

Chapter 7: Helping New York’s Students Learn and Thrive

Governor Hochul believes every child should have the opportunity to thrive in New York. That includes access to high-quality, safe and supportive education, robust and thoughtfully designed mental health resources that meet children where they are, and a policy ecosystem that keeps kids safe online. Governor Hochul is committed to building on her robust track record as a champion for students, families, and teachers to creatively address many of the challenges New York families confront. To date, Governor Hochul’s administration has:

- Invested \$37.6 billion in school aid, the highest level of school funding in state history, including fully funding Foundation Aid for the first time to ensure that resources reach the schools that need them the most.
- Implemented a universal free school meals policy—ensuring 2.7 million students receive free breakfast and lunch at school, addressing food insecurity in the classroom and driving down costs for families by an average of \$165 per child per month.
- Established a nation-leading policy to create distraction-free classrooms by banning the use of smartphones in schools statewide—an initiative that has already led to positive classroom environments and better student engagement in 83 percent of schools surveyed.
- Implemented free community college for students ages 25-55 pursuing careers in high-demand fields, with over 11,000 students participating already.
- Expanded the Tuition Assistance Program, increasing awards and raising income eligibility to benefit nearly 100,000 students. As a result of the expansion, over forty thousand students received aid for the first time.
- Expanded school-based mental health clinics, which help students get a licensed mental health care provider in a familiar stigma-free setting on their school campus. The state now supports 1,300 clinic satellites, up from 872 in 2020, covering 25 percent of all NYS public schools.

- Ensured school districts across the state are utilizing instructional best practices grounded in the Science of Reading to improve students' literacy achievement; the state is seeing improvements in student proficiency scores.

Governor Hochul will continue to build on this legacy by advancing a bold agenda that strengthens New York's schools, universities and colleges, youth mental health services, and online safety.

Advancing Student Learning and Supports

Back to Basics in Math: Transforming Math Learning through Quality Instruction and Professional Learning

Governor Hochul worked with teachers and school districts to ensure schools are teaching students to read the right way—by aligning instructional best practices with the evidence-based Science of Reading principles. As a result of these sweeping policy changes, and the hard work of our students and teachers, statewide reading proficiency rates have already begun to increase.

Building on that success, Governor Hochul will apply this model to the teaching of math, by proposing legislation to require the State Education Department (SED) to provide instructional best practices to school districts in the teaching of math, as well as guidance and resources to help educators select and implement curricula that align with state standards.

The State will also direct SUNY and CUNY to develop microcredentials in evidence-based math instruction to support New York's teachers and launch statewide professional learning opportunities in math instruction, including through regional hub pilots in New York's districts with the lowest math performance.

Together, these actions will support increased math learning for students, equip teachers across the state with evidence-based teaching techniques and materials, and create opportunities for professional learning.

Building on Back to Basics Literacy Through Support for In-Service Teachers

New York school districts have aligned their literacy instruction with evidence-based methodologies and are working to ensure incoming teachers are learning to teach using Science of Reading best practices, through the state action plan created pursuant to New York's participation in the Hunt Institute's Path Forward program.

In addition to this training of pre-service teachers, Governor Hochul will ensure the state supports current classroom teachers as this shift is underway. To do so, New York will provide additional current teachers the opportunity to complete a Science of Reading SUNY or CUNY microcredential at no cost. Microcredentials are high-quality certification programs that offer rigorous instruction in educational best practices, via an accelerated course. By continuing to offer this instruction to additional teachers for free, this model will ensure broad participation by educators across the state and will help ensure that all children have access to quality reading instruction.

In addition, Governor Hochul will provide additional, targeted resources to some of New York's highest-need districts that are lagging behind in Science of Reading adoption. Starting with Rochester and Yonkers, Governor Hochul will establish a three-year pilot program between each school district and a New York State college or university with an educator preparation program, which will provide targeted in-service professional learning aligned with evidence-based reading instruction. By focusing on a discrete number of high-need districts, this pilot program will reach teachers where they are, help ensure all students are receiving high-quality instruction, and work to close stubborn literacy gaps.

Accelerating Learning with High-Impact Tutoring

In addition to supporting evidence-based changes in the teaching and learning of literacy and math, Governor Hochul will also seek to accelerate student learning through targeted, high-impact tutoring. The state will support partnerships between high-need school districts and tutoring providers to ensure high-quality, individualized tutoring for students who deserve an extra boost. Tutoring opportunities will be limited to interested districts, and support both literacy and math. Evidence from other states and communities shows that this type of tutoring can be highly effective when implemented well, helping students overcome traditional barriers. Helping our students excel

in math and literacy will unlock a universe of opportunities for our kids and ensure our future workforce is equipped with the skills they need to succeed.

Creating a Sustainable Teacher Pipeline

New York, like many other states, faces significant teacher diversity, recruitment, and retention challenges. It is estimated that New York will need as many as 180,000 new teachers over the next decade, including early childhood educators.

To address these challenges, Governor Hochul will invest in a set of innovative teacher recruitment and preparation initiatives. She will direct SED to establish a new program to create an accelerated teacher preparation pathway for career changers and individuals who want to become educators and already hold a bachelor's degree. This new pathway will require pre-service work in high-need classrooms, to count towards teacher certification, expediting the process of getting prospective teachers into classrooms where they are most needed.

