are many ways the children are being counted, and we are not having the proper count.

So if you can't show a university or state that there are these many children who are deaf and blind, then you are not going to have universities serving them. So that's one issue.

I think the other is also reciprocity with the states. That if you live in Pennsylvania and you move to New York, and you are fully certified to be a teacher of the blind and visually impaired, you shouldn't have to take all of these classes over again and pay huge amounts of money for these tests, that people just don't want to do that. And I think that's a barrier as well.

SENATOR SERINO: That was some great

points.

I'm sorry, Mr. Beovich.

MR. BEOVICH: I just want to add to her point, just a specific story. We have a teacher -- a substitute teacher right now -- who is certified to teach special education in Connecticut, and she is doing great with our students. We can't right now -- she is not able to get her New York certification, and we are not going to be able to continue her next year because she is not properly certified.

And it is just -- it is just a shame, like you said, that there is not a better way for reciprocity.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Sorry to interrupt.

SENATOR SERINO: Okay. Thank you very much, both of you. Thank you.

DR. KAPPEN: Thank you.

MR. BEOVICH: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to Assemblywoman Niou.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you so much

for taking the time today.

And, you know, I used to actually volunteer in the Vancouver Deaf School when I was in high school. And -- yup, and I am fluent in sign language.

But I wanted to say thank you so much for all of your work, first and foremost. But I know that working in some of the classrooms that I did, that a lot of the important teaching goes on with smaller class sizes. I was just wondering what the effects of the current levels of funding have been, you know.

And, you know, I know there was testimony that it was insufficient, so I wanted to see what effect it had on class sizes and the quality of care for so many of the students.

DR. KAPPEN: For our students in the 4201 Association -- and I can speak directly for the Institute -- we have a class size that's determined by the State of New York. It could be that you would have six children, one teacher, one aide. Some classes may be

12 children, a teacher, and four aides -- I know in some of the special-needs classes and other schools.

So we have been able to maintain that, and the funding has not had us change that because it is a requirement that we would do that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: So what has the funding then changed for the students? Because there was testimony that there was insufficient funding. So what were the biggest changes, then?

DR. KAPPEN: I think some -- the funding definitely through COVID would be extra expenses that we had in order to open our schools.

I could say for our situation, you know, they talk about everyone should be six feet in the hall. Well, that's fine if you can see, but if you have no vision -- so we had to figure out, what are you going to do. So we had to run a very thin wire down the center of the hall, cover it with floor tape, so that when the child's cane hit it,

they knew they had to move to the wall.

Working on, you know, just the whole cleaning -- I mean, we had to have additional people for cleaning. Our kids touch everything, that's part of their life.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Right.

DR. KAPPEN: So at 12:00 every day we had to have someone wipe down the walls and wipe down -- so that helps.

And I think sometimes we can't maybe attract the best person you would want because of some of those salary types of issues, and definitely the funding I mentioned before. There are things that the children need, as I mentioned earlier.

We know there are a number of children that are deaf and blind that are in one of our schools, and it goes up to the eighth grade. They need, then, services for high-school types of activity. They would like to blend together these two schools working on that. But in order to have a quality education for those children, they need to have an intervenor. And this is

something other than an interpreter.

The intervenor is someone who is bringing that child into the environment so that they are knowing what's happening. If I were deaf-blind, for example, and I had an intervenor, the intervenor would be explaining to me everything that we were seeing on the screen here so that I know what's happening -- letting me know if someone is laughing or if, you know, something's happening in the room.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Right.

DR. KAPPEN: And there are many children that have blindness or deafness that have other disabilities that require medical intervention. So some of those children maybe need a nurse to be able to monitor that. And for the 4201 group, there has not been funding in their certificate of approval to allow them to do that.

So those are some of the things generically for our association that could really help the schools -- could help the schools help the state service these

children. Because we do have the skills and the knowledge to be able to provide these things.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go back to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Sean Ryan.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you. Thanks for your testimony today and, Dr. Kappen, thanks for your hard work.

I represent the area where St. Mary's School for the Deaf is, and I do a lot of work with Mike Kelly and his crew. And I visited several times during COVID. I was very impressed with all of the steps being taken, you know, in a very challenging environment to keep the kids coming into school, to keep everybody active and engaged, but also to keep a super-high level of academic learning going on at St. Mary's.

So I just want to give a shout out to the good work that you do. And if you ever

need anything that you need to reach out to me on, you know, please do.

DR. KAPPEN: Thank you so much.

SENATOR RYAN: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And we have Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you. And thank you all for your testimony and for staying with us this long. And I appreciated your testimony and the issues you raised with regard to the needs for this population.

One of the real challenges in the field is that there are -- it's not a high-incidence population, and that is a challenge for higher education and training. And it actually puts a little bit more pressure on the need for, you know, paraprofessionals to provide some of those services.

You know, I have sort of adopted the St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf, as you may have heard, who really has tremendous physical plant needs, including their auditorium, which I was focusing on until the

boiler went. And so I appreciate very much your advocacy for getting some funding for them, and I would be happy to continue to work with you on that in any way that I can.

MR. BEOVICH: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all for both for being here and with us. We appreciate it, and we appreciate all of the good work that you do, your organizations do.

DR. KAPPEN: Thanks for having us.

MR. BEOVICH: Thank you, and thank you for all of your support.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: The next panel, New York State Council of School Superintendents, Robert Lowry, deputy director; Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, Mark Cannizzaro, president; School Administrators Association of New York State, Cynthia Gallagher, director of government relations; New York State School Boards Association, Brian Fessler, director of government relations; ASBO New York, Brian Cechnicki, executive director; New York State Parent Teacher Association, Kyle

Belokopitsky, executive director. Hopefully I got most of those names pronounced correctly.

If we could start with School Superintendents, Robert Lowry.

MR. LOWRY: Thank you very much, Senator Krueger, Assemblywoman Weinstein. And thank you for all of your efforts to assure that the promise of the Foundation Aid formula will finally be fulfilled.

It is also a fact that the proposed increases in Foundation Aid and total school aid under the Governor's budget are stronger than any we have seen in many, many years. And so is the guarantee of a 3 percent increase in Foundation Aid for every district; 94 percent of the districts helped by this provision are average- or high-need districts.

And we also appreciate that the Governor's budget avoids cuts in expense-based and other aids, the kind of cuts that have been proposed in the past and have been routinely rejected by you.

One disappointment is that the proposal would not provide an increase in funding for Career and Technical Education. We hope that's something you will address.

There are some other facts we want you to be mindful of. We are in a period of high inflation. The Division of Budget projects the CPI will rise by 4.1 percent next year. The property tax cap for the coming year will be 2 percent before exemptions and exclusions are applied. This puts pressure on all districts to rely more heavily on state aid, and the pressure is especially great for the poorest districts.

For the high-need districts a 2 percent increase in the property tax levy would support only a 0.7 percent increase in total spending, and nearly half these districts rely on -- would receive only the 3 percent minimum Foundation Aid increase.

You have heard a lot today about concerns about student mental health, and that's another set of facts to bear in mind. Every year between 2011 and 2019 we did

surveys of superintendents on finance and policy issues, and the last three years the most widely noted findings were on the mounting alarm among superintendents about student mental health.

We did another survey in November, and my submitted testimony includes some details. As you would guess, the concerns about student mental health and well-being in general have grown. But there is some positive news. In the nine prior surveys, only twice had a majority of superintendents said any area of student services would be improved by their district's budget. One of those was school security in the year after the Parkland tragedy in Florida. This year in the survey we found 80 percent of superintendents said that student mental health services will be improved, and 78 percent said that extra academic help for students who need it will be improved. And yet those are still the two areas that are identified as the most widely cited priorities for new funding despite that.

Also, in open-ended comments in our survey, superintendents over and over again expressed concerns -- they expressed gratitude and appreciation for what the federal aid and Foundation Aid has made possible, but they also expressed worry about what happens when that federal money is gone.

I have been involved with state budgets for 40 years now. The overall outlook for the state is unlike anything I have seen, extraordinarily promising. So it's a good time to think about the future. And as part of that, we do think it is wise for the state to attempt to build its reserves. We also ask that districts be provided more options to set aside funds in preparation for a time when the federal resources are gone but student needs remain and the state aid may not be so strong.

Also, we are now on verge of achieving full funding of Foundation Aid, so we think it is good time to begin a process to identify shortcomings in the formula and try to develop consensus on changes. Among the

issues we are prioritizing are reviewing how student needs are accounted for and how the Regional Cost Index is constructed.

Finally, our commissioner, Betty Rosa, has proven to be a truly ardent champion of improving her department's capacity for customer service. We are encouraged that Executive Budget at last proposes increased funding for SED's operating budget. But we oppose the recommendation to move administration of the child nutrition programs to the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: You can just go in the order of -- Mark Cannizzaro, next?

MR. CANNIZZARO: Good evening, everyone. And it's nice to see everyone, and thank you for having me.

And I echo everyone else's statements with a thank you for ensuring that the Foundation Aid is getting to the schools. I have been going to Albany or testifying online here for seven or eight years in a

row, and every year I am asking for more Foundation Aid, and this year it is nice to not have to ask for an increase in Foundation Aid.

And just as a point of clarification for New York City schools -- and it was testified to by Lindsey Oates earlier -- all of the additional Foundation Aid that came to New York City was placed into the Fair Student Funding formula just to bring it to 100 percent for every school. So a lot of the additional things that folks are talking about, Foundation Aid is not going to cover unless New York City does a better job at managing some of their other finances.

Also I spent a long time -- you know, you have my testimony, so I'm not going to read it to you, but I spent a long time listening today and I heard talks of, you know, the importance of some very important things: Early childhood, community schools, social workers in schools, special education issues, keeping buildings open, and staff attendance. And I urge you to check

supervisor attendance, principal and assistant principal attendance, because that didn't drop a tick. You know, COVID issues with social and emotional learning and student behaviors, more CTE programs, dyslexia, teacher retention -- and there was talk of school climate having a lot to do with teacher retention -- remote learning, different ideas about what needs to be in a curriculum, parent engagement, and equity.

All of those things, and I think sometimes -- this is not lost on you, but sometimes not in the forefront of your mind. None of those things happen in a school or for children without the school leaders and the administrators. And why do I say all of that? Because there has been very little support for them in terms of professional development and having, you know, enough staff to handle what needs to be handled in the schools, especially at this time.

At CSSA we have a program for -- a professional development program. We call it the Educational Leaders Institute --

Executive Leader Institute, I'm sorry, and we focus on retention and recruitment of school leaders. And good school leaders are going to focus on retention and recruitment of teachers. Okay, we have a program designed especially for assistant principals who are interested in becoming principals. We have mentorships for our brand new assistant principals and principals, which is sorely needed. Okay?

And we are requesting some funding, as we always do, and we hope that the Legislature will support us in that funding this year.

And we also have some issues with the assistant principal in every school, and we are hoping we get some support there also. You know, the assistant principals are the ones that ensure safety. They ensure good school climate. They ensure a succession plan for when the principal does leave or retire or go elsewhere. And when we talk about shortages with cafeteria staff, guidance staff, social workers, teachers, the

people that -- it is the assistant principals that step right up and fill in in those spots and take on those critical roles.

So I urge you to consider, especially during this time of COVID, the fact that a recent NASSP report says that 44 percent of school leaders feel that they are going to accelerate their exit plan, whether it is through retirement or another way, from this system. We need not only quality support for these people, but we need more of them. And we need people to understand that they are completely overworked and they need the help.

So like I said, my remarks are in writing, but I just wanted to share that today. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Next, the School Administrators Association, Cynthia Gallagher.

MS. GALLAGHER: Yes. Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to present testimony. Regardless of the format or the platform, we are always privileged to feel that we have input into this process.

My name is Cindy Gallagher, and I am the director of government relations for SAANYS, which is the School Administrators Association of New York State -- about 8,000 members and about 428 school districts.

Part of my written testimony you will see and be very familiar with in terms of hearing points about this evening as well as earlier in testimony. I'd like to focus right on the building administrators and program directors. Their jobs have increased tenfold this year, and it is complex and it is challenging. We hear from all of them that they are contract tracers, COVID reporters, and COVID police.

From our Rochester colleagues we know that they have become supply distributors for masks and test kits. For our Long Island principals, we know that they are translators of health policies that come out very late on Friday evening. For our Central New York supervisors, they have become the supervisors for the pool of new substitute teachers who do not know the protocols very well. And in

our smaller districts, such as Herkimer, our principals have become classroom teachers -- not just for a period, not for a day, but sometimes a couple of days or a week.

So they are exhausted. So from their perspective, this increase in state aid and Foundation Aid, at 7 percent and 8 percent respectively, is like an anchor in quicksand, if that could be such a thing. They are extremely supportive and grateful that you have lifted a piece of their burden from them.

Very supportive of the use of the Foundation Aid formula, the statutory formula. It begins to provide a stability again in a very unpredictable context. So in that regard, they have now a tool that they could at least use for planning and budgeting the fiscal end of things.

Some of the issues that are very important to our members, of course, are mental health. Mark indicated a survey -- the same one, the same piece of that survey indicates that 58 percent of our principals

feel that the mental health supports to students is the highest priority, except that only 20 percent think that the services provided are sufficient. So the 100 million for the Recovery from COVID Fund, the 2 million for the positive climates are all excellent directions to move in, but it does not strengthen -- state initiatives show.

So we would urge us to think as a state on how we can help direct funding streams to really encourage agency collaboration as opposed to agency collision that might have happened this year off and on.

Other areas that are important to us are professional development, as well as the waiving of the salary cap for retired workers who wish to come into the workforce. We also would support the idea that school districts be provided the same kind of ability for a 15 percent reserve fund as did Dr. Mujica in his comments regarding state agencies.

So we thank you very much for this opportunity to talk with you tonight. We

know that you've heard a tremendous amount of information today. And of course we will always be participants in any which way we can to support you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Right on time.

New York State School Boards Association.

MR. FESSLER: Sure. Good evening. My name is Brian Fessler, and I appreciate the opportunity to offer our response and reactions to the Executive Budget proposal with you all, on behalf of the 671 member school boards that we serve here at the New York State School Boards Association.

I think it is important to start with a thank you. As you heard from many who have testified so far today, there is much to be encouraged by in this budget, and certainly a significant part of that is due to you and your colleagues enacting the Foundation Aid phase-in plan in last year's budget. We are very pleased to see Year 2 of that plan included in this year's proposal.

And we are also strongly supportive of the proposal to ensure that all districts would receive a minimum increase in Foundation Aid, recognizing that all districts face cost increases each year, especially in the current inflationary environment.

NYSSBA's also pleased to see the Governor's proposal to further expand access to broadband through the ConnectALL plan. Addressing the digital divide is an issue of equity that our members have recognized for years, which has only become more profound in this time of remote and hybrid learning.

We further encourage state leaders to add to ConnectALL initiative by moving minimum internet speed requirements to 100 upload/100 download, which is more in line with the needs of a 21st-century world.

In addition to being supportive of other proposals, including the recovery fund to support school district efforts to address student well-being and learning gaps, and funding to allow districts to make and

implement decisions in the best interests of the global environment, NYSSBA is also particularly pleased to finally see a plan to authorize forgiveness for districts who are facing aid loss for building and transportation expenses that were properly expended but were subject to penalty for late filing of forms due to inadvertent administrative or ministerial oversights.

Now, as you consider the Executive Budget, there are three items that I wanted to mention specifically in hopes of seeing their inclusion in the final budget. First, we ask for the current BOCES instructor aidable salary cap, now 30 years old, to be raised, in conjunction with an increase in special services aid for noncomponent districts. This is critical, as the interest in and importance of Career and Technical Education grows.

Second, at a minimum, we ask for the $20 million allocation for prior-year aid claims to be restored in this budget. This is even more important given the Governor's

aid forgiveness proposal that I mentioned previously.

