

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 14, 2022
11:00 AM

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 Donna March Tilghman, the Substance Abuse Prevention Intervention Specialists’ (“SAPIS”) Chapter Chairperson, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Governor’s proposed Mental Hygiene budget. I speak today on behalf of President Shaun D. Francois I. and the approximately 250 SAPIS represented by District 37, Local 372 NYC Board of Education Employees, who work in the New York City public school system. Federal dollars are allocated to the SAPIS program by the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (“OASAS”) and are supplementally funded through a joint \$2,000,000 legislative appropriation. We are here today seeking an increase of \$1,000,000 – for a total of \$3,000,000 – in joint legislative appropriations for SAPIS.

It is no secret that our students are facing a mental health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), the proportion of children’s mental health-related visits to Emergency Room Departments have skyrocketed since April 2020. The CDC’s report has concluded that it is critical to monitor children’s mental health, as well as promoting coping and resilience skills, and to expand access to services in order to support children’s overall mental health. The SAPIS program has been and continues to be best-equipped to shoulder this responsibility.

Since 1971, SAPIS have always mental health services and have taught essential social-economic strategies and have provided services to help students remain learning-ready. SAPIS use scientific evidence-based curricula approved by OASAS to conduct classroom presentations; SAPIS provide individual as well as group counseling, positive alternatives, peer mediation training, and provide leadership workshops. We service students from kindergarten through twelfth grade in all of the five boroughs, including students whom receive special education services.

We can honestly – and proudly – state that SAPIS are already trained and ready to respond to this COVID-19 mental health crisis. SAPIS have *always* been proactive in providing students and their families with the tools to navigate the myriad of societal, personal, and peer pressures that can derail healthy academic, social, and individual development. SAPIS are also responsible for monitoring behavior, as well as offering resources and services to support students when they find themselves struggling to improve. Our programming is already tailored to address the long-term consequences of the pandemic and the shutdown which have derailed and has affected healthy development. The SAPIS program develop individual work plans each year specially tailored to the needs of the students in the schools.

Local 372 has long testified to this panel about the devastating effects of cuts to the SAPIS program and the loss of over 200 SAPIS since 2006. Now more than ever, there are simply not enough SAPIS to provide support of all of our at-risk children and their families. This is not acceptable, and the program needs more SAPIS.

It is estimated that each SAPIS can directly reach an average of 500 students. Our requested increase of \$1 million (for a total of \$3 million) in SAPIS funding, would support the equivalent of an additional twelve full-time SAPIS positions, which would create lifelines for up to 6,000 more students in need. Without SAPIS, we are limiting these struggling students of their opportunity to a quality and competitive education.

It is in the best interest of our students that the State and the City continue to prioritize their investments in expanding the existing SAPIS program. SAPIS are unique and are trained to provide a broad range of services and programming. It costs approximately \$50,500 in base salary, plus 49% in fringe benefits, to hire a single SAPIS. After two years of service, the base salary increases 15%. Secondly, SAPIS are positioned in the schools and are accessible to all students during the school day to provide a variety of services. With these facts in mind, it simply makes sense to invest in SAPIS.

Local 372's goal is to continue working with the State to invest in the quality of life for both New York City students, their families, and communities at-large. Even in the midst of a pandemic, it

remains our shared responsibility to ensure our children meet and exceed their potential. The legislature has always been a leader in prioritizing opportunities for our children. For the past seven years, the legislature has allocated \$2 million annually towards SAPIS. On behalf of Local 372, we thank both the Senate and Assembly for your ongoing support for SAPIS provide. We must do more to combat today's urgent mental health crisis. That is why Local 372 requests that the legislature contribute an additional \$1 million towards SAPIS in this year's budget, for a total allocation of \$3 million in funding. We look forward to working with all of you to make this possible.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of Local 372 NYC Board of Education Employees and our SAPIS. We are available to answer any questions you all may have.