

February 1, 2024

Dear NYS Finance Committee,

As Youth Leaders of the Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP), who live all across New York City, we write to you today on behalf of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), alongside the Emergency Coalition to Save Education Programs. Over 160 organizations have come together to urge our New York elected leaders to identify funding to sustain essential education programs supported by federal COVID-19 stimulus dollars set to sunset June 2024.

We ask our elected officials to take immediate action to sustain critical education programs currently supported by temporary federal COVID-19 stimulus funding set to run dry in June 2024. The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has experienced an increase in microaggressions, violence, and racism that community members face daily. Lack of or discontinuation of this funding will result in schools neglecting to adequately address students' needs, including those of AAPI students across the city. Notable examples of this year's investments include:

- **\$67 million to support the addition of 450 school social workers, allowing nearly 194,000 students to gain access to a social worker.** Even with this investment, there is only one school social worker for every 435 students enrolled in NYCPS schools, and more than 240,000 students do not have access to a full-time social worker. Some of the barriers and challenges faced by AAPI students include implicit bias from teachers and administrators as a result of the model minority myth's perpetuation that AAPI students do not face mental health challenges and a general lack of comfort discussing their feelings about school with their families, often related to fear and stigma surrounding mental health. All students, including AAPI students, deserve access to a full-time social worker in their schools.
 - “Being a part of the Mental Health campaign team at the Asian American Student Advocacy Project, my peers and I have found that we do not feel supported in schools because of the lack of care and seriousness for mental health in schools, along with our families' belief that mental health is nonexistent. It is so much harder to reach out and ask for help. I believe that continuing to push for more social workers would benefit AAPI students because knowing that mental health is being prioritized in schools would allow us to unlearn the stigma surrounding mental health.” – **Julie Wu, Midwood High School**

- “As someone who has had issues understanding and talking about my AAPI identity in the past, having someone who could have understood and helped me navigate how to better learn about my heritage would have been so helpful for me in school. As someone who has a younger sister, I want her to be able to have those resources when she is older.” – **Olivia Kim, Stuyvesant High School**
- “The lack of social workers makes students feel isolated as they don't have the support they need. Social workers are a crucial part of a young person's life as they can support us with overcoming struggles.” – **Ashwyn Lu-Heda, Eleanor Roosevelt High School**
- “AAPI students may not feel safe or even allowed to share their feelings with their parents. A school social worker may be their only hope.” – **Aisha Mowla, Brooklyn Technical High School**
- “By not having these resources available, it tells students that their mental health is unimportant and invalidates their struggles. Students like myself are left to deal with their mental health issues alone, which is a very isolating and scary experience.” – **Emily Ng, Stuyvesant High School**
- “When there is a lack of social workers, schools are depriving students of access for them to be and feel safe. The goal of schools should not only be about educating the youth, but also caring for them.” – **Ari Schaer, High School of American Studies at Lehman College**
- **\$12 million for the expansion of restorative justice practices, which have allowed more schools to use alternatives to exclusionary discipline that keep students in the classroom while helping them build and repair relationships.** AAPI students have experienced an increase in microaggressions in schools and feel unsafe in their school community. Investing in restorative justice is imperative in building empathy and community for all students.
 - “My brother and I experienced racist incidents in schools and institutional negligence toward our treatment; we had no one to turn to. However, we've been very happy to see the efforts toward restorative justice being made in more recent years. These resources must remain so that future students of our state's public schools won't have to endure our experience to the extent that we did.” – **Casey Wu**
 - “If students do not feel safe even in their classroom, how can they be expected to thrive?” – **Jonas Wooh, N.Y.C. Lab School for Collaborative Studies**
 - “We need to continue expanding restorative justice practices that support AAPI students by promoting inclusivity and understanding, which contribute to

fostering community and belonging.” – **Ryan Kim, The Bronx High School of Science**

- “We want all students to feel belonging and safe in their school environment, and restorative justice is how schools should approach it.” **Jakoub Chen, Curtis High School**

