



Comments of

**The New York Association of School
Psychologists**

on the

**The NYS Mental Health Executive Budget
for Fiscal Year 2022-2023**

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The New York State Association of School Psychologists

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INTRODUCTION

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) is a statewide organization representing school psychologists across the state and the millions of school-aged children and families with whom they work with on a daily basis. School psychologists are trained and educated in the psychology of learning, motivation, and human development in order to address the many factors influencing the performance of students. These qualified mental health professionals conduct screenings and evaluations to identify cognitive strengths and needs to ensure academic success, and, in some instances, to determine eligibility for special education services. These professionals provide direct psychological services within educational settings, community settings, and state and local agencies, as well as promote access to mental health services within the educational system through information platforms. They are valued partners with state agencies such as the Office of Mental Health and NYSED in the development of psychological interventions related to children and youth and the provision of instructional presentations on relevant issues such as trauma, suicide, and depression, and otherwise lend counseling and support to students and their families.

Our members have participated in countless work groups and task forces on a range of pressing issues resulting in invaluable publications and guidance documents around frameworks for safe and successful schools, the SAFE Act, bullying and discrimination in schools, mental health education literacy in schools (linking to a continuum of well-being), suicide prevention, and behavioral health.

We share these comments under the backdrop of the national crisis that currently exists related to children's mental health. We are well aware of the impact that these past two years have had on the social and emotional adjustment of children and adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatricians, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association have declared a national emergency in children's mental health, citing the serious toll of the pandemic and other social justice factors within our nation. The U.S. Surgeon General issued a new Advisory to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis. And we applaud the Governor's own recognition of the mental health crisis in her State of the State address a few weeks ago. Children in New York are hurting. We see many of the children in our schools struggling with increased anxiety, heightened levels of depression, and general difficulties managing the challenges of school and life.

However, there are ways for you as legislators to support our children and make a difference in the mental health supports available to youth and families.

Senator Brouk and Assembly Member Rosenthal have sponsored legislation (**S4347A/A545A**) that would provide for the licensure of school psychologists. Currently, without this licensure, school psychologists are limited to working within school districts and some state agencies. However, there is a severe shortage of mental health professionals in the community and families are faced with long wait-lists, extensive travel, and unfortunately a reliance upon emergency room services at hospitals to access

needed services. Licensure of school psychologists would increase the mental health workforce throughout New York State and strengthen our mental health system by increasing access to vital services needed by thousands of our children and families. **The bill passed the Senate unanimously last session and we urge both houses to take this bill up immediately and move it forward to help children.**

Additionally, there are a number of proposals within the Governor's budget that would help to address the mental health needs of children.

We are pleased to **support the proposal for \$10 million in mental health support grants for school districts.** While federal grant funding over the past two years has been helpful to increase programs and supports, the reality is that ongoing funding is required to sustain and expand these interventions to address the devastating impact of the pandemic on children's mental health.

Unfortunately, we recognize that high needs districts have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and do not have the resources to address their students' needs. Therefore, we **support the Executive proposal for \$100 million to establish a matching fund- the Recover from COVID school program (RECOVS).** This will benefit high needs districts that use their federal relief dollars to expand summer programming or after school and extended day programs, as well as hire mental health professionals, expand mental health services, and other evidence based mental health supports. We would recommend that districts be required to account for or report to SED and their communities on the process by which the spending decisions were made to assure prioritization of mental health needs.

Other proposals that would facilitate mental health supports for children and families include:

- **\$10 million to fund expansion of Home-Based Crisis Intervention** and the establishment of a Mental Wellness Community Workforce
- **\$1.5 million to support expenses related to mental health programs** in schools, \$500,000 of which is to support the school mental health technical assistance center
- Establishment of **988 Suicide prevention and Behavioral Health Crisis Hotline system**, which school psychologists could support given their work in this area within the schools
- **\$2 million for grants to support programs designed to improve school climate**
- **\$3 million for districts to increase the use of alternative approaches to student discipline**, given that factors such as trauma and social justice issues impact student behavior

Finally, the New York Association of School Psychologists supports the following components of the Executive's Budget:

- \$11 million in mental health and other critical services for children in the Child Health Plus program
- \$250,000 in community schools grants to allow districts to expand mental health services and capacity
- The expansion of community based services to address the mental health needs of children and families
- Funding increases to support behavioral health services to address mental illness and substance use disorder

- Incentives such as retention bonuses for mental health providers to address workforce shortages
- Broadening the scope of practice for many professions and opening pathways to increase the workforce

Summary

We believe that school psychologists are an invaluable resource that have the potential to make significant contributions in the advancement of the stated intention and vision of the Governor and New York State Legislature for our children and youth.

We urge the Legislature to specifically identify school psychologists in all contexts as relates to the planning and implementation of the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 and the provision of mental health services to children.

In furtherance of NYASP’s stated mission of commitment to enhancing access to vital mental health services, we ask that the Legislature give thoughtful consideration to related legislature proposals, including:

- **S. 4347A** (Brouk) / **A.545A** (Rosenthal) - providing for licensure of school psychologists; and
- **S.1969** (Jackson) / **A. 5019** (Gonzales-Rojas) - requiring school mental health services in all districts.

We believe these proposals will enhance the availability and accessibility of mental health services to children and adolescents both in schools and in the community, while identifying additional funding streams for districts.

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We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments.