



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

October 30, 2015

Mr. Christopher Caruso  
Office of Community Schools  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, New York 10007

Re: Proposed Community Schools Policy

Dear Mr. Caruso:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the New York City Department of Education's Proposed Community Schools Policy (the "Policy"). We view the Policy as an important vehicle for creating shared language and expectations around the City's Community Schools Initiative.

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. (AFC) has focused on securing an appropriate education for New York City's most vulnerable children and families, including children who are in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, face homelessness, have special education needs, or lack proficient English language skills. Over the past 40 years, we have touched the lives of over half a million students and families.

We have supported the Community Schools Initiative because we believe that it has the potential to help the disadvantaged students and families we serve. Indeed, we were pleased to see the Policy specifically identify mental health, medical, and social services as "common features" of all community schools, as our clients often have a great need for such services but tremendous difficulty accessing them in their communities.

We recommend that the Policy be revised to make the following changes:

1. **Make clear that a healthy school climate and positive approaches to discipline are key components of community schools.** Despite the fact that the Framework for Great Schools recognizes "supportive environment" as a necessary element, the draft Policy mentions improved school culture and climate only in the outcomes that community schools aspire to achieve. We believe that the DOE is failing to recognize an essential ingredient for community school success and missing an opportunity to unite components of the City's school reform agenda. We recommend specifically the following

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changes:

- In the first paragraph, discussing how community schools are a central strategy for achieving the Mayor’s equity agenda, add “*and improving school climate*” to the end of the second sentence.
  - In the section identifying “common values and features” of community schools, amend the second bullet to read, “Robust engagement, anchored in positive youth development *and positive approaches to discipline*, ensuring that schools are welcoming and empowering to students, families and community members.”
  - Under the list of “core programs and services,” include “*practices to promote positive school climate, such as restorative practices.*”
2. **State specifically that parent and caregiver engagement includes parents and caregivers who have children with disabilities, immigrated to this country, or have limited proficiency in English.** These parents and caregivers are presumed to be included in all references to family engagement. However, in more than 40 years of working with families of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as well as with immigrant families, we have learned that deliberate, focused effort is required to bring these families into the school community as partners. We therefore recommend that under the part of the Policy identifying “common features that support student learning,” the bullet point talking about parents and caregivers as partners be revised to read, “Parents and caregivers, *including those who have children with disabilities, immigrated to this country, or have limited English proficiency*, are real and active partners in their children’s education.”

At the heart of the community schools strategy is the idea that schools will make *all* parents, caregivers, and students feel welcome and included. We urge the DOE to make sure that schools have the guidance, skills, and the resources to bring this vision of full inclusion to reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kim Sweet'.

Kim Sweet