

#SecureOurFutureNYC:

Policy Recommendations to Increasing Opportunities for New York City's Disconnected Youth

Address the Mental Health Needs of Young Adults Today

Increase access to quality mental health supports in middle school and high school

- **Increase the number of guidance counselors**, providing at least one for every grade and work to create a ratio of one counselor per 250 students as recommended by the American School Counselor Association.
- **Invest in school and non-profit partnerships in order to meet the growing mental health needs of students.** This would allow more non-profit counselors, such as that of Partnership with Children, to serve students in school that would not otherwise have been seen as a result of lack of counselors.
- **Scale up peer mediation programs that allow for one-on-one connection between peers to help de-escalate conflicts.** This type of programming is often supported by non-profit partners that train and manage peer mediators.

Ensure counselors have the training and expertise to serve the unique needs of students

- **Provide all counselors and school staff with professional development and additional resources.** Counselors and school staff should receive anti-bias and culturally relevant training with a focus on addressing trauma. There is also a need to increase professional development to counselors to address disorders and other health conditions/disorders. Additional training that addresses bullying, including de-escalating conflicts and enforcing restorative approaches is also needed.

Increase outreach and awareness of mental health resources and awareness

- **Increase awareness of school counseling services or other resources throughout the school and city.** Awareness and outreach of additional resources and support should be shared widely within the school community and throughout the city, especially if the school does not provide enough resources. In addition, more advertisements throughout the city are needed and schools should meet students where they are at by providing apps with information or an intensive social media campaign.
- **Build in mental health awareness and workshops in class or study halls.** This will allow students to learn more about critical issues and approaches to managing their mental health. Exmaples include awareness of issues such as suicide awareness and managing stress and anxiety.
- **Provide a personalized approach to meeting students' mental health needs.** Counselor or school staff to visit students at home to get a better understanding of their needs and to meet families. Counselors or school staff would be aware of student circumstances and able to better support them through home visits and other outreach mechanisms.

Make system-wide investments in recruiting and retaining more diverse counselors and staff

- **Create a pipeline for more diverse counselors**, educators, school staff, and leaders.
- **Expand anti-bias training** to school teachers and other school staff.

Ensure that Students have Access to the Non-academic Coursework and Opportunities for Academic, Personal, and Professional Growth

Expand curriculum to include more relevant and inclusive coursework for young New Yorkers

- **Develop a more inclusive sexual health education curriculum in NYC DOE schools.** There is a need to make the curriculum more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ experiences. In addition, partnerships with nonprofits like Planned Parenthood to teach sexual health education classes, and train peer educators to lead classes, would be more effective than having physical education or other teachers lead this course. Lastly, these classes are typically for a short duration of time, and extending the time frame of sexual education classes may also be more impactful.
- **Increase life skills** by including more “real world” application in coursework or offering additional classes or workshops on these vital skills. Examples of these skills include financial literacy (i.e. taxes, credit vs. debit), cooking, time management, and networking.

Increase both in school and afterschool programming to better support students and families

- **Increase non-profit partnerships that allow for academic and non-academic support.** The programs allow for career exploration, build career-readiness skills, provide opportunities for networking and growth within certain sectors, and develop life skills. In addition, there is a need to increase programs that also provide additional tutoring and support such as City Year.
- **Increase partnerships that allow for mentorship, and provide longer-term mentorships at an early age, starting at elementary school.** Examples of these programs include Big Brother Big Sister or peer-to-peer mentoring that allows for older students to mentor younger students, pairing multilingual learners with students that speak the same language.

Improve Dropout Interventions Process and Approach

Provide extra academic support and more personalized counseling and progress checks

- **Provide extra academic support** while in school to prevent drop out, instead of schools sending home a “letter in doubt” when students are not performing academically,
- **Provide more personalized counseling** to prevent students from dropping out. Have counselors or other school staff members available to speak with students about why grades and attendance might be slipping, and develop a plan to prioritize and support these students.
- **Allow for a more personalized progress check** to meet the students where they are, rather than measuring progress with a standard test. Counselors and teachers should reach out to students more often to check-in and track their progress.

Improve Communication between Schools, Students, and Caretakers

Ensure language access at every school and a variety of communication outreach methods

- **Ensure communications with parents/guardians are provided in multiple languages** and that school staff can communicate with parents that speak other languages.
- **Meet caretakers where they are and provide outreach and communications in ways parents and guardians can access**, keeping in mind that not all caretakers have access to digital communication. Focus groups with parents and other ways to gather feedback from them to improve communications are needed.

Expand Programming for Students with Caregiving and Financial Responsibilities

Increase daycare and other programming options as well as communications about programs for student parents

- Make daycare more accessible to student parents and invest in programs that connect students with childcare, such as the Living for the Young Family Through Education (LYFE) program.
- Increase communications and outreach about these programs across NYC communities.

Provide support for students that are helping to financially support their family

- Increase information and awareness about accessing essential needs resources, such as SNAP eligibility and enrollment and other support, in order to ensure that more families have their essential needs met.
- Provide a navigator approach to student and family enrollment in government support programs, within both the DOE and DYCD.

Provide Alternatives to High-stakes Standardized Testing

Introduce alternatives to the Regents Exams

- Standardized tests are not an efficient way of measuring a student's ability to succeed in or after high school. Project-based learning or work-based opportunities should be piloted as an alternative to the Regents.