



**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  
Committees on Juvenile Justice and Youth Services**

**RE: Oversight - Reentry Programs for Formerly Incarcerated Youth**

**Alyssa Perrone, Staff Attorney, School Justice Project  
Advocates for Children of New York  
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Alyssa Perrone and I am an attorney with the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York where I provide education advocacy and legal representation for youth involved, or at risk of being involved, with the juvenile or criminal justice system. My testimony today focuses on the educational reentry programming needs of New York City's formerly incarcerated youth.

School engagement is a crucial component of successful reentry programming. Yet, for too many youth, juvenile detention, placement, or incarceration is the place they become reengaged in school after a long period of disengagement. Sadly, disengagement from school is unsurprising. Research indicates that when behavioral and academic supports are not provided to youth in school and students face school suspension for their behavior, there is an increase in the likelihood that students will be held back a grade, not graduate, drop out of school, receive another suspension,



and become involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system, thereby feeding the school-to-prison-pipeline.

One of the benefits of Close to Home has been the increase in youth engagement in school while in juvenile detention and placement. Students in Passages Academy are earning more academic credits than ever before while in juvenile detention and placement, and those credits appear directly on the students' transcripts. This is particularly notable since the number of youth enrolled in school in New York City's juvenile justice system over the past five years has markedly decreased, leaving the remaining population in school in the juvenile justice system with even greater needs. For example, in the 2016-17 school year, 63.2% of students enrolled in school in Passages Academy had a disability, and more than 90% of students in Passages Academy read below grade level.

Despite the efforts of Department of Education Transition Specialists assisting youth reentering the community from Passages Academy and East River Academy (on Rikers Island), court-involved youth are often inadequately supported – academically and emotionally – within the under-resourced schools they return to or enter for the first time. Indeed, we have heard informally that the percentage of young people with a record of involvement with the juvenile justice system, either in middle school or in high school, who graduate with a high school diploma is in the single digits. When compared with 70% of the students in New York City's general



population who received their high school diplomas, this should be seen as nothing short of a crisis.

Advocates for Children is contacted frequently by programs working with court-involved youth who are struggling with the education aspect of reentry. We see firsthand that students are pushed out of school, drop out, and get rearrested. We also see too many students, particularly students of color, policed in school for typical adolescent behavior. NYPD data indicates that a substantial portion of what School Safety Agents and police officers do in schools falls outside of law enforcement. For example, as shown in Advocates for Children's [attached data brief](#) released last year, in the 2016-17 school year, 40.1% of NYPD interventions in school resulted in referrals to school staff for discipline and did not require law enforcement involvement, and 28.8% of police interventions in school involved students in emotional distress taken to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation. Policing in school is traumatic for youth, fails to address the root cause of behavior, and makes successful reentry a daunting challenge instead of a real opportunity.

We also see firsthand that formerly incarcerated students often attend schools that do not provide the mental health support or trauma-informed care they need to be successful in school. Because many court-involved youth have experienced trauma, all school staff in Passages Academy are trained in trauma-informed care, all students in Passages Academy get trauma screening, and where necessary, they also get mental health services in school, such as psychologist visits and medication.



However, when youth reenter school in the community, trauma-informed and mental health services are often nonexistent. Indeed, according to a recent report by the New York City Comptroller, in the 2016-2017 school year as many as 45% of New York City schools did not have even one social worker on staff.

Given the importance of improving the education of these students, we respectfully call on the City Council Committees on Juvenile Justice, Youth Services, Education, and Mental Health to hold a joint hearing to examine the educational outcomes of students upon reentry from juvenile detention, placement, or incarceration and ways to improve the outcomes for these students, as well as those at risk of juvenile or criminal justice system involvement. Critical to that inquiry is an examination of how to decrease policing of students in school and expand necessary direct mental health services in school, academic supports, and other resources to help students get on track toward a high school diploma and the opportunities it offers. The hearing could also examine promising research showing the effectiveness of having credible messengers, adults with similar life experiences to court-involved youth, build trusting relationships with youth and help transform their lives.

We look forward to working with the City Council, city agencies, affected youth and families, and other stakeholders to ensure that youth involved, or at risk of being involved, with the juvenile or criminal justice system are fully supported upon reentry to the community and can succeed in school. Thank you.