And last, we think it is important that the discussion about the future of the Foundation Aid formula updates and adjustments begin in earnest. Starting that process now, rather than when the formula is fully funded in '23-'24, would allow for a better understanding as well as appropriate and responsible transitions.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer NYSSBA's reaction to the budget proposal, and we look forward to our continued work together. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

ASBO New York?

MR. CECHNICKI: Thank you. Good evening. Thank you to the chairs and members of the committees for providing the opportunity today to speak with you, especially with these honored panelists joining me.

My name is Brian Cechnicki, and I am the executive director of ASBO New York, the

Association of School Business Officials.

You have our written testimony, and I would like to highlight a few items of what is in and not in the Executive Budget proposal.

Overall, Governor Hochul's '22-'23 Executive Budget provides the greatest level of optimism in the education finance space in a long time. The longstanding promise of achieving the full phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula, thanks to the efforts made by this Legislature last year, is finally within reach. We fully support the Governor's commitment to funding the second year of this three-year plan.

In our testimony we do highlight that despite this investment there are a number of school districts who are considered already fully phased-in due to a number of different factors, but they will receive a 3 percent increase. This is an important feature, especially in light of current inflationary trends driving up costs across the spectrum.

We are heartened by the fact that the

Governor has proposed fully funding the expense-based aid categories in hope that the Legislature will accept that recommendation. The Governor has also proposed forgiving aid penalties associated with inadvertent filing errors for both transportation and building aid. We have long supported these provisions and welcome their inclusion in her proposal.

There are other provisions that we have some questions and concerns about, though, before we are able to provide our support. First, with respect to the RECOVS mental health fund, we think that it is important to ensure that the grant application process is not so burdensome as to prevent districts from seeking these funds.

Second, while laudable in its goal, the conversion to all-electric school buses will require a careful review of the transition costs. Using the existing transportation need construct and funding these costs is an important first step, but the possibility of increased aggregate local

costs must first be clarified.

Moving beyond the proposal, there are a few items that were not included in the budget that are described in detail in our written testimony, and I'd like to highlight a few of those items.

First, the budget does not include an appropriation for the payment of prior-year adjustments, which would hold in limbo nearly $300 million in aid that is currently owed to school districts. In addition, the forgiveness provisions that we support are paid out of this fund, and that funding would also be withheld. We ask that this funding be restored as a permanent line item, not one subject to the annual renewal process through the budget.

Second, we believe that the current inflationary period has highlighted the need for the tax cap to grow with inflation when it rises above the current 2 percent limit.

Third, the Governor spoke to the need for the state to maintain a 15 percent fund balance. School districts are currently

limited to a 4 percent fund balance, and we support increasing that to 10 percent over a three-year period.

And finally, with the full implementation of the federal ESSA financial transparency requirement, the duplicative and burdensome state requirement should also be repealed.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

And now, New York State Parent Teacher Association, Kyle Belokopitsky.

Good evening.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: Good evening. I'm Kyle Belokopitsky, executive director for the New York State PTA. And on behalf of our president, Dana Platin, we are proud to represent our 250,000 members and the families of our 2.6 million schoolchildren.

In the past immediate years we have watched in awe as dedicated, outstanding educators, teachers, and school-related professionals and school leaders do all they

can do to serve our children. We sincerely thank them.

Families have been now combating this pandemic for two years, far longer than we can ever have imagined, dealing with underemployment and unemployment, food insecurity, homelessness, trauma, sickness, and mental health concerns. They are juggling work, family, childcare, and quarantine while at the same time trying to figure out how to access Wifi for learning, how to keep their children fed, and how to keep lights on and the heat on.

Public education is our nation's greatest hope. It is a promise that all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender and gender identity, learning abilities, or spoken words, have the right to a free, appropriate, high quality and diverse education -- one that will meet our children's needs and support them in our global economy.

We thank you, the Legislature and Governor Hochul, for your commitment to all

children, their families, and our schools. Overall, we are highly supportive of the Executive Budget: The full commitment to Foundation Aid and expense-based aids, after-school programs, early high school, PTECH and community schools. We also appreciate the increase for our Special Act schools and many programs to support our great teachers, SUNY, CUNY, and the expansion of TAP.

There is a legislative opportunity, however, to support expansion of CTE and STEM and support BOCES programs through an increase of the aidable salary cap and special services aid.

On pre-K and childcare there is a great opportunity, and we look to the Legislature for meaningful increases for high-quality, school-based pre-K programs and childcare for families.

On the school lunch program, we strongly oppose the transfer from SED to Ag and Markets.

While we support the Recover fund,

there is a meaningful opportunity for the Legislature to increase support for school-based mental health initiatives for our children.

We also appreciate the investment in broadband and support the expansion of high-quality, low- or no-cost broadband for families, and strongly support Senator Mayer's E-Learn proposal.

We fully support the expansion of school-and-community-based arts and music instruction -- as I sit here reflecting on my son's unicorn painting over my shoulder and him playing the saxophone in the other room.

See, every parent and family has a dream for their child. It is our job to be dream makers, ensuring every child -- no matter their zip code, no matter their ethnicity, their gender identity, their income, their immigration status -- has the highest-quality 21st-century education to lead them to success in college, career or life.

We humbly ask that you continue to

infuse our schools with the tools and resources necessary to accelerate the success of our children. Together we can shine a light on every child and make every child's potential a reality. There is no more other important work.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So now we are going to go to some questions. And we will start with our Education chair in the Assembly, Assemblyman Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Good evening, everyone. And yes, it is evening now.

I thank you for being with us here today and for your comments that you made. They were informative and good and kindly and important and well-taken.

And in particular, I want to say hello to my friend Mark Cannizzaro for being here. And to you and to all the people who are directly involved in education under these times, you have acted under difficult times and shown just wonderful leadership,

leadership by example.

But the supervisors, the principals in those schools have always done that. And just being a teacher for so many years in my life, I certainly knew and witnessed firsthand that if you had a good school, you generally had good administrators and good supervision outside. And that is still the case, and we thank you for that. And may you continue that, and we will at the same time continue to support you all.

Thank you for listening.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. And for the Senate opening, Shelley Mayer, our chair of Education.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you, and it is really a pleasure to see all of you and to acknowledge your leadership and your partnership.

I mean, we didn't get to this much better place than we have ever been in before without your collective work, and I want to

thank you all for being really wonderful partners. And also during COVID, putting kids first. So thank you.

Two things. One, it was nice to hear so many of you speak about the importance of full-day pre-K as sort of institutional thing we should do statewide. We know the City of New York was far ahead of the state, frankly, in making it a universal given. I hope that we can count on you all to work with us to ensure that the funding is there.

And it would be useful for you, particularly Mark and Cynthia, to talk about how your members feel about the impact, the educational and social impact, of having a full-day program for 4-year-olds. So I think that would be helpful going forward, because that's part of the case. It is not just the -- it is a value education, and -- well, maybe Mark could speak to that for a second, if you would.

MR. CANNIZZARO: Sure, I would love to.

When you speak to the principal of an

elementary school and children or a kindergarten teacher, they can tell without asking, within, you know, half a day, which students have been in 3-K and pre-K and which students have not. And they are far advanced and much more ready to tackle, you know, school and everyday schooling when they have had that opportunity. So we strongly support it.

The one issue that we're going to ask for support back on is about two-thirds of 3-K and pre-K students are in CBO preschools, and those folks make 50 percent -- the leaders and directors there make 50 percent of what a school assistant principal earns, which is about a $60,000 difference. And it is almost impossible to retain these folks in those CBO centers when they have the opportunity to move on.

So we really need some help there. We have actually -- we're actually in the position where we have sued to try to correct this.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MAYER: Thank you.

Just two other things. One, Brian talking about the ConnectALL program and increasing high-speed broadband to a really more reasonable rate, thank you for that. I hope we can count on your support. I think last year's broadband speed was inadequate, and it is interesting that you see that from your perspective.

One thing, Bob Lowry, you didn't mention -- I know it is a budget hearing, but superintendents have had to deal with inconsistent health guidance, particularly under the prior governor, and it has been real challenge.

Can you just speak to the need for more clarity and more communication to superintendents, if that's an issue?

You are muted. I am sorry, you're muted.

MR. LOWRY: It absolutely is a concern. It has been a frustration. I would say that we feel that the tenor of the relationship with the administration, the Health Department, has improved. But we

still continue to have concerns about some of the rules and also just the varied approaches across counties.

We have asked for statewide rules on some issues because school districts cross county lines. Over a third of school districts cross county lines. You take out Long Island -- upstate, it is over 40 percent. And school employees don't have to live where they work. So the issue of, you know, different rules across counties has been a point of frustration.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MAYER: I am going to stop you. I am going to run out of time, and I apologize. Thank you for that.

And I also wanted to thank Kyle for support of e-learning and the collective support for a better broadband policy. I didn't mean to cut you off. I am worried they are going to shut me down.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Shelley.

Next?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to

Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair, and thank you all. This is a very experienced and knowledgeable panel. So it's always great to hear from all of you, and thank you for the work you all do.

I just had a question. Kyle mentioned it a little bit, but, you know, if anybody else wants to give a little more detail as to what this transition to the zero-emission school buses -- really, the burden that it has the potential to bring. Because, you know, certainly making it aidable is helpful, but absent, you know, full funding for it, between the infrastructure and the costs of the buses themselves, it is going to be quite an undertaking to make this conversion -- and to start to do it this soon.

MR. CECHNICKI: I am happy to give some thoughts from the business side. You know, we have been talking with some of the transportation folks to better understand this as well, and I think you are right, the Transportation Aid that would fund some of

these costs is helpful.

The scale that we are talking about, though, both in terms of the production capacity of the industry to provide the buses but also the ability of districts and the third-party providers to scale up their own garages, personnel, equipment, and all of those things -- you know, even with the aid, even on Transportation Aid being a year lagging, there definitely is some concern about the scale there.

So I think those are some details that we want to dive into. But I think it is worth looking into a little more, just the exact timeframe to make all of that happen, because again, I think on the bus side, I think there's about 55,000 buses statewide. That's a lot of buses to convert over in a short period of time. And I think we need to take a close look at that.

MR. LOWRY: And if I could, I would add it is not only the buses, it is also things like replacing gasoline storage tanks with charging stations.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: Assemblyman, from a parents' perspective, we are worried about that proposal as well. While we of course support green initiatives, parents are worried there's not going to be buses to actually transport their children because of timeline and cost issues and supply/demand issues.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes. And I mean, Bob, to your point, I would think, you know, you are going to have districts that are going to have some interim period where they are starting to roll out some electric but still have traditional buses. That's how you make those two things work, needing the space for the charging and all that. It's going to be a challenge.

All right. Thank you, guys.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Serino.

Is that all right, Assemblywoman?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. We go to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to say thank you to all of you for all of the care you give to our children and acknowledging the issues with mental health.

Mr. Lowry, I was wondering, what do you think would be an appropriate increase for the Career and Technical Education? Because I think that is so important, and we should even actually be getting younger children involved.

MR. LOWRY: Yes. There are two funding streams for current technical education. One is through BOCES Aid -- there is an aidable salary limit. That has not been changed since, I think, 1990. It's, in any event, over 30 years. The Education Department, the Regents in their state Aid proposal called for a phased increase in that, and we would support that approach.

For the Big 5 cities and a handful of our districts that are not in BOCES, they are supported through Special Services Aid, and

we would support a corresponding increase in that funding.

SENATOR SERINO: Well, thank you very much, everyone.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So we go to -- the next Assemblymember is Assemblyman Jensen.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To sort of ask the group a question, we in our communities, especially my district and the Greater Monroe County community, we've seen a large uptick over the past year and half of school board meetings becoming highly confrontational for a multitude of reasons, whether it's curriculum-based or dealing with mandates that are being put on districts by the executive branch.

I just want pick your brains and see what your thoughts are. How do we lower the temperature -- and -- encourage --

(Zoom interruption.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Jo Anne Simon, please mute.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Sorry.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: -- encourage positive relationships between our educational leadership with our parents, with our students, and get your thoughts on what you are hearing from your members.

MR. FESSLER: I could jump in on that from the School Boards Association perspective.

One of the things that we do in support of our members internally is provide training, like a lot of our organizations do. And we have had a couple of trainings statewide, and then with various groups, to provide information and suggestions and guidance as to what are the roles and responsibilities of school boards.

In this context, what are suggestions in order to bring down the temperature regardless of where you are on whatever the issue may be, to bring down the temperature to ensure that, you know, we have productive, civil dialogues and conversations.

So, you know, certainly no silver

bullet, I think. You know, a lot of these issues, as you note, are contentious. And, you know, it is a challenging time for a variety of reasons. And so our association, on behalf of our membership, tries to make sure to provide those opportunities and trainings and suggestions to ensure that the relationship between the school district, community residents, taxpayers, parents, students, family members, teachers -- that that dialogue and conversation is as productive as it can be, given the contentiousness of a lot of the issues that we are discussing.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Brian, do you think a lot of those issues -- if there was more local control that local school leaders had in determining some these things, might that lower the temperature as well? Because there is an ownership in that community rather than a sense that they are being dictated to from Albany.

MR. FESSLER: I think it's really -- it tends to be issue-specific. You know,

certainly we are supportive of local control, you know, as a kind of foundational principle. But you did hear, I think, you know, some of those conflicts and challenges arise from various levels of inconsistency, whether appropriate or not, you know -- varying guidance, directions, rules on a county-by-county basis.

So certainly I think some of, you know, the frustrations arise from that level of inconsistency regardless of the local control aspect.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you.

MR. LOWRY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We will go to Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

I want to thank all of you for your hard work. But my question is specifically for Kyle from the Parent Teacher Association.

So there's quite a bit of discussion in New York City about mayoral control, and I don't know anyone who wants to do away with it. And yet we hear from parents very often

that they feel like they have been locked out of participating in our school system.

And I'm just curious whether the State PTA has any thoughts about how one can continue mayoral control while at the same time making sure parents really do feel like they have a role in our school system and in their children's education, since certainly my experience is schools where parents get involved are absolutely the best schools. You know, you have a win-win from parental involvement. And I'm just curious what your association's opinion is.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: And, Senator, we would totally agree with you.

You know, Michael Mulgrew earlier had some New York City-specific ideas about how to increase parent involvement there.

Family engagement is the most important thing, in our opinion, that a school could be doing. Really meaningful, two-way, back-and-forth, thoughtful and listening communications between parents and caregivers, between principals,

school-related professionals, classrooms, and then school leaders.

You know, we are renewed about continued conversations in New York City. We have a fantastic PTA in Queens, Queens Community PTA, so we're really excited about that. New York City also manages many of their own parent programs. So we continue to always encourage New York City parents that do call our office to continue to have those conversations, to have them in your school district or in your school building with your local parent-teacher organization that they have in New York City.

But I think you're right. I think it's that meaningful two-way communication. Parents and families want to feel like they are both being listened to and heard, and then have some type of change come out of those conversations.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. Thank you all.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we have a

number of Assemblymembers.

Assemblyman Otis first.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Hi, there.

I think I would like to ask a question of Brian from the School Business Officials regarding something you mentioned in passing in your testimony, but I'm really curious as to school districts during COVID and the unexpected expenses for testing, for other kinds of materials, and what they have done in varying ways to try and fit that into their financial plans and into their budgets, often not compensated for by state aid.

And any recommendations you can make on how we can try and make sure some of that stuff is reimbursed, if possible, or how you see that. And I'll just say my experience is different districts dealt with these challenge in different ways. Wealthier districts probably had a better foothold on options than higher-needs districts, and that in itself was not fair.

So whatever you can provide. School business officials are often the best ones to

ask a question like this, because they have to solve those problems.

MR. CECHNICKI: Sure. I think, you know, certainly the beginning of the pandemic, that was certainly a challenge because there was sort of the double whammy of being hit with those expenses, but also in an environment where aid was being cut at the time.

I think in the more recent years, between, you know, the first phase-in-step last year with Foundation Aid, the $3 billion increase in the budget, the additional federal money -- I think a lot of those expenses -- you know, the money is now available, but really it's a matter of how to access that money.

