



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

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

**RE: Oversight-DOE's Response to Incidents of Bullying, Harassment, and  
Discrimination in NYC Schools and Efforts to Improve School Climate.**

**Int. No 1538 amending the Administrative Code of the City of New York so that  
it requires the Department of Education to list the name and contact information  
of the designated Respect For All Liaison at each school.**

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**October 30, 2017**

Good afternoon. My name is Gena Miller. I am a staff attorney and Greenberg Traurig Equal Justice Works Fellow in the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York ("AFC"). I represent students who are bullied and accused of bullying with a special focus on Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer or Questioning ("LGBTQ") students and students with disabilities. I also provide know-your-rights trainings on bullying to parents, students, and professionals.

This testimony offers several recommendations to the City Council, the Administration, and the New York City Department of Education ("DOE") to prevent and address bullying, harassment, and discrimination in New York City schools by expanding whole-school trainings that improve school climate, better utilizing existing resources, increasing public awareness of anti-bullying resources, and improving reporting.



First, we call on the City Council to urge the Mayor and the Department of Education (“DOE”) to expand the City investment in and effectively implement whole-school trainings in Collaborative Problem Solving and Restorative Practices to promote a positive school climate and supportive, inclusive learning environments where bullying is prevented and appropriately addressed. Research shows that these positive, evidence-based approaches support schools in building the skills and capacities of students and adults to develop healthy relationships, constructively resolve conflict, and de-escalate behavior. Indeed, the Mayor’s Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline recommended that the City and the DOE implement these and other strategies in reports released in 2015 and 2016. While the DOE has piloted some of these approaches on an ad hoc basis, the City and the DOE have yet to invest in a long-term strategic plan with funding to build capacity to develop and expand whole-school trainings in Collaborative Problem Solving and Restorative Practices throughout the city. The City and DOE should do so with deliberate speed, beginning with schools and districts with the highest suspension and arrest rates and stakeholder reports demonstrating a negative school culture.

Second, the City Council should recommend that the DOE better utilize existing anti-bullying training resources to ensure whole-school Respect for All trainings (“RFA”) are conducted effectively every year. DOE Chancellor’s Regulation A-832 requires each school to designate at least one staff member as a RFA Liaison who receives training in how to address, report, and stop bullying



behavior. While the regulation requires RFA liaisons to turnkey anti-bullying training to all students and staff by October 31 each school year, AFC's experience indicates that some schools fail to provide this training. Indeed, we have received an increased number of requests from schools for AFC to conduct trainings for students, particularly for entire school grades or entire schools, indicating that some schools do not have the resources to provide the necessary trainings or know where to get them. To ensure the delivery and quality of anti-bullying training, the DOE should better monitor the completion and efficacy of RFA liaison trainings and materials provided to students and staff.

Third, the City Council should recommend that the DOE better utilize the Field Support Center ("FSC") School Climate Managers and other staff to track and use data and resources to prevent and address bullying in schools. Since FSCs are already required to identify needed supports and services and collaborate with schools, FSC School Climate Managers are well-suited to regularly review and use data from reports to prioritize interventions for schools. For example, they could determine which schools need additional support by analyzing complaint and incident reports, incomplete RFA liaison trainings, RFA planning descriptions in Consolidated School and Youth Development Plans, school climate surveys, School Quality Reviews, Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting, and high rates of school-based suspension and arrest. Additionally, FSC Special Education Administrators and Behavioral Specialists should use special education data to target support for school



staff and students. For example, multiple Manifestation Determination Reviews (“MDRs”) in a school year for the same student with a disability removed from school and high rates of non-compliance with IEPs in a school should trigger FSC push-in support. All data from the FSC should also be tracked on a citywide level. Additionally, we recommend that the City Council encourage the DOE to develop a position within the Special Education Department, at the citywide and FSC level, dedicated to social-emotional learning to collect and assess the data related to students with disabilities and to plan necessary interventions and services for this population.

Fourth, we support Intro No. 1538, requiring the DOE to post the name and contact information of each school’s RFA Liaison on the homepage of every school website. This will increase public awareness of the designated persons in each school who should provide anti-bullying training to students and staff and to whom complaints of bullying can be made. We thank Chair Dromm for his leadership on this important bill.

Fifth, we recommend that the City Council urge the DOE and superintendents to use quantitative and qualitative school climate measures in evaluating a principal’s performance that incentivize accurate bullying incident and complaint reporting. It is critical that students, families, and school staff feel safe to report bullying, and not fear a punitive or apathetic response. Rather, everyone must know that both school-wide interventions to address the culture of the whole school as well as targeted interventions



that focus on addressing the individual needs of students targeted by or engaged in aggressive behaviors will be implemented in a prompt and supportive way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.