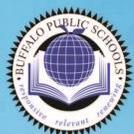


Buffalo City School District Budget Testimony Before The New York State Legislative Fiscal and Education Committees



Presented January 28, 2021

Dr. Kriner Cash, Superintendent of Schools
Buffalo City School District



The Education Bargain with Students and Parents

An equal and high-quality education is every child's civil right; and, as educators, we must deliver on this essential democratic principle. The Education Bargain is simple: The District will guarantee pathways to opportunity that will lead to achievement and success in exchange for hard work, commitment, and collaboration of our students and parents.



IT IS THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO:

- Place a high premium on education
- Make sure your child goes to school and to all classes every day
- Make sure your child does his in-school work to the best of his ability and puts in additional study time (up to two hours each day) outside of school hours
- Make sure you and your child show respect for teachers and for staff

Rigorous
Early Elementary
Education

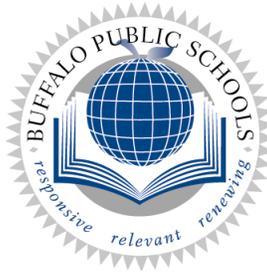
Strong
Community
Schools

Innovative
High Schools

Extended
Learning Excellence
for All Our
Students

Services for
Our Neediest
Children and
Families

New
Relationship
with Our
Teachers



The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

Throughout the devastating grip of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Buffalo City School District has kept faith with those notable words. We have worked diligently to place the health and safety of our students and staff as our top priority. Our teachers and administrators have been uncompromised in their dedication to students. As we transition to in-person learning, we are staying united in our efforts to bring children safely back to our much-needed schools and to our cherished classrooms. We are doing right by our students because this is the time.

Our strategic transformation plan, ***The Education Bargain with Students and Parents***, exemplifies for the nation the fundamental and required benchmarks for providing the equal and high quality education every child deserves and every parent expects. We are fast becoming a national proof-point and reference for improved public education.

As a result of The Education Bargain, 45 of 60 schools—and rising—are now in good standing in Buffalo. Leading indicators of our success also include:

- 1) On-time graduation rates up from 48% to over 76% since 2015;
- 2) 48 of 60 schools are meeting annual academic performance targets—up from 4 of 60 in 2015;
- 3) All levels of Buffalo’s civic leadership are collaborating effectively with the District to support our students (parents, elected officials, higher education, business, faith-based & advocacy groups, philanthropy, and labor organizations).

Meanwhile, we are relentlessly working toward a minimum 80% four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2021. And, after five and six years, our aim is for 100% of the student cohort to graduate with a college and career-ready diploma. We are committed to becoming a District in Good Standing—100% of our schools performing above benchmark—by 2023. Our services and support for our neediest children and families will continue to be exemplary. And, District business and financial operations will continue to be second to none in urban public education.

The Buffalo City School District stands united with Governor Cuomo as he leads New York State through these historic challenging times. We are united with him in his call for substantial federal support to relieve the suffering endured disproportionately by taxpayers in New York State—and most disproportionately in our communities of color.

We applaud the Governor for his continued support of education in Buffalo and we are grateful for his reliable leadership. Our Western New York Legislative Delegation, led by the Honorable State Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes and the Honorable State Senator Timothy Kennedy, has a record of exemplary and long-standing advocacy for our District. We are working closely with the Executive Budget Office and our esteemed legislators to secure the increased funding Buffalo’s children need to close the opportunity gap so clearly identified by Governor Cuomo and now laid bare as a result of this unprecedented pandemic.

During this pandemic, Mayor Byron Brown has demonstrated his stalwart reliability and support for the Buffalo City School District. We have coordinated closure activities together and our teams have operated in the spirit of mutual collaboration. Joining with Common Council President Darius Pridgen and his distinguished colleagues, we will continue to collaborate on a local legislative agenda that improves outcomes for our children despite all of the pernicious effects wrought on our community by the pandemic.

In sum, the Buffalo City School District requests a \$50.0 million, or 6.5% recurring increase in State Aid over the Governor’s proposed budget through a combination of the following funding and legislative requests:

- a. \$50.0 million or 9.2% increase in Foundation Aid;
- b. Permanent increase of at least \$2.6 million in the Health Services Grant;
- c. Rejection of the proposed 50% reduction in Supplemental Charter Tuition for \$5.0 million;
- d. Adoption of legislation to reimburse the District for approximately \$10.0 million in Supplemental Charter Tuition payments in the same year the tuition is paid;
- e. Adoption of similar legislation from 2020-21 to reduce the charter school tuition expense by 5.5% or \$7.6 million;
- f. Rejection of the proposed consolidation of Expense Based Aids avoiding a \$20.0 million reduction in reimbursable aides.