And so there's lots of different funding streams now, and all of them have different requirements. And so specifically with those mental health grants, we're sort of a little concerned just about what that grant process will be. Because the more and more, you know, districts have to complete

long applications to, you know, receive these funds -- and certainly that's the case with the federal money -- it just becomes an impediment to districts wanting to seek those funds.

The other piece here that we have been advocating for on the property tax cap side -- so for districts that are less reliant on state aid and more reliant on their local property taxes, in this current inflationary environment that's putting a lot of pressure -- those added costs are putting pressure on them as well.

And so having some room within the property tax cap to allow for true inflationary growth will provide some of that, you know, swing room to allow for those. So it's really -- there's a lot of money there, but a lot of it is sort of the process of getting that funding and, you know, trying to reduce the administrative side of that as much as possible.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Well, thank you.

And I concur with your recommendation

on the reserve fund percentage, that that is -- 4 percent is way too low to be responsible.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

I don't see any Senators, so I will go on with the next Assemblymember, Assemblywoman Niou --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry, no more Senators. Excuse me, no more Senators.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Right.

Assemblywoman Niou.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Hello. Thank you so much for waiting so long tonight. I wanted to ask a couple of questions, probably for Kyle and then for Mark. But I think anybody could probably answer. Or people can answer if they want to.

But I've heard from many parents in New York City, in my district especially, they feel unheard with regards to, you know, COVID protocols, remote options. You know, we also heard from a couple of teachers and the teachers' union, and Michael and Andy,

and we just heard that some different things have been good and bad. Because some people started to learn differently, we started to see people, you know, actually blossom under certain kinds of remote learning because that was a different learning style. And some people were having a harder time because there were changes in their learning style.

And so we wanted to kind of see what sort of frustrations and what sort of stories you were hearing from parents. And do you feel like you've been heard by city and state officials?

I also wanted to ask specifically, you know, if union members felt like they've, you know, clear guidance. I guess administrators also, if they had any clear guidance from relevant local and state authorities when it came to COVID protocols. And do you feel like they've been left on their own? Do you feel like you've been left on your own when it comes to decisions regarding the safety of students and themselves and their staff during this pandemic?

MR. CANNIZZARO: Yes. So all of those things are important points that you hit, you know, I heard Brian talking about the changing guidance, and one of the things that principals and school leaders do is build a trusting relationship with their communities. And that is really the basis of everything that they have.

And with all of the changing guidance and quite often things being announced that principals don't even have the details for and then, you know, parents calling and saying, Hey, what's this about or what's that about -- the most recent was this rumor of another remote learning opportunity, right? You know, all of sudden parents are calling the schools to say, Oh, there is going to be remote learning? What do I need to do? And the principals are saying, Well, I don't know, I only heard what you heard through this announcement.

So not only does that build frustration, but it breaks down trust. And that's been really going on for couple of

years now. So that's going to be the biggest thing, is trying to restore that trust with the families.

And, you know, look, we've always been the ones that have been able to do that. But it's been really challenging through this pandemic with the guidance that's coming at us, and really just changing every single day. You know, we just changed the isolation protocols. We didn't know it until it was announced that the isolation protocols were changing. So those type of things are very frustrating, not only for us but then for the families.

MS. GALLAGHER: If I might, to piggyback off that just for a moment, is that upstate, you know, as Bob indicated, many of our schools are in multiple counties. So when you find one county is providing -- the county department of health is providing one set of guidance as opposed to another, it gets very, very challenging.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Yes, we've heard that, mm-hmm.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: Assemblywoman, I'll be very brief. Yes. I think just yes to everything that you said.

Parents have been frustrated for a lot of reasons. You know, I'm a mom, I had COVID myself. I had to watch my son go through quarantine and remote instruction, so I could see that really firsthand.

As continuing Department of Health and CDC guidelines change, it's very important to communicate with parents. They really want to be heard on these issues and have a meaningful two-way conversation with school districts.

School districts are doing a great job in keeping our kids safe and communicating with parents, but it could always be more. So I thank my colleagues from the other associations for all of their work with their members and really communicating with parents.

But I think the answer is just yes, more is always better. Communication is key.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We next to go Assemblywoman Hyndman, to be followed by Assemblywoman Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Weinstein and Chair Krueger.

Hi, everyone. Thank you for your testimony. This is specifically for Mark Cannizzaro.

Thank you for your leadership. I have noticed that in my district we have lost approximately four principals, one of them being Harriet Diaz, who was real steadfast person in District 29 schools. And I know she talked about the Executive Leadership Institute and how important it is to make sure that principals have support.

I think a lot of times in the conversations around the pandemic that we have lost that our principals needed support too, in getting their buildings and their teachers all in alignment with all of the mandates and guidelines that come down.

So you have asked for $1 million, I believe, in more above the -- what we gave

you last year. So I just wanted to say that in order to keep the pipeline of principals in our schools whole, that I wholly support that, and as well as our assistant principals, identifying those principals who need that next push in leadership.

You've done a great job in leadership for principals in New York City, and anything we could do in the Assembly to help you to push that, to make sure we have good principals moving forward, I'm here to support.

I don't have a question, but hi, Kyle. Thanks, everyone, for their testimony.

MR. CANNIZZARO: Thank you so much. That's very much appreciated.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Sorry. I'm juggling, I apologize.

Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for staying with us all day and for helping us to understand the way COVID has changed your world and the needs that you

have as they relate both to our recovery from COVID as well as, you know, the Governor's budget and where we can help you further.

I have a question -- it may seem a little bit out of left field, but years ago one of the issues I know that a lot of the school districts had was technology issues. And they had not updated their computer systems, many of them would -- you know, people would leave and they wouldn't update the passwords and former employees might still have those passwords. They were vulnerable to hacking.

I'm curious what the current state of affairs is with regard to the technology and the resiliency of that technology in your various school districts.

MR. CANNIZZARO: I would say in New York City it's improved greatly, but it's still uneven. You know, not every building can handle the bandwidth. So that's one big issue.

As far as some of the security issues, it's less, I think mainly because people are

more aware and astute to protecting these things. But it's still -- we're still vulnerable in certain areas, but not as -- I wouldn't say it's as bad as it's been in the past.

MS. GALLAGHER: I would have to concur, except that we also had to shift to remote instruction, so many of the concerns that we heard from our building administrators in our -- in SAANYS was more or less how it was being secure within the homes, or the access. So this shift to remote also shifted the argument.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: And we'd agree -- oh, you go, Bob.

MR. LOWRY: I would just say that I think, you know, there have been some high-profile incidents with hackers or whatever, you know, seizing control of district data. In the Comptroller's audits, both these things cast a spotlight on these concerns, so I think school officials have become increasingly vigilant and diligent

about trying to make sure that they've done everything possible to protect their systems.

MS. BELOKOPITSKY: And I think from a parent's perspective, Assemblywoman, you know, SED had done -- previously did a survey when we kind of started remote instruction that found that at that time 215,000 students didn't have access to a computer, Chromebook or tablet to use for instruction. And the same survey found that 165,000 New York State school students lack internet access to actually participate in remote instruction.

Now we are in a new school year. Fast forward, school districts have done fantastic things to get devices into students' and families' hands. And I think your continued investments in the Legislature and our broadband initiatives really define, you know, real true meaningful low-cost and no-cost solutions for families is going to be critical as we continue to move forward in some type of remote environment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Do you think there is a personnel need for people who

are -- you know, to consult with the school districts with regard to security? You know, I know everybody is more aware now, but I'm concerned that -- of the technical expertise throughout the state.

MR. LOWRY: You know, I don't hear that. And I would say that districts outside of New York City typically work with their BOCES, BOCES -- some of the BOCES maintain a regional information center. So that's a source that districts have available to them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Right. Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

I also just want to take a moment to thank all of the members of the panel, particularly the school administrators and supervisors, for keeping our schools -- all the good work you do keeping our schools open during this time of uncertainty. And, you know, you have a lot of support within the Legislature for all of the work that you do. We are very grateful.

And with that, we are going to thank

you. There are no more legislators who have questions, and we are going to move on to next panel.

MR. LOWRY: Thank you.

MR. CANNIZZARO: Thank you.

MR. FESSLER: Thank you.

MS. GALLAGHER: Thank you. Have a nice night.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: If you have the witness list, this is Panel E: Alliance for Quality Education, Jasmine Gripper, executive director; New York State Community Schools Network, Alli Lidie, network lead; New York State Association of School Psychologists, Beth Rizzi, president.

I think everybody is in -- yes. So why don't we go in that order, starting with Alliance for Quality Education.

MS. GRIPPER: Yeah, thank you for having me. My name is Jasmine Gripper. I am the executive director for the Alliance for Quality Education.

I want to start my testimony by thanking the Legislature for committing to

fully funding the Foundation Aid formula. This is the first time since the Foundation Aid formula was created that the full phase-in amount has been included in the Executive Budget. Parents, students, and educators appreciate that we don't need to fight for this much-needed and much-deserved funding.

You have my full testimony to read; I'm just going kind of summarize a few key points and respond to a few comments I've heard earlier in the hearing.

First, there was a lot of discussion on the Foundation Aid formula. Again, we are excited about the commitment to fully fund the formula, but I just want to remind you that school districts have only received year one of a three-year phase in. No high-needs school district is receiving their full Foundation Aid amount until 2023. So before we start evaluating outcomes, we need to give districts time to get their full Foundation Aid and account for the disruptions in learning caused by the

pandemic.

For decades our schools have been underfunded, and getting students on track is not going to happen overnight. We support accountability for districts, especially what's outlined in the Contract for Excellence. The Legislature needs to ensure districts are meeting those requirements as the Foundation Aid is phased in.

Second, we have fought for decades for this funding, but we are worried that a high portion of state aid districts will be required to give it over to charter schools. There is a full-page summary of the impact of charter schools at the end of my testimony, but for example, in New York City, for the last three years New York City has been paying out for charter schools 200 million more every year, for the last three years. If this pattern holds, of the 350 million in state aid increases to New York City, over 50 percent is going to go to 14 percent of students.

That is a deeply skewed distribution.

We need the State Legislature to curb the rising costs of charters.

As many of you mentioned, many of our districts and families are experiencing mental health crises due to the pandemic. It is absolutely essential that the Legislature moves forward supports for children and their families and their communities. A positive school climate, community schools, legislation like the Solutions Not Suspensions bill, the bill by Senator Jackson and Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas, for mental health counselors and psychologists in every school building -- these are essential.

Lastly, the pandemic has revealed that childcare in New York State is in crisis. There are surplus funds in the State Budget which need to be invested in moving New York towards universal childcare as it's laid out in the Brisport and Hevesi bill. The cost to parents is too high, and providers need to be paid a quality wage.

New York really needs to invest in the

continuum of care from birth to 12. We look forward to working with legislators to make universal childcare a reality in New York State, and I thank you for your time.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So next we can go on to the New York State Community Schools Network.

MS. LIDIE: Hi. Thank you.

I am Alli Lidie, I'm representing the New York State Community Schools Network, and I want to thank you for the offer of the committee to provide testimony this evening.

I want to thank you all for the many comments and questions shared today regarding committee schools and your support for the strategy. Given that, I don't want to spend my time trying to sell you on community schools as the right place to invest. It is already clear that New York community schools work. If you are not, though, please do read the written testimony. You can learn more about the strategies, demonstrated return on investment, and what community schools have been doing across the state.

I will say, though, that given what we know about community schools, and what you all have expressed today, it is unfortunate there were not new investments directly in the community school strategy in the Governor's budget. So we are asking the state to maintain the $250 million in existing community schools funding, and dedicate an additional $100 million in a new community schools categorical aid to adequately fund and sustain communities schools statewide.

Also, in order to support schools, and effectively utilizing the community school strategy, the state currently funds three regional Technical Assistance Centers, or TACs. During the pandemic, the TACs have shifted their work, including hosting multiple webinars for the field focused on current needs. They created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Portal, conducted virtual site visits, and helped districts discover how community schools can help support the adults in schools too.

The strategy is needed now more than ever before, and they need support to be able to work with more schools and districts. Therefore we are asking the state to increase the $1.2 million investment in TACs by 800,000, for a total appropriation of $2 million annually.

We also support critical funding for the programs and services that community schools effectively leverage and coordinate, including after-school and summer, expanded learning programs, pre-K, school-based health centers and mental health. This is all outlined in our written testimony.

The one specific piece I want to touch on for education is our ask around the new proposed RECOVS learning and mental health grant. The community schools strategy demonstrates that schools should not be doing this alone. This new funding stream should require that school districts demonstrate mutual collaboration with at least one community-based after-school, youth, or family-serving organization or a mental

health partner to help students recover academically. We think that will be the most effective way forward for this funding.

So thank you for your time.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. And that's -- you can go.

MS. LIDIE: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Beth, from School Psychologists.

MS. RIZZI: Good evening. My name is Beth Rizzi, and I'm the president of the New York Association of School Psychologists.

I want to thank the chairs and all of the panel members for this opportunity to share our comments on the Governor's Executive Budget.

I share these comments under the backdrop of the national crisis that currently exists related to children's mental health. We have heard this mentioned multiple times by many panelists, and many of you, this afternoon and this evening.

We are well aware of the impact that these past two years have had on the social

and emotional adjustments of children and adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatricians, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association have declared a national emergency in children's mental health, citing the serious toll of the pandemic and other social justice factors within our nation.

The Surgeon General issued a new advisory to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis, and we all applaud the Governor's own recognition of the mental health crisis in her State of the State address a few weeks ago.

On a personal level, I can tell you that our children are hurting. I see many of the children in my schools struggling with increased anxiety, heightened levels of depression, and general difficulties managing the challenges of school and life.

There are ways for you as legislators to support our children and make a difference in the mental health supports available to

youth and families. Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Rosenthal have sponsored legislation, S4347A and A454A, that would provide for the licensure of school psychologists. Currently without this licensure, school psychologists are limited to working within school districts and some state agencies.

However, as I am sure you are all aware, there's a severe shortage of mental health professionals in the community, and families are faced with long waitlists, extensive travel, and reliance upon emergency room services. Licensure of school psychologists would increase the mental health workforce throughout New York State.

Additionally, we have heard mentioned multiple times today Assemblymember Rojas and Senator Jackson's bills requesting one social worker and one school psychologist in every single school building around our state. This too will enable us to support our children better in their environments.

Additionally, there are a number of

proposals within the Governor's budget that would help to address the mental health needs of children. We are pleased to support the proposal for $10 million in mental health support grants for school districts.

And unfortunately, we do recognize that high-needs districts have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and do not have the resources to address their students' needs.

Thank you so much for your time this evening, and I welcome any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all for being here.

Assemblyman Benedetto, did you have any questions? Okay. So then we have Assemblywoman Simon, and then we will go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Very good.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you very much.

I have a question for you, Dr. Rizzi, which is about, you know, the mental health needs of our students in schools. We have

talked a lot about those issues such as anxiety and depression and the trauma that they are experiencing. But some of our children have also experienced COVID, and there have been reports of cognitive impacts of COVID on children, in particular on children, and I am curious whether or what work is being done to look at those needs, to establish what kind of cognitive impacts, how long they may be lasting, how present are they in the schoolchildren in New York State.

And I know many school psychologists are familiar with assessment work; others are not. And I'm curious what you are doing to address that issue, because I think long-term effects of COVID could very easily affect a lot of our children's learning.

MS. RIZZI: Absolutely. Thank you for your question.

I think that we are very early in that particular game, as much as I hate to say that, and it's almost -- I would call it similar to the research with regard to concussion. And we are going to have to

continue to study this to see what the long-term ramifications are.

However, of course, when there are concerns about a child's development, both cognitively and academically, we look to our school psychologists to assess the student's needs and to compare any baseline data that we may have on hand to whatever post-COVID data we have and then can therefore continue to collect.

