



**Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
New York City Council Committee on Education
March 23, 2018**

Good morning Chair Treyger and members of the City Council Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee on New York City's Fiscal Year 2019 Budget (FY19).

As the representative of more than 2.6 million Brooklynites, I am acutely aware of the challenges facing our education system. Maintaining a system that serves 1.1 million students from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs takes cooperation and real engagement with the communities the schools serve. We task our schools with more than just academic excellence. We expect them to help develop students who are responsible citizens capable of compassion and empathy. That cannot be accomplished with a one-size-fits-all approach. We must think beyond the four walls of the classroom. With this goal in mind, I have several requests for the committee.

After years of tireless advocacy, I am pleased to see Mayor de Blasio included \$2 million for an extended use pilot program in our schools. We often refer to our schools as community hubs. We need that to be more than words. Our school buildings need to be accessible outside of school hours to community groups at no cost. I understand that there are legitimate fees associated with keeping buildings open longer, such as security and custodial personnel, but this cost should be borne by the City, not by small, local non-profit organizations that cannot afford the fees. These groups are the direct connection to the surrounding community that is so badly needed in many of our neighborhoods. Students and families should feel welcome in our schools, and opening up these spaces to local groups will help our schools live up to the community hub moniker. In addition, \$2 million is significantly less than what it would cost to build new community centers in a city where real estate is some of the most expensive in the nation. I urge the City Council to support this funding inclusion in the final budget.

Second, I applaud Mayor de Blasio's inclusion of the civics education program funding. In recent weeks, in the wake of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, we have seen the potential of civic activism among our young people. In response to the shooting we have seen students organize and outline a list of demands for action. My office has and is conducting a survey to establish a Students' Bill of Rights, and our initial analysis has identified that civics education is a key demand of today's students. We must ensure that a robust civics curriculum is available to all students in our school system and I urge the City Council to support this funding in the final budget as well.

Third, once again this year, we have seen that the current system for admission to our specialized high schools does not reflect the abilities of students of color. These schools are more segregated than ever and the current test-only admissions system is failing New York City students and families. This is why I have called upon Mayor de Blasio to conduct a high-quality public review of the process to re-designate our post-1971 specialized high schools. We must seriously consider re-designating the five specialized high schools that can be changed by a vote of the Panel for Education Policy. We do not have to completely eliminate the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), but we can allow those schools to consider other entrance criteria, such as class standing in middle school, among others. Tweed can no longer be allowed to operate on this issue in the shadows; years of their complacency have led to this crisis in confidence.

Last year, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and I released “Fixing the Pipeline: Solutions to Disparities in Gifted Education in New York City,” a report that made several recommendations about how to address this growing problem, including opt-out testing for gifted and talented programs in pre-k as well as the creation of new, borough-specific specialized schools. To date, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) has refused to have a meaningful discussion about these proposals, instead opting to limit discussion to existing programs. The proposals ranged from universal gifted and talented testing at an early age and kindergarten programs for all communities to the expansion of gifted middle school programs and SHSAT preparation for all. Every community should have access to these vital programs without having to send students outside of their neighborhood to get the education they deserve. We need more money for local gifted programs and money to ensure that students who are admitted to citywide programs are provided with free transportation to those schools regardless of where they are located.

Fourth, we must bring our school buildings into the 21st century. Since taking office, I have dedicated more than \$100 million in capital funding to give schools the technology infrastructure they need. However, this cannot be done adequately with our allocation alone. As was evident by my “School Technology Report,” released in December 2016, our schools desperately need to be modernized with proper networking and wiring that anticipates future demand — not systems that are outdated the moment they come online. We are living in a world driven by technology and yet our schools’ networks cannot tolerate more than a few dozen students online at once. We must dedicate far more capital to modernizing our schools as well as preparing our teachers to use the technology in the classroom that the students will be using in their future careers.

With this in mind, I renew my call to expand the definition of capital to include tablets, and issue a new call to redefine Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technology to be capital eligible. The New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) and the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME) recently dedicated \$6 million for a VR/AR Lab at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and that size investment of public funds should be met with an education pipeline that will prepare students for the burgeoning New York City VR/AR industry.

Finally, I request that \$8 million be allocated to provide a stipend for school Sustainability Coordinators. In my report, “Supporting Sustainability in Schools: A Greener Path Forward,” I

outlined the importance of sustainability coordinators in schools and how their work can be a game changer for the future of our city. Educating our youth about sustainability is a key component of reaching our lofty sustainability goals. We should treat sustainability coordinators in a way that signifies the importance of their job. They cannot simply be a name on a line — they must be reimbursed, as we do sports coaches, and they must be given time during the school week to plan programs and initiatives.

Thank you in advance for your work to ensure that all New Yorkers can safely raise healthy children and families.