

45 Broadway ● 22nd Floor ● New York, N.Y. 10006-3007

(212) 967-0322

[www.unhny.org](http://www.unhny.org)

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

**Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**At the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**Presented by Gregory Brender, Co-Director of Policy and Advocacy**

**March 23, 2018**

Thank you Chair Treyger and members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) of New York is New York City’s association 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, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH’s membership includes 39 organizations employing 13,000 people at over 650 sites across the five boroughs of New York City to provide high quality services and activities to over 750,000 New Yorkers each year.

Typical settlement house services range from early childhood education and after-school, to youth employment and college access, to adult education and workforce development, to behavioral health services, homelessness prevention and older adult services. Essentially, our members provide “one-stop” shopping for all community members—be they children, youth, immigrants, older adults, or working families.

Settlement houses work closely with public schools and the Department of Education to support New York City’s students throughout their entire education and their lives. Settlement houses currently run:

* Early childhood education programs including Year- round full day EarlyLearn programs, 3-K for All and Pre-K for All;
* After-School programs in both public schools and community based sites;
* Community School Partnerships with Renewal Schools;
* Learning to Work Programs which support young people completing their high school degree at Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers; and
* English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes either via their own teachers, or by hosting DOE teachers in their settlement house classrooms.

Today I am here to discuss two issues facing settlement houses in the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget that impact settlement houses’ ability to educate New Yorkers- **Salary Disparities** in the early childhood education system and the elimination of funding for **Adult Literacy Programs**.

**Salary Disparities in Early Childhood Education**

**Background**

EarlyLearn child care centers and family child care networks operating under contract with the Administration for Children’s Services are the only option for year-round, high-quality early childhood education for children 0-5 years old. Pre-K for All and 3-K for All programs offer services for only 6.5 hours a day. However, working parents need care and education programs for their children and a longer day that allows them to stay on the job.

In September 2019, these year-round, full-day programs will transfer from holding contracts with Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to Department of Education (DOE) as part of the administration’s efforts to create a unified early childhood education system.

However, these programs are struggling in large part due to the inadequate salaries of those responsible for providing education and care for the youngest New Yorkers.

**Salary Disparities Impact Educational Programs**

In 2016, United Neighborhood Houses and Campaign for Children released a report, *Losing the Best*, which used the City’s own data to examine quality education and classroom environments in city-funded early childhood education programs including programs in community based organizations and programs in public schools. The report found that on average, early childhood programs in community based organizations outperform public schools in nine out of ten metrics used by two well respected early childhood evaluation systems- ECERS which examines classroom environment, and CLASS which examines instruction.

However, these very same programs are struggling to keep their doors open and retain quality teachers, directors and support staff. Their staff, whose salaries are determined by the amount of funding that the City provides to its contracted providers, are much lower than the salaries of similarly qualified professionals in the public schools. And many are living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet.

The salary disparities are stark and grow over time. For example, a certified head teacher in a 3-year-old classroom in a community based organization has a starting salary of $46,920 while a certified teacher in a public school starts at $61,894. After time, these disparities grow wider. With eight years of experience, a public school teachers’ annual salary will have grown to slightly over $81,042 while a teacher in a community based program will be earning just $48,920.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Unsurprisingly, many staff are forced to leave community based programs for higher paying jobs with New York City Department of Education. A child’s interaction with a qualified educator is the most important part of early childhood education success. When we lose those educators, we lose the ability to make a profound impact on children before they start school.

**Salary Disparities Affect Early Childhood Staff**

New York City’s early childhood education providers are losing teachers, directors and staff because these salary disparities have a meaningful impact on their lives.

Recently, I met with a teacher’s aide in a community based early childhood education program in Brooklyn. She spoke passionately about her love for the work and seeing children smile every day and knowing that her work had a direct and positive impact on young children. However, when it came to being able to live in New York City on the salary of an early childhood educator in a community based organization she had this to say:

..the sad truth is that this important work doesn’t pay enough

to afford to live in this city. I am a single mother of two girls,

one who is 7 years old and one who is ten years old. My

entire paycheck goes to cover bills. My daughter wants to do

gymnastics. She wanst to learn to dance. But I have to tell

her every month that we can’t afford it- that we only have

enough to pay rent and other basic necessities. I get my health

insurance through Medicaid because I can’t cover the cost

of monthly premiums and co-pays. I am eligible for food stamps.

This dedicated teacher’s aide is not sure if she can stay in the field and continue to make a difference in children’s lives.

**Moving Forward for Salary Parity in the FY 2019 Budget**

The City’s efforts to build a unified early childhood education system are laudable. However, if the staff in community based organizations continue to earn lower salaries than their similarly qualified counterparts in public schools, the City will have a divided system with stark inequalities. The City must not wait and should take immediate action to address salary disparities in early childhood education.

**Community Based Adult Literacy**

With the support and leadership of the City Council, the City has invested $12m in newadult literacy dollars in both FY2018 and FY2017 through DYCD. While this funding represents important progress after significant cuts in FY2016, adult literacy providers are currently struggling to make the best use of this investment because of severely underfunded reimbursement rates, as well as significant delays in the contracting process. Through a 2017 DYCD-commissioned analysis of the true costs of providing quality adult literacy programming, it was revealed that on average, adult literacy programs should be receiving about $3,600 to provide instruction and support to each student they serve[[2]](#footnote-2); instead, the current reimbursement rate hovers between $850- $1,000 per student. This means that many adult literacy providers are actually taking a loss on contracts when they provide literacy services to their community.

In order to rectify this imbalance in contract reimbursement rates, UNH recommends the City baseline this $12m investment in the FY2019 Executive Budget and develop a new procurement that more closely tracks to the true cost of quality programming. Unfortunately, FY2018’s joint Administration-Council investment ($6m each) was zeroed out in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget, meaning thousands of immigrants and other adult learners across the City will lose access to their adult literacy programs at the end of this fiscal year.

UNH also supports and recommends the creation of an Adult Literacy Taskforce with the goal of developing a comprehensive City vision for adult literacy services across all relevant agencies (DYCD, HRA, DOE, CUNY, etc.). Much as the City has plans for supporting its young children (UPK, 3K) and its older adults (Age-friendly NYC), it should have a comprehensive vision for the City’s 3.5 million immigrants and other adults lacking English proficiency and/or a High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma. Such a taskforce would also be responsible for designing the City’s response to changing federal policies that will make it harder to serve undocumented adult learners, as well as establishing a unified and user-friendly referral system for New Yorkers seeing adult literacy services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.

1. Salary Disparities in NYC’s Early Childhood Education Workforce. *Campaign for Children and Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York,* 2018. https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/salary-parity-infographic-final.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Literacy Assistance Center, 2018. *Investing in Quality, A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders:* <http://www.lacnyc.org/investing-in-quality.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)