



**Testimony to the New York State Division of the Budget:  
Achieving Balance through Prioritization  
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November 29, 2007**

Good afternoon. My name is Katherine Eckstein and I am the Policy and Advocacy Specialist at the National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools at The Children's Aid Society here in New York City. We, at Children's Aid, would like to thank Governor Spitzer and the Division of the Budget for holding hearings and for giving us the opportunity to testify. I'm here to talk with you about the benefits of after-school programs and the community schools strategy.

The Children's Aid Society, founded in 1853, provides comprehensive services for 150,000 of New York City's neediest children and families each year. Our goal is to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children and families, and to provide every child with the support and opportunities needed to become a happy, healthy and successful adult. The services we provide address every aspect of a child's life, from infancy through adolescence, and include education, health, counseling, adoption and foster care, career readiness, arts and recreation, and emergency assistance. Along with our work in New York City directly serving children and families, we run two national technical assistance centers.

**After-School Programs**

We are deeply concerned about the \$30 million loss in funding statewide for after-school programs and we urge the Governor to include an additional \$30 million in this year's budget to maintain the number of children being served. We know that 600,000 children in New York State are alone and unsupervised during the after school hours.<sup>1</sup> We should be expanding after-school opportunities for young people in New York, not taking them away.

Through much of Children's Aid's 154-year history, after-school programs have figured prominently in our comprehensive array of services. Today we provide after-school programs for more than 10,000 children and youth at locations in schools and community centers. Our work is supported by multiple funding streams such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC), Advantage After-School, Extended Day School Violence Prevention and New York City's Out-of-School Time Initiative. We serve 1,675 children alone using 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers funding.

In addition to providing direct service, we are invested in advancing the after-school field, which includes increasing the number of high quality after-school programs for children throughout New York State. We are an active member of a number of coalitions, including the Coalition for After-School Funding.

Those of us who run programs see first-hand the profound difference they make in the lives of children and their families. Working parents are comforted knowing that their children are in safe, enriching programs during out-of-school hours (including during the summer and on weekends). We also know, and research shows, that children and youth who participate

consistently in high quality after-school programs have improved student outcomes. An evaluation of Children's Aid's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs in six of our community schools shows<sup>ii</sup>:

- Middle school youth were significantly more likely to achieve proficiency on standardized test scores if they participated regularly in the Children's Aid 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC after-school programs. Students participating for two years were even more likely to achieve proficiency.
- Seventh- and eighth-grade students participating in the Children's Aid's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC after-school programs did significantly better than non-participants on reading and math tests.
- Middle school youth who participated regularly in Children's Aid's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC after-school programs had significantly better school attendance than non-participating youth.

Just this week I had a high school principal with whom we partner tell me that the attendance is better during the school day because children participate in after-school programs. Other principals have told me repeatedly that the academic enrichment and youth development opportunities that we provide in after-school programs contribute to improvement in student achievement.

What is at stake is that young people, like the students at Fannie Lou Freedom High School in the Bronx, won't have the opportunity to take music and dance, or participate in debate. I have heard them describe, both to me and to members of the State Legislature, how much of a difference this program makes in their lives and what they think they would be doing if they could not participate in it. What is at stake is that middle school students at the Mirabal Sisters Campus in Washington Heights won't have the opportunity to research, write and perform plays they have written.

In Staten Island we've had to cut by half the number of middle school children we can serve in our after-school program there. Given what we know about the crisis in middle schools and the critical importance of the middle school years, this is a travesty.

A \$30 million additional state investment in after-school programs could not only re-instate critical after-school seats for children, but it could also be a first step towards a more coordinated system of after-school programs in New York State. New York should follow states like California who have invested in a long-term, statewide strategy for after-school.

### **Community Schools**

After-school programs are part of a larger Children's Aid research-based strategy called community schools. We urge the state to invest in pilot community schools initiatives around New York State because they are good for kids – the research has shown it – and they are a cost-effective, fiscally responsible use of existing and new dollars.

In the late 1980s, The Children's Aid Society became a partner with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to form community schools. This strategy brings together community-based organizations, the school system, and families to make the school a center of community life and a perfect place to serve the whole child. Currently The Children's Aid Society partners with 22 schools in New York City. Over the last fifteen years, through our National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools, we have hosted more than 8,000 visitors from across the United States and 40 other countries. There are 28 states with community school adaptations; some of these states are working on moving a statewide agenda forward. The national Coalition for Community Schools has 170 member organizations. It is part of the national agenda for children in England to make every school, all 23,000, a community school.

Why is this strategy so compelling and why are so many cities, states and countries adopting it?

There is increasing acknowledgement that school success depends upon sound instruction, but that is not enough. Without a doubt, the quality of school leadership, teachers, curriculum and pedagogy makes a huge difference in the lives of children. We also know that children face myriad struggles that affect *how prepared* they are to learn and often preclude them from engaging successfully in school.

Several well-documented factors prevent students from engaging successfully in school. These factors include medical and dental problems and a lack of health insurance, mental health challenges, stress in families and communities related to violence, un- or under-employment, immigration status, having no place to go during out-of-school hours or a lack of opportunities for parental involvement. Children too often do not have access to (or their families do not know how to access) needed supports, services and opportunities that can address these challenges.

