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SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR DAVID C. BANKS ANNOUNCES SUCCESSFUL EXPANSION OF SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Citywide investments in student well-being will result in historic the hiring of over 500 new school social workers and guidance counselors

NEW YORK – Schools Chancellor David C. Banks today released the Department of Education’s annual report on social workers and guidance counselors, showing that our investment in the hiring of mental health professionals to support student well-being has resulted in an increased number of staff in these positions citywide. Nurturing the social emotional health of our students has never been more critical. With thanks to our local, federal, and state elected officials for their advocacy, over the course of this school year alone the Department of Education hired over 500 social workers and guidance counselors in response to our students’ changing social emotional needs.

“As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s vital that we do everything in our power to address the emotional toll that these past two years have had on our youngest New Yorkers,” **said New York City Mayor Eric Adams.** “This incredible investment in more than 500 social workers and guidance counselors for our students will give them the resources they need and deserve to confront any trauma caused by the pandemic. I am deeply proud that the Department of Education continues to prioritize the well-being of our children.”

“Schools are safe havens for our students, and they are critical in supporting students as they heal from the past two years of challenges.” **said Schools Chancellor David C. Banks.** “It’s my priority to give our children what they need to grow into the very best people we know they can be, and that means addressing the toll this pandemic and other traumatic experiences have had on our students’ mental well-being. I’m proud that this important expansion connects our children to the vital resources they deserve, giving them the necessary tools to grow and flourish as learners and productive members of their communities.”

“We are striving every day to offer an ecosystem of care for the whole child that prioritizes student well-being, ensures emotional and physical safety, and supports students in reaching their full potential,” **said Dr. Jawana Johnson, Chief of School Culture, Climate, and Well-Being.** “Student mental health affects how they act, think, and feel, and those who are properly nurtured and supported are better positioned to succeed in school and beyond. Every student needs access to counselors and wellness staff now more than ever to support their continued healing and growth following the pandemic. That’s why we directly allocated resources for in-school supports to schools where they can have the greatest impact.”

Every student carries unique experiences into the classroom that can act as unseen barriers to full participation in the educational experience. In 2014-2015, the Department of Education had a total of 3,890 full-time and part-time social workers and guidance counselors. Now, thanks to our committed expansion, the Department of Education employs a total of 5,033 guidance counselors and social workers, an increase of nearly 30%. This means that every school has—at minimum—access to a social worker, guidance counselor, or school-based mental health center, ensuring a solid foundation of care for all our students.

Currently, the citywide guidance counselor and social worker ratio is 1:183, stronger than the student-to-school counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association, 1:250, and has significantly decreased compared to a 1:215 ratio in 2020-2021. This ratio has also decreased significantly since 2014-15, when it was 1:260. Today, more of our students than ever before have access to individualized time with and support from our expanded network of in-school wellness support staff.

“Even before COVID, the City Council has long called for more guidance counselors and mental health professionals for students in our schools,” **said New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams.** “For the past two years, the numerous impacts of the pandemic have taken a significant toll on the mental health and well-being of our children. As a city, we need to consistently provide nurturing educational environments that support social emotional learning and wellness with appropriate staffing. With the Department of Education focused on expanding these resources for our children, I look forward to ensuring the needs of all students in our school system are met.”

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, students have dealt with isolation, grief, and uncertainty, generating a once-in-a-lifetime mental health crisis for young people," **said Representative Nydia M. Velazquez.** "That's why this announcement is so important, adding hundreds of new mental health support staff for NYC schools will show our youth that they are not alone, and help is available."

"It's been a relief to see the conversation around mental health shift over the past couple of years, breaking down the stigma associated with this issue, and encouraging people to seek the help they need. However, we still have work to do in terms of connecting some of our most vulnerable New Yorkers with this help, including our school-aged children," **said Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso.** "I applaud our Department of Education for hiring over 500 social workers and guidance counselors to help our youngest New Yorkers cope with their changing social-emotional needs, introducing them to mental health support early, connecting them to additional support services, and further changing our conversation around this important issue that impacts us all."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has left in its wake a serious mental health crisis in our schools, where our young people have endured three straight years of education disruption, periods of isolation and even the loss of loved ones to this virus. Now more than ever, we need major investments in the mental well-being of our students to ensure they have the proper support they need to thrive in the classroom and in life," **said Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** "By hiring hundreds of social workers and guidance counselors, we can finally

begin to address the mental health inequities across our school system and offer the stability and support that every student deserves, regardless of ZIP code."

"It's important that as we emerge from this pandemic, we are caring for our children and their mental well-being. Simply put, a child will be unable to learn if they are struggling with challenges beyond the classroom. I applaud Chancellor Banks and the Department of Education for moving to make this substantive investment in our students," **said Assembly Education Chair Mike Benedetto.**

When our students or school communities are in crisis, our expanded school-support network is ready to provide wrap-around services and meet students where they are with necessary interventions. Following the tragic Bronx Fire on January 9th, impacted schools were met with relief services by the Bronx Borough City Office social work team, led by Dr. Roger Ball. This incredible team of social workers stepped into impacted school communities, helping students and staff express their feelings, address their grief, and move through loss.

"This is a watershed moment in history as the pandemic continues, and this is the time for us to add more social workers, more clinicians, more guidance counselors, more mental health professionals to our schools," **said Dr. Roger Ball, Supervisor of School Social Workers for the Bronx.** "If we are going to rise to the occasion, then we must do whatever it takes to meet the moment—I am glad that this effort includes the expansion of our network of in-school supports, creating more accessible services for our children."

The NYCDOE has a long-standing commitment to nurturing the social emotional needs of our students, and we are proud to provide several initiatives addressing student well-being:

Social Workers in High-Need Schools ensures that schools with demonstrated need receive funding for a full-time school social worker. These schools were in a neighborhood hardest hit by COVID-19, had economic need, and lacked direct mental health services prior to this expansion.

Guidance Counselors in High-Need Schools funds a guidance counselor to positively impact students' academic success, social emotional development, and post-secondary planning.

Bridging the Gap (BTG) ensures that schools with high numbers of students residing in homeless shelters have access to a social worker who supports the specific needs of students and families affected by homelessness.

Single Shepherd aims to pair every middle and high school student in grades 6 through 12 in Districts 7 and 23 with a dedicated guidance counselor or social worker to support them through graduation and college enrollment. Shepherds support students at a targeted 1:100 ratio. Starting in 2021-22, Single Shepherd funding was allocated directly to schools.

School-Response Clinicians (SRCs) historically provided care in times of immediate emotional distress and supported students and their families with receiving long-term care, as needed. Starting in 2021-22, forty-eight SRC positions were allocated directly to individual schools that received their support in the past but lacked a full-time school social worker. These social workers are now positioned to provide full-time support to students at their assigned school.

Family Healing Ambassadors is a for-families, by-families initiative and part of DOE's ongoing commitment to promoting student wellness and supporting trauma-responsive, healing centered practices in our school communities, ultimately empowering caregiver and parent ambassadors to lead healing centered projects in their communities.

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Contact: Chancellor's Press Office press@schools.nyc.gov