



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth  
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

***Oversight: Afterschool Expansion and DYCD's Concept Paper***

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst  
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Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kate Connolly, and I am Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

UNH thanks the Council for its dedicated advocacy on behalf of and alongside the afterschool providers and community members who utilize these programs. While we were not successful in gaining additional funding to support existing programs, we are pleased that afterschool has remained part of the public discourse. We see the recently released concept paper and the future Request for Proposals (RFP) as another key opportunity to strengthen the existing afterschool system in NYC, and to prepare for future expansion. We hope DYCD will take provider feedback into consideration when finalizing the RFP to ensure the new model reflects the reality of what families and young people need today, as well as the inputs and funding needed to support high-quality programming.

COMPASS Elementary and SONYC providers have struggled for years with the repeated extension of afterschool contracts. The delay to reprocur these contracts has resulted in low staff wages, shrinking budgets due to increased supply costs, and frustration over an outdated program model. We are excited to see progress in the procurement process and look forward to 10 more years of high-quality afterschool programming in New York City.

After the release of the Concept Paper on May 30th, UNH convened our settlement house members in small group conversations, as well as organizations representative of the larger youth development field through the Youth Development Collective (previously known as the Neighborhood Family Services Roundtable). In addition to formal meetings, we also engaged in conversations around this concept paper with individual community-based organizations, both those who do and do not currently have COMPASS contracts, as well as other advocates focused on city-funded afterschool. With their feedback, we have developed the following recommendations. Some of these recommendations offer alternatives to what is currently laid out in the concept paper, while some are requests for clarification where the intent of the language was unclear. We hope there will be further opportunities for conversation and feedback before the upcoming Request for Proposals.

Although our full response<sup>1</sup> to the concept paper includes additional questions and recommendations, the major areas we see a need to revise based on feedback from current and hopeful afterschool providers are:

- Funding model
- Staffing requirements
- Mental health component
- Summer programming

### **Funding Model**

As DYCD is aware, current providers have struggled to operate programs with current low funding rates that sometimes date back to 2011. With significant increases to minimum wage, ballooning inflation, and increased participant need in the face of a global pandemic and growing unaffordability, this has been one of the top concerns for providers (and the youth development sector at large) going into the release of the concept paper. The increased rates in the concept paper acknowledge this concern, but the proposed price per participant (PPP) rates are still inadequate to properly fund 12-month contracts or the additional requirements laid out in the concept paper.

In a November 2023 report, [\*Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City\*](#), UNH worked with our members to develop model budgets for both school-year and year-round afterschool models. Although the model budgets laid out in this report are based on the current COMPASS Elementary and SONYC requirements and do not take into account the continued inflation over the past 2 years, they provide a useful baseline for understanding the minimum funding necessary to operate high-quality afterschool programs. We were disappointed that the concept paper did not take into account feedback from providers on the pitfalls of low funding rates. We urge DYCD to correct this and issue an RFP that will fund programs at adequate rates for the duration of the contract. If the future awards will be for six-year contracts, consideration must be made to fund programs appropriate for not only the first year, but also the sixth year. Standard cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and cost

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<sup>1</sup> UNH's Response to the 2025 COMPASS Concept Paper can be found here: [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/23/attachments/original/1755875431/UNH\\_Response\\_to\\_2025\\_COMPASS\\_Concept\\_Paper.pdf?1755875431](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/23/attachments/original/1755875431/UNH_Response_to_2025_COMPASS_Concept_Paper.pdf?1755875431).

escalators should be used to ensure contracts are sustainable and responsive to the current economic reality.

If DYCD is unable to raise the PPP rates in the RFP, DYCD should re-evaluate the programmatic and staffing requirements in accordance with the lower funding rates. They must not ask providers to deliver underfunded services.

In addition to the low funding rates, we also have concerns about the 10% subcontracting requirement laid out in the concept paper. Requiring a minimum of 10% of every program budget to go towards subcontractors is unrealistic and further strains the low proposed price per participant rates. Although the concept paper stresses the importance of community partnerships, there is no explanation given for how the minimum subcontractor requirement was reached. There are many ways to foster community partnerships that are not so rigid and allow for localized approaches to programming.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Increase the proposed Price Per Participant<sup>2</sup>.**
  - **Increase the base COMPASS Elementary PPP to \$10,728 per participant for a 12-month contract for school year and summer programming.**
  - **Increase the SONYC PPP to \$5,500 per participant for school-year contracts, and \$7,682 per participant for 12-month contracts.**
  - **Fund center-based contracts at a higher PPP rate to account for the additional required staff positions and facilities maintenance.**
- **Include a COLA tied to the consumer price index in years two through six, and include a built-in annual inflator for OTPS as costs for food, transportation, insurance and other supplies continue to rise.<sup>3</sup>**
- **Change the subcontractor requirement to list a maximum of the total program budget to be used instead of a minimum amount.**
- **Share a list of high-quality subcontractors by subject area to contracted organizations.**

### **Staffing Requirements**

Based on listening sessions and conversations with current contractors, there are several concerns with the proposed staffing requirements. Most concerns focus on the increased qualification requirements for most staff positions. This section of the concept paper and forthcoming Request for Proposals warrants additional review and justification from DYCD. While we agree that it is important to have qualified staff working in afterschool programs, the ongoing nonprofit staffing crisis requires flexibility and support from the City to ensure that staffing requirements are achievable and do not undermine program stability.

