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YONKERS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Budget Testimony**  
before the  
**New York State Joint Legislative  
Fiscal and Education Committees**

**Presented January 27, 2016 by:**  
**Dr. Edwin M. Quezada**  
**Interim Superintendent of Schools**



# Budget Testimony

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Distinguished members of the Joint Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees, thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Yonkers City School District. I'm Dr. Edwin Quezada, Interim Superintendent of Schools, here to advocate for the 27,000 students who, on a daily basis, seek the American Dream. And, to explain why investing in the Yonkers Public Schools is a prudent use of our State's tax dollars.

It is our joint responsibility to provide each child an education that will enable them an opportunity to attain their dreams and become productive citizens. Yonkers Board of Education Trustees, the Mayor and City Council have embraced a common goal committed to an educational agenda that supports the needs of children who attend school in an urban center, and who continue to lack a sound basic education.

**Much of this success was accomplished working together with our Mayor, City and State delegations and the Governor garnering valuable resources for our children.** Let me highlight a few programs that have the greatest impact on our children.

- Full-day prekindergarten programs were successfully reopened in all of our elementary schools through a State grant that ends in 2018. I'd like to underscore the importance of prekindergarten for urban children. More than 14 years of Yonkers performance data demonstrates that students who attended our full-day prekindergarten in the past showed significant long-term growth with higher academic achievement on English Language Arts and mathematics assessments, as well as stronger graduation rates.
- Extended Learning Time, a longer school day, began this year at four elementary schools, also grant funded through 2017. Teachers are using additional instructional strategies supported by arts educators, community partners and professional development.
- Community schools are being developed in seven elementary schools and one high school.
- Career and Technical Education offerings have been restructured to align with workplace needs and employment trends, and our P-TECH program is a model for the State.

**Why invest more in Yonkers children?** Because, our school district continually improves student outcomes; just look at the State data.

On January 11th, the State Education Department released the 2015 graduation rates and once again, Yonkers Public Schools' graduation rate is up. The June 2015 graduation rate is up 5% from last year to 74% and for August the gain is 2% with 78% of the Class of 2015, the 2011 Cohort, graduated on time. And, it's important to note that these gains are in every subgroup; English Language Learners, Economically Disadvantaged and every ethnic group, Once again, Yonkers outperformed the State's urban school districts, and is closely aligned to the statewide rates of 78% for June and 80% for August. From 2010 to 2015, our graduation rate increased by 11% for June graduates and by 10% for August students.

Yonkers Public Schools made gains in the 2015 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments over the three (3) years of new Common Core Standards. ELA is up 2.8% for students scoring level 2 and above with a greater gain of 3.9% for students scoring level 3 and above. Mathematics shows greater gains over the three years, up 7.8% for students scoring level 2 and above with a greater gain of 9.4% for students scoring level 3 and above. For 2015, the scores show modest improvement in the percent of students achieving proficiency this year compared to last (level 3 and above): English Language Arts went up by 1.7% and Math went up 2.2%.

In addition, our enrollment grows every year by almost 300 students; this trend is predicted to continue.

As you can see, our commitment to education has not waivered - enrollment is increasing, more families are staying in our City, teachers remain committed to our students' education, students achieve at high levels and graduate on time.

Community schools and partnerships flourish in every school. We work with local health, medical and post-secondary institutions to provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students and family members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children.

And, the successful implementation of the 2014 Inter Municipal Agreement between the City of Yonkers and the Board of Education is a model approach to shared services in municipalities facing financial challenges.

**Now that I have captured your attention with Yonkers' successes, let me share our challenges.**

Yonkers children are educated in a crumbling infrastructure. The average age of our school buildings is over 75 years. These schools are at or over their capacity and cannot accommodate current technology or required additional instructional space for our growing enrollment and increasing need for in-district space for Students with Disabilities and English Languages Learners. Out of necessity, due to limited funding and staff, our annual capital improvement plan is actually done as triage, prioritizing projects based on health and safety, and building integrity needs.

Yonkers is further constrained by the 70% State reimbursement on approved construction projects. This can be remedied by City's proposed legislation for the reconstruction of Yonkers schools. The Yonkers community supports this legislation and will vigorously lobby for its adoption.



The challenge facing the Yonkers City School District in 2016-2017, and beyond, is to meet its lawful responsibility to provide educationally sound instructional programs that addresses the needs of Yonkers students and the community. Too many years have gone by and too many Yonkers students have not had the benefit of an appropriate public education. The majority of our schools do not have a guidance counselor, a school psychologist, or a social worker. Let me share our student teacher ratios: guidance counselors 787:1, psychologists 1,115:1, social workers 2,231:1. Our elementary schools are void of extracurricular activities or sports, music and art are limited to a day or less a week, and our student teacher ratio for library media specialists is 3,347:1.

Yonkers is determined to turn these challenges into real opportunities for our students. I ask that you recognize our challenges, celebrate our successes, and commit to expanding opportunities for Yonkers children.

Help us **move towards compliance** and provide opportunities for our students. Please consider:

- Increasing the Foundation Aid formula to recognize growing enrollment both at BEDS day and throughout the year, thereby providing Yonkers essential reoccurring revenues to support our increasing number of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners;
- Restoring the total amount of our Gap Elimination Adjustment this year;
- Providing full funding and reimbursement for our Career and Technical Education programs which has remained stagnant for years and does not recognize program sequencing that begins in 9<sup>th</sup> grade;
- Recognizing that Pupil Support Services, Art, Music, and Sports are not extras; these are essential components of a sound basic education;
- Increasing funding for Community Schools statewide to enable Districts to properly implement mandated instructional improvements
- Providing adequate funding to support Professional Development aligned to State Mandates.

Finally, I encourage each of you to visit Yonkers and see firsthand the appalling condition of so many of our schools. I'm confident that your visit will convince you to support the City's school reconstruction legislation and, as you have with other cities across the state, become an active participant creating jobs and quality schools, to improve the entire Yonkers community.

Yonkers Board of Education Trustees, the Mayor and City Council, parents, students, teachers, administrators, civil service employees and I are committed to the education of all of our children. I ask you to also commit to our diverse, growing, and vibrant community. It is Yonkers time; give our children what they deserve.

**Thank you.**

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Dr. Edwin M. Quezada  
Interim Superintendent of Schools

**Who We Are**

- 26,489 students
  - 16.2% Students with Disabilities, 11.8% Limited English Proficiency
  - 56.4% Hispanic, 19.4% Black, 17.2% White, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, Multi-Racial
- 3,579 employees
  - 1,887 Teachers, 117 School Administrators, 27 Central Office Administrators,
  - 1,548 CSEA/Other
- 39 Schools
  - 10 prekindergarten to grade 6
  - 20 prekindergarten to grade 8
  - 1 prekindergarten to grade 1
  - 1 prekindergarten to grade 12
  - 2 grades 7 to 12
  - 5 grades 9 to 12
  - ✓ Each elementary school has full-day prekindergarten, mandated full-day kindergarten and a unique magnet theme
  - ✓ Comprehensive high schools provide 24 specialized career and college readiness programs and unique magnet themes
  - ✓ Montessori education is available across all grade levels
  - ✓ Dedicated academically talented school for grades prekindergarten to 8 and the International Baccalaureate Programme for grades 9 to 12
  - ✓ Yonkers Pathways to Success: free adult education and job training

Yonkers Public Schools has centralized school registration for all students. The District is committed to a School Choice Process that is open and equitable to everyone. The District offers families more educational opportunities than any other school district in Westchester County.

**[yonkerspublicschools.org](http://yonkerspublicschools.org)**  
**914-376-8000**