



**TESTIMONY OF NYC SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA BEFORE THE
STATE ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS AND STATE SENATE FINANCE
COMMITTEES ON THE PROPOSED 2014-2015 EXECUTIVE BUDGET**

Tuesday, January 28, 2014

Good morning Chairs Farrell and DeFrancisco, Education Chairs Nolan and Flanagan and all the members of State Assembly and State Senate here today. I am New York City Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña. It is my pleasure to be here to discuss Governor Cuomo's 2014-2015 Executive Budget as it relates to education. Seated with me are New York City's Budget Director, Dean Fuleihan and New York City Department of Education's Chief Financial Officer, Michael Tragale.

Before I begin, I would like to give you a brief overview of my background. I started my career in education at Brooklyn's P.S. 29, where I spent 22 years as an elementary school teacher. After that, I spent ten years as principal of Manhattan's P.S. 6. In 2001, I became Community Superintendent in Brooklyn's District 15. I then became Regional Superintendent of Region 8 and then Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at the Department of Education in 2004. But what has most prepared me for my role as Schools Chancellor and has fueled my passion for this work is not simply my professional experience – but my experience as a student. Let me explain.

I am the daughter of Spanish immigrants, and I started school as a non-English-speaking student. It was not only a struggle to keep up academically, but also to acclimate to a completely unfamiliar setting. My kindergarten teacher consistently marked me absent when I did not respond to the name she continuously mispronounced during roll call. As far as the school was concerned, I was not there. But I had the immense good fortune of having an advocate. My father accompanied me to school and insisted in his own quiet way that my kindergarten teacher repeat the correct pronunciation of my name after him so that she would honor his daughter's presence in her classroom.

What if someone like me had not been blessed with a father who was committed to getting involved in my education? Would I have fallen further and further behind without someone looking out for my best interests?

Now I would like you to reimagine that scenario. Imagine how different that experience would have been had there been a place where, before I arrived in kindergarten, I was able to adjust to school in a learning environment where teachers helped me develop verbal skills, an expanded vocabulary, as well as the confidence and problem solving skills needed to thrive and engage, both with adults and my peers; where quality educators understood and met my unique learning needs.



This brings me to why I am here today – *all* of New York City’s students deserve the best education possible, as early as possible, with the supports in place that will follow them through every stage of their education. And as Chancellor, I am here to see that, with your partnership, this becomes a reality.

First, I would like to applaud Governor Cuomo for recognizing that this begins with high-quality full-day universal pre-K.

We know that significant growth in speech, language, and brain development occurs before kindergarten. By getting children into language rich environments as soon as possible, pre-K helps develop the critical vocabulary and oral language skills that serve as a foundation for academic success throughout the remainder of their education – ultimately setting them up for success in college and careers.

To start kindergarteners on that path, pre-K must address all areas of a child’s development and reflect how young children learn best. Teachers advance this kind of practice by incorporating purposeful play into every day. A quality pre-K curriculum is aligned with state standards covering everything from socio-emotional development to language, cognitive skills and physical development. Pre-K is the place for individualizing instruction to reflect how each child is progressing, and orienting instruction around relevant and meaningful science/social studies themes. This individualized approach benefits all children—whether they are learning English as a second language or need deeper support around foundational skills in any or all aspects of early learning and development.

High-quality full-day pre-K also makes the most of the early years by establishing strong partnerships with families. All parents are busy. Some may be struggling financially. They all have a limited amount of time to spend with their children. In addition to providing children with a solid, full-day of instruction, pre-K programs will work collaboratively with families to extend learning outside the classroom and provide support as children transition from pre-K and into kindergarten.

With these benefits in mind, last month New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio created a task force with the sole assignment of making pre-kindergarten free and universal for all four-year-olds in New York City. To date, the task force, in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Administration for Children’s Services, and other city agencies, has made clear progress and has developed a plan for rapid expansion of high-quality full-day pre-K seats over the next two years, starting with an increase of 186% year one alone.

I am confident that efforts already under way, lessons learned from previous expansions, and additional strategies being put in place will result in our success. By success, I mean increasing access and ensuring every seat, as well as providing a learning environment of high quality. Qualified educators interacting with children and families every day are essential. To make the most of our investments, the City is taking a comprehensive approach: developing pre-K specific teacher recruitment and selection tools, strengthening up-front professional



development for early childhood educators, and increasing the number of instructional coaches working with programs to provide more targeted support on an ongoing basis.

