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Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, and Chancellor Carranza Announce 2021 Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan for Schools

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NEW YORK— Mayor Bill de Blasio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, and Schools Chancellor Richard A. Carranza today announced a mental health plan to support students this fall, as part of the 2021 Student Achievement Plan. The first phase will focus on the 27 communities hardest hit by COVID-19, with plans to make these critical mental health supports available to students citywide.

“The trauma of the pandemic has been acutely felt by our youngest New Yorkers,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “In New York City, we believe that mental healthcare is a human right, and our students will not navigate this pain and grief alone. Now with our school communities, we will give our kids the emotional support they need to succeed in a safe and supportive environment.”

“Now, more than ever, it’s important that we are able to pinpoint and address student strengths, weaknesses and areas of concern. The pandemic has tested everyone’s ability to work through some pretty tough challenges, and when children head back to school, each with their own mix of emotions, they will need more support than ever,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. “This new screening will provide educators and staff with a more accurate indicator of how our children are doing when they re-enter the classroom. Learning and growing, continuous improvement is important for students and educators. There is no better investment to pair with our SEL and restorative justice curriculum.”

“Students are only able to succeed academically when their social and emotional needs are being met, and we are only now starting to understand how this crisis is impacting our young people,” said **Schools Chancellor Richard. A Carranza**. “Building on what we know works as we look

ahead, we know we'll use these tools and resources to provide our school communities with the ability to confront and address trauma while fostering a safe, supportive environment for all students.”

Building on years of investments in the social emotional wellbeing of students, and expanding on the recently announced 2021 Student Achievement Plan, the mental health plan is a three-pronged approach to confront the trauma and mental health crisis faced by our students. Beginning in the 27 communities hardest hit by COVID-19, the DOE will make social, emotional, and academic behavior screeners available for all students K-12, hire 150 additional social workers, and add a community school in each of the 27 neighborhoods. This first phase will serve approximately 380,000 students across approximately 830 schools. This plan includes partnerships with community-based organizations and builds on the administration's significant investments in the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, including through our Resilient Kids, Safer Schools initiative that expanded social-emotional learning and restorative justice approaches citywide; and our Bridge to School plan which provided educators with additional supports and trainings in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A social emotional screening is an evidence-based tool that facilitates a check-in on how students are doing emotionally and assesses a general sense of wellbeing, based on the observations made by the adults in school that know them best. The results of the screen will be analyzed by a school-based team to guide school-wide programming, elevate and address needs of specific students who might need additional care, and coordinate between parents, counselors, social workers, and clinicians to provide interventions that meet the unique, personalized needs of that particular student.

Currently, every school has access to a social worker or guidance counselor, and we will continue to add to this pool so that more schools can have more full-time, dedicated support. DOE will hire an additional 150 social workers to serve schools in the communities hardest hit by COVID, prioritizing the schools in these communities currently without a fulltime social worker. Social workers will work in partnership with educators and Health + Hospitals clinicians, through the previously announced Pathways to Care initiative, to target resources, clinical supports, and interventions to students based on their unique needs.

To further expand services that support the whole child, this plan will transform 27 schools in these communities to become Community Schools. Community Schools are a cornerstone of this administration's approach to rethinking the place a school has in its community, by connecting schools to community partners who provide wraparound services to address the specific needs of that school's community. A recent RAND Corporation impact study of New York City's Community Schools program found that they have many positive impacts, including increasing graduation rates, decreasing chronic absenteeism and disciplinary incidents, while improving student achievement.

The second phase of this initiative will move to make these mental health and wellbeing supports universal. Our children need these supports, and we need the federal government to step up and provide school districts with appropriate resources to meet unprecedented mental health needs laid bare by the pandemic. With additional and significant federal stimulus aid, the City can expand this work to provide all students with social, emotional, and academic behavior screenings, hiring a total

of 500 social workers, and growing a total 100 Community Schools. With federal support, every New York City school would have access to a mental health clinic, CBO-provided mental health services, or a social worker.

The strategies announced today are part of an ongoing, citywide effort to meet the mental health needs of children and young people in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In August, the Mayor, First Lady and Chancellor announced the Bridge to School program to help schools integrate trauma-informed practices into school reopening, following an historic investment to address the social-emotional needs of students. In addition, ThriveNYC and DOE collaborate on several innovative mental health programs that serve children and families, which offer a combination of in-person and tele-mental health support during the pandemic.

“The emotional impact caused by COVID-19 in communities of the South Bronx and East Harlem has been devastating, especially for our children,” **said Council Member Diana Ayala, Chair of the City Council's Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction** “The fear and anxiety brought on by this pandemic has been overwhelming and may have further severe and long-lasting reactions. By providing additional clinical resources to those hardest hit by COVID-19, we provide the very mechanisms that will teach our children to learn how to cope with stress and deal with their circumstances.”

