

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF LOCAL 372, NYC BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEES
DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 | AFSCME
TO THE JOINT ASSEMBLY AND SENATE MENTAL HYGIENE BUDGET HEARING
FEBRUARY 13, 2018

Good morning, Chairwoman Weinstein, Chairwoman Young, and distinguished members of the New York State Senate Finance and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. We, Donna Tilghman, SAPIS Chapter Secretary, and Kevin Allen, SAPIS Chapter Chair, would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Governor's proposed 2018-2019 Mental Hygiene Budget on behalf of President Shaun D. Francois I, DC37, Local 372 NYC Board of Employees' 279 Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) that operate in the New York City public school system. SAPIS counselors are funded through an Assembly budget-add appropriation and funding sourced from the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS).

SAPIS provide essential prevention and intervention services for 1.2 million public school students. Their work is an essential component in school programming providing many students and families a safety net of services which include: leadership classes, clubs dedicated to mental health awareness, peer mediation training, classroom presentations, counseling services (at-risk, crisis, individual, and group) drug and gang intervention, and a host of additional mental health services for a variety of conditions. These counselors help children keep their focus on remaining learning-ready through the use of coordinated and collaborative proven methodologies to cope with the myriad of societal pressures that detract daily from healthy academic, social, and home environments. SAPIS counselors are responsible for monitoring behavior, as well as offering resources and services to support students when they find themselves struggling and/or struggling to improve.

In 2006, there were 502 SAPIS working throughout the five boroughs. Today, there are less than 300 SAPIS spread across 1,800 schools – a distribution of more than 6,000 students per SAPIS counselor. There are simply not enough SAPIS to address the needs of all of these children and

their families. In reality, each SAPIS provides direct classroom lessons and counseling services to an average of 500 students each, with services available in only 325 out of over 1,800 schools.

The loss of more than 200 SAPIS counselors since 2006 have been devastating. The pivotal work that SAPIS perform in our schools is supported by data that indicates a correlative link between the laying off of the SAPIS and a steep rise of drug use and violence in occurring in schools. This robs students of the opportunity to a quality competitive education; and ultimately, their futures. The adverse consequences from bullying, gang-affiliation, drug use, drinking, and peer pressure strain relationships, not only in the schools, but across a societal planes. Achieving a sufficient number of SAPIS counselors in the public schools system decreases the negative health, social, and educational consequences that influence behavior in and outside the classroom.

Today's youth are more vulnerable than ever before due to the growing drug abuse epidemic. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that heroin use has more than doubled among young adults ages 18-25, over the past decade. According to a 2013, Youth Risk Behavior Survey from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 8.0% of NYC public high school students in grades 9-12 reported lifetime use of an illicit drug (cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, or methamphetamine). Students not only using drugs and consuming alcohol, but we are witnessing a rise of prescription drug use amongst high school children, especially in Manhattan and Staten Island. Youth who live in Staten Island reporting at the highest proportion (12.8%), followed by youth who live in Manhattan (11.0%). A core mission of SAPIS is to reduce the prevalence of substance abuse among youth, delay the initiation of substance abuse behavior among youth, decrease the negative health, social, and educational consequences associated with substance abuse and prevent the escalation of substance abuse behaviors to levels requiring treatment.

Local 372 SAPIS employees seek to bring resources and solution driven methodologies to all NYC schools students, in all 32 school districts from K-12, including special education. SAPIS staff are also trained to implement the most effective evidence based programs available. A dedicated SAPIS counselor provides a range of services including classroom lessons using evidence based curriculum, individual and group counseling, early intervention services, peer

leadership programs, positive youth development activities, crisis intervention, referrals to substance abuse and mental health services, school-wide prevention projects, and parent workshops. These are resources that make a difference in the lives of hundreds of students needing prevention and intervention services throughout New York City Schools.

SAPIS have consistently implemented evidence based programs with fidelity. In addition, SAPIS are used to support schools during crisis. They are trained and deployed to respond to serious events that affect school communities, such as death of a student or staff member. A specific example of this would be: of the 139 high level crisis situations from September 2014 – March 2015, SAPIS were deployed to assist in 76 of the incidents.

New York cannot afford to neglect the important work of the SAPIS Counselors. In 2009, the federal government ceased funding for SAPIS through the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act. New York, through the OASAS budget, continues to maintain a \$14 million allocation to administer the New York City Department of Education school-operated prevention programs services that SAPIS provide. It costs approximately \$71,723 (\$50,100 salary plus \$21,623 fringe) to hire a single SAPIS. After two years of service, the cost per SAPIS is \$82,483 (\$57,616 salary plus \$24,867 fringe).

For the past three years, the Assembly has allocated an additional \$2,000,000; this has provided the funding for approximately 25 additional SAPIS positions. Together, these 25 SAPIS are able to provide prevention education in the classroom, and direct counseling for approximately 12,500 at-risk students and their families who would otherwise not have the support they need. For us to be able to maintain the current number of employees, we are asking the Assembly to maintain this \$2,000,000 allocation in the FY 2019 Budget, and for the Senate to contribute an additional \$1,000,000 to support the hire of an additional 12 counselors.

We thank both the Senate and Assembly for their expressed support and recognition that the 1.2 million students taught in more than 1,800 public schools need access to resources and services that SAPIS workers offer to keep pace with adverse societal pressures. Suffice to that New York City school students need to be safeguarded by appropriately supporting funding for SAPIS

counselors. The biggest challenge is in offering the necessary resources to the multitude of school children and their families as the number of SAPIS workers continues to spiral downward.

While there are limited state resources, New York State has always been a leader in prioritizing opportunities for its children. Local 372's goal is to partner with the State in making a smart investment in the quality of life for both New York students, their families and communities at-large.

We look forward to working with all of you to make this possible. Again, thank you for the opportunity to come before you on behalf of DC 37, Local 372 NYC Board of Education Employees. We will answer any questions you may have.