And we're going to have to do research over the next several years, I believe, to truly address what this might be and to also tease out what is the potential cognitive impacts versus lack of access.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

And first, Jasmine -- nice to see you all, and -- but question for you. I appreciate that you include childcare in your education conversation. Do you have a specific dollar ask, or are you supportive of

the Brisport or the Ramos bill? What's your position on how best to address the inadequacy of childcare?

MS. GRIPPER: Yes. The dollar ask is $5 billion for Year 1. I know it is a lot, but the industry has been disinvested in for so long we lost about 1,500 providers that permanently closed their doors during the pandemic. We think the Brisport bill provides a pathway to universal childcare. The Ramos bill is good, but she leaves out one critical component, which is before- and after-care for school-aged children up to age 12.

And working parents really need that component. And even those extra three hours are really expensive if you don't qualify for a subsidy. The Brisport bill completely eliminates means testing, which is a huge barrier for undocumented folks having access, and also it traps parents in poverty. If you make a dollar more than what the subsidy requires, you can no longer get the subsidy.

And it is too expensive -- right now,

childcare costs more than the cost of CUNY or SUNY tuition, and we really need to rein that in for parents.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of you for your really fighting for kids.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Sean Ryan.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Thank you very much, Jasmine and Beth and Alli, for your testimony today.

Jasmine, you thanked the Legislature for the Foundation Aid increase, but I feel it's really appropriate to turn it around and thank AQE for the Foundation Aid increase. You know, in 1993 a lawsuit was filed alleging that poor kids and medium-wealth kids were being shortchanged in New York State, and that went through one of most torturous processes of a lawsuit I've ever seen -- in court, dismissed, appealed, back in. And then a previous governor said, you

know, that -- the lawsuit was called the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, the CFE -- they said it was dead, there is no such thing, and no district is owed Foundation Aid.

But I knew that wasn't true because I had a button, and the button told me exactly how much my districts were owed. I keep that button. I really wish I could bring it out right now as a prop. But I know that my districts, especially the lower-wealth ones, they're going to get every one of those dollars in the next three years, you know, because of the commitment of everyone on this call, especially the Education chairs.

So I would say to you, thank you very much, but also, you know, your predecessor Billy, and I'm sure someone came before Billy Easton. And then the other progeny of your good work is the community school efforts in New York State.

So thanks, thanks for your hard work. And I look forward to, you know, working together in the future. But I really look forward to Year 3 when there is no CFE debt

anywhere in New York State.

MS. GRIPPER: Yes. Thank you. This was something we all did together. It took the Legislature standing up to Cuomo and demanding that, even when a powerful governor said it was not real. So thank you all for fighting with us.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Senator Ryan.

I believe that Assemblymember Niou has her hand up now.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. I was just about to call on Assemblywoman Niou.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Sorry about that.

I just really wanted to add in -- I actually wanted to ask your advice on -- you know, you did put out this page on the inequities with the charter schools, and I was wondering what your solution would be for this on the state level.

MS. GRIPPER: Yeah, I think the school districts talked about this, which is increasing the aid category to charter schools so the state is picking up the tab,

reducing the rent payments in New York City -- a lot of the ballooning costs have been going to New York City -- reject the Governor's proposal to increase charter tuition -- we really just need to rein in the costs.

We think charters can and should get an increase, but not 50 percent of the Foundation Aid money going to public schools when they only serve 14 percent of the entire population.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: And currently with the formula the way that it is, it actually takes from our schools now, right? So like the way that, you know, the buttons that we were just talking about -- it would be a very, very different amount that would actually be getting to our kids, right?

MS. GRIPPER: Exactly. Either the state itself can pick up the tab and reimburse districts 100 percent for what they pay for charter costs, but if not, then that comes out of what districts would be giving for its general ed population.

So yes. That's extremely problematic, and that's the issue we want to address. And we should look into a long-term solution with the charter formula.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: I am really glad that you clarified between the two bills, between the Ramos bill and the Brisport bill. And I feel like, you know, the asset-limit piece was a very big one on my end.

And I think that, you know, a lot of other social benefits, a lot of our different programs often have these asset limits that are harmful to folks and trap them in a cycle of poverty. Could you elaborate a little bit more about, you know, what that looks like for folks, and why that is so important?

MS. GRIPPER: Yes. So currently, if you're a household of four and both parents work full-time and make minimum wage, you do not qualify for a childcare subsidy. And you're expected to pay $15,000 for childcare, which is absolutely ridiculous and impossible.

And so what you have to do as a parent

is not make more than what the cutoff is for the subsidy. And if you make a dollar more, you lose your entire subsidy right now. And so that means parents, especially single mothers, really get trapped in low-wage work. And they can't advance professionally, because if they do, the childcare burden is too much and then they can't afford to send their kids to childcare.

So it really puts the burden -- if you don't have family support to help you with childcare, it puts you completely out of the workforce or it traps you in low-wage jobs.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: And I am super-appreciative of you for saying that, and also for all of your work. But I also am saying that, you know, I think that one of the other things that you guys fight for is making sure that we have after-school.

Is the after-school -- universal after-school, I believe -- is what you are hoping for? Can you talk to us about how that creates segregation when we don't have it?

MS. GRIPPER: Yeah. I mean, kids need a place to go. We talk about the rising crime rates in our community, and a lot of that is committed by kids who have nothing to do after school hours. And if we keep kids busy, productive, it is a good thing. And parents want their kids to have a safe place to be.

So, one, childcare subsidies help pay for after-school costs for kids up to age 12, which is really important. I think the other thing is community schools that are often open for a longer school day are essential for filling in that gap as well.

And so there is no one-size-fits-all approach. We need to make sure parents have options, those options are free and accessible in their community, and that they also have access to transportation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

There are no further questions for this panel. Thank you all for the good work you've been doing over the years.

MS. GRIPPER: Thank you.

MS. LIDIE: Thank you.

MS. RIZZI: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Going on to the next panel, Panel F, New York Charter School Association, Yomika Bennett, executive director; Charter Parent Council, Jason Montanez, charter parent; Success Academy Charter Schools, Edwin Cespedes, board member; New York City Charter School Center, James Merriman, CEO.

And if you can go in --

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Cespedes is not with us at this moment.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

THE MODERATOR: We will sync him in if we get him.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So let's -- the other three are here. So if we can start with New York Charter School Association and move on from there.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you, Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer, and Benedetto, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Yomika Bennett. I am the executive director of the New York Charter School Association.

Charter schools are not only delivering for students right now, they are about what's possible in the future. As you know, charter schools are public schools authorized by law. The law states, quote, teachers, parents, school administrators, community residents, or any combination thereof can start a school. This is a powerful law giving people the power to impact education.

Consider for a moment the sad history and current circumstance in some cases regarding education for disadvantaged communities. We should encourage charter schools as a matter of right and self-empowerment, particularly for marginalized and historically disadvantaged communities.

Charter schools offer all students,

regardless of race, identity, zip code, or family income, the opportunity to attend schools of their choice. There are fewer than 360 charter schools in the entire state. They serve more than 170,000 students. These schools offer a range of choices for families -- college prep, neurodiversity, dyslexia schools, autism schools, bilingual education schools, African and other culture schools, sustainability, CTE and health sciences, STEM, music, arts, and much more.

During the pandemic, charter schools throughout the state were able to adapt their learning options to meet the needs of their particular school families, with many charter schools offering in-person learning while surrounding schools were closed or remote.

The association applauds the Governor for her vision and support for students and family in the Executive Budget. However, there is more work to be done. New York State should promote charter school education because it works for families and students.

Per-pupil funding for charter school

students should be increased to equal per-pupil funding for district schools. Charter schools should have the option to choose to receive state aid directly. The current process sets up an us-versus-them paradigm where charter school students are viewed as stealing money from the district, when the reality is funding follows the student to support their public school education, not an entitlement of the school district.

Finally, New York State must remove the limit on the number of charter schools allowed by law as well as provide facility funding for charter schools statewide. Ultimately this also helps achieve the goal of reducing class sizes to improve education. Importantly, doing so also opens the pathway for people of color to start schools.

We urge you to create an Educational Equity Fund similar to the proposal in the Executive Budget to establish the Cannabis Social Equity Fund. Certainly if the state can support and encourage members of

disadvantaged communities to open cannabis shops, surely it will support and encourage members of those same Black, brown, and other disadvantaged communities to start schools.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And next -- Jason? Jason, can you go next?

MR. MONTANEZ: Can you hear me now?

Hi, everybody. I would first like to thank all of the chairs -- Weinstein, Krueger, Benedetto, and Liu -- for having me here today. I am Jason Montanez, and my family has been living in Buffalo for over 20 years. My son Jabari previously attended West Buffalo Charter School. My daughter Juliet, a kindergartner, has also chosen to follow in his footsteps and is now attending there.

When we first started looking for schools for our son, we started to look at the diversity of the staff, how big was school, what was the technology like in those schools. But the most important thing was

how is leadership of the schools, was the staff and the leadership all in sync. After seeing five or six charter schools in the area, we decided to enter the lottery for West Buffalo Charter School, where we were ultimately selected.

We firmly believe that the people who have the greatest influence on our children's lives besides family are teachers. I feel as a parent we owe it to our children to put them into the best schools and to get them the best education possible. West Buffalo Charter School has offered our family this and much more. When my son was in fifth grade, the school nominated him to the Buffalo Prep Program. This combination of what he learned in his charter school, combined with the supplemental learning from Buffalo Prep, helped my son be way ahead academically. He got multiple scholarship offers from numerous Catholic high schools in the area and eventually chose Canisius High School as a destination for future learning.

We firmly believe this is all because

of the excellent education he had at West Buffalo Charter School. In fact, West Buffalo Charter School does such a good job that for his graduating class of 52 students, 15 students went to private schools, either on partial or full scholarships, while another 17 students went to criterion schools.

Although the school has the perfect storm for failure -- such as a high free-and-reduced-lunch rate, a high number of ENL students, and a high number of students with disabilities -- the student achievement numbers, based on New York State assessments, are consistently in the top five when compared to Buffalo public schools and other charters.

As you make decisions regarding the New York State budget, please consider providing equitable funding to all types of schools. The money doesn't belong to the entity, it belongs to the child that is receiving an education, and it should be provided to the child regardless of the type

of educational institution that they attend. We have to support each individual child. They are our future, and as adults we have to invest in them fairly and equitably.

In addition, there should also be no limit to the existence of any type of school. Why would you put a cap on anything that would benefit anyone, especially our children? The charter school cap is missing from the budget this year, but we cannot afford to withhold great education options for our children just because of the type of school it happens to be. The only type of schools we should want to remove are schools that are not educating our children.

We need more of what is working for our children, not less. The budget should reflect this support that all children deserve and need. Our children will be sitting in your seats in the future. They are our greatest investment, and it starts with their education. Funding for charter schools should be on par with that of public schools. Charter schools offer longer school

days and a longer academic year, and that extra instructional time is a key for most of their success rates. Our children need the extra funding to help their needs and for their continued success.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. And we go to James Merriman now.

MR. MERRIMAN: Hi. Good evening, everyone. Thank you to the chairs, the ranking members, and all the members of the Assembly and the Senate for the opportunity to testify.

Let me make just a few points. Charter school funding, despite all the talk about it being something unknowable, is knowable. It's set in the state law. The figures are transparent. They are knowable just in the same way that you can look at school state aid runs, if that's what you choose to do.

You want to know how much a charter school is going to get? It's right there in -- right there online. It's also clear that funding on a per-pupil basis, on average

in New York City, is less, much less than the funding the district has at its disposal to educate the students who choose district schools. For some schools it is to the tune of several thousand dollars.

I extend an open invitation to any member or any of their staff to sit with us and go through these numbers, and indeed we're looking to work with the new administration and Governor Hochul's staff to provide even more data to allow you and the public to make these comparisons. You should be able to do so.

We also call on New York City's Independent Budget Office to update its own analysis, which has shown historically the pattern of underfunding of charter school students. Simply put, the claim that charter schools get more money per child is not true.

You know, as I have listened, I can't think there is this undeniable fact. The only reason we have a growing charter sector is because each year more and more parents are choosing charter schools. And thus your

argument with charter schools is really an argument with parents.

Look, I personally -- I regret terribly that we are not more liked with members. But I can tell you it's even more dismaying, actually dismaying, to the over 100,000 families in New York City that desperately want you to support their efforts to find the best public school for their children. When I talk with them, they simply can't understand why you don't.

Despite that, it remains true that almost 40 percent of African-American students in early grades in New York City's public schools are in charter schools, and our ELL enrollment this year has reached record levels and continues to climb.

As Chancellor David Banks made clear, he wants to grow what is working. We want to be part of that partnership. We want to work hand in hand with him and district schools in New York City for a brighter future for all New York City schoolchildren.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to our chair of Education, Assemblyman Benedetto.

Mike, you're still muted.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: I thought I did, I'm sorry.

Okay, listen, folks, you spent a long day here, you've hung in there, I thank you for that. And I appreciate your testimony, okay? And I appreciate some of the things you do there in the charter school community, you know, because, bottom line, we are looking at kids.

But you know, James, you talked about getting to be better-liked in the Assembly or the Senate by some of the members. You know, there is constantly questions in people's minds about are charter schools playing on a level playing field with the public schools. Okay? Do they have the correct number of special education population, and what is the nature of the special ed population?

Why don't we have the State Comptroller with powers to audit the charter

schools in the City of New York? Why aren't we allowed to take maybe a look at their books and open up their books for us? And how about dismissal and getting rid of kids, their suspension policy, is that done with due process?

You know, these are questions that are thrown out a lot of times by a lot of my colleagues. And, you know, I've got to say they're right in a lot of those cases. So we want them to like you guys, but also you guys have got to be a little bit more likeable, okay. And I appreciate some of the work you do, okay. And I see a purpose in it for you, but I also have to be honest with you. There are questions in the minds of a lot of people, and -- well, keep fighting, please.

Thank you.

MR. MERRIMAN: Thank you, sir.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Yes, I see Senator John Liu's hand up.

SENATOR LIU: I'm not going to use the whole three minutes, Madam Chair.

I want to say that I don't agree with anything that James Merriman said, but I like him. Mike Benedetto, this is a likable man. He stayed true to his cause and mission for over 20 years, and I always look forward to seeing him every year at this budget hearing.

But James, I don't agree with what you said. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Senator Liu.

Back to you, Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: With that, we'll go to Alicia Hyndman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Weinstein.

I think my colleagues -- I don't know if it's getting late and we are getting a little loopy, but we'll see.

One of the things, the constant things we heard today -- thank you for your testimony. One of the things we heard today a lot was about the SUNY authorizer and the problems that are plaguing that authorizer. I remember when we used to have three

authorizers for charter schools: DOE, SED, and now SUNY seems to be the main one, and the problems there.

So what do you say about that? And also, Yomika, I think your analysis with cannabis and charter schools -- I'm trying to -- you know, I get it but, you know, I think that was interesting.

And one of the things -- my last part is when Bloomberg came into office, he changed the formula in New York City where the money follows the child no matter what school they go to. I think that's an interesting analogy, because one of the things that all of the -- even the Big 5, when they testified today, was about the loss of the traditional public school money and it going to the charter schools.

And the last thing I'll say is -- I lost my train of thought. But if you could follow my train of thinking, I'd appreciate it.

MS. BENNETT: I'll start. I'll start with the Social Equity Fund. And thank you

for the questions, Assemblymember.

The Social Equity Fund analogy is if the state's policy is we must support, right, economic development, right, and community development, helping disadvantaged communities, right, that fund is supporting cannabis shops, which is fine. That's okay -- right, that's a policy.

The same policy should certainly be applied to schools, right? Schools are a basis for good communities, right? Good schools make good communities. People choose to move into schools because of the -- excuse me, into communities because of the quality schools. So if there is an understanding that the Social Equity Fund is needed for disadvantaged communities and people should start cannabis shops, that same policy must apply to schools.