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the assumptions and costs used to calculate these rates, please see the narrative and model budgets in UNH's report, [Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City](#).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of model budgets with 3% annual COLAs and cost escalators can be found in the above referenced report.

Both the Group Leader and Youth Worker roles have historically been entry-level positions, allowing young adults and youth, respectively, an entry point into the youth development field. However, the education and experience requirements laid out in the concept paper reflect a significant increase in the expectations for individuals being hired into these roles, while the position responsibilities have not changed much. Within the context of a years-long staffing crisis in the nonprofit sector, these inflated requirements do not take into account either the need to foster a pipeline of youth development workers, or the competition these positions face with other minimum wage jobs. The proposed requirements for Youth Workers laid out in the concept paper - that individuals must be at least 16 years of age with a high school diploma or GED, or have one year of experience - are unrealistic. This role is an important entry-level position that provides older youth with their first job in a setting that is already set up to support them both professionally and personally. Maintaining the restrictive requirements would effectively end a pipeline of workers into the youth development field, and add to the current staffing crisis.

Additionally, the proposed qualifications for the Content Specialist role mirror those required for the Program Director. This creates a potential barrier to hiring as the Content Specialist is a part-time role, but requires both a four-year degree and extensive supervisory experience. This puts smaller community-based organizations at a particular disadvantage as they may not be able to offer additional hours to a Content Specialist across multiple programs in order to have the role be full-time, as we expect larger organizations to do.

The inclusion of mental health components in the concept paper are clearly in response to the stated needs of current contractors and families. However, as many providers will not have mental health professionals staffing afterschool programs, it is important to clarify the responsibilities and requirements of staff members fulfilling the mental health components laid out in this model. Understandably, mental health provision for minors in New York City and New York State is highly regulated. This part of the model should be closely evaluated to ensure that HIPAA regulations, administrative burden on providers, and cost of things like cyber security insurance and other requirements in order to comply with state mandates around personal health information are taken into account regarding both the funding rates and requirements on the contractors.

The contrast in expectations for school-based and center-based programs is particularly stark in the staffing requirements. While the three additional positions (Janitor, Security, and Front Desk Reception) required for center-based programs reflect the additional demands of running afterschool out of a non-school site, the concept paper does not clarify whether this will be accompanied by funding to cover these staff. Requiring three additional staff positions to be funded out of the same price per participant rate is unrealistic and will aggravate the inequities between center-based and school-based programs.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Make the education qualifications for the Content Specialist more flexible, with the supervisory experience optional.**
- **Allow Group Leader and Youth Worker positions to be entry-level positions, reflecting how these roles are used in current afterschool programs.**
  - **Remove the experience requirement for Group Leaders**
  - **Remove educational requirements of Youth Workers.**

- **Clarify the requirements for who is eligible to fulfill the mental health requirements laid out in the concept paper.**
- **Fund center-based contracts at a higher rate to account for the three additional required staff positions.**

### **Mental health component**

The mental health needs among youth have grown significantly over the past 10 years and, especially, since the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate DYCD's recognition that afterschool providers are often faced with these needs, and may be in a prime position to connect young people with care. However, assessing mental health needs and accessing mental health supports are complex and must be done with care and qualified staff. Additionally, there are currently serious delays in accessing pediatric mental health supports<sup>4</sup>, which will impact how quickly afterschool contractors are able to connect participants to clinical services. The upcoming Request for Proposals must clarify the specific responsibilities of contractors around mental health supports, and take into account the proposed qualifications and pricing structure laid out in other parts of the concept paper.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Share a citywide referral list of youth mental health support providers.**
- **Limit contractors' responsibilities for mental health supports to referrals, with options to provide further support based on the capacity of the provider.**
- **Clarify if a referral to the school site's School Counselor or School Social Worker is sufficient to meet the requirements of the contract.**
- **Collaborate with other city agencies and partners to provide more in-depth professional development opportunities to contractors on the topic of mental health support.**

### **Summer programming**

We commend DYCD for making the COMPASS Elementary model a 12-month model. This will help improve staff hiring and retention, which will bring more stability and experience to programs across the City. We urge DYCD to do the same for SONYC contracts, providing consistency for participants, schools and contractor staff.

However, the sections describing summer programming are vague in how contractors should expect the summer months to be structured. With the hours of operation being listed as 8AM to 6PM, it seems there may be an opportunity to envision new models for summer programming.

