

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 13, 2024
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 25 Mental Hygiene budget. Local 372, under the leadership of President Shaun D. Francois I., represents 256 Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS). For many years, the SAPIS program was funded through a combination of federal and state funding 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. However, due to the elimination of federal aid and a rising need for services, we respectfully request that the New York State Senate and Assembly allocate a total of \$6 million to support the SAPIS program.

New York City school children are in a crisis! The demand for mental health resources has surged since the pandemic. 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 2020.¹ 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. Additionally, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice

¹ [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/mm6811a1.htm)

and Delinquency Prevention, evidence suggests that programs implemented at earlier stages in a child's life may be more effective in prevention efforts and behavior adjustments than programs implemented in later adolescent years, especially for high-risk populations.² That is why it is crucial that we increase funding towards SAPIS.

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.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) recognizes the importance of mental health well-being in the school setting. The DOE also acknowledges 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. Despite a serious and

² Park, 2008; Phillips, McDonald, and Kishbaugh, 2017; Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond, 2004.

recognized need for these services, the SAPIS program remains critically underfunded. Local 372 has long testified to this panel about the devastating effects of federal funding cuts had on the SAPIS program. With a loss of over 200 SAPIS since 2006, there are not enough SAPIS to support all of our at-risk children and their families.

Not only are there not enough SAPIS to place one in every public school, there aren't even enough SAPIS to place one in every public-school *campus* (which can comprise of more than three schools). Our SAPIS are instead moved to different campuses based on an evaluation as to who needs a SAPIS more. That should not be the system used to determine the needs of our children. Having to pick and choose which campus needs it the most leads to the children who had a SAPIS, having their resources being taken away, which in turn, negatively impacts them. Students and their families need more resources to address this mental health crisis. The \$2 million alone does not meet the demands of these extraordinary times.

Two hundred fifty-six SAPIS are currently employed to provide programming and services to the City's 957,438 public school students. 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%. SAPIS are positioned in the schools and are accessible to all students during the school day to provide a variety of services. An individual SAPIS can effectively reach to up to approximately 500 students in need.

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.

Local 372 requests that the legislature contribute a total of \$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. 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.