



## **Testimony for NYC City Council's Committee on Education**

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

Good afternoon, Council Members and Chair Treyger - always nice to see you again. Thank you for continuing to hold the DOE and City Hall accountable for a situation that -- no matter HOW they try to spin it -- gets worse every day.

My name is Jennifer Goddard and I'm the parent of a NYC public school student in Brooklyn who has an IEP and is currently at home in medically necessary instruction because of his severe asthma and overactive immune system disorder. I'm here on behalf of the New York City Coalition for Educating Families Together (NYC CEFT).

It was extraordinarily hard to listen to the propaganda vomited here by the DOE and DOH today. If there's one lie they need to stop it's claiming this year's strategies are a success based on last year's when 70% of students WERE NOT PHYSICALLY IN SCHOOLS BECAUSE WE HAD A REMOTE OPTION.

A lot of the speakers here have already raised questions about and spoken strongly on topics that we are also very concerned about in the NYC CEFT. I'd like to briefly talk about what the DOE's gold standard looks like for two populations of New Yorkers: medically fragile students, who most need support and protection at this time; and parents who are keeping their children home out of legitimate safety concerns.

My son is in an Outschool.com math lesson at this very moment that I've had to pay for because he receives only one hour of instruction per day in the DOE's medically necessary instruction.

One hour per day is the bare minimum currently required by a NY State Dept of Education Chancellor's Regulation but it's certainly possible to offer more, especially if the NYC DOE has a "plethora of substitutes" and "abundance of paraprofessionals" that the first deputy chancellor spoke of earlier. I challenge him to argue how one hour per day is a gold standard.

My son is suffering actual learning loss NOW. Since Sept 13, he's received exactly 11 hours of learning as a medically fragile student in the DOE's home instruction program. That equates to less than 2 regular school days.

I want to bring another very important issue to this committee's attention that is happening to parents in our group, as well as others who recently shared their experiences on social media. Several of our members, including from District 75, have received calls from ACS for educational neglect for either keeping their children home because they are afraid for their safety or because of school bus issues.

This is happening now in Queens and in the Bronx, despite assurances from the Chancellor that were made to this very committee that ACS would NOT be weaponized against parents fearful of their children or family members contracting covid at school.

It started last week when borough district offices and attendance teachers started calling parents and THREATENING them with ACS. We immediately alerted members of the media who were told by the DOE that this wasn't happening. They can try gaslighting tactics on the media but you can't tell parents in our group who this happened to that they imagined it. One of our parent members has even been threatened about attendance because her 14-yr-old daughter -- who caught covid at school the 2nd week -- had not yet returned ... even though she still has symptoms.

Only one testimony can be true if you are presented with opposing testimony. We humbly request that you please examine statements made by the Chancellor during the Sept 1, 2021 oversight hearing regarding ACS. If the DOE refuses to provide transparency into basic numbers like how many students are vaccinated or even in the system, they need to be held accountable for something like making demonstrably false statements under oath.

I also want to point out that the president of the UFT, Michael Mulgrew, testified today and again yesterday to the NY State Senate Standing Committees on Education, NYC Education and Budget & Revenue that the burden of contact tracing is on teachers and school administrators right now - not the 200 or so professionals staffing the Situation Room or Test & Trace that the NYC Dept of Health stated today. So we ask the committee to examine that more closely, too.

The DOE can spin lies on record here, but you can't lie to parents who KNOW: what is happening in our homes and in schools is NOT SAFE and NOT A GOLD STANDARD. The DOE has NOT come back stronger than last year.

We again request that the DOE offer a remote option to parents who are desperately worried for their children's health. Doing so would address a number of current problems facing our schools, including staff shortages, overcrowded and unsafe classrooms and shared spaces like hallways and cafeterias, help keep students who cannot yet be vaccinated safe, and limit the virus' transmission throughout the city in families and communities already devastated by the pandemic.

Thank you.

In Solidarity,

Farah Despeignes, President

[FarahD@ceftnyc.org](mailto:FarahD@ceftnyc.org)

Amy Tsai, Vice President of Special Education & District 75 Policy

[AmyT@ceftnyc.org](mailto:AmyT@ceftnyc.org)

Jennifer Goddard, Vice President of Communications

[JenniferG@ceftnyc.org](mailto:JenniferG@ceftnyc.org)