



YONKERS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

*Sustainable Solutions for Student Success
2017-2018 and Beyond*

Presented February 14, 2017 by:
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Superintendent of Schools

Let's Make Yonkers Schools Complete

Distinguished members of the Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers City School District; I am Dr. Edwin Quezada, Superintendent of Schools. The City of Yonkers is an amalgamation of diverse citizens from every continent and socio-economic strata. It is in this City where over 32,000 children and their families strive to achieve the American dream. We, 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. It is a responsibility that comes with many challenges.

Who are Yonkers students? They are 32,320 urban students: 26,595 prekindergarten to grade twelve students in the District's 39 public schools, 427 Students with Disabilities in out-of-district placements, 696 students in the Charter School, and 4,602 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	57% Hispanic
17% Students with Disabilities	19% African American/Black
12% English Language Learners	24% White Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, Multi-Racial

Last year, I came before this body and reported that the state of the Yonkers Public Schools is strong and invited you to invest where success is becoming a reality for *all* children. I asked you to help us move towards compliance, and you did. With your support, the City of Yonkers and its schools delivered.

Together, we were able to:

- Increase grades 3 through 8 English Language Arts and Mathematics results
- Remove five schools out of eight from the list of Persistently Struggling and Struggling Schools
- Achieve the highest graduation rate of the Big 5 Cities, which continues to improve as was noted in last week's release for the 2012 Cohort
- Expand the Community School Model
- Accept the My Brother's Keeper Challenge
- Institute a model Prekindergarten program in every elementary school
- Reduce out-of-school suspensions in all schools and institute Restorative Practices as a component of relationship building in all schools
- Champion the *Rebuild Yonkers Schools* campaign

Today, Yonkers is poised to becoming a model district for urban education; all of the necessary elements for **sustainable solutions for student success** are within reach. Our district continues to strive forward, determined to create opportunities for *all* students and committed to supporting *all* families. The essential missing element is recurrent revenues aligned to our pupil demographics. ***We will continue to plead for Foundation Aid with poverty measures that accurately reflect the populations being served and provides the maximum flexibility for districts to target revenues that will result in increased student academic performance and support children's social and emotional needs.***

Work with us to make Yonkers schools complete; the State, the City and the school district share the responsibility. Schools throughout New York State have full time counselors, psychologists, librarians, social workers, music and art teachers, reading teachers and more. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Yonkers Schools. Our 39 schools that service 26,595 students have only 25 psychologists that is a student teacher ratio of 1,064 to 1; 13 social workers with a ratio of 2,046 to 1; 36 school counselors with a ratio of 739 to 1; 8 library media specialists with a student teacher ratio of 2,660 to 1; art at 633 to1 and music at 831 to 1. How are we expected to support the needs of our students and their families who are 79% economically disadvantaged, 17% are Students With Disabilities and 12% are English language learners? Children who come to us with these needs require significantly more than we are able to offer; and these numbers increase annually. Yonkers students deserve to learn in schools where the appropriate resources are available during and after school.

Partner with Yonkers; support our work as we create a model district for urban education. The Mayor, the City Council, the Board of Education Trustees and the community at large have embraced the My Brother's Keeper Challenge. Together, we will fight to provide a sound basic education with the appropriate academic, social and emotional supports for our students and families. Your help is needed to make Yonkers schools complete for the urban students we serve.

- Change the Foundation Aid formula to allow for more recurrent revenues
- Increase funding to address the needs of Students With Disabilities and English language learners
- Increase the allocation for Career and Technical Education thereby enhancing college readiness for all students
- Ensure Full-day Prekindergarten is permanently funded for Yonkers through recurrent revenues rather than grants
- Increase funding for Professional Development
- Increase funding for extended day and after-school programs to support teacher driven initiatives in every school
- Ensure appropriated funds are expeditiously available

For Yonkers Public Schools to attain sustainable solutions for student success recurrent revenues must be the norm. Our students require consistent long-term interventions and this cannot be accomplished with intermittent one-shot or short multi-year grants. Let me provide a concrete example. Our proposed 2017-2018 budget, which includes only a status quo and required sustainable expenses, presents a gap of \$38 million dollars. To balance the budget, I must identify \$38 million dollars of savings. This is not realistic nor is it acceptable. Who gets affected by this practice? Our students. Once again, we are forced to eliminate programs that work by cutting needed staff and reducing services. This cannot occur. A 21st century education requires consistency, more time on task, research-based programs, essential staff and funding to engage the parents and the community. This can only be accomplished when we make Yonkers schools complete.

Finally, I want to say thank you to the State Legislature and Governor. Last year, Mayor Spano, his administration, the Trustees of the Board of Education and the entire Yonkers community advocated for the *Rebuild Yonkers Schools* legislation. With your support this bill submitted by our outstanding Yonkers delegation is now the law. Rebuilding Yonkers schools can no longer be a conversation, it must become a reality. Our students are learning in spaces that are not suitable for a 21st century education. This is a travesty that must be corrected. Please consider providing Yonkers support with this work that is aligned to what has been provided to similar communities. Give our students the opportunity to shine.

With limited funds we have proven that we are a community on the move and our magnificent students excel. Let me give you an example. Last week, the State Education Department released the 2016 graduation data. Yonkers August graduation rate went up again by 4 percentage points, graduating 82% of the Class of 2016; that is higher than the State average of 81%. And, our dropout rate is down to 4%, half of what it was last year and 2 percentage points lower than the statewide average of 6%. You can clearly understand why Yonkers is determined to pursue **sustainable solutions for student success**. Be a part of our history, dream with us, and I can assure you that success will be the reality for every child in the City of Yonkers.

Thank you.



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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