To support our high school students in learning about and entering the teaching profession, New York will launch new P-TEACH programs, which will allow high school students to get a head start in learning about and preparing for careers in education by taking college courses in relevant subjects for credit. Additionally, the State will support the enhancement of TeachNY, an online resource which provides information, coaching and guidance for prospective teachers as they explore the profession and apply to educator preparation programs across the state. With additional resources, the program will aim to support more than 7,000 teacher recruits statewide in the next three years.

Finally, to consider longer-term solutions, Governor Hochul will establish a Task Force consisting of higher education, government, and nonprofit stakeholders, coordinated by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, to examine the scope and root causes of teacher shortages across the state, barriers to entry for incoming prospective teachers, and propose policy and regulatory solutions.

Through this broad package of reforms and programs, New York State is strategically identifying and removing many of the barriers that currently deter individuals from pursuing careers in teaching. Together these policies will result in thousands of additional high-quality teachers in New York's education ecosystem, supporting a brighter future for all students in New York.

Establishing the Empire AI Student Challenge

The widespread use of AI, particularly by students and employers, has become an increasingly ubiquitous reality in both learning and professional environments. As students and teachers grapple with the uses and implications of new technology, many report feeling overwhelmed by and unprepared for use of the technology.

To address these anxieties, safely allow students to engage with the technology in positive ways, and equip young New Yorkers with the skills they need to harness future technologies, Governor Hochul will establish the inaugural Empire AI Student Challenge. Groups of students in grades K-12—with a sponsoring educator or expert—will work to identify a problem facing the public and find or create a solution using AI. Sponsoring educators and experts will be provided with access to training to learn how to teach the responsible use of AI to students and how to prepare for its potential future applications in the classroom and beyond.

The challenge will include on-site events at participating Empire AI member campuses, including SUNY and CUNY campuses, so students can learn from the cutting-edge work that is being done in the space right here in New York. This allows students the opportunity to unlock creative solutions to problems facing the public and learn how to responsibly use AI while supporting educators as they prepare to teach participants in our future workforce.

Increasing Our Understanding of Our School System and Programs to Support our Students

New York's fragmented data systems make it hard to chart the trajectories of our students from early intervention and education to graduation and employment. To address this, New York has started to build out a secure statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS), a system meeting the highest standards of data privacy and security that connects records across early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce to understand the impact of supports, services, and opportunities on student journeys over time.

This year, Governor Hochul will support a targeted investment to expand the capacity to build and manage the system in a thoughtful way, and make sure data is made available to families. The State

will also establish a multi-agency governance board to ensure state agencies work together to guide and oversee the project, which will allow for the use of data across various agencies over time. This work will allow the State to gain a comprehensive understanding of how education, workforce, social services, and healthcare intersect in people's lives, ultimately resulting in better-designed programs and policies, more effectively allocated resources, and more opportunities for New Yorkers to succeed.

Getting Offline and Outside with Cooler Schoolyards

Extreme heat caused by climate change is increasingly common and dangerous, particularly in urban settings. In fact, on New York's hottest days, New York City's built environment lifts temperatures 9.7 degrees hotter than surrounding areas.

Governor Hochul will build on her Unplug and Play campaign and her Extreme Heat Action Plan to launch a new funding opportunity in the Clean, Green Schools Program, that supports infrastructure and nature-based solutions to combat extreme heat in schoolyards. This investment will transform baking-hot asphalt playgrounds at public schools across the state into shaded, permeable green spaces that protect students and serve as cooling anchors for the surrounding neighborhood. The State will also create a broader, one-stop-shop online resource to provide information to communities on ways to combat extreme heat, including at schoolyards, to help keep New Yorkers safe and healthy.

Ensuring Indigenous Youth Have Access to Relevant, Quality Civics Instruction

Indigenous students across New York State continue to experience educational disparities, including lower engagement in civic and community-based learning opportunities that support college, career, and civic readiness and engagement. To ensure that all school districts have the capacity and frameworks needed to engage Indigenous youth in school-based civics education, New York will expand the Indigenous Youth Service Project to serve additional school districts. This project, initially started in LaFayette, Silver Creek, and Niagara-Wheatfield, piloted an innovative service-learning approach that demonstrated that when Indigenous youth engage in service-learning

grounded in community values, they build academic confidence, civic skills, and leadership capacity. Expanding the project statewide will ensure that Indigenous students across all regions have the same opportunities for growth and success.

Elevating Excellence: Strengthening Mentoring Programs for Black and Latina Girls

Governor Hochul is committed to supporting and uplifting all New York children so that they feel comfortable and empowered to take on leadership roles in their communities. To confront traditional barriers to mentoring and leadership resources for young Black and Latina women, Governor Hochul launched the Black Girls Mentoring Initiative and the Latina Mentoring Initiative (LMI). This year, she is reaffirming her support for these programs that empower participants to enhance their professional and personal skills while building confidence to become leaders among their peers. New York's diverse and expansive constituencies are what make us so special, and Governor Hochul will ensure that no child feels like they don't have the skills or access they need to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Connecting Higher Education and Opportunity

Holding the Line on Costs and Promoting College Affordability at SUNY and CUNY

Governor Hochul is championing affordability for New York students and families by holding the line on costs at New York's public colleges, freezing tuition for resident undergraduate students at SUNY State-operated campuses and CUNY senior colleges, and providing these institutions with additional operating aid so more New Yorkers can earn a degree without taking on crushing debt. By keeping tuition flat across SUNY and CUNY campuses, she is shifting the burden away from hardworking New York students and families.