"I have long held that every single school in New York City should be a community school," **said Council Member Mark Treyger, Chair of the City Council's Committee on Education.** "I am proud of the Council's work over the past three years to ensure that every school has access to a guidance counselor or social worker, to add hundreds of new social workers, and to save the Single Shepherd program. Now, more than ever, our children need access to intensive social-emotional supports. They are contending with food insecurity, familial unemployment, illness and death, social isolation, and instability, all of which lead to trauma. But, this trauma need not be generational, if appropriate supports are available and easily accessible. Adding 27 new community schools and 150 new social workers in the communities hardest hit by COVID-19 is a critical step towards giving students and families the resources they need to recover. I look forward to continuing to work with the Administration to further expand access to vital social-emotional supports for our students."

“Students throughout New York City have been severely impacted by the devastating tentacles of the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19. We are compelled to respond to this disruption in the educational process with a myriad of initiatives and use this opportunity to construct and fund programs that will remediate and reduce the effects of systemic racism and structural inequities that produced conditions in Black and Brown communities that historically have had a disproportionately negative impact on those families. This mental health program is sorely needed to address the trauma experienced by students in those communities that have traditionally been marginalized and underfunded in areas such as housing, education, social services, health, and mental health. I look forward to the implementation of this program, as well as the opportunity to explore other initiatives that will help our students to overcome the long range negative affects of COVID-19," **said Council Member Inez Barron.**

"This public health crisis has had a profound impact on our students' mental health and wellbeing. Between school closures, transitioning to remote learning, and social isolation, many students are

struggling both academically and personally. We must prioritize our students' social and emotional wellbeing as this crisis continues, especially in the hardest hit communities which are still facing severe economic impacts. This new program will give educators and staff new tools to support our children and address their needs as we return to in person learning. Thank you to Mayor Bill de Blasio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, and Schools Chancellor Carranza for this initiative and commitment to our students' mental health needs, said **New York State Senator Luis Sepúlveda**.

“The pandemic has only compounded the stresses, anxieties, and mental health crises borne by the nation’s children,” said **Emily Barson, Executive Director for United States of Care**. “To turn the tide, policy makers at every level will need to prioritize accessible, equitable care that accounts for both physical and mental well-being. This is a significant investment in the future of mental health in NYC.”

“The American Psychological Association applauds the 2021 Student Achievement Plan, which will provide much-needed mental health supports to New York City schoolchildren,” said **Dr. Arthur C. Evans Jr., Chief Executive Officer and Executive Vice President for the American Psychological Association**. “The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the stress on all our children, and this plan to add mental health providers promises to help the city's students cope and even thrive through these difficult times.”

“I applaud Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, and Chancellor Carranza for taking aggressive action to help students facing mental health challenges during this unprecedented time,” said **former U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum**. “There is no health without mental health, and students cannot learn when their needs go unaddressed. By identifying children who are struggling and connecting them to proper supports, New York City is serving as a model that school districts across the country should urgently follow.”

“Schools represent a key location for better identifying and addressing our children’s mental health needs. Without screening, we only guess at who we should treat, and without treatment, we only find out more needs through screening,” said **Dr. Benjamin F. Miller, Chief Strategy Officer for Well Being Trust**. “We need both screening and treatment to improve outcomes, and we applaud the city for recognizing the psychological toll and trauma COVID-19 has had on our communities and moving to do something about it.”

“Suffering is widespread but for our hardest hit communities, COVID-19 has been devastating. For the children and their families in these communities, school can be a haven and Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, and Chancellor Carranza are making it so,” said **Linda Rosenberg, Executive Director of External Relations for Columbia University Department of Psychiatry**. “We applaud their commitment to the mental health of New York’s children and the promise they are making to give all of our children the opportunity to develop their gifts and contribute to our world.”

“Providing mental health supports and resources to New York City’s youth will be paramount to student success in 2021 and the future,” said **Kimberly Williams, President & CEO of Vibrant Emotional Health**. “Recognizing the psychological impact of COVID-19 on our youth, and creating meaningful opportunities for screenings, education and services, will help build resiliency in our communities.”

“I applaud the forward thinking of Mayor de Blasio and his team in utilizing Community Schools to provide holistic care and coordinate recovery for thousands of students and families. What this pandemic has revealed across our country is that Community Schools have played a critical role in the communication, collaboration, and coordination of essential supports and services necessary in this health crises, but also for racial healing and addressing related social issues. The stimulus is the perfect opportunity to accelerate the development of Community Schools especially in the neighborhoods where students and families need it the most.” **Jose Munoz, Director for Coalition for Community Schools – Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)**

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