



Creating Conditions for ALL Students' Success



**Joint Public Hearing before the New York State Senate
Standing Committees on Education, NYC Education & Budget and Revenue
*To review how school districts are spending Foundation Aid and ARP funds.***

**Presented October 5, 2021 by:
DR. EDWIN M. QUEZADA
Superintendent of Schools**

Distinguished members of the New York State Joint Senate Standing Committees on Education, New York City Education and Budget and Revenue. I appreciate the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers City School District; I am Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, proud Superintendent of Schools for 27,000 prekindergarten to twelfth grade students attending in-district and out of district programs.

Often, I state with confidence that Yonkers Public Schools is the best urban school district in America, and I can because the evidence is in the data. Yonkers students' on-time graduation rate exceeded 80% beginning with the 2012 Cohort and over the past two years was 90% and our dropout rate was 3%; our graduation rate is higher than the statewide average and our dropout is lower than the statewide average. These numbers reflect the incredible work and commitment Yonkers administrators, faculty and staff provide our students who are 77% economically disadvantaged, 19% are Students with Disabilities and 13% are Multi-Lingual Learners. When sharing our students' success, I also note that Yonkers success is because we create solutions for all students' success that do not solely rely on sustainable financial support by the State. To maintain this outstanding momentum is a daunting task for our learning community because sustaining quality initiatives over time requires dependable and recurring revenue.

Fortunately, last year the State Senate and Assembly for the first time in decades addressed the Foundation Aid inequities by committing to fully fund the current formula beyond 2024, and simultaneously you fought so that the federal ARP funding was sufficient and properly appropriated to school districts. Yonkers children and families for generations to come owe you a debt of gratitude, you fought for children across the State and magnificently represented our city. Because of the outstanding leadership of Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senator and Education Chair Shelley Mayer, and Assembly members Gary Pretlow and Nader Sayegh, I say with pride that Yonkers' legislators are education champions.

For Yonkers, based on current wealth statistics in the formula, our Foundation Aid increased this year by \$21.9 million and is expected to increase another \$11.2 million over the next two years totaling \$44.3 million over three years. This funding allows Yonkers to rebuild critically needed pupil support professionals, such as school counselors and psychologists as well as instructional programs that have proven to support our students' academic progress due to the loss in learning time. With the legislative commitment to fully fund Foundation Aid beyond 2024, we have an opportunity to sustain these supports. Once again, thank you.

Equally important is the \$70.3 million ARP funding. With these dollars, the Yonkers Public Schools is able to provide staffing and programs that are foundational to educating the whole child and begin to restore a comprehensive academic program with opportunities for all students to thrive. This is critically important post pandemic to address students' academic and social emotional needs.

Collaboration has been, and will continue to be, a key ingredient on how we allocate these funds. The Trustees of the Board of Education actions and policies are explicit regarding ongoing communications with stakeholders. During the summer in 2020 in preparation for reopening schools in the fall of that year with hybrid and remote instruction, we held 10 virtual and in-person Town Hall meetings. For the current 2021-2022 school year, to gather stakeholder input for the ARP funding, 5 meetings were held in April and May with stakeholders. Moving forward there are 10 community meetings in English and Spanish scheduled from October through June as well as additional meetings with our employee bargaining units' leadership teams and our City elected officials. On our district's September 2021 Opening website, our 2021-2022 Restoration, Renewal and Hope Plan is posted as well as a Stakeholders Input Form. These meetings and input from stakeholder will continue through 2024.

To meet the specific needs of our significant number of low-income children and families, Students with Disabilities and English language learners, Yonkers will initiate a variety of programs, platforms of learning, and increase professional resources and supports necessary to address our students' unique needs. Additional teachers were hired in the areas of Special Education, English as a New Language and Speech. An Aquatics Therapy program was initiated to address the needs of children with Autism as well as to improve coordination, gross motor development and reflex. Multilingual learners and Students with Interrupted Formal Education will benefit from summer and extended learning programs after-school and Saturdays.

To accelerate student learning and close the achievement gap exacerbated by COVID-19, we have expanded our culturally responsive curricular programs and hired additional staff in Career and Technical Education, art, music and physical education, library media specialists and reading teachers. Addressing lost instructional time during the summer in 2021, we offer an elementary literacy, numeracy and arts enrichment summer program for 2,000 high needs students embedded with a social emotional component and a Parent Academy. Based on its success, we will replicate this summer program in 2022 and double the enrollment.

To mitigate the technology gap that is so prevalent in urban communities, and to empower extended learning in the home, Yonkers provides access to devices and connectivity, which is a significant impediment for low-income families. In addition, a multitude of learning platforms are now available to support in-person instruction, afterschool learning and remote learning required for students who are quarantined or have approved medical needs.

Critically important is the significant increased need for students experiencing mental health and social well-being issues. This required the hiring of additional school counselors, psychologists and social workers. A new initiative will provide services to McKenny Vento students and families, a dedicated learning center for students experiencing challenges and is a bridge for coming out of incarceration to complete their education. School counselors will provide College, Career and Civic Readiness (CCCR) services and daily social emotional learning (SEL) supports across the prekindergarten to twelfth grade continuum.

District personnel will monitor the implementation of all initiatives and will evaluate their effectiveness, using formative and summative assessments. In addition, we will survey parents and staff regarding the efficacy of all new initiatives.

Finally, I would be remiss if I do not remind you that Yonkers Public Schools MUST be rebuilt. Mayor Mike Spano has championed a \$2 billion investment in our schools. Our students need green, state-of-the art schools. You have expressed your support for this concept; let us make it a reality.

The work that Yonkers is doing on behalf of its students is innovative and follows a systems thinking approach. Your courage, your fight for equal access, has made this possible.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. On behalf of Yonkers' children, we will continue to fight for sustainable recurring funding beyond 2024. By partnering with you, I am convinced we will create solutions grounded in equity and access for ALL children. Every child deserves an enriched educational environment, access and connectivity to technology as well as an appropriate compliment of professionals and initiatives to address their academic and social-emotional needs. Our future is in the minds and hands of the children we educate today, let us work together and offer them excellence.

Respectfully submitted.



YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Education Trustees

Rev. Steve Lopez, President
Dr. Rosalba Corrado Del Vecchio, Vice President

Andrea Brown
Gail Burns
Kevin Cacace
Dr. John C. Castanaro
Lakisha Collins-Bellamy, Esq.
Sheila Greenwald
Amjed I. Kuri

Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
equezada@yonkerspublicschools.org
914-376-8100

2021-2022