

TESTIMONY

New York City Council Hearing

New York City Council Committees on
Higher Education & Education

Presented on
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Oversight Hearing: Are NYC's Public School Students Adequately Prepared for College?

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Good afternoon Chairman Rodriguez, Chairman Jackson, and members of the New York City Council's Committees on Higher Education and Education. My name is Randi Herman, and I am 1st Vice President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). On behalf of CSA's nearly 13,000 members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on New York City's public school students' college readiness.

Clearly, all of the data at hand indicates that our students are not adequately prepared for college. If only 1 in 5 students is considered college ready by the New York State Department of Education (NYSED), we have not only failed NYC students but we are also guilty of perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The conversation today needs not lament the past, only take an honest look at what is missing from the equation; what we have overlooked, and where we can implement change to ensure that our students are best prepared to meet the challenges of higher education.

CSA strongly believes that in order to improve college readiness amongst our youth we must further examine: early childhood education and the achievement gap, recruitment and retention of quality leadership, common core standards, and social and cultural development opportunities.

Early Childhood Education & the Achievement Gap

The reality is that there is an achievement gap that persists in NYC. Only 13% of Black students and 15% of Hispanic students statewide are deemed college-ready after four years of high school, compared to 51% and 56% of Caucasian and Asian-American graduates respectively. Given this data, it is incumbent upon NYC to address this longstanding problem with a realistic plan that will level the playing field and provide the necessary resources to finally create equity for all students.

Research shows that high quality preschool and full-day kindergarten have proven successful in reducing the achievement gap, and we must immediately strengthen our early childhood programs which set the foundation for educational success. Right now, the DOE provides universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) for all four-year-olds; however, as with all great measures there are flaws in its design. Last year the city refunded the state nearly \$30 million dollars due to under enrollment in the DOE's UPK program. The primary reason being that the program was only offered for a half day. Few parents working a full-time job would be able to utilize UPK—especially our city's single parents who comprise one of the few groups that have experienced an increase in poverty since 2009 according to the city-run Center for Economic Opportunity.

The key here is that “young children who enter school behind their peers are unlikely to ever catch up, resulting in a persistent “achievement gap,”¹ and the logic is quite simple: increase

¹ “Early Childhood Education: A Strategy for Closing the Achievement Gap” published by Strategies for Children, Inc.

quality, full-day UPK for NYC students, and they are then better prepared for elementary school and beyond.

Recruitment and Retention of Quality Leadership

All of the research tells us that a key ingredient for a successful school that helps to create successful students is the school leader – the Principal. Unfortunately, we fear the possibility of losing many of these individuals. We find that NYC is not laying the groundwork to retain and train its educational leaders to aspire to become Principals. In fact, in a recent member survey, CSA found that 35% of Principals were dissatisfied with their job security in 2011. That’s an increase from 24% only three years earlier in 2009. 43% of Principals expressed dissatisfaction with their salaries, up from 30% in 2009. Also, 73% of Principals are unhappy with their workload, an increase from 64% in 2009.² Action must be taken to improve Principal morale. For example, we should enable our school leaders to focus on instruction. We should not continually create mandates that are not aligned with curriculum and implementation.

A landmark new research study conducted by economists Raj Chetty and John Friedman from Harvard, in collaboration with Johan Rokoff from Columbia University, indicates that “having a good 4th grade teacher makes a student 1.25% more likely to go to college and 1.25% less likely to get pregnant as a teenager.”³ Unfortunately, the converse is also true. Having a poor teacher has the same impact as missing 40% of the school year. Therefore, just as we should be preparing the best educators to be our school leaders, we should be recruiting our best teachers and providing them with the professional training they need to truly excel and positively impact their students. According to the study, one effective strategy that some Principals use is called “looping.” Teachers who are particularly outstanding (in the elementary schools) remain with their students for at least two consecutive years. This truly maximizes the positive impact great teachers can have by getting students ready at an earlier age to be better prepared for middle school and high school.

Common Core Standards

We wholeheartedly agree with the DOE’s Chief Academic Officer Shael Polakow-Suransky who recently stated, “The way to address performance among other income groups- and to move the needle across all our schools- is to begin teaching and requiring more complex skills, which is at the heart of our work around literacy and the Common Core standards.”

In conversations with high school Principals around NYC, an overwhelming number told us that the formula for college readiness is actually too low! It comes from an analysis of scoring a 75 on the English Regents exam and an 80 on the math Regents. This roughly predicted that students would get a “C” in college level courses in the same subject. Is that what we really want – “college ready” students who only get “C’s” in college? We must set our standards higher and at the same time devise realistic strategies that are aligned with the goal of graduating “proficient” students who will be better prepared for college and get “B’s” and not “C’s!”

² 2011 CSA Member Survey

³ “The Value of Teachers” by Nicholas D. Kristof. *New York Times*. January 11, 2012.

Social and Cultural Development Opportunities

Lastly, with the seemingly endless cuts to education, our students also suffer from lack of social and cultural literacy. When we take away vital funds that contribute towards costs for student-run clubs and other extracurricular activities we take away from the student's potential to be a "well-rounded" candidate for higher education, thus directly impacting their opportunities for social development.

In fact, participation in extracurricular activities is also proven to increase attendance, and students who participate are three times as likely to perform in the top quartile on a composite math and reading assessment, and more likely to aspire to higher education.⁴ College readiness is not just about academics—entangled within is the desire to pursue a degree, absorbing fears about loans and debt, and sometimes something as small as having never left New York City. As it stands, most schools do not offer many extracurricular activities because there is no room in the budget leaving Principals to add fundraising to their roles and responsibilities in order to provide their students with opportunities for social interaction and development.

Please hear us when we say education – early childhood education included – cannot sustain any further cuts if we plan to give our students a fighting chance. By leaving our students unprepared and therefore incapable of obtaining a college degree we are perpetuating the cycle of poverty within our own city. According to NYSED's own statistics, the difference in median salary between high school graduates and those who have a bachelor's degree is more than \$20,000. The City of New York cannot afford to see its future, our youth, not obtain a degree beyond high school.

In closing, CSA remains committed to do our part in collaborating with the Department of Education and the Council to do whatever is necessary to enable more of our students to become college ready in the years ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

Randi Herman
1st Vice President

CSA is Local 1 of the American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO, located in Washington, DC. CSA is also affiliated with the NYS Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA), which is, in turn, a member of the NYS School Administrators Consortium (NYSSAC). CSA represents nearly 6,100 Principals, Assistant Principals, Supervisors and Education Administrators who work in the NYC public schools, 400 Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Day Care Centers, and 11,000 retired school supervisors and their spouses and domestic partners.

⁴ "Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement," National Center for Education Statistics.