It is clear that neither the school system nor the social service system alone can provide the continuum of supports that children require to be physically, emotionally and socially prepared to learn and grow into healthy adults. And while many, though not enough, of these services are available in communities, they are so poorly coordinated that they either do not reach the children who need it the most or they don't have the impact they could if the education and social services systems worked together.

Community-based organizations, which have significant expertise and marshal considerable resources in the fields of mental and physical health (including health insurance enrollment), parental involvement, early-childhood education, after-school programs and youth development, can and should partner with schools to locate essential student support services in or close to schools – the concept of going where the children are. Well-documented research and Children's Aid's own practice demonstrate that the coordinated of these components at the school level increase the likelihood for student success.

**Outcomes from 14 years of research on Children's Aid community schools include:**

- **Increased academic achievement<sup>iii</sup>**
- **Improvement in student attendance<sup>iv</sup>**
- **Improvement in youths' social and emotional development and community engagement<sup>v</sup>**
- **Increased parent involvement<sup>vi</sup>**
- **Reduction in special education referrals, resulting in more appropriate special education referrals,<sup>vii</sup> and improvements in mental and physical health.<sup>viii</sup>** Screening and treating children with challenging behaviors for underlying mental health issues before screening them for special education services diverts children from long-term tracking in special education.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Improvement in school climate<sup>x</sup>**
- **Demonstrated benefits of early childhood education<sup>xi</sup>**
- **Enrolled children in health insurance.** Last year alone in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, we facilitated the enrollment of 528 children in health insurance at six of our schools.

While our schools have documented very positive outcomes, they serve only a small number of the students both in New York City and the rest of the State who could benefit significantly from this approach.

This strategy can have statewide impact and be adapted to school districts throughout New York State: urban and rural, small and large. We know this because we have seen it from our work nationally and internationally.

This strategy is cost effective because it seeks to most efficiently and effectively coordinate existing funding from the education, medical and mental health, after-school, and child welfare sectors. In many cases, the majority of new money can be used for the coordination of the programs.

However we also know that that the need for services represents far more than existing funding streams provide. For example:

- 44% of eligible children don't receive childcare subsidies and only approximately one-third of the parents who would have chosen to enroll their children in fully funded PreK programs had the option to do so in 2005.<sup>xii</sup>
- One in five children and youth are believed to have a mental health disorder, but fewer than half of those obtain any mental health services.<sup>xiii</sup>

Towards that end, we are asking the state to continue to move in the direction of expanding programs that benefit children statewide.

New York can be a leader in putting forth a model for change – community schools – that will have statewide impact on the health, well-being and educational achievement of children by coordinating existing initiatives in health, education, early childhood, child welfare...etc., where the kids are – in schools.

We invite all of you to come and see a community schools in action. Thank you for your time today.

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<sup>i</sup> Afterschool Alliance: [http://afterschoolalliance.org/states/states\\_facts.cfm?state\\_abbr=NY](http://afterschoolalliance.org/states/states_facts.cfm?state_abbr=NY)

<sup>ii</sup> *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools Year One Findings*, prepared by Kira Krenichyn, Helène Clark, Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel and Lymari Benitez of ActKnowledge, September 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools Year One Findings*, prepared by Kira Krenichyn, Helène Clark, Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel and Lymari Benitez of ActKnowledge, September 2005. See also *Summary of Fordham University Research Findings 1992-1999*, prepared by ActKnowledge.

<sup>iv</sup> Op cit., *Fordham University Research Findings 1992-1999*. See also Op cit., *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools Year One Findings*.

<sup>v</sup> Op cit., *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools Year One Findings*. See also op cit., *Fordham University Research Findings 1992-1999*.

<sup>vi</sup> Op cit., *Fordham University Research Findings 1992-1999*.

<sup>vii</sup> Unpublished paper: *A Call for School-Based Student and Family Support Services*, by James Langford, October 2005.

<sup>viii</sup> *The Children's Aid Society's Community School Mental Health Services Analysis of Progress in 4<sup>th</sup> Year of the New York State Education Department's VESID - Effective Practices Contract*. Evaluation conducted by Helène Clark and Robert Engle of ActKnowledge, November 2003. See also PS 50 Evaluation of the Health Component in its First Year. Evaluation conducted by Helène Clark, Melissa Extein, and Robert Engle of ActKnowledge, September 2003.

<sup>ix</sup> Harvard Graduate School of Education, T. Hehir, September 2005.

<sup>x</sup> Op cit., *Fordham University Research Findings 1992-1999*. See also Op cit., *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools Year One Findings*.

<sup>xi</sup> *The Children's Aid Society's (CAS') School-Based Zero to Five Head Start Programs at P.S. 5 and P.S. 8. are the Spring Board to Children's Success in School and Form the Base of Real Parent Involvement*. See also Unpublished paper: *Children's Aid Society Community School Head Start Program - Retrospective Study*, by Margaret Caspe and Dr. Andrew Seltzer, October 2005

<sup>xii</sup> Op cit., *Growing Up in New York: Charting the Next Generation of Workers, Citizens and Leaders*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Op cit., *Growing Up in New York: Charting the Next Generation of Workers, Citizens and Leaders*.