



# **T E S T I M O N Y**

## **New York State Senate Committee on Civil Service and Pensions**

**Tuesday, October 17, 2023**

### **THE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERVISORS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

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Good afternoon, Senator Jackson and your honorable colleagues. It is a pleasure to be with you today, and we are grateful for your continued support over the years.

My name is Mabel Muniz-Sarduy, Director of Political & External Affairs for the of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). I bring you greetings from our President, Henry Rubio. CSA is the labor union representing 6,100 in-service and 10,500 retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Administrators and Supervisors working in New York City public schools and four charter schools. CSA is also the collective bargaining unit for 170 Early Childhood Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Early Childhood Education Centers.

The issues that your committee is examining – the challenges and opportunities facing the civil service sector and public sector pension funds – are extremely important to our members. Public-school educators enter the profession because of their deep desire to impact the lives of children and young adults. They appreciate that their valuable service is acknowledged by the city and state with a reasonably valued pension fund that allows them to retire with dignity. It is a fitting incentive that thankfully spurs many to take on the challenging work they perform every day, and it helps our system make public education jobs more financially sustainable. These pensions also sometimes encourage public school educators to remain in their professions longer, allowing them to build the necessary skills and experience to become the talented and dedicated leaders guiding our system at all levels.

These pension benefits have become even more meaningful within the civil service and public sector since 2020. We must stress the sacrifices made by our members – and our sisters and brothers who work alongside them in public service - throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. CSA members have tremendous impact on their students' educational progress and emotional well-being, and this has been especially true in recent years. Principals and

Assistant Principals were singularly responsible for leading students and teachers through COVID-19, addressing learning loss, and implementing in-person education and virtual learning. Our non-school-based members, administrators who serve the system in various ways, were often redeployed to help support schools in need and took on every imaginable role behind the scenes to make sure schools successfully pivoted to remote and hybrid learning and that public school families got the social-emotional support they needed. Meanwhile, our early childhood educators served as a lifeline for our city's families and epitomized the term "essential worker" as they worked in-person, often 10-hours each day, serving students at great risk to their own health. Others were able to perform their jobs while their own children were being cared for. On the frontlines of this tragedy, CSA members provided stability and a much-needed sense of normalcy for our children and young adults in uncertain, challenging times.

Please consider the following as you continue this critical review.

### **Recruitment & Retention**

At no time in recent memory has the need to recruit and retain school leaders been as acute as it is now. Like many others invested in this critical work, CSA anticipates that the trend of high turnover in school leadership will continue in the coming years.<sup>1</sup> A 2022 survey by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that 1 out of 2 school leaders say their stress level is so high they are considering a career change or retirement. 3 out of 4 of school leaders (73%) and students (74%) report they needed help with their mental or emotional health last year. Another survey by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)<sup>2</sup> found that while this exodus "... *will impact all*

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/why-school-leaders-are-considering-an-early-exit-one-principals-take/2020/08>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nassp.org/news/nassp-survey-signals-a-looming-mass-exodus-of-principals-from-schools/>

*students, historically marginalized communities, students of color and those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds will be disproportionately affected by the departure of our strong and dedicated school leaders.”*

The number of New York City principals leaving their position has steadily risen since 2018, and more principals left their position last year than any other of the last five school years, with an increase of 55% in departures since the first year of the pandemic.

Our union has always drawn attention to the recruitment and retention of school leaders and administrators, recognizing how deeply stress and burnout impact our personal lives and the school communities we serve. The job remains among the most rewarding; but these days, we have even further need to address the issues of recruitment and retention as the job becomes increasingly demanding and complex.

The pandemic has only exacerbated the growing challenge. There is mounting evidence to illuminate just how much the pandemic impacted the mental health of school administrators. According to a survey conducted by the RAND Corporation last year, nearly 85% of principals reported frequent job-related stress. 48% of principals reported dealing with burnout, and 28% reported symptoms of depression.

CSA's own recent internal survey revealed more specific information about how New York City school administrators feel at this moment. Nearly 40% of our members reported being currently dissatisfied with the job, and about 50% believe that work-related stress has impacted the quality of their job performance. 63% of members believe work-related stress has impacted their physical health, and 65% believe it has impacted their mental and emotional health. Nearly 78% believe stress impacts their sleep often, and 53% believe their work impacts their personal relationships.

We must constantly remind ourselves that the mental health of leaders can have ripple effects. Burnout leads to turnover, and there's convincing data that higher rates of turnover among school leaders lead to higher rates of teacher turnover, all of which greatly impacts a school's growth. In 2020, the National Association of Secondary School Principals released a report that reviewed findings from 35 major studies and concluded that too many

states and local public-school systems are not investing enough resources in recruiting, training, and retaining school leaders.

One of the most impactful ways of supporting school leaders is to make professional development available to them through our Executive Leadership Institute (ELI)<sup>3</sup>. CSA established ELI many years ago as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the provision of practical, relevant, and essential professional development for today's school leaders. Put simply, ELI provides the necessary training to help school leaders successfully fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders, and ELI's programs give school leaders the tools they need to create true learning communities.

Through ELI, CSA has created the Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals (ALPAP)<sup>4</sup>, to attract and support school leaders considering becoming a school principal. Every year, ALPAP helps foster a new cohort of strong, inspired, and dynamic leaders to help our youth succeed. ALPAP provides a path forward for Assistant Principals and Education Administrators who have demonstrated a readiness to become Principals.

CSA has also fought to improve retention and recruitment in early childhood education through our fight for pay parity for ECE directors who work in CBO-based centers. The educational leaders of these centers still earn far less than their counterparts who work in public schools. Virtually all these directors and assistant directors hold master's degrees and are certified teachers and experts in their field. They supervise large staffs, observe and evaluate teacher performance, guide and review lesson plans, and assess incoming children. They also have substantial additional administrative duties, which range from maintaining attendance rolls, payroll, and budgets to writing RFPs and grant proposals. Their day-to-day responsibilities mirror those of their DOE counterparts. Yet many earn less than half of those that run DOE-based centers.

We believe that hiring well-trained educators is the most essential factor for the success of ECE centers. Adequate, fair pay is fundamental in attracting

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<sup>3</sup> <https://elipd.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://elipd.org/leadership-program/>

and retaining the best educators at any level in the education system. The inability of these centers to recruit and hold on to directors threatens to impact the quality of their programs. The children at ECE centers are no less important than the children in public school buildings. These children are also our future doctors, engineers, mathematicians, teachers and artists. ECE centers strive to achieve the same level of social, physical, intellectual, cultural, creative, and emotional development as the programs in public school buildings. However, if the directors of ECE centers are paid on a lower scale and treated like second-class citizens, they are branded as less important.

## Tier VI

Any examination of the current civil service system in New York must include a hard look at the enactment of Tier VI and its impacts. As 10 years has now passed since Tier VI was enacted, it must be acknowledged that those now enrolled in that tier will earn a significantly reduced pension as compared to those previously. This is having two effects:

- It makes public service employment less attractive as a career choice.
- It discourages people from remaining in the public service for an entire career.

We believe that it's unfair that some professionals must work longer and contribute more to earn a significantly reduced pension than those of their peers in identical roles working in earlier decades.

We must confront the fact that Tier VI will not provide adequate retirement benefits in the long term: retirement assets as a percentage of salary and age.

Respectfully submitted,

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