

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 16, 2023  
9:30 AM

Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and distinguished members of the New York State Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Governor's proposed FY 24 Mental Hygiene budget. Local 372, under the leadership of President, Shaun D. Francois I., represents, approximately 250 Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS). The SAPIS program was previously funded through a federal allocation that passed through the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and, in previous budgets, has been supplementally funded through a joint \$2,000,000 legislative appropriation. We respectfully request that the New York State Senate and Assembly allocate \$6 million to support SAPIS.

New York City (NYC) school children are in a crisis! Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, schools faced a surge in demand for mental health resources. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the proportion of children's mental health-related visits to emergency room departments skyrocketed after April 2020.<sup>1</sup> The CDC's report has concluded that it is critical to monitor children's mental health, promote coping and resilience skills, and expand access to services to support children's overall mental health. The SAPIS program has been and continues to be best equipped to shoulder this responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> [MMWR, Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–September 19, 2020 \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6810a1.htm)

Since 1971, SAPIS have always provided mental health services, have taught essential social-emotional strategies, and have provided services to help students remain learning-ready. SAPIS use OASAS-approved Evidence-Based Program (“EBP”) presentations applied in group and individual settings as positive alternatives for NYC public school students in need. SAPIS service K-12 throughout all of New York City’s 32 school district, including special education.

SAPIS has 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 and offering resources and services to support students when they struggle to improve. The SAPIS program develops individual work plans each year specially tailored to the needs of the students in the schools. The programming is tailor-ready to address the long-term mental health challenges wrought by the radical changes that students have been forced to deal with over the past few years.

While the New York City Department of Education (DOE) recognizes the importance of mental health well-being in the school setting, they also acknowledge that the students in New York City are underserved, stating that approximately one in five students who could benefit from additional mental-health support does not get them. According to the DOE’s Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS), highlighted within the New York State Comptroller’s report on “Mental Health Education, Supports, and Services in Schools,” from September 2018 to April 2020, there were a total of 488 incidents at five focus schools involving 271 students. Out of the 488 incidents, there were 18 incidents involving suicide/suicide ideation and 68

incidents of intimidation/bullying (the NYS Comptroller's office recognizes that bullying can lead to mental health issues). And these statistics only represent five schools.

Despite a serious need for these services, the SAPIS program is critically unfunded. Local 372 has long testified to this panel about the devastating effects of the cuts to the SAPIS program and the loss of over 200 SAPIS since 2006. Now more than ever, there are not enough SAPIS to support all our at-risk children and their families. The time to make a greater impact is now; students and workers need more resources to address this time of crisis. The \$2 million threshold does not meet the demands of these extraordinary times.

An individual SAPIS can reach approximately 500 students in need. Approximately 250 SAPIS are currently employed to provide programming and services to the City's 900,000 public school students, with the City turning to less effective and more costly alternatives to meet the increased demand for more Social-Emotional Learning curricula, including community-based organizations and school social workers. 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. In contrast, hiring a new social worker cost approximately \$63,000 plus fringe benefits. With these facts in mind, it 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 New York City students, their families, and communities. No matter the crisis, - social injustice, mass violence, school bullying, economic challenges, drugs, peer pressure, and losses

experienced from Covid 19 - it remains our responsibility to ensure our children meet and exceed their potential in environments and cultures of well-being.

Local 372 requests that the legislature contribute an additional \$6 million towards SAPIS in this year's budget. This would support the equivalent of an additional forty-eight full-time SAPIS positions, creating lifelines for up to 24,000 more students in need. education.

We are committed to working together to make this possible. If you have questions or need additional information, please get in touch with Donald Nesbit, the Executive Vice President of Local 372 – NYC Board of Education Employees, District Council 37 | AFSCME. Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit the testimony for Local 372 NYC Board of Education Employees.