Certainly there is no suggestion at the state level that Black and brown folks should open up cannabis shops but they shouldn't open schools. So that was my point there.

And for SUNY --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: We don't have a lot of charter school operators that are Black or brown. We have a lot of -- we have larger chains, but if you can name a couple of Black or Latino or Asian charter school operators, I think that equity piece is valid.

MS. BENNETT: And maybe that's a failing of getting information out there. There absolutely are founders of color and leaders of school of color. What we need, right, as well as we need more. And just as the Social Equity Fund would do that for cannabis operators -- find people, encourage people from a disadvantaged background in the communities to open cannabis shops -- we should do the same thing to encourage people from disadvantaged communities to open and start and operate charter schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN HYNDMAN: My time is up.

Hi, Jason. Good to see you here.

MR. MONTANEZ: Thank you, Assemblymember.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Krueger?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

I just need to jump in on the equity money from my bill for marijuana. If you look at the bill, it's actually 40 percent goes to equity work in communities where the harm was done by marijuana; 20 percent goes to drug treatment and education about staying away from drugs; and 40 percent goes into the New York State public school funds.

So on the theory that charter schools draw their money down from the New York State public school funds, I think I can safely say money from the growth of a cannabis industry will help the educational funding stream of New York State, which is not excluding charter schools, since that's where you all are getting your money.

So I actually think you need to look at the entire funding stream of that new industry as opposed to just one piece of the funding stream. Thank you.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you for that,

Senator.

I just want to clarify that the point is to create an educational equity fund. The point was that the Social Equity Fund exists, the state has clearly shown that they have an appetite and a way to do this.

There is a need for an educational equity fund to address the educational inequity that has happened -- and we all know the history of education in this state. An equity fund to address those inequities is much needed and should have the state's support. So thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Niou.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Thank you so much for having me.

So I will determine if I like you after this question, Mr. Merriman. Just kidding.

(Laughter.)

MR. MERRIMAN: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: The suspension

rate at New York City charter schools is sometimes higher than in public schools. I wanted to see why it is, and how can you claim to be better at educating our students while subjecting them to such draconian measures?

MR. MERRIMAN: Well, first of all, I think the data on suspensions is less than ideal, and certainly one of the things we would love to work with is setting out a better gathering of all of that data. We would be very open to that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: I'm talking about suspensions in schools.

(Laughter.)

MR. MERRIMAN: It varies from school to school. And the whole point and part of charters is parents can choose into a school that they feel provides the environment that they want for their children.

I am absolutely, I think, talking on behalf of charter school leaders when they say if they could get to zero suspensions, they would love to get to zero suspensions.

They are as aware as you and I that kids not in school are not learning.

But in certain circumstances -- and if you were to listen carefully, as I think you did, because --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Actually, that's why I asked you that question. Also I'm running out of time, and you are talking too slow, so I'm going to ask another question -- and I apologize --

MR. MERRIMAN: Fair enough.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Yeah. So there are often reports of charter school CEOs earning exceptionally high salaries. And in general, there is far less clarity into how charter money is spent than at public schools.

Why should we approve increased funds to charter schools, knowing how much of that -- you know, charter -- how much of that some charter officials will receive, far more than their public counterparts?

MR. MERRIMAN: So you know how much they receive. I would argue that the

question is, how good an education are they giving students?

I mean, there are superintendents on Long Island earning nearly 400,000 to 500,000 if you include in retirement benefits. Is that excessive? I don't know. People rarely raise the issue.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Okay, so that's your answer. All right, great.

So also I wanted to just add in just because I think that the punch line, of course, was that the state's education policy fund is Foundation Aid. So I think that that was the whole point of what Senator Krueger was saying. And I appreciate all of the work that she did, of course, on marijuana, but also on the fact that our state education equity fund is Foundation Aid. So I wanted to make it obvious.

Thank you, everyone.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate, I don't believe you have anyone, but we do have an Assemblyman.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, I don't see

other hands.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So Assemblyman Smith.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you so much, Chairwoman.

So a few of the issues -- and thank you for attending and enlightening us on some of these things. I definitely would like to have perhaps follow-up conversations to learn a little bit more about it. I represent -- my district is on Long Island, but a few of the things that were mentioned, and things that have come up in my district -- what percentage would you say of your workforce is unionized? You know, teachers in charter schools. I believe there are some.

MR. MERRIMAN: I don't believe less -- I mean, there are some. Probably less than 10 percent.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Okay. Probably less than 10 percent. Okay. Because I think that, you know, we are talking about some of the differences when we are comparing apples to oranges, trying to figure these things

out. And again, admittedly, I represent -- on Long Island we don't have too many charter schools, and it's an issue that -- you know, I was a public school teacher. I'm a strong advocate for public education. So it's something that I have a tough time coming to grips with when we are trying to -- we're talking about public funding going to institutions that -- that this concerns about accountability in the same regard and questions about that.

So I think that that's where my colleagues and myself are kind of coming from, where there is a little bit of skepticism because we just don't have answers, you know. There are certain things that we don't have access to, information. So if there are ways that you can help us understand, that would be very helpful, I think, because as we are going forward -- and then the other part of it is, you know, maybe a little bit more controversial, but I'll use an example.

One of my colleagues here on

Long Island served in the New York State Assembly. He ran for New York State Senate last year, and in the waning days of his campaign -- he ended up winning the race, but an organization associated with the charter school industry spent $2.7 million -- $2.7 million against him. Now, he was a member of the State Assembly and, you know, didn't really take a strong position on school choice or, you know, advocate for public schools.

Of course, so I think, you know -- and again, I'm not singling out, but when we're talking about skepticism and information regarding how members feel about things, you know, I can say nobody has ever spent $2.7 million in any campaign I've been involved with, but it might be tough building bridges at that point. So I think we have some issues in that regard as well.

So -- and again, I'm not asking you a question. It's more of a statement. But I think that's something that's concerning to a number of us, and I can see by the facial

expressions that my colleagues may have similar feelings.

But again, if you could provide additional information, I think that would be helpful. Thank you for your time.

MS. BENNETT: May I respond to that as well?

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: Thank you.

MS. BENNETT: Just on the accountability. Charter schools are accountable. They're accountable to their authorizers. The school districts also have the authority to come in and inspect records and documents related to the schools. And in charter schools, if the schools don't perform according to expectation, they are subject to closure. Every five years they go under review for that.

So there is a lot of accountability for charter schools, there's a lot of oversight authority right now, and so I think there is some disconnect between accountability and charter schools and what is required. We're happy to provide more

information on what is required there.

And on the political stuff, understand that the association is a nonprofit, we're a C(3). We're nonpartisan, we don't get involved in races or selecting candidates or anything like that. I just wanted to make that clear as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMITH: I totally understand. It's a different group that claims affiliation and whatnot. So thank you for your time on that.

MS. BENNETT: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

I believe there are no further questions, so thank you to the panel.

And we will be bringing in the next panel, Panel H: New York State School Facilities Association, Fred Koelbel, legislative committee cochair, and New York School Bus Contractors Association, Nicholas Vallone, president.

MR. STAPF: Chairman?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes.

MR. STAPF: I'm in Panel G. Joshua

Stapf, Literacy Rochester.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Aha, you're right. I skipped one. Thank you.

MR. STAPF: You're welcome.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry about that.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Panel H, I got the message that Panel H is in the green room, not actually here now.

So let us go to Panel G: New York Library Association, Briana McNamee, director of government relations and advocacy; Bio Bus Inc., Ben Dubin-Thaler, executive director and founder; and Literary Rochester, Joshua Stapf, executive director. Thank you for speaking up when I almost skipped over you all.

If you can go in that order, starting with the New York Library Association.

MS. McNAMEE: Thank you, Chair Weinstein. My name is Briana McNamee, and I have the privilege of serving as the New York Library Association's director of government relations and advocacy.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity, especially after a long, long day, to testify on behalf of our state's libraries and our library systems and the more than 10 million New Yorkers who hold library cards. Also, I apologize for my senior dog pacing in the background.

This year's Executive Budget proposal includes $96.1 million for State Library Aid, $14 million for State Library Construction, and the release of $150,000 for the Library Funds. Well, I wish it were different. I come before you once again to speak about the failure of our Executive to acknowledge the crucial role that libraries serve in our communities and the contributions our librarians make towards the state education system.

The State Library Aid Program, as you may know, is a primary source of funding for New York's library systems which provide shared services and resources to each library in New York. These systems' services ensure that every community and every New Yorker,

regardless of relative wealth, have access to quality library materials and services.

Library systems services are efficient, they're effective, and they empower their libraries. While the Executive proposal does represent a moderate $2 million increase, it falls short of the education statute by $6.5 million. I should note, even if funded at the level, which is $102.6 million, the State Library Aid Program would still make up less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the entire state budget.

For library construction, the Executive has slashed the Library Construction Aid the last two years by $20 million. As a result, every year you all have the responsibility to identify and resecure the aid. Unfortunately, this process has left the program stagnant. A statistic you likely have heard and seen me use before, $1.5 billion. That is the current need within our community for infrastructure upgrades and renovations.

Next I will briefly mention the Love

Your Library fund. Each year the New York State Summer Library Reading Program hosted by local libraries offers unparalleled literacy and enrichment opportunities to the state's young learners. Generations of students have combated summer learning loss due to the program's literacy, supported arts, and programming. We support the Executive's proposal to distribute $150,000 of available funds to our library systems for this purpose.

And lastly, with my 30 seconds, Instructional Materials Aid. That includes library materials, textbooks, software, and hardware. Aid for each is critical to ensure students have access to educational materials and technology. Currently the rate is 6.25, $6.25 per pupil. Our association supports the Board of Regents proposal to increase this aid, and we ask that you include it in your one-house and the final budget.

I would happily take comments and questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We'll go on to Bio Bus, Inc.

MR. DUBIN-THALER: Hi. Thank you so much, chairs, ranking members, and members of the Senate and Assembly.

My name is Benjamin Dubin-Thaler. I am a scientist turned nonprofit science education person, and Bio Bus is the organization that I started in 2007. I went out and bought a used GM transit bus, filled it with microscopes, and started bringing the bus to schools all across New York City and New York State.

And the idea was that if students experienced what it was like to be in a real science lab working with scientists, it would ignite their passion for science and careers in science. Now we are 26 scientists strong. We are helping students -- hundreds of thousands of students reach their scientific potential.

We have two mobile labs, community labs, in West Harlem and the Lower East Side. We reinvented our programs twice during the pandemic, and in close partnerships with our

schools, principals, and science teachers. We went online, now we are back doing safe in-person programs. And we have been able to continue our paid research internship program.

We have over 50 high school and college students doing research with our scientists this year. Their work was recently featured in the New York Times, and those students are publishing a scientific paper. We have, in total, reached over 260,000 students in New York State since 2008.

New York State previously awarded $400,000 in capital funds that helped us build our newest mobile lab, so we now have two mobile labs that helped us double our capacity. And this year over $500,000 from New York State, in the budget line as well as member items, meant that we are reaching more students and spending more time with each student and have been able to hire additional scientists to help us reach students and, especially in this time, help students

overcome the learning loss that's especially hard-hitting in science when there's, you know, such an importance of hands-on work.

We are proud to match the public support that you all have helped us get with private investments, partnerships with Regeneron, Pharmaceutical, Colgate, and universities like Columbia and NYU. We have over 100 volunteers that help us achieve our mission, and together we are working to increase the number of students from communities that have been excluded from science because of race, because of gender, because of socioeconomic status. And they want to join New York's growing STEM workforce and meet the demand for STEM jobs, and we are trying to help them get there and we are helping them get there.

Thank you for your support in helping us continue to be a trusted partner for schools, communities, and young scientists as we expand to reach even more students.

Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

And now, Literacy Rochester.

MR. STAPF: Hello, my name is Joshua Stapf. I'm the executive director of Literacy Rochester, and I would like to talk about a group of education that doesn't seem to have an exact home within the committee structure of both the Senate and the Assembly, which is adult education and adult literacy.

New York State has 3.4 million adults that don't have a high school degree and/or are lacking the literacy levels to have functional abilities within society.

As a volunteer-driven program, we do appreciate both the Legislature and the Executive including $7.8 million within the budget for the Adult Literacy Education Fund. For those of you who are unsure about that, New York State is actually one of very few states in the U.S. that provides adult literacy education funding that is not coming from the federal level, so we greatly appreciate New York State providing that extra funding.

The bigger thing, though, is that funding is restricted, and to really focus on workforce development, and it is leaving out people that are not looking to get into the workforce, whether they're a stay-at-home parent, they're retired, or they are disabled and they can't get into the workforce. And adult literacy has an impact not only on a person's -- a single person's life, but it's their family. It will help resolve poverty, incarceration rates, reduce public assistance. It increases child literacy rates along with also increasing civil engagement within their community.

So as a representative of adult education, we are looking for support for a new funding stream called the Community Literacy Fund, which helps community-based organizations that are volunteer-driven to provide services to these people that don't fall within normal adult education funding and programming.

These are people that often cannot do a three days a week or four hours a day --

you know, they need the services that can be provided by a volunteer because they can meet only on Thursday nights at 6:00 or Saturdays at 2:00. And they cannot move at same pace as group education classes; they usually often have to go slower.

Our standard person that we help has a reading level of below fifth-grade, and these are people ranging anywhere from 18 all the way up above 65.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all for being here.

We have a number of members in both houses that have questions, so we're going to start with Assemblyman Jensen.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you very much, Chairwoman, and I do have some questions for Bri.

But I do just want to make a comment that it's my own personal public policy that we should always take the recommendations of bearded individuals named Josh. So I certainly appreciate that.

Bri, I know you talked about

Construction Aid. Could you tell or share how many projects were funded with the $34 million that was included in the budget last year?

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So we don't have the number of projects for the 2022 budget last year, as the application for those projects just ended in October. But for the '21 budget we do -- or the '20-'21 budget -- we do know that the Library Construction Aid program supported 135 projects.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Okay. I know when meeting with libraries -- Chairs Jean-Pierre and Ryan had a statewide tour, and I was happy to participate with part of that -- we heard from stakeholders during that, as well as throughout the year, that libraries in the state are owed around $102 million.

Could you share a little bit more information about what that figure means?

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So overall I think in the last decade -- I do have a chart on this somewhere -- I think we were actually

owed around $130 million, if you're talking about what's in statute and what we lost or haven't received in aid.

But that $102.6 million that you're referencing is contemplated in Education Law. It's based on our funding formula that is tied to the census. Numbers obviously are based on the 2010 Census, and not the most recent. But when you see that in our talking points or hear advocates, that's what they're talking about.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: And I know Commissioner Rosa at the beginning of the day -- it seems like a lifetime ago -- talked about the Instruction Materials Aid and SED's desire to increase that number and the failure of the Executive to do that.

You know, certainly I would imagine that NYLA would be in support of that increase, if only just to get the library benefits of that. Could you touch on that also?

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. A really good question.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Oh, thank you.

MS. McNAMEE: So Library Materials Aid is part of the state formula aid, and it's intended to supplement local funds budgeted for school library program support.

So currently, as I auction-called-off in my testimony, the current rate is $6.25 per student attending both public and nonpublic schools within the school district's boundaries. The Board of Regents proposal would increase that approximately $2.

I should also note that that rate of $6.25 has not been increased since 2007, so it's been quite some time.

ASSEMBLYMAN JENSEN: Thank you very much, Bri. And thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We're going to go to the Senate now.

Senator Krueger, do you have any senators?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much. We do, and the first will be our Education chair, Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you.

I want to thank you all for being here and for your testimony, but I want to just focus on, Joshua, what you said.

One, these ALE programs have been a stepchild with no real home, and yet I think all of us know how critical they are in our districts. So I very much appreciate this.

A question on your Community Literacy Fund, which we've been contacted about as well. Are you proposing that that would be given to the State Education Department to distribute? Where would that be placed, do you know?

