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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses**

**Before the New York City Council**

**Committee on Education**

**Honorable Daniel Dromm, Chair**

**On Education in the FY 2018 Preliminary Budget**

**Presented by Andrea Bowen**

**March 21, 2017**

Good afternoon Chair Dromm and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify. I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses, New York City’s federation of settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement begun over 100 years ago, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multiservice approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH’s membership includes 37 organizations employing 10,000 people at more than 600 sites across the five boroughs to provide high quality services and activities to over 500,000 New Yorkers each year. Settlement houses provide a broad range of services including early childhood education, after-school programs, youth employment programs, adult literacy, workforce development, legal services, and services for older adults. UNH member organizations are deeply invested in education programs, including Learning to Work (LTW), and the City’s community and renewal schools initiatives.

LTW is a DOE program that allows over-aged and under-accredited students to utilize social-emotional learning supports (e.g., counseling), career and educational exploration (e.g., an internship component), and other educational supports (e.g., focus on increasing supports) in pursuit of a high school diploma and post-secondary professional planning. CBO partners supplement, with supportive services, the DOE staff at Transfer Schools (small high schools for youth who have fallen behind in credits or dropped out of high school) or Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs), which are evening academic programs for youth who are behind in credit, considering dropping out of school, or need the YABC because of responsibilities during the daytime.

Community schools combine strong curriculum and academic enrichment, such as extended learning time, with wraparound social services for parents, families, and the community at large, such as health and legal services, after school, food pantries, and more. In NYC, schools are paired with lead Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that coordinate with school administration to provide services and deeper academic engagement. Renewal schools are schools that, following years of low academic achievement, have been operating as community schools. The City began an ambitious community school initiative in 2014 to support long-ailing schools, and approximately 140 schools are currently operating as community or renewal schools.

Eleven UNH members are the lead CBOs at thirty community schools across the City, including nine renewal schools.

In the FY18 City Budget, we seek continued or expanded funding for educational programs, including:

* **Learning to Work** – Greater than $10.8 million
* **12% cost of living increase for all human services contracts**

Specifically for community and renewal schools, we seek:

* **Attendance Improvement and Dropout Prevention funds -** $x
* **Renewal School funding** - $x
* Continuation, and in many cases expansion, of the additional city funding streams that are integral to community schools, including Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) funds.
	+ **COMPASS** – An additional $8.8 million to equalize rates
	+ **SONYC** – Baseline at $20.3 million
	+ **Beacon Community Centers**
	+ **Universal Pre-K**
	+ **EarlyLearn**– Enhance at $x
	+ school food pantries - $x
	+ health & mental health centers - $x
* **Continue funding for Cohort 1 Community School Grant Initiative schools** - $x
* **Assume funding for Cohort 2 CSGI schools** - $x

*Learning to Work*

LTW is one of several human services programs in need of increased funding. Funding for eighteen currently-existing or planned LTW programs at current contract costs would equate to $10.8 million, but even that funding level is insufficient to meet program need. This is both a broader human services contracting issue, and an issue specific to LTW.

In December, UNH joined over 200 organizations in a letter to Mayor de Blasio calling for a 12% across the board increase in human services contracts. This investment is needed now more than ever. New York’s community infrastructure—its settlement houses and community-based organizations—is the only thing that can ensure our City can be the sanctuary it needs to be to protect New Yorkers against policies aimed at our communities.

Contracts for CBOs in community schools, as well as programs serving other vulnerable populations including older adults, adult learners, immigrants, and young children, are struggling to meet expenses with contract rates that have stayed stagnant for years as expenses have risen. The persistent underfunding of contracts has a direct impact on the quality of services provided and leads to programs that utilize philanthropic dollars just to keep the doors open instead of providing the innovative enriching programs that we know are best able to support New York City’s students and families.

We therefore urge the City Council to include in its response to the Preliminary Budget a request that the administration include funding for a 12% across the board increase to human services contracts.

However, LTW specifically has been cut through the years. Budgets tightened in 2009 and 2010, and were not restored; minimum wage increases and full fringe benefit rates for youth taking on internships also increased program costs, and were not compensated by increased contract costs. Furthermore, adherence to the program model requires low student-to-CBO staff caseloads. With decreasing budgets, staffing levels have consequently suffered, resulting in higher-than-optimal caseloads.

As LTW stakeholders consider the true cost of providing services to YABCs and Transfer Schools, we ask that the City support funding for LTWs beyond the $10.8 required to fund contracts at their current levels.

