



Testimony re: Education Hearing

Submitted to
Senate Committees on Education and NYC Education

Submitted by
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My name is Perla Rodriguez and I'm the Education Programs Manager for Hispanic Federation; we are a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance Hispanic communities through programs and legislative advocacy. I am also representing the Latino Education Advocacy Directors (LEAD) Coalition, which consists of leading educational advocacy organizations committed to improving Latinx academic outcomes and opportunities in New York State. Created by the Hispanic Federation, the coalition works to highlight and address the educational needs of Latinx students in the following ways: identifying and supporting effective practice; public policy advocacy and research; and the advancement of a shared educational agenda.

Foundation Aid and ARP Funds for MLL and Latino Students and Families

During the past eighteen months, educators, students, and parents navigated a set of unprecedented challenges. Since our students' academic learning became interrupted, alarming statistics clearly indicate that Black and Latino students are falling behind. Studies have shown that students are missing between a third to a full year of reading, with math learning having a greater loss due to school closures.¹ These gaps have affected many students of color that were already experiencing disproportionate academic disparities, lack of college access/success and career opportunities. We commend the state for allocating additional financial resources to increase Foundation Aid to support student advancement. The additional funds from the American Rescue Plan will further enable schools to address educational inequities and learning loss.

This testimony highlights how schools supported by our LEAD Coalition members have utilized the funds, and more specifically what the NYC Department of Education informed them the funds can be utilized for. Our members have shared that schools are extremely happy with the additional funds especially that they have options for how they can further support students.

Schools can design a structured plan within their current teaching models to support English Language Learners (ELLs) with identified needs, particularly those who are students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education, newcomer ELLs, and long-term ELLs who have received instruction in U.S. schools for more than six years. Students with interrupted/inconsistent formal education have intricate needs due

¹ (October, 2020). Estimates of learning loss in the 2019 - 2020 School Year. *The Center for Research on Education Outcomes*. Stanford University:
https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/short_brief_on_learning_loss_final_v.3.pdf

to traumatic migration experiences and may not have a familiarity with school culture making them at-risk for dropping out. Schools have been able to provide these students with even more individualized learning plans to ensure their academic success. Further, these services target those who remained at the same proficiency level or decreased in their proficiency level in The New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) from Spring 2021 or are newly admitted ELLs this year or in the past two school years. The results from this test and increase in funding enabled schools to provide more robust supports to multilingual learner (MLL) students who may be suffering academically due to the interruption in learning during the height of the pandemic.

Foundation Aid and ARP funds further enabled schools to allocate funds for the expansion of existing supports and the creation of new ones through additional hires. They now have additional resources to provide support for ELLs during, before, and after the regular school day. The allocations also provide the opportunity for additional professional learning to address the specific needs of ELLs including content in home languages. This lends to added parental engagement activities in English and in students' home languages, giving parents guidance on effective strategies to support their children's learning in and out of school. Since "snow days" will be replaced with virtual learning, indicating that remote instruction is here to stay, it is crucial for parents to be meaningfully engaged in their children's education. Parent engagement can only be possible with linguistically relevant supports that consider English language barriers that may prevent parents from helping their students academically. Home language instructional materials are in the works to further support parent engagement. These are supports that many parents desperately needed during the pandemic but that schools could not provide due to limited resources.

Schools also utilized funding for supplemental reading programs, interventions, and professional development. Research-based reading programs like the Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention Program (STARI) for students who read two or more years below grade level in grades 6-9 is being implemented at certain schools. STARI addresses reading comprehension and gaps in fluency to move students to higher reading levels within one year. This intervention program leverages peer discussions to unlock deep comprehension and critical reading ability. The program provides teachers with daily lesson plans to deliver lessons and lead reading discussions. The funding will enable schools to convert these interventions into home language instructional materials so parents can further support students' reading comprehension.

Overall, these funds allowed some schools to allocate resources to strengthen core instruction for all students and plan for targeted interventions for Multilingual Learners. This includes specific professional learning for bilingual and ENL teachers, including training on modalities to help students with autism like the Applied Behavior Analysis Training. The funding also allows schools to contract qualified vendors with expertise in ELL students to provide relevant professional learning opportunities. Funds can also go towards purchasing texts, curriculum, and other materials to support daily instruction in MLL and bilingual classrooms.

Lastly, the increase in Foundation Aid and the ARP funds have also been utilized to make orders for technology devices, the hiring of social workers, and ELL teachers for summer schools. There is also room to activate the funds as specific needs arise, which is crucial as staff and administrators assess school environments and student needs in this return to full-time in-person learning. This includes requesting funding for additional staff or technology needs.

Although these funds have been recently dispersed, there are concerns about schools' ability to sustain these expanded supports once the American Rescue Plan funds run out since they are one-time funds to be used over the next three years. We ask that the Senate continues to prioritize funding for schools to maintain programs that address the deep needs that have arisen from or been further exacerbated by the pandemic. As we move forward in this return to full-time in-person learning, we continue an uphill battle to address the needs of our students and families, but the state can only recover if we continue to make bold investments in our education. Our students are the future that will carry us over the long-term devastation that the pandemic has created. We look forward to working with you and we thank you for hearing our statement today.