MR. STAPF: So we don't know exactly where it would be placed. We would usually recommend that it would not be placed within the Education, just because of the focus on -- that Education takes on the workforce development and how this is not so much driven that way, even though it is still within -- it's an adult education field.

SENATOR MAYER: So where would you -- do you have an idea where you want it to be

placed? Or if you don't know, fine.

MR. STAPF: I don't. No, I do not.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. And the other thing is that fund would fund programs that are volunteer-based in terms of providing adult literacy services. Is there adequate money for those that are not volunteer-based, for the regular ALE program? I think that you have less of an ask for that.

MR. STAPF: Yeah, so the ALE programs that are not volunteer-based, they follow a traditional education model of a classroom setting, so they hire teachers.

And so the Community Literacy Fund is meant to support learners that do not thrive within that traditional model, and they need that flexibility that is being able to be provided by a volunteer.

You know, you can't try to plug them into a classroom at 6 o'clock at night when it's only one person that maybe can meet at that time. But a volunteer can meet one-on-one at the time and location that best serves them, and also go at the speed that

works best for them, not the speed that works best for the majority of a group.

SENATOR MAYER: Do you have an approximate number of the number of individuals who would be served by this program statewide?

MR. STAPF: Yeah. So we estimate that with it up and running, we would serve about 32,000 people. So that would be an investment from New York State of $1,000 per student. And then we estimate the in-kind donation of a volunteer's time being $3,000, giving a total investment of $4,000 per student for anybody that would be involved in this program.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. Thank you.

MR. STAPF: Which is about a third of the current adult learners that are being served by adult education funding in New York State.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. Thank you, very helpful. I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we go to the

assembly.

Our chair, Assemblyman Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank everybody for being here so late.

Briana, we all love our libraries. We always say that. That's universal. But also universal, we always seem to do wrong for the libraries in the budget, and hopefully we'll correct that this year. We are going to try.

MS. McNAMEE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Ben, I love the Bio Bus, you know that. I have been on the Bio Bus. You are a scientist and you said you bought a second bus and you doubled your capacity. Well, you are a real mathematician. Yes, you did. And maybe in the future you could buy an electric bus like we are talking about and triple your capacity.

MR. DUBIN-THALER: Okay.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: But we are all for the Bio Bus.

And Joshua, I had the privilege of

meeting with a whole bunch of you guys only a couple of weeks ago in regards to adult literacy, and I've already had discussions with my educational team about it, and we are going to try to do -- I don't know what we can do, but we are going to try, okay? So your message is being heard.

MR. STAPF: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: And that's all I have to say. It's late and I know we are all a little tired.

Good luck, everybody.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Sean Ryan, who's the chair of the Libraries Committee. Oh, I am slowing down. Sorry about that.

SENATOR RYAN: It's your first demonstration of waning energy. Very good.

Thanks to everyone for coming out to testify today, and thank you, Briana, for the hard work you do with your association and, you know, working closely with myself and Assembly Library Chair Kimberly Jean-Pierre.

And we did a tour this summer, and we

were joined by the Assembly ranker, Josh Jensen, so we learned a lot. But one of the things that kept coming up was the cost of ebooks, and then the second was the lack of internet connectivity and how libraries fill the gap on that. And I was considering if you could take a second to talk about those issues, please.

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. As far as ebooks, unfortunately, our Ebooks for All bill was vetoed by the Governor, but I have a lot of hope that we are going to reintroduce and just kill advocacy this year and really make sure that the Second Floor and all of you here and your colleagues really understand ebooks and digital literacy.

But as far as ebooks, just a little bit about it. The average cost of an ebook from a major publisher has tripled between 2011 and 2020. Libraries typically end up paying two to three times more than they do for a hard cover -- sometimes up towards $65 per copy, compared to maybe $15 for a hard copy that an individual might cover.

So instead of owning an ebook, the other part of this is that instead of owning that ebook forever, like a person -- like we would if we had purchased it, librarians must decide at the end of the licensing term whether they're going to renew it or not.

And then I think your other question was about how libraries are closing the gap on the digital network. I do know during COVID we tried to expand our networks. We tried to increase hotspots. I know we are working very closely with other organizations and allies in our community, including the NDIA, to really try to eliminate that digital inequity as much as possible.

But certainly with any funding, including last year's $50 million grant, that would certainly help.

SENATOR RYAN: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We -- let's see. Kimberly Jean-Pierre, our Library chair.

Hi. I saw her. The hand was raised.

THE MODERATOR: She's there, Chairwoman, but we cannot hear her.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yeah, we're trying to hear you, Kimberly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Can you hear me now?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Yes, we can.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Oh. I did a whole spiel.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Repeat. Repeat.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Well, I say this -- it's not so early in the day, for sure. And I want to thank everybody who has testified in this panel and to our chairs and to my chair -- my cochair in the Senate, Senator Sean Ryan. I know he said we did a tour over the summer. It was only a month ago. It feels like over the summer because we have been doing a whole lot.

But Bri, I want to thank you for your partnership. And I know last session, last

budget, we were able to increase our Construction Aid by $34 million. And with the Executive proposal, the slash cut, if you could talk a little bit about how much libraries would be at a disadvantage if we cut it, what positivity that the Construction Aid would do to libraries now.

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So first -- just thank you, and the tour was awesome. And yes, it was in December. It was very cold, I remember.

But as far as the Construction Aid, yes, it was reduced by $20 million again. We are very fortunate that the Board of Regents are aligned with us, and we're looking for $45 million, which is still a drop in the bucket compared to the $1.5 billion need.

But those construction funds go to everything from -- you saw it on your tour -- a new child's reading area to a new annex to actually like safety features, ADA compliance, water features -- not water as in fish tanks, but making sure we have compliant water fountains and things like that,

compliant bathrooms.

So really those funds are going directly into your community to make sure that your residents have not only nurturing spaces but safe and healthy spaces as well.

So certainly with the reduction in dollars, if it stays this way I would be concerned that, again, those few hundred -- 135 projects we benefited last budget season could drop to a half of that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. The time clock ticks.

In the last 30 seconds, what is the difference in cost between a hardcover or soft-cover book and an ebook book -- as my legislation was vetoed, we hoped -- we are going to bring it back and we hope for a positive outcome.

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So typically, on average, a hardcover book is anywhere between $15 and $25 for a library, where for an ebook the cost can be anywhere -- typically we see between $48 and $70. At least that's the average that I'm seeing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Per license, correct?

MS. McNAMEE: Per -- yeah, we're talking about per book. So for the ebook it would be per license.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The Senate has one more.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I was going to say does the Senate -- yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes. I see Samra Brouk.

SENATOR BROUK: Yes, a late addition to the list. Thank you so much.

I wanted to hop in because I had to give some Rochester love to our representative here, Josh, for holding it down.

I just want to say thank you so much, Josh. One, for making it through this day and coming and testifying, but also for the work that you do. We know it well here locally. And as someone whose father would have very much used these kinds of services to support his family, as a refugee from

Ethiopia, we know not just the economic but the family impact that this has. So I want to thank you for your support for this Community Literacy Fund.

I know that you have been working on this for a very long time, and give you a chance, one more chance, to convince folks of the importance of this that you might not have gotten a chance to speak on in your testimony.

MR. STAPF: Thank you. And we appreciate all the support that everybody has been giving us, especially you, Samra.

So with the Community Literacy Fund, the investment is to help people be able to -- just be able to engage in their community and engage in their life as just everybody else does. You know, we have people that come into our office that can't go to Wegman's by themselves -- which is a grocery store, if you don't know what Wegman's is. They can't go to the grocery store by themselves. We have parents that can't help their kids with their homework,

that can't have doctor's meetings.

You know, in the United States it is estimated that over $100 billion in healthcare costs is related to adults having low literacy skills. Which means they can't read medications correctly, they can't properly communicate with their doctors on what the issues are. A child of low-literate parents is 72 percent more likely to be low-literate themselves. And it is estimated that about 43 percent of adults in poverty right now have reading levels below the fourth grade.

So it just affects everything from poverty to childcare to health. So being able to increase someone's literacy levels not only benefits them, it benefits their family and it benefits the community that they're a part of. So it's kind of a win-win-win.

And with the volunteer aspect that the Community Literacy fund is focused with, you know, one-fourth of the investment comes from the state. The rest comes from a community

member. So it really is the community helping the community be better.

SENATOR BROUK: Thank you, Josh. I look forward to working on that with you as well. Thanks.

MR. STAPF: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We now have three Assemblymembers, so we'll start with Assemblyman Otis, and then Assemblywoman Lunsford and then Assemblywoman Niou.

So we'll start with Mr. Otis.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Briana, you touched on it earlier about the Digital Inclusion Grant Program, and the way that's envisioned, the library systems are going to be a very important part of that.

And Josh is here, and I know Josh is very interested in digital inclusion work as well in what he's doing in Rochester. We've spoken.

But Bri, can you just give a little more flavor to how important digital inclusion programs are for dealing with digital literacy around the state and the

role that libraries play?

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So those funds that were allocated last year, libraries across the state are really looking forward to those funds finally being distributed.

But much of the work that we are already doing is neighborhood-based, it's right in our communities. But with additional funds, we can really use our community partnerships and collaborate with others who are already doing similar or expanded work and really make sure that we are addressing digital equity -- near, far, and every crevice of the state -- and making sure that we have digital navigators out there, making sure that we are spreading that Wifi access and really making sure that patrons -- at least at libraries -- of every age have access to the internet which they desperately to really thrive in the 21st century.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: And Josh, how do you see that tool working with the work that you've already described in Rochester?

MR. STAPF: Yeah, so I definitely agree that the digital equity needs to be addressed.

I think one aspect that people kind of overlook is they think that digital equity is giving people access to the internet and access to a computer. But it also comes with them being able to use it. It's great that you give them a computer, but if they don't know how to use it, it becomes a pretty expensive paperweight on their table.

So it definitely is a two-pronged approach of providing the education while also giving them access to the tools.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Great. Thank you both, and thank you, Helene.

I will yield back the rest of my time.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Just quickly.

Thank you to Ben and your program. So I represent the East Side of Manhattan. Sometimes I refer to it as Bedpan Alley, because we have so many hospitals and

research facilities, and lots of them talk about offering internships to young people.

And I'm just curious, have you had any cooperation from them? Because it seems like sort of a perfect match with what you are doing and then having the opportunity to have internships in these amazing life science research facilities and hospital research facilities.

MR. DUBIN-THALER: Yes. Thank you for that question. It's an incredibly important topic, because we know how important those kinds of internships are to develop a young scientist's career. It's a critical experience, and most scientists -- most adult scientists like myself, when asked, you know, what caused them to actually pursue a scientific career, it's often those early research experiences as a high school and as a college student.

We are working directly with partners at Cornell to develop pathways for our students in our program across the city to be able to go into labs. In your district --

and a model that we have for that is actually a partnership that we have right now with Mount Sinai School of Medicine. That was the partnership that was highlighted in the New York Times article in the middle of the pandemic where we had students who were -- if you're a little squeamish, you might want to turn off your audio -- we had students who were going across the city collecting bird poop -- pigeon poop, goose poop -- and putting them in tubes. They were trained by the scientists, by a post-doc at Mount Sinai, and then they were bringing it back to the lab and learning how to analyze the genetic material in that poop.

The purpose of all of this is to actually prevent the next pandemic. Because we know from coronavirus -- and flu virus is the same way, and a lot of viruses, you know -- they have animal reservoirs. So this is a research experience that these students had, exactly like you are talking about. Not only did they get recognition in the New York Times -- and the students themselves were the

main voices in that article -- but they're publishing a paper on it.

So that's exactly the kind of experience that we want, to continue to partner with Cornell, with Rockefeller, with labs across the city in order to increase the opportunity for those kinds of experiences.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. If you're looking for more contacts, I seem to have all the life science companies that are taking over these buildings and they come to talk to me about why I shouldn't have a problem with them taking over buildings. So I'd be more than happy to say to them, What are you doing to help the young children get internships in there so that they can become our next generation of scientists?

So I'm easy to find, so just come find me. Thank you.

MR. DUBIN-THALER: Will do. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Lunsford.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you,

Chair Weinstein, and thank you to both chairs for your superhuman stamina, and everyone else who has stuck it out this late.

My questions are for Joshua, because I am a homer. Joshua, can you talk to me a little bit about Senator Mayer's question earlier about how this funding would be distributed? We talked a little bit when you initially came to me about sort of umbrella organizations.

Is there a trusted organization that this could be funneled through that you think would fairly distribute these funds to the local organizations?

MR. STAPF: Yeah, I think there are. Currently, through the ALE funding, part of that funding is to create what is called a stack. And that is kind of an oversight organization for ALE-funded groups, and there is one that handles what's called rest-of-state, and then there is one for the city. So they understand a lot of the volunteer-based programming that's kind of related with a lot of the ALE organizations.

And actually, when ALE started over 20 years ago, the funding for ALE actually went through one of the organizations, called Literacy New York, and they actually had -- they're the ones that kind of doled the money out based on the contracts that the state provided.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Could any literacy fund work the same way?

MR. STAPF: They definitely could work that same way. You know, the goal is to be able to provide the education and the resources that those students need, not so much try to fit a student into the parameters that State Ed or the federal government with WIOA, which is Workforce Investment -- Title II, WIOA Title II is what it's called.

You know, instead of trying to fit it into those parameters and make a student fit, the Community Literacy Fund is looking to make the program fit into what the students need, be able to provide funding to cover expenses like childcare and transportation for these students that currently aren't

covered.

A good example is right now we actually have three refugee mothers who are at home watching kids, they have very young kids that aren't in school, they don't have their own transportation, they can't really leave the house. So we have to -- we are figuring out ways to be able to serve them there or also figure out how we can get childcare for them so that they're able to come to a program, that we are there to help them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you, Josh.

And just for everyone else to know that in my district, English as a second language learners and New Americans are the primary way people receive adult literacy services. So I want to thank Josh and Literacy Rochester very much.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman Niou.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: So I mostly raised my hand because I wanted to ask Ben more questions so that John can make interesting faces.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: But I really wanted to say thank you to, you know, the panelists for presenting.

Ben, I love your program. Bio Bus is one of the programs that I have given my dollars to, to make sure that we can have amazing STEM programs for our kids, especially in the Lower East Side who have really loved your amazing adventures.

And then, Mr. Stapf, I want to say thank you so much for ALE advocacy, because we also really desperately need your programs in our district as well because, you know, we have so many immigrant adults who do not speak English as their first language. My parents -- I would have probably honestly recommended that they use your program as well. And I think it's really, really important that we fund the Community Literacy

Fund.

So thank you so much for presenting, and I'm really glad that Samra was able to give you time to be able to emphasize the importance of it.

I just have a couple of questions for Ms. McNamee. Could you -- I know --

(Zoom interruption.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: -- funds for the Love Your Library program, and they were never actually distributed. Right? And do you believe that this huge delay has been perpetuated -- like, why do you think it has been perpetuated for so long? And how can we ensure that we prioritize library funding?

And then you also spoke about, you know, the tremendous underfunding of our State Library Aid and some of the negative aspects. But what are some of the evolving needs in our current-day, post-pandemic, I guess -- well, I guess we are still in the pandemic -- and what can we do, and why do you -- I guess why do you think that these delays are happening when we desperately need

library help right now?

MS. McNAMEE: Sure. So I'm going to really try hard to remember everything that you asked.

But the first is why the Love Your Library fund -- that was created 15-plus years ago. And first it was a license plate, and then, second, it was a tax contribution by personal or business contribution. And I think, much like a lot of these funds that are created -- how many different license plates do we have in New York State? I think a lot of these funds are created and then they're forgotten about, and I think a part of it is because it's a feel-good concept and then it goes away.

And I think in our case our sponsor, who originally put this Love Your Library -- retired. And so no, to answer your question, it has never been distributed. It is now well over $150,000, and those funds, while that seems minuscule to many, that's thousands of dollars to each of the systems to be able to put towards a specific issue -- summer

reading, which is so incredibly important.

