



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Response to Adoption of City Budget

June 19, 2019 (NEW YORK CITY) — Today, Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement in response to the New York City Council's vote to adopt the Fiscal Year 2020 city budget:

The budget adopted today takes important steps forward for our City's students — increasing the number of school social workers so that more students receive the social-emotional support they need; funding additional Bridging the Gap social workers to help address the chronic absenteeism and trauma that often impede the education of students living in shelters; providing preschool special education classes for hundreds of children with disabilities who have been sitting at home waiting for the seats they need; and making more schools accessible to students, parents, and teachers with physical disabilities. We thank Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Johnson, Finance Committee Chair Dromm, Education Committee Chair Treyger, and the City Council for negotiating a budget that invests in children and youth who face enormous barriers and yet are too often left behind.

Social Workers for High-Needs Schools: By adding more than 200 school social workers, the City is taking an important step to focus urgently needed resources on the social-emotional needs of students. Too often, we see schools resort to classroom removals, school suspensions, arrests, handcuffing, or EMS transports, instead of providing students with the behavioral support they need to stay and succeed in school. This investment will allow thousands of students to get necessary support in school from mental health professionals.

Bridging the Gap School Social Workers for Students Living in Shelters: We are pleased that 31 of the new social workers will be Bridging the Gap social workers who work with students living in shelters in schools with high concentrations of these students. This investment will bring the total number of Bridging the Gap social workers to 100. At a time of record student homelessness, Bridging the Gap social workers play a critical role in helping to ensure students living in shelter can get to school every day and receive needed counseling and support to address the trauma of homelessness. Schools alone cannot end homelessness, but, with the right support, schools can transform the lives of students who are homeless. One hundred Bridging the Gap social workers will go a long way toward helping students living in shelter overcome obstacles and succeed in school.

School Accessibility: For too long, the City has tolerated a system where students who use wheelchairs are effectively barred from most schools. No child should be turned away from school because they can't get into the building. By investing \$750 million over five years to make more schools accessible to students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities, the City is literally opening doors to inclusion and integration for people who are too often excluded.

Preschool Special Education Classes: Hundreds of the City's preschoolers sat at home this year waiting for seats in preschool special education classes, in violation of their legal rights. We are pleased that the budget includes funding to continue the preschool special education classes that the Department of Education opened this year and to add 200 new seats in September. However, these additional seats do not meet the full need and will still leave children with disabilities at home while their peers participate in 3-K and Pre-K programs. The City must ensure there is a preschool special education class seat available for every child who needs one.

Special Education Supports: We hear from families every day who are struggling to get the services their children need in school. We are pleased that the budget includes funding to hire more school psychologists, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and service providers; pilot an intensive program for students with autism; and launch an inclusion program for students with dyslexia and other print-based disabilities. With nearly 40,000 NYC students with disabilities going without the full special education instruction they are entitled to receive under the law, this investment is sorely needed.

Busing for Students in Foster Care: For students who have been separated from their families and placed in foster homes, school can be a critical source of stability. We have joined with 30 organizations to call on the City to guarantee busing for kindergarten through sixth grade students in foster care because no student in foster care should be forced to change schools due to lack of transportation. We are pleased that budget documents indicate that the Administration has agreed to use existing resources to ensure busing for students in foster care, but need more details about how the Administration will carry out this commitment.

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.