All of the training provided will focus on giving early childhood educators the tools they need. They will receive ongoing support to plan instruction that meets the needs of young learners, partner with families to enhance student learning, and refine plans as necessary to ensure all children move towards developing the skills and knowledge described in the New York State pre-K learning standards. These standards known as the “New York State Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core” includes everything from socio-emotional development to early literacy, cognitive development and language acquisition.

The Governor’s proposed budget outlines a plan to use state funds to pay for statewide full-day pre-K programs, but this plan falls short of what would be required to make universal high-quality full-day pre-K a reality in New York City. We all agree on the necessity to provide universal pre-K, but to actually fulfill this promise, we must be clear-sighted about the resources necessary to make it happen for the largest school district in the nation.

As Mayor de Blasio outlined in detail before this body yesterday, of the \$100 million allocated in the Governor’s proposed budget for pre-K statewide for one year, New York City’s share would cover less than 1/8th of the new funding needed to provide quality, full-day universal pre-K to all eligible preschoolers looking to enroll. Again, *every* child deserves access to high-quality early education. We need the resources to make this happen.

Giving New York City students a quality education is not just a matter of investing in their early years. By 7th grade, we know whether a child is on the road to graduating high school or dropping out. Our end goal is having more students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and careers, but we must build up from the foundation by starting these efforts when children come through our doors in pre-K and continuing to support them along the way.

Since I began as Chancellor 3 ½ weeks ago, I have geared much of my attention towards middle schools –a crucial turning point in a child’s academic career. Through school visits, I have begun identifying outstanding practices and expanding partnerships throughout the City. Wonderful things are happening in these schools, and by sharing best practices we can improve the quality of schools across the City.

One area where I would like to see growth is extended learning time in after-school programs. After-school programs have the potential to be a support system for students, both academically and emotionally. Just like pre-K, these programs offer crucial resources that may not be available to students. Not only do they help our students improve academic performance, they foster community at a critical time in their child’s development. At an age where the alternative can lead to dropping out or incarceration, a good after-school program has the power, not only to change the course of a student’s academic career, but to change their life.



In order to invest in these important programs, we need a dedicated, long-term funding stream to do so and our Mayor's plan to fund full-day universal pre-K and after-school programs by imposing a small tax on the City's highest income earners is a strategy we can rely on. In other areas, our funding has not been as stable.

As you all know, in 2007, the New York State Legislature and Governor finally acted on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court ruling. By establishing the State's obligation to ensure every student's constitutional right to a sound education (and adequate resources to do so); this should have ended the unfair distribution of state aid to local school districts. And yet, since 2009, the State has not met the court-ordered obligation, to our City, and other school districts elsewhere in the State.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Assemblywoman and Education Committee Chair Cathy Nolan and many other New York State legislators for reminding the Governor in a January 10 letter of the State's obligation to this commitment. In Fiscal Year 2015 alone, there is a shortfall of over \$2.7 billion of outstanding additional foundation aid to New York City schools; not to mention the \$312 million loss last year when a teacher evaluation agreement was not reached.

The tenants of the Common Core Learning Standards are laudable, but I acknowledge the rollout has been imperfect. We will address the implementation challenges with a dedicated focus on professional development and curriculum. However, these require new expenditures for materials, training and assessment, and the cost of time diverted from instruction for testing. Now principals – who are really the heroes in this scenario – have to do more with less.

Without these fiscal remedies, class sizes will soar; there will be cuts in arts education and professional development. Principals will be forced to make decisions they should not have to make regarding where to make cuts and which necessary educational tool or program will need to be sacrificed because of lack of adequate funding. Our students deserve better. They deserve what is rightfully, and constitutionally, theirs.

It is one thing to talk about quality education for all students. But, actions speak louder than words. We must commit to making the changes necessary to turn that vision into a reality. We must make first steps, and in order to do so, we need to invest resources in programs that engage children early, and keep them engaged at every step along the way. I would also like to reemphasize our commitment to supporting English Language Learners and their distinct instructional needs.

This weekend, as I visited potential pre-K programs for my 3-year-old grandson, I realized how privileged some of us who can afford to put our kids into these private programs are. All parents deserve the same access to quality education for their children. As parents or grandparents, think for a moment – what kind of educational experience would you want for your child? If your gut has not already answered, then I ask that you listen to your conscience.



Investing in our kids' education is an investment in their futures and the workforce of tomorrow. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

