

March 15, 2018

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

On behalf of the undersigned New York City organizations dedicated to the well-being of children and families, we are writing to urge you to provide critical support for students who are homeless. Given the record numbers of students experiencing homelessness and the significant needs of these students, we urge you to restore the \$10.3 million included in the FY 17 and FY 18 budgets for supports for these students and add \$20 million for the following initiatives:

- 1) **Establish a Deputy Chancellor's Office for Highly Mobile Students**
- 2) **Hire Field Support Center Directors for Highly Mobile Students**
- 3) **Increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 43 to 100**
- 4) **Hire 50 DOE social workers, instead of additional DOE Family Assistants, to provide intensive supports at shelters to address education-related issues**

In 2016-17, a record 104,088 New York City students were identified as homeless. This represents a 50 percent increase from just five years ago. Students in temporary housing have worse educational outcomes than their permanently housed peers. Outcomes are particularly bleak for students living in New York City shelters—38,000 students during the 2016-17 school year. These students have higher rates of disability, higher rates of suspension, and higher rates of absence. More than half of these students miss at least one month of school per year. Only fifteen percent score proficiently in reading, and only twelve percent score proficiently in math. Ten percent of middle and high school students living in shelter are suspended.

For the past two years, we were pleased to see your Administration support students living in shelters by providing \$10.3 million in the FY 2017 and 2018 budgets. The \$10.3 million has funded successful after-school literacy programs at shelters and enrollment support for families living in shelters. Moreover, this funding has allowed 43 DOE social workers to be placed in schools with high populations of students living in shelters as part of the Bridging the Gap program. Given the impact of these initiatives, we were very surprised and disappointed that the FY 19 Preliminary Budget eliminated funding for these initiatives. **To support the growing number of students who are homeless, the City needs to restore the \$10.3 million and provide an additional infusion of resources to hire high-level leadership and an increased number of social workers to focus on these students.**

1. Establish a Deputy Chancellor's Office for Highly Mobile Students

The growing number of students in temporary housing represents a crisis that requires more of the City's attention and resources. Addressing this crisis requires high-level leadership, which is why the DOE should appoint a Deputy Chancellor for Highly Mobile Students. Currently, the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Program is buried under the vast and varied portfolio of the Deputy Chancellor for Operations. This arrangement makes it unlikely that the 100,000

students in temporary housing will get the attention or support they need. By working across agencies and DOE divisions, the Deputy Chancellor's Office would develop and implement policies to better serve students in temporary housing and students in foster care.

2. Hire Field Support Center Directors for Highly Mobile Students

While each DOE Field Support Center has a Director for Special Education and a Director for English Language Learners, as well as staff teams focused on special education and English Language Learners, the Field Support Centers currently have no staff focused on students in temporary housing or students in foster care. Given the particular laws and policies that apply to these students and the barriers they face, we recommend that the City hire Field Support Center Directors for Highly Mobile Students to support schools in serving students in temporary housing and students in foster care, provide professional development to school staff, and work to track and improve educational outcomes for these students.

3. Increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 43 to 100

We also must continue and build on the services currently in place. For the past two years, your Administration has supported students living in shelters through the Bridging the Gap social worker program. This year, 43 DOE social workers are working in schools with high populations of students living in shelters as part of the Bridging the Gap program. These social workers provide counseling, connect students with academic and mental health services, and work to combat chronic absenteeism.

We are deeply concerned that the FY 19 Preliminary Budget eliminated funding for the DOE Bridging the Gap social workers. Moreover, more than **150 schools serve a population in which 10 percent or more of the students live in shelter**, and most of these schools do not yet have a Bridging the Gap social worker. To continue the success of this program and fill gaps in services, we recommend that you restore the existing funding for the 43 social workers and add 57 social workers for a total of 100 Bridging the Gap social workers.

4. Hire 50 DOE social workers, instead of additional DOE Family Assistants, to work at shelters

As the number of family shelters, cluster sites, and commercial hotels has grown, the number of Family Assistants has not kept pace, leaving many families in shelters without access to shelter-based DOE staff. Currently, there are approximately 117 DOE Family Assistants who work in shelters. These Family Assistants are not required to have a college degree or any formal training in social work or education. With all of the education-related challenges students living in shelters face, the DOE should hire shelter-based social workers to provide intensive supports to address education-related issues and help students and families address barriers to education and navigate the school system, including enrollment, attendance, transportation, school applications, special education services, school suspensions, and early childhood education. At a minimum, as Family Assistants leave their positions, the DOE should replace them with social workers and, as new shelters open, the DOE should hire social workers instead of Family Assistants to work there.

As you work to design a program that will serve students who are homeless, we strongly urge you to **restore the \$10.3 million to fund existing supports and add \$20 million to establish a Deputy Chancellor’s Office for Highly Mobile Students, hire Field Support Center Directors for Highly Mobile Students, increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 43 to 100, and hire 50 DOE social workers to provide intensive education-related support at shelters.** These initiatives would have a substantial impact on the lives and education of the 100,000 students experiencing homelessness in New York City.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

Children’s Aid

Children’s Defense Fund-New York

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for Educational Justice

Coalition for the Homeless

Committee for Hispanic Children and Families

Good Shepherd Services

Henry Street Settlement

The Legal Aid Society

Monadnock Development

New Destiny Housing

Partnership with Children

United Neighborhood Houses

Win (formerly Women in Need)

cc: New York City Council