



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be Delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education; Committee on Health; Committee on Hospitals; and Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction

Re: School-Based Mental Health Clinics

April 17, 2024

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Naphtali Moore, and I am a Staff Attorney on the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children 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. AFC is also a member of the Dignity in Schools Campaign–New York (DSC-NY), the Campaign for Effective Behavioral Supports in Schools, and the Emergency Coalition to Save Education Programs.

Every child should have access to school-based social-emotional, behavioral and mental health services, especially given the continuing children and youth mental health crisis, with rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality at concerning high levels. AFC's work with families, as well as data, shows that far too many students are not able to access the mental health support they need. At AFC, we hear from many families of students struggling with mental health crises, whose children are sent to the hospital or removed or suspended from school instead of receiving the mental health support they need to remain in the school community. Too often, schools lack the appropriate resources, trained staff, and clinics and rely heavily on punitive, exclusionary discipline and policing. In fact, during the 2022-2023 school year:

- The NYPD reported 2,838 “child in crisis” interventions, in which a student displayed signs of emotional distress and was removed from school by police and sent to a hospital for a psychological evaluation—representing an 18.9% increase from the 2021-2022 school year, when NYPD reported 2,386 such interventions; and
- New York City Public Schools reported removing and suspending students 36,992 times. Compared to 2021-22, the number of reported class removals increased by 29.6%, principal suspensions increased by 13.8%, and superintendent suspensions were up 10.7%.



While we should be focusing on the need to increase the number of school-based mental health clinics and other programs to help address the behavioral and mental health needs of students, instead we are facing the potential loss of important mental health supports in schools within the next few months. As one key example, the City Council was instrumental in securing \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum, a cross agency partnership between New York City Public Schools, Health and Hospitals, and the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare and keep students in school. This model is being rolled out at 50 high-needs schools in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn through supports such as partnerships with mental health clinics, staff to provide students with timely access to mental health services, a NYC Well hotline to advise school staff, mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis, and training for staff.

Unfortunately, the funding for the Mental Health Continuum expires in June, and although this model was highlighted in the Mayor's Mental Health Plan, the Preliminary Budget does not include any funding to continue it. In addition, expiring federal stimulus funds are currently funding a range of supports including 450 school social workers and restorative justice programs, and there is not yet a plan to sustain these investments. We thank the City Council for calling on the Administration to restore funding for the Mental Health Continuum, social workers, and restorative justice programs, among other important education programs, in your budget response.

We urge the City Council to ensure that the budget includes and baselines \$5M to continue the Mental Health Continuum and includes and baselines funding to sustain a range of important education programs currently funded with expiring federal dollars.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.