*Community Schools*

Community schools have been improving outcomes and individual lives. Graduation rates have increased seven percent in the City’s renewal high schools since the start of the initiative. At schools run by UNH members, we have heard remarkable success stories. A parent of a 12th grade student at Orchard Collegiate Academy, whose lead CBO is Henry Street Settlement, remarked recently, “I am the parent of two students who went to the same school, one before Community Schools and one after.  My oldest didn’t graduate, but Angelica will.  Community Schools made the difference.  If you guys weren’t here, Angelica wouldn’t be getting her high school diploma. She actually enjoys coming to school.”

A parent of a 10th grader at Juan Morel Campos Secondary School notes, “Because of the community-based programs offered at the school, my children now participate in therapy, my family works together in the kitchen at Family Cooking Class on Saturdays, and my son and nieces have participated in trips, sports, dance, art, music, and drama. Through these experiences, my children have enjoyed exploring the unknown and they now want to travel. They have been taught self worth by the staff, who have taken the time to have conversations with them.”

When the City initially announced its community school initiative, the administration noted that it would take three years to implement. As we face the end of that three years, we need continued funding. Community schools, when viewed as a means of improving outcomes in schools, is an approach that may take as long as five or ten years to sustain. Key models of community school systems, such as those in Union City, New Jersey, and New Haven, Connecticut, have shown that sustained effort, longer than five years, is necessary to improve student outcomes.

Community school operations are sustained through a variety of funding streams.

**Attendance Improvement and Dropout Prevention** – Maintain at $x

These grants were initially provided in 2014 to strengthen the first 45 community schools. Funding should be baselined once again to continue services.

**Renewal Schools** – Maintain at $x

Renewal schools have received a dedicated funding stream since FY15. This funding should be baselined.

**Supplementary funds**

Several funding streams, including DYCD and ACS programs, are integral to the budgets of community and renewal schools. These include DYCD’s after-school program for middle schoolers, Schools Out New York City (SONYC), Comprehensive After School System of New York City (COMPASS), and Beacon Community Centers; Universal Pre-K, maintained by the Department of Education; and EarlyLearn, which is the City’s early childhood education system, inclusive of Head Start funding, managed by ACS.

COMPASS after-school programs for elementary schoolers are funded at differential amounts. Most programs are funded at $3,200 per child, but some are funded at $2,080 per child. UNH urges the City to invest $8.8 million to equalize rates for all COMPASS elementary school programs.

The Preliminary Budget included $15 million in FY18 only to fund 22,800 SONYC summer slots, even though there are a total 34,000 SONYC after-school slots. This means that summer programs are not guaranteed for all SONYC participants. We urge City Council to work with the Mayor to include an additional $5.3 million and baseline $20.3 million for SONYC summer programs in the Executive Budget.

Beacons Community Centers, which include after-school and services for families and community members co-located in public schools, and Universal Pre-K are baselined. We appreciate the City’s maintenance of these vital funding streams, including the Preliminary FY18 Budget’s baselining of $6.2 million for 10 new Beacons.

EarlyLearn, funded in part by City tax levy funds in combination with several federal funding streams, requires a funding increase to make several programmatic improvements, such as professional development training, increasing enrollment, and guaranteed five-year eligibility (due to families currently losing EarlyLearn eligibility with even a small raise). These changes and more are outlined in UNH’s report *Starting Strong: The Settlement House Vision for New York City’s Comprehensive Early Childhood Education System.* This supplemented funding will require $x.

Furthermore, there are several funding streams that provide services integral to social, emotional, and physical health of community school students and families, such as school-based health care, and food pantries. These streams are thus, and should be funded at the following levels:

* **Item x** – Restore at $x
* **Item y** – Restore at $y

**Community School Grant Initiative Funding**  - Maintain Cohort 1 schools at $x, and sustain Cohort 2 schools at $y

New York State funded community schools via a Community Schools Grant Initiative (CSGI) in two three-year cohorts. The first of these cohorts, with 12 schools, lost its CSGI funding on June 30, 2016. Thankfully, the City maintained funding for these schools as community schools at $x. This funding must be maintained. Another 13 schools in the second cohort will lose their CSGI funding on June 30, 2017. The City should continue funding these schools at $x.

Thank you for your time. I may be contacted at abowen@unhny.org, and I look forward to answering any questions you have.