



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
431 West 125th Street, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

February 20, 2019

Chancellor Richard Carranza
NYC Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

I commend you for making mental health care a priority in our schools. However, recent data on New York City students suggest that much more needs to be done. By examining poverty, discipline, and school climate data, we see that there is a great need in our public schools for a drastic increase in social workers, school-based mental health direct service providers and additional socio-emotional supports.

Research on mental health indicates that social workers can be a tremendous asset in supporting vulnerable students and improving school climate. However, in 2017, when my office released the report, "Who's Caring: The State of School Based Mental Health Care in NYC Schools," one of the key findings was that New York City Department of Education (DOE) social workers have overwhelming caseloads and are stretched too thin. In fact, we found that there was a ratio of just 1 social worker to every 800 students in the borough of Manhattan.

There are also numerous data about New York City students which suggest a high need for licensed social workers in schools. Last year, *The Times* reported that 1 in every 10 students in New York City sleeps in a homeless shelter or the homes of relatives. Based on the Department of Education's Demographic Snapshot Data, the percentage of students facing economic hardship is over 70%. According to the most recent NYCDOE Student Survey results, bullying is pervasive. Eighty-two percent of students who were surveyed in 2017 reported that students harassed, bullied, or intimidated others in school – that's 17% higher than in 2012. Additionally, suspensions and removals topped 46,500 during the 2016-17 school year.

Research shows that appropriate mental health services correlate with better educational outcomes, reduced suspensions, reduced absenteeism, and improvements in school climate¹ and therefore the NYC DOE should be investing more heavily in research-based solutions: mental health services and social workers. The Fiscal Year 2020 budget should fund the ratio of social workers recommended by the National Association for Social Workers – 1 social worker for every 250 students and 1:50 for the most vulnerable populations.

¹ Gale A. Brewer, "Who's Caring: The state of school-based mental health care in NYC schools", 2017, <http://manhattanbp.nyc.gov/downloads/pdf/School%20Mental%20Health%20Report%20-%202017%20-%20Final.pdf>

While striving for the goal of a 1:250 ratio, there are several other steps that DOE can take to improve mental health services for students:

- **Community Schools:** Restructuring community school funding is critical for improving mental health supports. Whereas the community school model is typically oriented around providing social and emotional supports for students, the Independent Budget Office found that in the 2018-19 school year most community school funding in New York City is allocated for academic services (\$118mm) while only \$18.4mm was allocated for health, mental health, counseling, and dental care. This funding distribution must change. New York City students deserve community schools that prioritize the right supports for their needs.
- **Social Work Graduate School Students:** The DOE should rethink how social work graduate school interns can play a role in supporting more students. Schools that have a licensed social worker on staff can provide supervision and support to social worker interns. The expansion of this program would have a dual benefit – more students would have access to in-school mental health services plus these graduate school interns who need the clinical practice would also be engaged for future careers in school based or youth mental health services. For schools that do not have the resources to hire a licensed social worker, I think it is important that we figure out how to facilitate a combination of school based and off-site management by graduate programs or service providers like settlement houses. By leveraging graduate school internships, schools can have access to an intern pool to help meet students’ day to day needs and not just the needs that arise in emergency and crisis situations.
- **Restorative Training:** Expand the use of and training in restorative practices. The DOE has recently invested \$23 million toward antibias training for all teachers and administrators. However, this training is brief, and doesn’t involve key members of the school community – e.g., parents and School Safety Agents. By investing in restorative practice training for all those who work with and around students, school climate and discipline will improve. Social workers can play a large role in restorative trainings and maintaining restorative school climates.
- **Response to Crises Reform:** Stop the practice of relying on School Safety Agents (SSAs) to respond to in-school mental health crises. According the NYPD’s 2018 SSA Report by School data, 32.21% of all incidents reported in schools were “child in crisis” incidents. The preponderance of such incidents is alarming but even more so because the current first responders (SSAs) are not trained mental health professionals and do not have comparable clinical experiences to social workers. This mismatch of needs and resources must end. Therefore, NYCDOE should update the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding between NYCDOE and NYPD in order to redefine SSA interactions with students so that they are required to notify certified professionals about mental health crises when appropriate.

- **School-based Mental Health Prevention & Intervention Program for High Needs Schools (SMHPIP):** Increase funding for the SMHPIP so that high need schools can afford the services of full-time social workers. SMHPIP currently has maximum reimbursement of \$90 per student with a cap rate of \$157,751 per school per year. For a school with 500 students, this means that the maximum reimbursement is \$45,000 – thousands of dollars less than the average salary for social workers in New York City and many schools do not even have that many students in the first place. Without drastic increases to the SMHPIP funding, high need students will continue to go without appropriate mental health services.

I know you understand the importance of providing better socio-emotional supports for young people and I hope to work together with you to address this most important issue. If you would like to meet with our office and work together to improve access and outcomes for vulnerable students through providing sufficient social work services and implemented restorative justice practices in our schools, please have your office contact my Senior Policy Analyst, Patrick Joseph. You can reach him at 212-669-8146 and at pjoseph@manhattanbp.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gale A. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gale A. Brewer

cc:

Paula Broomfield, Borough Director of Suspensions, NYCDOE

Cecilio (Bo) Diaz, Students in Temporary Housing Manhattan Representative, NYCDOE

Dr. Roger Platt, Assistant Commissioner, NYC DOHMH

Kim Sweet, Executive Director, Advocates for Children