What was your second question?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: No, that was basically really it.

I think that that is really important to make sure that we get our money to our libraries that are promised to our libraries, and we really needed your help during this pandemic, and I think that we are actually -- some of the services that you are providing are helping to save our students right now. So I just really appreciate it.

MS. McNAMEE: And if I could just really quickly -- I do remember you had mentioned like the importance of library aid in general.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: Yeah.

MS. McNAMEE: Like where the heightened cost is. I think COVID, we've seen -- like we've just seen basic inflation. And then I think with COVID there are increased costs to staffing and health and safety and making sure that we are addressing our community needs and what they deserve,

and that comes with a cost, as well as printing and everything else that we have seen.

And with increased aid, the services that you come to expect from public libraries are simply going to be expanded to address every age and every service that they need. So I think it's time for an investment in libraries, certainly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NIOU: I agree.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you, panel, for being here.

We are going to move on to the next panel, Panel H: New York State School Facilities Association, Fred Koelbel, legislative committee chair; and New York School Bus Contractors Association, Nicholas Vallone, president.

If you can go in that order. Fred can start. Three minutes on the clock.

MR. KOELBEL: Thank you for this opportunity, and I applaud you on your endurance as we roll into our 12th hour for all of you.

The New York State School Facilities Association, we represent the directors of facilities responsibile for maintaining and operating thousands of school buildings and facilities across New York. These last two years have been challenging for our members. However, our members and their staffs met these challenges and provided clean, healthy, and safe places of learning for New York students.

We continue to meet these challenges despite staff shortages due to quarantines, retirements, and lack of candidates. Our budgets continue to be stretched by increased costs, new demands, and aging equipment. In short, the slices of our pie have become very thin. So I thank you for working with Governor Hochul to ensure funding for the cost of conducting enhanced lead-in-drinking-water testing and remediation. I encourage you to continue this practice to provide funding for future programs and initiatives.

Speaking of costs, I would like to

highlight a couple of initiatives that we're supporting. First is our proposal for capital outlay. Under the current law, a project of less than $100,000 wholly funded for a capital outlay in the district's annual budget can be reimbursed through the Building Aid the following year.

One hundred thousand dollars is an inadequate number. When you factor in the cost of prevailing wage and the soft cost of any project, it doesn't really do anything. This increased cost will allow small projects to be quickly addressed before the need rises to the level of a bond. In short, we think it will save money because it avoids the cost of bonding money and borrowing and addresses the issue while it's still a small cost and hasn't grown larger.

Energy Reserve Fund. We are promoting the creation of an Energy Reserve Fund for schools. I think this year highlights the need. Energy costs are unpredictable and difficult to budget. I was on a meeting this morning with my staff, and in just one week

the price of fuel oil for us, which we buy in a cooperative with 78 others districts down here on Long Island, went up 20 cents a gallon. Okay? This Energy Reserve Fund would give districts a way to address unanticipated spikes in energy costs without impacting programs.

And then in the Governor's -- the Executive Budget proposal includes language that would allow the Environmental Facilities Corporation to offer public schools district financing for wastewater and stormwater infrastructure projects. Access to this program would help us address what are quite frankly needed but not glamorous and exciting needs.

So, you know, having a dedicated -- having a line of funding outside of our budget where -- people don't get excited over drainage projects, I can assure you of that.

I know it has been a long day, so I'm going to conclude there, and if you have any other questions I will address them at the end.

SENATOR MAYER: Mr. Vallone.

MR. VALLONE: I want to thank all the members of the joint committee for allowing us the opportunity to speak today. My name is Nicholas Vallone. I'm the president of the New York School Bus Contractors Association and executive vice president of Rolling V Bus Corp.

We represent over 200 private pupil transportation companies transporting half of New York's students. We employ approximately 55,000 New Yorkers operating over 30,000 school vehicles. School buses are and always have been the safest way for children to travel to and from school.

We applaud the Governor and the Legislature for your recognition of the extreme crisis we are in with the school bus driver shortage. We strongly support the Governor's plan to roll out third-party CDL testing and stand ready, willing and able to be a helpful partner in the implementation. This is one initiative that will have the greatest as well as longest-lasting impact.

We are certain that third-party testing is a significant adjustment that will help solve our issue here in New York.

Next I would like to speak on the excessive financial burden in regards to the quarantine expense of 2021. We estimate that we have paid over $20 million to employees to quarantine to keep our workplace and our students safe. This continues to be a tremendous financial burden to our industry and an expense for which we are not reimbursed. We are asking for your support to allow traditional reimbursement of these funds that went 100 percent towards the health and safety of our students.

Next, we applaud Governor Hochul, the Senate and the Assembly for proposing to electrify New York's school bus fleet. Many of our members are at the forefront of that movement, already running electric school buses throughout the state. Despite the significant advantages of electric school buses, the up-front cost has emerged as the greatest obstacle to their adoption.

New electric buses can cost three times that of a traditional clean diesel bus, and that is before considering infrastructure costs. Not only can operators not afford these vehicles, but these vehicles are also yet to be proven reliable in all operating environments here in New York State.

One effective way to speed up the conversion to an electric fleet is by eliminating the sales tax associated with the purchase of new equipment. The cost is currently passed along from the contractor to the school district, then to New York State, essentially paying its own imposed tax. In addition, we strongly suggest the creation of a green ribbon panel to examine and research our actual experience in running electric school buses here in New York.

Nevertheless, none of this will be possible without a change to Education Law Section 305 that speaks to pupil transportation contract modification. Current law does not allow for contract modification or amendment if such amendment

causes additional cost to the state, locality, or school district. Therefore, current law does not permit contract modification related to wages, related to compliance or related to electrification.

Lastly, we appreciate the Executive Budget proposal includes $400,000 for the continued funding of the State Education Department's school bus driver safety training program. We'd also ask that additional funding be made available to SED's pupil transportation department so that this office may be properly staffed in order to accommodate the changes coming to our industry.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre, chair of the Libraries Committee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Good evening, and nice to see you again, Nick.

MR. VALLONE: You as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: I want to first thank you and all of your members who have committed their time during the pandemic, the height of the pandemic. And I know that there is a bus shortage -- a bus driver shortage, and we are paving our way, which -- I know that we spoke before and you're trying -- we're trying to see how we can get those jobs out into the communities so we can get more drivers.

But if you can speak to where you stand with outstanding reimbursements that are owed to bus companies from the state, if any, and also how we can better assist with recruiting efforts to the workforce. Because I remember we talked about how during the pandemic the drivers were still working and you were paying them, so -- and you have not been reimbursed.

MR. VALLONE: So on outstanding reimbursement, that's not related to my point. And my testimony would be I believe you are referring to the fact that the state did not reimburse school districts and made

an announcement, rather, that they would not reimburse school districts for transportation that did not occur after May of 2020.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Correct.

MR. VALLONE: Yeah. So, you know, those situations certainly did exist. We are far beyond them. We certainly would like to see that situation rectified. And, you know, I believe we are the only state in the nation that took that position.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.

MR. VALLONE: And as far as getting these jobs out into the community, I'll bring it back to third-party testing. Right now, if you want to be a commercial driver in the State of New York, there is one sole gatekeeper, that being the DMV. And we love our colleagues at the DMV, and they've done a phenomenal job. But the expansion of opportunity in allowing individuals like myself and my colleagues and BOCES and driver training schools to make that situation more approachable and more accessible for more individuals, we truly believe that is

necessary to compete in this workforce when there are so many other opportunities for folks to go to work.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Interesting. Okay, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Shelley Mayer.

SENATOR MAYER: Yes. Very briefly. And thank you for your perseverance for making it through today.

But Fred, I just wondered -- you know, one thing you don't mention here and I haven't seen much about is any incentives to encourage schools to install solar. What has been your experience with whether schools are interested? And if they're not interested, why not?

MR. KOELBEL: Well, I have 48 kW on my elementary school in my district, and I have another --

(Zoom interruption.)

MR. KOELBEL: -- on the maintenance building in my district. Both were installed through our grants in the early '90s or when

we had had that funding.

One of the problems with the schools is the cost of solar. While it is coming down, it doesn't necessarily pay for itself for the school because we don't get to take advantage of the tax credits. You know, in many areas that's what makes it affordable for individuals. But when it comes to schools, we don't get the advantage of those. So as recently as two years ago we were looking at doing it as part of a performance contract, and it's difficult to make that work.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. I hear you. I think that's a conversation we should have and figure out a better way to do it. I'm not sure the finances haven't changed in the last two years.

But that being said, Nick, thank you for your people really hanging in there during a very tough period of time. I know we worked hard to make sure some of these issues got resolved. What is the starting salary -- first, I'm very, very supportive of

the third-party testing as a method of increasing drivers. What is the starting salary for a school bus driver? For example, you're in the Catskill region. Is it minimum wage?

MR. VALLONE: No, Senator. And that's a really difficult question to answer aside from an individual, say, hourly rate. It ties more to a -- it's not only an hourly rate but a guarantee of hours per day and a guarantee of days per year.

As you know, schools operate for 180 days, but often drivers are paid for upwards of 200 days-plus, excluding their option to drive in the summertime. So it's a really, really tough question to answer, but it's far from minimum wage.

SENATOR MAYER: So on balance, though, starting drivers are being paid what, $20 an hour? I mean, just give me a ballpark. Because, you know, one of the reasons I think we don't have enough is that traditionally we haven't paid enough.

MR. VALLONE: Well, it's a fair point.

And yes, I will say that it's anywhere -- I mean, New York is vast -- anywhere from 18 to 25 starting, and as high in some places as 35. Right?

But what I will say to your point is that in looking at those different regions and looking at those areas with those different pay scales, the problem that we face is identical.

SENATOR MAYER: Okay. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

MR. VALLONE: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go now to the Assembly chair of Education, Mike Benedetto.

ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Yeah, I just felt compelled just to say thank you to both of you men for your -- for who you represent and how you have done and how dedicated you have been either providing for the facilities and getting our kids safely to school, and just also for your endurance being here all day long, if that's what you were doing, waiting for your time. You should be

complimented. The people you represent should be complimented.

And know we think highly of you and what you guys have done. Thank you for being there in our time of need.

Have a good night.

MR. VALLONE: We appreciate that, Assemblyman. And I will be absolutely sure to share that message with our drivers and matron staffs, because they are the real heroes here.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We are going to move on to the next panel.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, you have Jo Anne Simon, who has popped up with her hand.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Jo Anne Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: It's not really a question.

Mr. Koelbel, I just want to follow up with you. Maybe I can give your office a call, because I have a kind of very nerd

question that I would like to ask and I don't want to take up all of the time of everybody else. But I just wanted to say that. So I'll speak to you soon, I hope.

MR. KOELBEL: All right. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So now the next panel. For those of you following, it is Panel K. Even though I and J comes afterwards, which probably isn't the best thing on the Education hearing.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: However, the panels were moved around, and the alphabet didn't change.

So Panel K is BOCES of New York State, Dan White, legislative chair; Rural Schools Association of New York, David Little, executive director; Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation, Andy Mager, organizer.

And if Dan White could start.

MR. WHITE: I will. Thank you very much, and I appreciate your persistence now that you're working on well over 11 hours. I

appreciate you sticking with us.

I'm Dan White, district superintendent, Monroe 1 BOCES, here representing the 37 BOCES in New York State and the 700 school districts we serve. You have our written testimony, so I will be very, very brief.

I want to hit on two important points of this. We have heard a lot this morning, this afternoon, and this evening on increasing state support for current technical education. It is a proposal that we have talked with you about before, you supported it in both houses. We are asking for that support again, and that is the increase of the CTE aidability for BOCES and also for special services aid for the Big 5.

We have a critical pipeline of future employees that we need to develop for many sectors of our economy. I know you all know that. And we believe strongly that every child in New York State should have access to quality CTE programs so they can participate

in the opportunities that exist in this economy. So we thank you for your support in the past, and we will ask you for your support moving forward. As you know, that was not in the Executive Budget.

The second point I want to hit on is support to promote access to mental health services. As you know, the need for mental health and behavioral health services predates the pandemic, but the need is now greater more than ever, and you heard that quite a bit today.

BOCES supports over 100,000 students in New York State, some of which have some of the greatest social and emotional developmental needs of kids in our region, yet we were not made eligible for the grants in the Executive Budget around mental health. That compounds the issue, because we were also not eligible for ARP funds with some of the federal monies.

And we would ask you to consider, if those things move forward in the budget, to make BOCES eligible as well, as we serve,

again, some of the neediest children in our region.

That being said, grants go away, as we know. Federal funds are going to go away. And I think there is time to have a concerted discussion about access to mental health services in our schools and our communities everywhere in this state. We would welcome participating in that discussion. How can we develop consistent funding streams for schools and agencies, and how can we develop a consistent pool of professionals that can serve our community? So we will be willing and able to participate in that discussion.

We have other things in our budgetary language that we submitted to you, but I'm going to stop and step aside so you can invite in other panelists.

Thank you for the time.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Can we move on now to David Little.

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Thank you, everybody, for hanging in there for this long. I know exactly how

tough it's been because I did it too, since 9:30 this morning, watching, and I appreciate it.

Also, obviously, I appreciate the effort that all of you have made, along with the Executive, in reshaping the entire discussion around public education. We aren't talking about the total so much this year, for the first time.

We also -- I'm thrilled to not be talking about how we will have to horse-trade untoward proposals that would shift costs onto local districts in order to get at the real discussion that's underway. This is for the first time in my memory -- and that's 38 years involved in this, either in the Legislature itself or as part of this process -- that we haven't had to try and figure out how to buy back savings that have been passed on to local city school districts. It's a refreshing approach. And truly, for both of those things, we're are very grateful.

But there's a -- what can no longer be

considered an unintended consequence in this procedure we're going through, in the second of three years of fully funding Foundation Aid, and that is the practical implication of all this is that much of this funding is going to our wealthier districts, because they're the last to be fully funded because our neediest districts in many cases were the first to be fully funded when we started to restore the money taken with the Gap Elimination Adjustment.

So we now find ourselves in the circumstance that the vast majority of high-need districts, certainly most of our rural districts -- and that's 370, virtually half of the school districts in the state, and a third of the students -- are receiving a less than inflationary increase.

The purchasing power of half of our districts is going to decline because we now have either a 2 or a 3 percent increase, respectively, for all of those districts held on save harmless. Forty-two percent of our districts are not under the current formula,

and the ones that are under the current formula are operating under a formula that's now over a decade old, and certainly the needs of our children haven't remained constant over that time period.

All of this begs the question of what we're going to do after full funding. Are we simply going to add an inflationary increase and add more or less money per year, depending on what the state's finances are? Or are we going to take the time and effort needed to cost out what it costs in 2022 and beyond to provide the state's constitutionally required education to all of its children? We haven't undertaken that exercise in probably 15, 17 years.

And so to ignore that now, to know that we have many more English language learners, we've got a phenomenally increased degree of student mental health needs, we've got tremendously increased student poverty -- and yet our formula doesn't adjust for that at all.

You know, particularly for our rural

schools, while everyone's had a tough time during the pandemic, the impact on rural children has been the equivalent of solitary confinement. When you can't be transported and your parents have the car and you don't have internet access, you're by yourself. And we know what the emotional and psychological impact of that is when we do that to people, and that's what's happened.

And so we've got learning loss, we've got social and emotional retardation among our students, and we have to address those things. And we have no plan for that within our existing formula.

You know, I attended Senator Mayer's public forum about what to do about Foundation Aid, and I heard the same remarks every time I went to one of them. We had urban education advocates who were rightly asking for full funding of Foundation Aid, but their mantra was "How do you know a formula's broken until you fully fund it?"

Well, you know because it's a mathematical formula with predictive value.

Right? We knew exactly what would happen when we fully funded this. And so we have to take responsibility for also knowing how many of our children are not being helped in this circumstance.

