



**TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
PRESIDENT MICHAEL MULGREW**

**BEFORE THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE COMMITTEES
ON EDUCATION, NYC EDUCATION, AND BUDGET AND REVENUE**

**TO REVIEW HOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE SPENDING
FOUNDATION AID AND AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN FUNDS**

OCTOBER 5, 2021

Good morning. My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the union's 190,000 members, I want to thank Chairs Shelley Mayer and John Liu and all the members of the New York State Senate's committees on Education, New York City Education, and Budget and Revenue for convening today's public hearing to review how the New York City Department of Education (DOE) is spending the Foundation Aid increase and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds received this spring.

First, I want to congratulate and thank you for your leadership in Albany. This year, your commitment to NYC public education is historic, driven by an increase of \$530M in Foundation Aid and a promise to provide full Foundation Aid funding over the next two years.

We have fought for this funding since 2008. Now that it is finally in place, all of our public schools are funded at 100 percent fair student funding for the first time ever, up from 93 percent on average last year. Because this is the primary and most flexible funding source for NYC schools, it means schools can hire academic interventionists, art and music teachers, guidance counselors and other professionals needed to meet the needs of all students in their buildings.

In addition to the Foundation Aid increase, we are grateful for the \$7 billion our school district received from the American Rescue Plan Act, a federal economic stimulus bill, to spend over the next three years. We are confident this funding will help us determine and address our students' academic, social and emotional needs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the Academic Recovery Plan devised for NYC schools, we will conduct a literacy and numeracy diagnostic of every student enrolled in our school district this year. At our urging, the city Department of Education ensured that diagnostic tools could be used by our educators to conduct the assessments and evaluations. Providing our educators with these tools, instead of using outside consultants, empowers them to draft thoughtful recovery plans for their students.

Schools in NYC are already required by statute to provide academic intervention services (AIS) to students who are at risk of not achieving the state learning standards. AIS services are often provided by a team of professionals in a school, with many NYC schools already having permanent AIS teams. We believe enough federal stimulus funding has been provided for schools to build their own AIS teams where they do not exist and enhance the teams where they do.

We recommend each school team have at least two academic intervention specialists (AIS teachers) and two mental health professionals. The AIS teachers provide instruction to students in need, either one-on-one or in small groups of students with similar needs. The AIS mental health providers manage the day-to-day crises, deescalate situations involving students and provide preventative counseling.

With a team like this in place, a teacher who identifies a student in need of support can first document their efforts. If their support is not enough, they can raise the issue with the intervention team, which can review the situation and recommend interventions. The case can be revisited at team meetings to evaluate progress and ultimately decide whether the student can be removed from intervention services or recommended for additional services.

The key to the success of AIS teams is that they are assigned to work with students who are not mandated to receive services, thereby freeing up, for example, a school's existing psychologists and social workers to work with students mandated to receive additional supports. Whether or not we want to call them AIS teams, they are needed in every school, and I am confident that each school has the funds to hire the right professionals.

We are happy to see that this year's DOE budget, in part because of ARP, includes funding to hire 500 social workers and other mental health support staff. Similar to how members will be able to use academic diagnostic tools, members across the city will be able to use the Devereaux

Student Strengths Assessment as a social emotional screening tool to help identify students in need. Members will be able to quickly match students with services including individual or group counseling, mentoring or small group social-skill building. We must, however, make sure we have a long-term plan to maintain these additional services when the ARP funds dry up after three years.

Working with the DOE, there are many other elements of the Academic Recovery Plan that I can praise including extended summer school programs for all students and college and career counseling for high school juniors and seniors. However, we continue to fall short on lowering class size. The DOE's commitment this year to lowering class size in 72 high-needs elementary schools by hiring 140 additional teachers is only a small down payment.

I think it's important to note that smaller classes are not only in the best academic interest of our students, but also essential for their health and safety. Due to budgetary shortfalls, we already failed once at lowering class size after implementing Contracts for Excellence in 2007. We cannot let it happen again, especially since this time funding is in place.

If the Mayor and the DOE do not get it done, then we will mandate it legislatively, which is why we support local bill Int. 2374-2021 sponsored by NYC Council Education Committee Chair Mark Treyger. The bill would amend the health section of the city's administrative code to cap classroom capacity at 35 square feet of net floor area per student by September 2024. As mentioned, the funding is in place, and real estate vacancy rates are at an all-time high — it's time to get creative.

Thank you once again for today's public hearing. It's important that we hold our city school district accountable for how it spends the enormous infusion of funds made available thanks to you and our federal representatives. With your oversight and support, I am confident we can head in the right direction. Though it will be tough, and we will face many challenges, I know we will do all we can this year to begin to address the academic, social and emotional needs of our students. I look forward to engaging again on this topic as we continue to monitor its progress.