

# FUNDING FUTURES

## Budget cuts imperil programs

BY ERIN DURKIN

FREE ENGLISH classes for immigrants.

After-school programs.

Dropout prevention.

As the city tightens its belt and the mayor's budget eliminates funding, programs for thousands of Brooklynites could get the ax.

The City Council is scrambling to work out a budget deal — but there's a lot less cash to go around.

"The mayor, unfortunately, every year drops our initiatives," said Council Finance Committee Chairman David

Weprin (D-Queens). "Every year, we restore the money. This year, though, is a very tough year."

Weprin said even if the Council can't get all the money back, it might be able to keep the programs alive with smaller budgets. "I can't promise they'll be restored at 100%, but I'm hoping we'll restore most if not all of it," he said.

Here's a look at some of the programs that would be lost if their city funding dries up, and how some of the Brooklynites who depend on them would be affected.

### ◀ Joshua Martinez, 18

By his sophomore year, Joshua Martinez was sick of school.

"School is not hard at all. It's easy," said Martinez, 18, of Bedford-Stuyvesant, a student at Legacy High School. "I lost interest because I had no kind of challenge.

"I was missing a whole bunch of days," he said — an understatement, according to counselors who say he was often absent three or four days a week. "My grades would go lower and lower."

That was before he joined ENACT, which works to stop kids from dropping out through acting and drama.

It's one of seven organizations funded by \$2 million from the Dropout Prevention Initiative, which serves 6,300 youngsters and is slated for elimination.

Martinez recently delivered an impassioned monologue on growing up without a father at an ENACT performance.

"I have a reason to come to school because it's a little more fun now," he said, adding that the staff helped him deal with personal turmoil after his mother lost her apartment, forcing him to move from relative to relative. "I'm trying to come every day.

"I was borderline dropping out," said Martinez, who now hopes to graduate next year and attend Hostos Community College in the Bronx. "I would have taken my GED and been working now at a minimum-wage job, no college, nothing."

### ▼ Dwayne Carolina, 15

Dwayne started going to the Madison Square Boys and Girls Club in downtown Brooklyn when he was 8, because his mom needed somewhere to send him while she was at work.

Seven years later, he has grown to love it. "It's like another home to me," he said. "I learn new stuff every day."

He's one of more than 10,000 kids who, when they get out of school each day, head for programs funded by a \$6 million initiative dubbed Out-of-School Time Option 2.

"For the vast majority of families in this city, in order for them to pay their bills, both parents must work," said Educational Alliance Vice President Danny Rosenthal. "Paying for a nanny or a private after school program is not an option."

"It's one of the most important things in my life," said Kaitland Martinez, 16, who is now a counselor at the Center for Family Life program in Sunset Park, which she has attended from the age of 6.

Without it, "The teenagers would be out of a job [and] the children would be running around in the streets," she said.

