



February 19, 2020

Dear New York State Senate & Assembly Finance, Ways and Means, and Education Committee Members:

Thank you for your continued support of Children's Institute's nationally recognized and replicated **Primary Mental Health Project** (Primary Project). This evidence-based program **protects the academic, social and emotional growth of at-risk children across New York State** (NYS). We are very grateful the Governor continues to support this school-based prevention system as an *Aid to Localities* item in the Proposed 2020-21 Executive Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education. We seek your support of this proposal so we may continue to bring Primary Project to school districts, and so we may identify and reach all of the about 110,000 K-3rd grade NYS students with moderate social and emotional behaviors jeopardizing their school success.

At the currently proposed level of investment, Primary Project can directly resource schools to begin providing annual screenings to about 5,000 children to identify social-emotional and school adjustment risks. Of those screened, 840 children will go on to receive Primary Project, a cost-effective paraprofessional-led **prevention program** for children **that circumvents more costly health and educational intervention services**. We also help school districts across NYS maintain Primary Project year after year. These efforts resulted in 24,500 total screenings and over 3,300 referrals to Primary Project during this past 2018-19 school year.

As successful as this program is in swiftly resolving children's at-risk school behaviors in 12-15 weeks, and despite it being a proven effective lynchpin for school social workers to identify and triage all children at risk each school year, the proposed \$894,000 level of support means no single increase has occurred after an eight percent cut over a decade ago. We seek your support in obtaining an allocation of **\$1,200,000** to restore the program to where it would be were there no cut, and if rising costs were considered. These new funds will result annually in 18 additional schools providing 2,100 screenings, another 300 children in NYS benefitting from Primary Project's early intervention services needed, and hundreds of other children appropriately referred to other tiered interventions due to its data-driven processes.

This modest investment to Primary Project is far-reaching in its effects, in ways including but not limited to:

- Primary Project is **self-sustaining and less costly** than other social and emotional intervention services
- Children receiving Primary Project services improve their **ability to focus and participate in class**
- Children gain **confidence, social skills**, and school **attendance** improves
- Children's **risk behaviors quickly decline**: 50% of children who receive Primary Project decrease or eliminate risk factor status in the recommended 12-15 week intervention period

Children's Institute's services and programs **result in greater student learning and success**. Children's social and emotional risk behaviors are as great a challenge in schools as ever before. We **urge your support of the Primary Project's** early intervention system as schools across the state seek this program to resolve student barriers to early academic success.

Thank you,

Ann Marie White, Ed.D.

Executive Director