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<sup>4</sup> According to a report by the Campaign for Healthy Minds, Healthy Kids, in New York State, 3 out of 4 young people covered by Medicaid or Child Health Plus are unable to access outpatient behavioral health services. This is partly due to chronically low reimbursement rates, which has caused a staffing shortage amongst behavioral health professionals. (Campaign for Healthy Minds, Healthy Kids, [Solutions to New York's Youth Behavioral Health Crisis](#))

Despite having completed four years of Summer Rising, the City has released little data on its efficacy and has not conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the model. In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this model, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released [\*One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families\*](#). Some of our key findings were:

- Many families are dependent on free summer programming provided by the city. 58% of surveyed parents said they did not have a back-up option if Summer Rising was not available, with the percentage rising to 64% for low-income families.
- Middle schoolers expressed frustration with the DOE-led academics. 87% of focus group participants disagreed or felt neutral in regards to the statement “I feel engaged in the morning session” of Summer Rising.”
- Despite recognizing the value of summer academic enrichment, many parents participating in the survey expressed frustration over a lack of communication around the DOE-led academic program. Parents reported being unclear about what curriculum was being used, who their students’ teachers were, and if their child’s learning needs were being met. This was in contrast to reports of regular communication from the CBO staff.
- There are widespread concerns whether students with IEPs and English Language Learners are receiving appropriate accommodations. Over half of CBO staff said that a shortage of paraprofessional support for students with IEPs was one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, some focus group participants who identify as English Language Learners shared that they were excluded from the DOE-led academic portion and given arts & crafts projects instead.

Additionally, on March 13, 2025, the Department of Education released the Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis, which used spring 2024 and fall 2024 standardized academic data to compare the academic performance of young people who participated in Summer Rising to those who did not participate in the program. From this data, we can see that there were moderate academic gains in the elementary school participants. However, this was not true for middle school students. Even for middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days, there was no statistically significant impact on Math scores. Furthermore, when compared to other students in the City, middle school Summer Rising participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days actually fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group. DOE’s own impact analysis supports our findings that Summer Rising is not an appropriate model for all middle school youth.

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child’s preference, but most low-income families are reliant

on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement. Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them, and, if youth, parents, and staff are reporting frustration with the current model, the City should pivot to alternative models that have the potential to re-engage them. Additionally, the poor attendance of Summer Rising programming shows us that young people and families are voting with their feet. While an emphasis on academics can help some students, research has shown that the most important factor for impact is engagement - if students don't attend the program, there can be no impact.<sup>5</sup> Allowing for multiple summer programming models<sup>6</sup> would also provide district-level flexibility to better serve English Language Learners and students with disabilities. In the current model, there is little room for flexibility and limited resources to provide these young people with the proper support.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Maintain currently proposed language to make COMPASS Elementary contracts 12-month contracts.**
- **Expand the SONYC model to allow for 12-month contracts for sites providing summer programming.**
- **Allow for a variety of summer programming models in both COMPASS Elementary and SONYC contracts to suit the needs of different populations of students. There should be further clarity in the upcoming RFP about the different summer programming options available to contractors.**

In addition to the above, the concept paper does not lay out how DYCD will choose new afterschool sites, only stating “the list of eligible sites in the RFPs will include additional public and non-public schools to align with the recent announcements regarding increases in funding, as well as neighborhoods eligible for Center-Based funding” (page 5). In a recently released report, [Mapping the Gap: Expanding Afterschool Access in New York City](#), UNH mapped the current landscape of afterschool programming in New York City, and was able to assess the level of current afterschool access by Neighborhood Tabulation Area (NTA). In a review of the 40 new afterschool sites starting up this school year<sup>7</sup> we were pleased to see that almost all of the new sites are located in areas with no or limited current access to afterschool programming.<sup>8</sup> We hope the 5,000 new slots added with the upcoming RFP and the 10,000 new slots to be added in FY28 will be placed with the same consideration, aiming to offer access to more neighborhoods and families.

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<sup>5</sup> Diehl Consulting Group. (2023). Indiana 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation Report: 2021-2022.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of alternative summer programming models are provided in our [Recommendations for Summer 2025](#) document.

<sup>7</sup> A full list of the new sites can be found on DYCD's website: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/after-school/compass-expansion.page>

<sup>8</sup> The only new site in an NTA that already has moderate access to afterschool is Harlem (North) where there is both a high economic need index and high student enrollment.

Please see the full report (linked above) for an assessment of afterschool access by neighborhood, but below is a summary of our main findings:

- NYC is much closer to achieving universal access for middle school programming than for elementary school programming.
- The majority of NYC neighborhoods have limited access to afterschool for elementary-aged children, with 22 NTAs that contain an elementary school having no publicly-funded afterschool program.
- Despite displaying high economic hardship, many NTAs in the Bronx have limited access to elementary and/or middle school afterschool programs, showing a need for further investments in this borough.

We hope DYCD will similarly assess the total landscape of programming and projected needs of individual neighborhoods when determining the location of new sites.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at [kconnolly@unhny.org](mailto:kconnolly@unhny.org)