

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 7, 2019

Good morning, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and distinguished members of the New York State Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. I am President Shaun D. Francois I., and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Governor's proposed Mental Hygiene budget. I speak today on behalf of the approximately 300 Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) represented by DC 37, Local 372 NYC Board of Employees who operate in the New York City public school system. SAPIS counselors are currently funded through an Assembly budget-add appropriation.

SAPIS provide essential prevention and intervention services for 1.2 million public school students. Their work is an essential component in school programming, and provides many students as well as 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 1,700 schools – a distribution of more than 4,000 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 a fraction of the over 1,700 schools in the system.

The loss of more than 200 SAPIS counselors since 2006 in the wake of federal cuts has 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 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 opioid 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 are 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 report 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 counselors seek to bring resource 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. For example, of the 139 high level crisis situations from September 2014 – March 2015, SAPIS were deployed to assist in 76 of the incidents.

For the past four years, the Assembly has allocated an additional \$2,000,000; this has provided the funding the equivalent of 24 full-time SAPIS positions. Together, these 24 SAPIS are able to provide prevention education in the classroom, and direct counseling for approximately 12,000 at-risk students and their families who would otherwise not have the support they need. 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 us to be able to maintain the current number of employees, we are asking the Assembly to maintain its annual allocation in the FY 2020 Budget, and we are asking the Senate to contribute an additional \$2,000,000 to support the hire of an additional 24 SAPIS. New York cannot afford to neglect the important work of SAPIS counselors.

We thank both the Senate and Assembly for their expressed support and recognition that the 1.2 million students taught in more than 1,700 public schools need access to resources and services that SAPIS workers offer to keep pace with adverse societal pressures. New York City public school students need to be safeguarded by appropriately supported 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 remain well below peak numbers.

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. Likewise, Local 372 respectfully requests the Assembly maintain its \$2,000,000 allocation for SAPIS, and the Senate allocate an additional \$2,000,000, for a total of \$4,000,000 in state funding for SAPIS.

I 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 and the SAPIS counselors we represent. I will answer any questions you may have.