

June 6, 2022

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Invest \$5 Million in the Mental Health Continuum, an innovative, evidence-based model where high-need schools partner with hospital-based mental health clinics to prioritize student wellness and family engagement so students can succeed in school

Dear Mayor Adams,

We are writing on behalf of a broad group of advocates, parents, students, and community members to urge you to take a necessary next step in your Administration's efforts to serve students with mental health needs. As highlighted in a recent U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a youth mental health crisis. Over the past two years, many of our young people have experienced unprecedented disruption, isolation, and loss—for example around 8,600 New York City children lost a parent or caregiver to COVID. An alarming number of children and adolescents are experiencing anxiety, depression, self-harm, and/or suicidal thoughts or attempts. However, access to mental health care is severely limited. **Schools have the potential to be sites of wellness, healing, and recovery—but only if we reimagine the student experience to ensure that schools have adequate resources to address students' emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs in a trauma-informed, culturally competent manner.**

There are viable solutions. Last year, the City funded the **Mental Health Continuum, an innovative and evidence-based model for supporting students with significant, unmet mental health needs by integrating a range of direct services and developing stronger partnerships between schools and hospital-based mental health clinics. With baselined funding for the Mental Health Continuum, the Department of Education ("DOE"), Health + Hospitals ("H+H"), and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH") can provide more effective and efficient supports to students with significant mental health needs in high-needs schools.** Unfortunately, in FY 22, the City allocated \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum for only one year so, unless extended, the funding for this critical initiative will expire in June 2022 just when it is getting off the ground.

The Mental Health Continuum represents the first-ever cross-agency collaboration (DOE, H+H and DOHMH) to help students with significant mental health challenges access direct mental health services in school and connect students to other services throughout the City. This model prioritizes wellness through school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics; NYC Well hotline expansion to advise school staff; child mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis; direct mental health services; School-Based Mental Health staff; Collaborative Problem Solving training, an evidence-based approach to building school staff capacity to better manage student behavior; and family engagement. Ongoing support for this model will generate a huge cost savings by preventing student

involvement in the foster care system, law enforcement system, juvenile or criminal legal system, and hospital system. This model aims to meet the needs of students with significant mental health challenges in the schools and neighborhoods with the highest rates of NYPD interventions, suspensions, and chronic absenteeism.

With \$5 million in the FY 22 budget, the model is currently launching in 50 high-needs schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn to provide the support that students and schools desperately need now and moving forward. However, its success depends on future sustainability. The City must baseline \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum in order for it to succeed, with the following funding allocations:

- **FY 23: DOE: \$889,459; H+H: \$3,638,068; DOHMH: \$472,473 (Total: \$5M).**
- **FY 24 (and beyond): DOE: \$787,272; H+H: \$3,740,255; DOHMH: \$472,473 (Total: \$5M).**

We urge the City to include and baseline \$5 million in the FY 2023 budget to sustain the Mental Health Continuum. Without this investment, these schools will continue to rely on law enforcement, hospital emergency rooms, exclusion from school, lost instruction time, and punishment when a non-police, public health continuum of targeted, evidence-based interventions is needed to prevent student mental health crises and appropriately respond when they occur so students can succeed. **It is time for the City to make this strategic cross-system investment.**

We stand ready to work with you to advance this critical budget priority and would be happy to meet with you to discuss it. For follow up, please contact Kim Sweet, Executive Director, Advocates for Children of New York, at ksweet@advocatesforchildren.org or (212) 822-9514, or Dawn Yuster, Director of the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York, at dyuster@advocatesforchildren.org or (212) 822-9542.

Sincerely,

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Metropolitan Parent Center
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Together
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic
Our Bodies our births

Parents Supporting Parents NY
(PSPNY)
Sistas & Brothas United-Northwest Bronx
Community & Clergy Coalition
StriveHigher Inc.
Swain Creative Media Group, llc
The Coalition for Behavioral Health
The Innovative Daycare Corp

The Renaissance Charter School
The Westside Commons
Tutors on Wheels
United Neighborhood Houses
Urban Youth Collaborative
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