

Good morning / afternoon. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

My name is Stephen Stowe and I am the President of the Community Education Council for District 20 in southwest Brooklyn. Today I will first address how State and Federal aid funding is being used in our District and second, I will request that one-time Federal aid funding be used on the one-time expense of school construction.

First, on State and Federal aid - in terms of assessing effectiveness, the feedback I have received is that it is very early in the process. But here are some anecdotes from schools I have spoken to.

Along with the rest of the City, our District will screen students for social-emotional health. Our District does not currently know if this assessment will be repeated throughout the year. Schools are also using their own methods to monitor social-emotional health. Specific initiatives include purchasing services from Bank Street College of Education and Harmony Social Emotional Learning, adding a 15-minute SEL period at the beginning of the school day, and working with 3rd party consultants.

In terms of academic performance, our District will be administering a periodic assessment from the vendor Curriculum Associates. One school was able to use funding to purchase a supplemental instructional program from the vendor to engage students between assessments targeting specific skills needed.

Funding has also been spent on Academic Intervention Services, including for Special education students and English Language learners. This funding supports services both during the school day and after school. Funding has been spent on hiring AIS providers and paying teachers per session for after school programs.

Funds have been set aside to enhance remote learning - specifically to pay teachers to plan asynchronous lessons, ensuring students have devices and purchasing online learning applications such as Nearpad and Seesaw.

And schools transmit this to parents using multiple methods including the website, backpacked letters and communication apps like Remind, Operoo, school messenger.

Second. I would now like to make a request. District 20 is a District made and shaped by immigration. 75% of the students are from families with incomes placing them below the poverty line. 23% are English language learners. And we are severely overcrowded. According to the most recent DOE capacity figures, District 20 is at 125% of capacity. The problem is especially acute for our high schools which are at 151% of capacity. One of our high schools - Fort Hamilton - is at 193%.

Per the Interim Final Requirements of the American Rescue Plan Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Local Educational Agencies must plan for the following - safe in person instruction, continuity of services and modifying facilities to allow for physical distancing. All of these, and more, can be achieved by adding seats, reducing overcrowding and thereby improving students' learning environment.

I am aware that the City has a published plan on the use of Federal funding. However, local authorities are required to periodically review and if appropriate, modify the plan.

I am not a lawyer or a legislator. But I have noticed three things I would like to bring to your attention.

1. Of the City's total \$7.3 billion in Federal aid, \$3.2 billion is planned to fund programs which would extend beyond the 2024 & 2025 deadlines for Federal funding under the CRRSA and ARP, respectively. This creates the obvious challenge of finding funding sources past these deadlines. Furthermore, while many of these programs are well-intentioned, they do not all necessarily address the specific concerns raised by the COVID pandemic or a potential future pandemic.

2. Federal education aid is allowed to be spent on construction. Guidance discourages it, citing the time limits I just mentioned. But why not allocate federal funding for near term costs such as site acquisition, freeing up State and Local capital funding? Funding can always be redirected at a later date under the periodic review process if suitable capital uses can not be found. Money is fungible.

3. The ARP authorizes spending on "any activity authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act". The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act itself states that new construction is authorized in order to improve programs authorized under the Act. District 20 sends many students with disabilities to schools outside of our District in order to receive their required instruction and services.

In conclusion, if any legislator or administrator can redirect Federal funding to provide new capacity in District 20 - in particular for high school students and / or for students with disabilities - they would earn the District's deep, lasting gratitude. It would represent a use of short term funding allocated to short term expenses but which creates long-lasting change to the learning conditions for our District. And it would literally achieve the President's goal to "Build Back Better".

Thank you.