



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be submitted to the New York City Council
Committee on Education**

RE: Int. No. 131 - In relation to requiring the DOE to equip all exit doors with an alarm system in all elementary school buildings and buildings accommodating district 75 programs.

Advocates for Children of New York

June 12, 2014

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit the testimony below.

My name is Kim Sweet, and I am the Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), a non-profit organization that has been working to protect the rights of New York City's most vulnerable children for over 40 years.

At AFC, we feel strongly that a comprehensive approach is necessary to keep safe youth who may tend towards wandering away from their schools. We support the targeted use of alarms, but only as a piece of a larger plan. Reliance on one strategy alone, as is the case in the bill before the Council now, will only serve as a band-aid to the problem. By themselves, alarms are unlikely to prevent another disaster like NYC experienced last fall when Avonte Oquendo was able to leave his school unattended.



We propose instead that solutions must be driven by individual students' needs and proclivities and adapted to unique school situations, taking into consideration staffing, location, and building layouts. To be successful, any move to protect students from elopement will also need to include targeted training of school staff, improved communication within each school building and a variety of carefully thought out preventive measures.

While AFC fully supports moving to protect young students and students with autism or other disabilities that may make them especially vulnerable in the outside world from being able to leave their schools unsupervised and unprotected, we would recommend that the proposal before the Committee today be expanded to include a multi-faceted approach to improving school safety.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. I can be reached at (212) 822-9514.