- **\$10 million toward the expansion of bilingual programming to support the education of English Language Learners.** The Asian American Student Advocacy Project surveyed AAPI ELLs from 18 high schools across NYC and gained valuable insights into the challenges faced by AAPI ELL students in NYC high schools. ELL students face issues beyond academic challenges. They face cultural challenges and barriers in social interactions.
 - “For AAPI ELL students, we face linguistic barriers and misunderstanding that sets us to become overwhelmed and isolated in school. I have seen many of my AAPI friends being pressured to do their best at school, but language has been the biggest challenge.” – **Kyae Sin Linn Lat, John Dewey High School**
 - “As an ELL student, I experienced a lack of support from teachers. This made me unable to understand what others said and led to a sense of hopelessness. Consequently, I isolated myself from students and teachers, creating a barrier that kept me from fully engaging in the community. Hence we must expand bilingual programming to support the education of ELL students.” – **Haixin Wu, Manhattan Hunter Science High School**
 - “When I first moved to the United States, I struggled to adapt to a new community, especially as my school did not offer ESL classes. Due to my middle school's lack of bilingual programming, I struggled with class materials and socializing with other students.” – **Jiwon Lee, Eleanor Roosevelt High School**
 - “To better support the AAPI students who are struggling to learn English, we must continue to support programs to help them thrive.” – **Ethan Pereira, Saint Francis Preparatory School**
 - “The bilingual programs are not just about resources; it's about creating an environment that embraces and supports students learning English. Elected officials must ensure that everyone, regardless of their language background, feels valued and included.” **Aqida Rama, Brooklyn Technical High School**
 - “Without adequate support, ELL students feel lonely and left out because they don't know what others are talking about. Investing in bilingual programs would support students in building social skills, which are crucial for building

relationships and feeling supported in their community.” – **Karen Kong, Midwood High School**

- “Having a program where ELL students can feel supported and seen as they are adapting to their new school environment is crucial to prevent isolation and depression for ELL students.” – **Jakoub Chen, Curtis High School**
- **\$7 million to expand access to translation and interpretation services.** The AAPI communities consist of approximately 50 ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages. Translations and interpreting services are essential for schools to better engage with students and families.
 - “ All students are different. It is imperative that the government understand the needs and differences between all students. Language plays a crucial role in bridging our diversity gaps, and we must continue enhancing this for all.” – **Kyle Lin, James Madison High School**
 - “In a place like New York, with many backgrounds, translation and interpretation services are basic necessities.” – **Aisha Mowla, Brooklyn Technical High School**
 - “I have seen the effect of disrupting the lives of my friends and their parents because there was a lack of adequately translated material. This then results in the people losing access to opportunities.” – **Harpreet Singh, Stuyvesant High School**
 - “It is essential to engage the parents in the school community. For the AAPI community, there are many languages spoken, and there are many parents who struggle at events such as parent-teacher conferences. How can the parents stay involved when there is a lack of culturally responsive translation and interpretation services?” – **Brayden Wan, Bard High School Early College**
 - “ As a first-generation Bengali-American student, I have parents who speak little English. However, teachers would send home notices with a Bangla translation on the back. These Bangla translations helped my parents be more involved in my education and aware of what was happening at school. Hence it is important to expand access to translation and interpretation services for all students and their families.” –**Reona Alam, Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics**

Some other investments include an increase in the number of seats in 3-K, investment in preschool special education programs, an increase in the number of community schools, hiring more psychologists and family workers, hiring coordinators to provide shelter assistance, and support for literacy instruction and dyslexia programming.



This summary does not reflect every investment NYCPS has made using temporary federal stimulus dollars, but it underscores the enormously high stakes for students—especially those whose needs have too often been overlooked—and the urgent need for elected leaders to act before this funding runs dry.

We are counting on our elected officials to fund these programs and services to ensure every student can thrive in school and communities.