So I would simply say, with the $5 billion --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: David, I'm given you a little leeway with the time, if you could just sum up. The time has expired.

MR. LITTLE: Yeah, this actually was my last comment. Thanks, Chair.

Simply, there's 2 billion in discretionary money within the budget, there's 5 billion set aside for us to put to a Rainy Day Fund in the middle of a crisis. And I would certainly urge the Legislature to try and fight for funding so that those districts that are at the 3 percent increase when inflation is greater than that not come out of this thing worse off than they were going into it, while many of our wealthier communities are getting an extreme level of support.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

And lastly in this panel, Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation.

MR. MAGER: Great. Thank you very much.

My name is Andy Mager. I represent Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation, a project of the Syracuse Peace Council. We're a community organization of non-indigenous people here in Central New York who have worked in solidarity with the Onondaga people for over two decades to protect our shared environment and build a sustainable future based on justice for all who live in our region.

I come before you to urge increased support for three indigenous schools on indigenous territories which have been consistently underfunded by New York State for decades. My written testimony lays out the factual information, so I'll talk more personally here.

My concern about the terrible harm we have carried out against indigenous peoples

was born in my U.S. history class at Oyster Bay High School on Long Island. My teacher, Mr. Vandermeer, supplemented the regular curriculum by having us read Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, the powerful story about the nearly successful effort to destroy the indigenous peoples of the American West.

When I moved to Syracuse 40 years ago, I realized that I could be part of the solution, working with the Onondaga people to make amends for the legacy of violence and displacement imposed upon them by New York State and the United States.

I have had the privilege of attending a variety of events at the Onondaga Nation School, a facility which embodies the future of their nation. Filled with cultural imagery, language learning, and community spirit, the Onondaga are rightly very proud of their school.

But this school, like the Tuscarora Nation School in Western New York and the St. Regis Mohawk School in Northern New York, is desperately in need of major renovations,

systems repair, and expansion. And I'll note, following the previous speakers, that these are all three rural schools. It's long past time for New York State to remedy this situation.

Our ancestors signed treaties with the Haudenosaunee. Unfortunately, these treaties have been repeatedly ignored and broken. This history includes the illegal taking of land, denigration of cultural and religious practices, unfair treatment in the courts, and the appalling boarding school era -- fortunately, all of which indigenous communities have survived.

Governor Hochul's budget makes a good start, providing over half of what the superintendents of these districts have requested to bring the schools to parity. We owe a huge debt to the first peoples of New York State. The 60 million for these three schools is a small down payment on our road to justice.

I'm happy to take questions and engage in further discussion. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. White, I just wanted to quickly get into -- you know, you talked about the, you know, the current structure with CTE and the $30,000 and phasing in an increase over three years for the aidable salary.

A few years ago, myself and colleagues in our conference did roundtables around the state regarding something we called the Learn for Work Initiative, and we talked to BOCES in all of the regions of the state. And certainly this was a concern that every student that maybe is appropriate to be placed in one of the programs doesn't, because it becomes a little bit of a bean-counting exercise to the school. And I think ideally we'd be in a situation that a kid who is going to benefit from going to BOCES is going to get the opportunity, and it really is an equity issue for students

throughout the state.

So certainly I think that is, you know, a good solution within the current construct. But do you think we ought to be looking at maybe really rethinking the way we fund BOCES, to make sure that it truly is -- the resources are there so that a student who will benefit from it can go there?

MR. WHITE: I think this is -- this proposal -- and thank you for those comments. I think this proposal is a very good start.

As you know, BOCES do not levy taxes, we do not receive state aid, and we can function in our current system. The aidability, particular for CTE, has not been addressed in over 30 years. So each year a school district sends a student, they're picking up a greater local share which will lead to some of the things that you described previously. So we think this is a huge step to do that.

I think there are opportunities to look at how we can increase greater access to BOCES' current technical education programs

and other things, as well as the Big 5. An increase in Special Services Aid would really help.

I remember you coming around the state to do that. And there are tremendous opportunities for children in this economy, and it is a shame when not every kid in every community can have quality access to programs to really fully participate in the economy. And it's an access equity issue, as you described. And we think this is a big step in the right direction to be able to provide greater equity there.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes, and I think certainly on the career side and also on the educational side, when we have gone out of our way to create educational diploma pathways through a CTE option and that class is not available to a student in a certain district, then that avenue really isn't open to them. So thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate, do you have -- I don't think you have anybody?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We don't have any

hands up.

I do want to just point out to Mr. Mager that the issue of the three Native American schools' funding showed up this morning, and my two colleagues from Syracuse, Rachel May and John Mannion, raised the issue of real concern for the Onondaga School in particular. And we sort of match-made them with the Regents and Betty Rosa, who was going to follow up on this with them. So you might want to double-check with them as well.

MR. MAGER: Okay. Thank you very much. Yes, we have been in touch with -- particularly Senator May's office. Yeah.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So I think then we are -- this panel is -- going to say goodbye.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all for being here.

MR. MAGER: Hope you are not here too

much longer.

MR. LITTLE: Thanks, folks.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We're getting near the end.

We're going to bring in Panel I: New York State Catholic Conference, James Cultrara, director of education; Agudath Israel, Avrohom Weinstock, chief of staff.

And Jim, if you want to lead us off.

MR. CULTRARA: Good evening. And we are very grateful to you for inviting our comments on the Executive Budget. Good to see you all. And I wish we could actually be in person, but still good to see you.

We are also -- I should say more so -- grateful for your ongoing support of the several programs that benefit the students, teachers, families of the state's religious and independent schools. Those programs go a long way to providing assistance for our teachers and our kids. More is needed, but let me comment specifically on the Executive Budget proposal.

Two programs in particular, of which

the Governor increases significantly the non-public safety equipment from $15 million to $45 million -- a generous increase. We've got great needs in this program, and the Governor recognizes that by allowing for the first time to -- schools can use those funds now to remediate hazardous conditions and to take care of critical capital needs in maintaining our facilities.

For too long, too many of our schools, Catholic schools, have had to close because they couldn't raise the funds needed to maintain their facilities. So finally we have access to those funds. Likewise, the Governor provides a generous increase in the STEM program from 40 to 55. It is a very popular program that you created, for which we are grateful -- popular enough that applications are coming in at $100 million. So the appropriation is just halfway there.

We are hoping that under both programs the Legislature -- which you created these programs to our benefit -- we hope that you add to your support for these programs.

One program that the Governor did not provide funding for that's been there since 1985, and that is the immunization reimbursement program that reimburses our schools located in the cities of Buffalo, Rochester, and New York City, for the costs of those schools and their principals in complying with the State Health Department's immunization program.

Again, since 1985 there was funding, and you and your colleagues increased that funding a number of years ago. Since that increase, though, it's never been advanced in an Executive Budget, and you have had to restore those funds, which we hope you will do once again.

Finally, while these programs that I have highlighted do provide direct -- excuse me, indirect support to parents and the education costs that they face, our parents still need help with the direct costs of their children's education. And my colleague, Avrohom Weinstock, if he has time, will talk about how 529 plans can provide

some of that help.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Now, Avrohom Weinstock.

MR. WEINSTOCK: Sure. Good evening, chairs and members of the committee. I am certainly appreciative of your time at this late hour. Thank you for being here.

My name is Avrohom Weinstock, and I am testifying on behalf of Agudath Israel of America, which advocates for and serves 162,000 Jewish non-public schools to children across New York State. Education occupies a central place in Judaism and is viewed not simply as a means of attaining a job, but as a medium with which to transmit a cherished set of values.

As you know, at approximately $26,000 to educate each public school pupil, New York's 383,000 non-public school students save taxpayers nearly $10 billion annually. Put another way, while there is much to be thankful for in the Executive Budget,

14 percent of children still receive just 0.96 percent of the total education budget.

Each child and each community is different. Nonpublic schools stand for the simple notion that parents should be able to offer the environment they believe will work best for their child. With the above in mind, and with budget projections firmly positive through 2027, now is the time for bold action to ensure that all schools can best educate our children in a safe environment.

With that, I will focus on a few areas of acute need. Jersey City, Muncie, Pittsburgh, Poway, Brighton, and now Colleyville -- a growing number of cities have gained notoriety for being the sites of antisemitic violence at a Jewish school, community center or house of worship. Asking for security funding to prevent something we hope will never occur is not the type of ask I want to make, but for the sake of our children, it is the one I need to make.

The proposed Executive Budget includes

a nonpublic school safety equipment increase, which my colleague Jim just mentioned, from 15 to 45 million, and expands its list of allowable uses. Agudath Israel respectfully requests, given the current unfortunate reality, that the Legislature approve an increase of at least this much in the enacted budget.

We also support the proposed increases in STEM in the Executive Budget and making schools whole for medical recordkeeping performed, as my colleague just mentioned.

Personally, I could say that I benefited from a rigorous, multi-linguistic, dual-curriculum yeshiva education. Agudath Israel encourages a substantial equivalency solution that fully respects the rigor, diversity and autonomy of Jewish schools.

And with this I'll close. Now, today I could say that I could save for the college education of my second-grade daughter in a 529 account. But will she be admitted to the college of her choice?

The proposal -- High Fives, as we call

it -- is to allow all parents, public and non-public, access to their 529 account for broad high school educational expenses, be it an SAT prep tutor, you know, a course -- whatever it might be -- tuition. Note that the IRS and many states already allow this for K-12.

With that, I'll thank you for partnering with us to enhance the education, diversity and security of New York's children wherever they may best learn.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So I don't know if we are too tired, or you were just both really concise in your remarks. I think it is combination of both. But you're both people that we -- representing organizations that we've dealt with over the years, and we're very much appreciative of the work you do for the non-public schoolchildren, 400,000-plus non-public schoolchildren in our state.

So I think -- we thank you for being here. And we move on --

MR. CULTRARA: Thank you, and thank

you for your support.

MR. WEINSTOCK: Thank you.

SENATOR MAYER: Thank you. Thank you both.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And again, we will move on to the final panel, which the final panel has become a panel of one because Mr. Thomas was in flight -- so it was going to be in flight, so he couldn't make the hearing.

So we have our last witness for the hearing: Advanced Energy Economy, Ryan Gallentine, director.

Ryan, feel free to begin.

MR. GALLENTINE: Thank you. All right, you guys made it from this morning. It's a marathon here. I assume I am the headline act here in the last spot.

Yes, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the proposed budget on behalf of Advanced Energy Economy. My name is Ryan Gallentine. I am the policy director for Electrifying Transportation at AEE. We are a national association of businesses working to

accelerate the move to 100 percent clean energy and electrify transportation in New York and the United States. Our membership includes companies that build electric school buses, charging infrastructure providers, and fleet operators.

My comments this evening will focus on the Governor's proposal to electrify the state's roughly 46,000-vehicle school bus fleet.

AEE supports the Governor's proposal to achieve 100 percent electric school buses in New York by 2035. Electric school buses carry enormous potential economic, climate and health benefits, especially for our most vulnerable citizens, which I outline in detail in my written testimony.

So we are asking the Legislature to accept portions of Part B and modify others. But by enacting Part B, New York would be one of the first states to provide dedicated transportation aid for charging infrastructure and the electricity associated

with charging these electric school buses. This section should be adopted.

And moving on to amendments, as you work to hammer out the details of the school bus program within the budget, I am offering the following four suggestions for you to consider.

Number one, ensure schools have immediate access to robust incentives. The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the State Bond Act money may eventually help fund incentives for electric school buses, but the timing for those funding streams' availability is not clear, especially if school districts are to start purchasing electric school buses to meet the Governor's 2025 target. Those school districts need to have access to those incentives now.

A state appropriation of at least one year of incentive funding will ensure that the funds are available immediately. They can be replenished on a supplemental basis once other funding streams are secured. You

might also consider making multiyear transportation funding programs available for schools now to help cover the higher up-front purchase price of electric vehicles, which has been discussed in previous panels.

Number two, prioritize incentives to school districts most in need. As outlined in a bill we actively support, Senate Bill 5268, AEE recommends an incentives program that gives the most aid to school districts who are most in need of support as measured by the level of aid that a school district received in the previous fiscal year.

Number three, lease term extension. The Executive proposal increases the length of allowable procurement terms for electric school buses from five to 10 years. This is a needed change, but increasing this option further to 15 years will allow districts even more latitude and flexibility in negotiating for favorable terms when procuring these buses.

It does not require the leases to be 15 years, but it gives districts additional

flexibility to make that decision at the local level. And longer ownership terms enable bus operators to realize the greater total cost of ownership parity with the diesel buses, due to lower fuel costs and reduced maintenance.

Finally, sales tax exemptions. School districts use school bus contractors as we heard to transport their students. We would support a sales tax exemption for the purchase of those contracted buses. Those private contractors should receive the same incentive to transition their fleet to zero emissions, as we heard from Mr. Vallone of the School Bus Contractors Association.

So with that, I will wrap up. Thanks for the opportunity to provide input on this, and we are supportive of these provisions.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: All right. I did not see any Assembly or I didn't see -- sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: A quick one.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I see Senator

Liu has --

SENATOR LIU: No. No, ma'am. I insist my Finance chair go first.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I will be quick.

SENATOR LIU: Don't be quick. I am sorry, point of information. What time did they end last night?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We were 13 hours. So we have 10:30 last night, so --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We are early tonight.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We are going to beat last night's meeting. We are shorter than last night.

SENATOR LIU: Well, I may have a lot of questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, you don't, John.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: No, you don't.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: As many as you can get in in three minutes.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Krueger.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

So you heard the previous panelist be concerned that there hasn't been enough research yet into whether electric school buses will be able to do the job. And I am curious whether you have explored any studies, because there have been electric bus lines in various places. I don't know about school buses.

Have you done the research to convince people that we actually are ready to move to electric buses, while we may need to do some adjustments in our laws and even some adjustments in supplements for -- if there are higher costs up front? Because it's my understanding that the cost saved from not having to pay for diesel fuel would actually bring the cost in favor of electric over a period of time.

So I am just curious what your analysis of this is.

MR. GALLENTINE: Yeah, it is really this classic question of CapEx versus OpEx, right? It's a higher up-front cost that you

receive over the reduced -- over the period of time electric vehicles are, you know, proving to achieve parity over that, as I said, that 10-to-15-year life span of the vehicle.

I will say like, you know, electric school buses have not been around for all too many years, so it's an emerging field. But, you know, as my colleague Orville from Lion would have mentioned, they're running school buses in a number of different places that are not so different. They also have their pilot project in White Plains that's running right now.

And, you know, there is a lot of opportunity here. And I do think, from what I have heard from my members, it is less about the technology or the vehicles being able to do it, it's really about this financial hurdle and these up-front costs. Manufacturers on that 2035 timeline have told me that they are able to make that. They are not concerned.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very

much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So John Liu, Senator Liu, did you have a question? Or you were just looking to draw this out?

SENATOR LIU: Madam Chair, I would never do that to you, because I know you have more hearings to run. I only want to thank Ryan for the information.

I do support getting us all to electric everything as quickly as possible. The question is always, as Senator Krueger invoked, that, you know, how soon can we do this. And how much more expensive is it now, rather than next year or the year after, because the infrastructure keeps building itself?

Anyway, that's it. You will see no filibuster here.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Great. So I want to thank all of our -- I want to thank Ryan for being our last witness and waiting.

MR. GALLENTINE: I appreciate it.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: It's been long

for us. I want to thank all of the -- my cochair, Senator Krueger, and all of the members who have participated throughout the day, and the public, for those of you who have followed and been watching.

We are going to officially end the hearing and remind people that on Monday, January 31st, at 11 a.m. is the Workforce Development hearing, to be followed at 2 p.m. with the Housing hearing.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Or sometime in the afternoon. We always claimed 2 p.m. for the second hearing.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Right. And that one will go a while, too.

So thank you all.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And this officially ends today's hearing. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And thank you to all the chairs and rankers for staying all day. Take care.

(Whereupon, the budget hearing concluded at 9:20 p.m.)