March 5, 2018

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

Dear Mayor deBlasio,

As organizations committed to creating healthy, safe New York City schools where students and staff are treated with dignity and respect, we are writing to urge that the FY 2019 Executive Budget include funding to invest in whole-school, evidence-based practices to improve school climate in high-needs schools. In particular, we ask that you support the inclusion of two budget items that derive from recommendations by the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline, comprised of diverse stakeholders ranging from city agencies and the City Council to researchers, unions, school staff, students, parents, and advocates.[1] By making these strategic investments to effectively support the mental and behavioral health needs of students in high-needs schools, the City will make real and lasting change to the ways schools address student behavior while keeping students in school and learning.

The numbers of suspensions, summonses, and arrests in NYC schools continue to decrease, and the crime index in schools is at an all-time low. This trend is promising because evidence shows that punitive, exclusionary practices do not work. While fewer students are being suspended and arrested in school, the numbers are still high and disparities based on race and disability persist. NYPD interventions last year included 2,702 incidents involving students in emotional distress sent to the hospital for psychiatric evaluation, sometimes using handcuffs on children as young as 5 years old. Schools desperately need more tools and resources to implement effective alternatives, or we may see a back-slide from the progress so far.[2]

In order for your reforms in school climate and discipline to succeed and be sustained, the City must realign its resources to reflect the critical needs of students and school staff. We strongly support your plans for expansion of whole-district restorative practices to three additional districts and continued joint City and City Council funding of the City Council Restorative Practices Initiative; however, additional funding is needed to provide systemic solutions for addressing the most challenging behaviors.

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[1] The Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline, "Maintaining the Momentum: A Plan for Safety and Fairness In Schools, Phase Two Recommendations" (July 2016), http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/sclt/downloads/pdf/SCLT_Report_7-21-16.pdf.

[2] Advocates for Children of New York, Children in Crisis: Police Response to Students in Emotional Distress (Nov. 2017), http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/children_in_crisis.pdf?pt=1; Urban Youth Collaborative and Center for Popular Democracy, Policy Brief: Young People's Vision for Safe, Supportive, and Inclusive Schools (Oct. 2017), https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Young%20People%E2%80%99s%20Vision%20for%20Schools_Policy%20Brief_%20FINAL.pdf.

We urge the City to make the following investments in FY 2019:

(1) **$2.875 million per year for direct mental health supports and services for students, using a medical model,** with meaningful coordination between schools and mental health providers as an evidence-based alternative to disciplinary action in 20 high-needs schools; and

(2) **$1 million per year for whole-school training and support for school staff in high-needs schools using the evidence-based model of Collaborative Problem Solving** to help students with significant behavioral challenges and the staff that support them resolve problems in a skill-building, collaborative way.

These recommendations are described in more detail in the attachment. We urge your support and leadership to ensure funding for these investments. We stand ready to work with you to advance these critical budget priorities and would be happy to meet with you to discuss them.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Children of New York
The Bronx Defenders
Children's Defense Fund – New York
Citizens' Committee for Children
Coalition for Educational Justice
Communities for Crisis Intervention Teams in New York City
Dignity in Schools Campaign – New York
Educators for Excellence
exalt
Legal Aid Society
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Law School Legal Services, Inc.
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Parent Action Committee

Add Strategic Investments in Evidence-Based Practices to Improve School Climate in High-Needs Schools

We urge the City to make the following two investments in the FY 2019 Executive Budget:

1) Mental Health Support Continuum Pilot ($2.875 million per year)

This pilot program, recommended by the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline, uses a medical model to help ensure that students in 20 high-needs schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx have access to direct mental health services when needed. It would include school partnerships with hospital-based mental health clinics and call-in centers to assist schools with students in crisis, school response teams that help students get direct mental health services, school-based behavioral health consultants, whole-school training in the evidence-based model of Collaborative Problem Solving, and program evaluation.

We recommend that the **FY 2019 Budget include and baseline $2.875 million per year to launch and sustain a mental health support continuum pilot in 20 high-needs schools** in Brooklyn and the Bronx. It is critical that this funding be included in the budget for at least three years to develop capacity in these schools.

Components of the pilot include:

1. **Two Hospital-Based Clinics** to support identified schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx by formalizing relationships and creating protocols for the Maimonides Medical Center Urgent Evaluation Service (UES) Clinic to accept referrals from identified schools for student behavior that does not need to be assessed in the emergency department of a hospital, and expanding the model to the Bronx ($260,000 per clinic x 2 = $520,000)
2. **Two Call-In Centers** within the clinics where clinicians field questions and provide advice to school personnel interacting with students in crisis and direct them to the appropriate level of care (included in clinic cost)
3. **Five School Response Teams**, based on the mobile response team model, offering services directly to students and families while working to enhance each school's capacity to respond to the mental health needs of its students ($235,000 per team x 5 = $1.175 million)
4. **Whole-School Collaborative Problem-Solving Training** ($40,000 per school x 20 = $800,000)
5. **Four Full-Time School-Based Behavioral Health Consultants** (masters level social workers with clinical experience) each assigned to five schools to assess their needs and address issues related to mental health and substance use ($70,000 per clinician x 4 = $280,000)
6. **Data Collection and Program Evaluation** ($100,000)

2) Whole-School Collaborative Problem Solving ($1 million per year)

Collaborative Problem Solving ("CPS") is an evidence-based model that has demonstrated effectiveness with children and adolescents who have a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.[3] Unlike traditional models of discipline, CPS focuses on teaching students with behavioral challenges the skills they need to succeed such as flexibility, frustration tolerance, and problem solving. Use of CPS helps schools move away from an exclusionary, punitive model to a problem-solving, skill building approach in which students take responsibility for long-term behavioral change in an environment where the adults are trained to support them.

Research indicates that CPS can lead to dramatic decreases in the most challenging behaviors. Other results include significant reductions in time spent out of class, detentions, suspensions, injuries, teacher stress, and alternative school placements.[4]

We recommend that the **FY 2019 Budget include and baseline $1 million per year to systematically implement whole-school Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) in 25 high-needs schools and develop a cadre of CPS-Certified Trainers to build capacity by training other schools** in this evidence-based approach to transforming school climate and discipline to keep students and staff safe. It is critical that this funding be included in the budget for at least three years to develop capacity in these schools.

[3] *See* www.thinkkids.org/learn/our-collaborative-problem-solving-approach/ (accessed on Feb. 12, 2018).

[4] *See, e.g.*, Greene, R., Ablon, J., Goring, J., Raezer-Blakely, L., Markey, J., Monuteaux, M., Henin, A., Edwards, G. and Rabbitt, S., 2004, Effectiveness of Collaborative Problem Solving in Affectively Dysregulated Children with Oppositional-Defiant Disorder: Initial Findings. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, v. 72, no. 6, 1157-1164; Stetson, E. and Plog, A., 2016, Collaborative Problem Solving in Schools: Results of a Year-Long Consultation Project, School Social Work Journal, v. 40, issue 2, 17-36; Epstein, T., & Saltzman-Benaiah, J., 2010, Parenting children with disruptive behaviours: evaluation of a collaborative problem solving pilot program. Journal of Clinical Psychology Practice, 1(1), 27-40; Pollastri, A., Epstein, L., Heath, G., and Ablon, J., 2013, The Collaborative Problem Solving Approach: Outcomes Across Settings. Harvard Review of Psychiatry, v. 21, 188-195; Schaubman, A., Stetson, E. and Plog, A., 2011, Reducing Teacher Stress by Implementing Collaborative Problem Solving in a School Setting. School Social Work Journal, v. 35, no. 2, 72-93.