These requests are essential in order to meet all of the challenges that await us as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Further, the requests address our revised revenue targets for our long-term fiscal plan. Finally, these requests ensure the continued and effective implementation of our strategic transformation plan, ***The Education Bargain with Students and Parents.***

Thank you for embracing and sharing our mindset of excellence and high expectations for all of Buffalo’s children. Thank you for all of your collective efforts in defeating the terrible impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on our communities. And thank you for your faithful service to New York State. We will stand with you—united, committed, and resolute—because the “time is always right to do what is right.”

Dr. Kriner Cash



Superintendent of Schools
Buffalo City School District



BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

2021-2022 LEGISLATIVE REQUEST SUMMARY

- Support for the Commissioner’s and Board of Regents proposals:** The Buffalo City School District affirms our support for the Commissioner’s and Board of Regents 2021-22 legislative proposals.
- Foundation Aid Request:** Based on the Governor’s proposed budget and the District’s desire to utilize the Federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act funds evenly over the two years the legislation allows, the District has a recurring deficit of \$50 million annually over the next two years. For 2021-22, the Buffalo City School District requests a **9.2% or \$50.0 million increase** in Foundation Aid. This is necessary given the extraordinary needs of District students and to continue effectively implementing the ***Education Bargain with Students and Parents***.
- Health Services Grant:** In the Governor’s proposed 2021-22 budget, there is a cut of \$1.2 million in the District’s funding for health services. However, the health-related needs of our students are escalating. The District requests a permanent increase in the \$5.3 million health services grant (or a bullet aid allocation) of **\$2.6 million** to help offset the rising costs of providing nursing and health services to our students as shown in these projections:

Year	Costs of Services
2020-21	\$7.9 million (budgeted)
2021-22	\$7.9 million (projected)

- Supplemental Charter Tuition Reimbursement:** The Governor’s proposed budget includes a 50% reduction in Supplemental Charter Tuition Reimbursement for the 2021-22 school year. We request Supplemental Charter Tuition Reimbursement be funded at 100% of the amount in legislation. Additionally, we further request the Governor sign pending bills into law which will reimburse the District for Supplemental Charter Tuition in the same school year the tuition is paid by the District.
 - Buffalo’s Charter school related costs are estimated at \$25.0 million more than the associated revenues for those students on an annual budget and cash flow basis.
 - Full funding of the Supplemental Charter Tuition Reimbursement Formula and the additional legislation will help reduce that budgetary and cash flow gap by an estimated **\$5.0 million and \$10.0 million respectively** in 2021-22.
- Charter School Tuition Formula:** The District requests relief from the current charter school tuition formula, consistent with the legislation adopted in 2020-21, which reduced charter school tuition by 5.5% as a result of the reduced State Aid to school districts. If similar legislation is adopted, **the District will save approximately \$7.6 million**.
 - Without this legislation, the District’s projected charter school tuition in 2021-22 will increase at least \$8.0 million, before the impact of any new charter schools, which will increase the tuition expense even further.
 - Note that during 2020-21, charter schools in Buffalo were recipients of \$12.0 million in federal PPP loans, which will likely be forgiven by the federal government.

6. **Proliferation of Start-Up Charter Schools:** Provide the District veto authority in approving new public charter schools in Buffalo or approve a moratorium to ensure new charter schools fulfill an unmet need in the District. Otherwise, new charters are continuing to saturate the District with more general education K-8 seats when most of our elementary schools (70%) are in Good Standing and the District graduation rate is over 76%.
7. **Independent Receiver for Closed Charter Schools:** We request legislation that appoints an Independent Receiver for closed charter schools to audit and ensure that public assets are protected and returned to the District of residence so they can be utilized to support the re-enrolled children.
8. **Reject Consolidation of Expense Based Aids:** We request that the proposed consolidation of expense based aids into a block grant be rejected. This proposal will result in an approximately **\$20.0 million** reduction from the current reimbursement system based on a full year of Transportation Aid. The largest component of this reimbursement is Transportation Aid which reimburses costs that are driven largely by market conditions outside of the control of school districts, including the proliferation of charter schools. Further, Career and Technical Education reimbursement aid is critical to ensure District students are able to receive the most relevant training in CTE available through the expansion of those programs.