



Yonkers Children: A Guaranteed Return on Investment



SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS 2018-2019 AND BEYOND

**Budget Testimony before the New York State
Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees**

Presented January 31, 2018 by:
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Testimony

Distinguished members of the Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees thank you, once again, for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers City School District; I am Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, Superintendent of Schools. The City of Yonkers is a diverse citizenry from every continent and socio-economic strata, and all of our families strive to achieve the American dream. We educate over 31,000 children in public, private and parochial schools. The City of Yonkers and New York State are responsible to provide the intellectual, social and emotional foundation for these children to thrive as productive citizens in our great country. Governor Cuomo in the State of the State and in his 2018 Policy Book unveiled an ambitious public education agenda to create equity in all schools, which speaks volumes to the needs of urban communities. It is a responsibility that comes with many challenges that require additional resources. Yonkers asks this esteemed body and Legislators across the State to embrace these challenges and support equitable education for urban children.

Who are Yonkers students? They are 31,210 urban students: 26,626 prekindergarten to grade twelve students in the District's 39 public schools, 470 Students with Disabilities in out-of-district placements, 698 students in the Charter School, and 3,416 children in City of Yonkers Parochial/Private schools. These children receive services such as transportation, textbooks, library resources, nurse, pupil support services, Title I, II and III funds and special education services. District enrollment is projected for continuous growth through 2020-2021. **These students reside in Westchester County and deserve to have the same educational experiences and opportunities as their peers throughout the county. And, their needs are decisively greater. Many Yonkers students face extreme poverty and require academic, social and emotional supports.**

79% Economically Disadvantaged	58% Hispanic
17% Students with Disabilities	18% African American/Black
12% English Language Learners	24% White Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, Multi-Racial

The state of the Yonkers Public Schools is strong. Our commitment to provide a sound basic education to all of our children is even stronger. As a community, we embrace an all-encompassing philosophy to educate all of our students, their families, their younger siblings, and the community at large. Thriving networks of support are available in Yonkers that begin when a child is born and culminates once the young adult enters college, the military or workplace. Similarly, we have strengthened our community school model providing medical and mental health services, legal assistance and social services in many of our schools and our Adult Education Center which annually services over 1,000 adults.

Yonkers has evolved into the quintessential Community District Model; an example of what a strong partnership between State and City Government, the public schools, and community agencies can create for our children, families and community.

The results are tangible in the City of Yonkers:

- My Brother's Keeper movement is flourishing and considered a model in New York State. Initiated in 2016 by Mayor Spano and co-chaired by Rev. Dr. Jim Bostic of the Nepperhan Community Center and me with the enthusiastic support of the Board of Education. Yonkers MBK has ignited our community to rally around our young men and women of color through mentoring and collaborations. The effectiveness of our work brings national attention to Yonkers. Last week, the national Campaign for Black Male Achievement spotlighted Yonkers as a "City on the Horizon"—a municipality beginning to scale up its investment in Black men and boys. It all starts with caring adults.

- Yonkers Basics, a nationally growing initiative, which we began last year with the goal to support families with infants and toddlers and their caregivers prepare these youngsters to enter school ready to learn. We are accomplishing this by gathering many community agencies and organizations to work with us.
- Significant reduction in the number of Persistently Struggling schools from 7 to 3 schools.
- 86% Graduation Rate for Class of 2017 (2013 Cohort) - above the State average of 82% and the highest of the Big 5 cities.
- 3.7% Drop-out Rate in 2016-2017 that decreased by 49% over three years - lower than the State average of 6%.
- Improved annual results on State assessments in grades 3 – 8 English Language Arts and Math.
- Increased SAT scores for the District by 15% in Reading and 12% in Mathematics over three years.
- Afterschool programs with wraparound services offered during and after school in 15 schools.

Our work is not complete. Yonkers' young people are magnificent, and they hold the keys to our future in their hands. Yet too many of them have been delayed, distracted or diverted on their paths to success. Eradicating conditions that limit students' social, emotional, and academic progress must be everyone's goal.

Yonkers is asking all State officials to partner with us so that:

- Psychologists, social workers, and school counselors are in every school
- Art, Music, and Technology are an integral component of every student's educational experience
- Modified and Junior Varsity sports are offered to all students
- Prekindergarten is a State supported mandate for urban children, not only offered when grant funding is available
- Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners funding is aligned with the additional services required to educate these children

These services must be sustainable and uninterrupted throughout our children's education to accomplish our common goal – a sound basic education for all New York children. To do this, Yonkers seeks your support to:

- Address the inequities of the Foundation Aid Formula that negatively impacts the City of Yonkers. This year, the impact may be even greater. Yonkers Public Schools is entitled to receive \$243 million in Foundation Aid. The current school aid runs indicate Yonkers Foundation Aid is only \$195 million leaving us short \$48 million. The Executive's proposal provides a \$4 million increase in Foundation Aid – creating a \$43 million shortfall. If the State expects us to provide a sustainable sound basic education, Foundation Aid must be fully funded in 2018-19 and beyond.
- Allocate additional funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) and ensure that districts are reimbursed starting with Grade 9 students. Currently, Yonkers offers CTE courses to 1,223 ninth grade students. If we were to be reimbursed for these students, Yonkers would receive an additional \$2.2 million.
- Legislate prekindergarten for all New York State children as a State responsibility.
- Increase Yonkers aid for new school construction and much needed repairs.

- Do not change the reimbursement for Students with Disabilities Summer School from the current 80% reimbursement to a combined wealth-based income/property formula which continues to negatively impact our district. Yonkers reimbursement would decrease to 60.2%, a loss of \$1 million for mandated 12 month services for these high need children.

Yonkers Children – A Guaranteed Return on Investment. Strong partnerships have and continue to produce robust positive outcomes for children. The relentless work of the Yonkers Public Schools learning community and Trustees collaboratively with Mayor Spano, his administration and especially our distinguished State delegation has created conditions for our students and parents to believe that a sustainable sound basic education is within our reach.

However, our financial situation remains in a precarious state. This year, our status quo budget is expected to be \$623 million and our anticipated revenues are \$577 million. This leaves a projected shortfall of \$46 million. Closing this gap requires your support.

Yonkers is a resilient community that believes a dynamic prosperous future must be a reality for its public school children and their supportive adults.

Finally, **Rebuilding Yonkers Schools** cannot become a topic of conversation or a problem to be analyzed for years. The critical need is here and now for Yonkers children and staff. Currently, we are struggling with a deficit of over 4,000 seats in antiquated schools that barely support 21st Century learning. To provide a sound basic education for our continuously growing student enrollment is an ongoing challenge. Rebuilding public schools must be a decisive action driven conversation among elected officials and all stakeholders with a commitment to put shovels in the ground beginning next year. Wisely, last year this esteemed body created the mechanism to access additional dollars. Today, I am asking for the political will and additional monetary support to begin building three (3) new schools. This can be accomplished if you provide the City of Yonkers 98% reimbursement for new school construction, thereby aligning Yonkers reimbursement rate with the other Big 5 cities. The economic and social future of our community and State is reliant on a 21st Century educated workforce. The promise begins in prekindergarten, evolves through high school graduation into post-secondary studies. Yonkers children are a guaranteed return on investment, an 86% graduation rate higher than any of the large New York State school districts. **All we need are sustainable solutions for student success in 2018-2019 and beyond.**

Thank you.

Yonkers Public Schools

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