



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

RE: Oversight: Guidance Services for Students

Int. No. 403 – A Local Law to amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York, in relation to requiring the New York City Department of Education to report information regarding guidance counselors in schools.

Res. No. 166 – Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to establish a comprehensive college preparation program, based on the college readiness model proposed by the Urban Youth Collaborative, to improve and expand college access for all students.

Advocates for Children of New York

September 29, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on guidance services for students, Int. No. 403, and Res. No. 166.

My name is Dawn Yuster and I am the School Justice Project Director at Advocates for Children of New York where I focus on individual and systemic advocacy aimed at dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

We strongly support the City Council in publicly monitoring the number and distribution of guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists in New York City schools, recognizing the essential nature of these roles to the education of

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the city's students. We would like to see the data that is eventually collected be used to expand access to academic and behavioral student support services. We also support the City Council's call on the New York City Department of Education to establish a comprehensive college preparation program to improve and expand college access for all students, particularly low-income students and students of color, and we want to be sure that students with disabilities and English Language Learners also are able to benefit from what the program has to offer.

The New York City School-Justice Partnership issued a ground-breaking report in 2013, which set forth recommendations for the Mayor of New York City to stem the tide of students of color and those with disabilities entering the criminal and juvenile justice systems each year – and help these youth stay in school and attain better academic outcomes.. Notably, the report recommended increasing the number of guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists, starting with high needs schools. We endorse that recommendation and urge the city to target additional funding for these positions to schools with the highest numbers of suspensions, summonses, arrests, Emergency Medical Services calls, and over-age students.

Increasing the number of guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists has the potential to significantly impact the lives of students by providing them with necessary academic and mental health counseling, supports and services. In our work, we frequently see firsthand the essential need for more and



better trained support staff. For example, we see instances where school staff call 911 for a student only to have the police and Emergency Medical Technician arrive at the school and determine that the student does not require their services. We also see schools call EMS only for the students to be seen by a treating psychiatrist and released on the same day. Just this past Friday, I met with a father of a seven-year-old boy desperate for help. His son's school repeatedly calls EMS when his son exhibits behavioral challenges that could be de-escalated, managed, and even prevented if the school had the appropriate student support services. To better address students' behavioral needs, the Department of Education needs more guidance personnel, and also needs to provide training from experienced mental health professionals to school staff around trauma-informed care, positive behavior supports, and de-escalation techniques that will enable school staff to respond appropriately to students in crisis and those at the highest risk of school suspensions and referrals to Emergency Medical Services.

Additionally, we see schools unable to meet students' behavioral needs resort to exclusionary disciplinary practices, such as suspensions and classroom removals, that do not address underlying behavioral and mental health issues and, instead, contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Other students, while not removed from the classroom, fail to receive the appropriate emotional and behavioral supports they need to succeed academically. To expand access to student support services, we



recommend partnerships between schools and community-based clinics and hospitals. Such partnerships already exist at some specialized schools and learning environments such as the transfer schools for over-age, under-credited students. There is an opportunity to take the learning from existing specialized schools and share it broadly with mainstream schools to help them grow and develop the capacity to meet the needs of all of New York City's students.

Finally, we recommend strengthening Int. No. 403 by requiring the New York City Department of Education to report additional information, including:

- indicating whether the nature and scope of the counseling received by each student includes behavioral and mental health counseling and positive guidance interventions;
- identifying demographic information for students in temporary housing;
- disaggregating numbers of guidance counselors, social workers, and psychologists in each school; and
- providing the number of part-time guidance counselors, social workers, and psychologists in each school, including how many days per week they work.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.