

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 22, 2020

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY AND TASKFORCE ON
RACIAL INCLUSION AND EQUITY ANNOUNCE EXPANSION OF MENTAL
HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS IN NEIGHBORHOODS HARDEST HIT BY
COVID-19**

New initiatives will provide trauma-informed counseling and connect students to outpatient mental health clinics

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray today announced that the City will add new mental health services to hundreds of schools in the neighborhoods hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Two new programs will use existing resources to maximize mental health support for students and confront the trauma that has been caused by the public health crisis. This work is supported by the administration's Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity, which brings an equity-based approach to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in hardest-hit communities.

"COVID-19 has taken a tremendous emotional toll on our city's students," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "Now, our educators, parents, and school communities will not endure the trauma of the pandemic alone. To those who are suffering, your city sees you and we are here to help."

"Now, more than ever, we want all of our students to know that they are not alone, and there are compassionate, trained professionals ready to help them process anxiety, grief and trauma that may have intensified during the pandemic," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "Parents and educators in our communities hardest hit by COVID-19 have called out for this kind of direct support and we are responding."

More specifically, the School Mental Health Consultant Program was converted to the School Mental Health Specialist Program. Launched in 2016, the Consultant Program served 46% of the City's public schools. Licensed social workers worked with these schools to survey their existing mental health resources, build custom mental health plans, and, when needed, connect students to mental health support in the school system and to clinical services in their community. Currently staffed by mental health workers, the Consultant Program has delivered 6,993 trainings to 217,379 Department of Education (DOE) teachers and staff since 2016.

Under the new program, the current mental health workers will become Specialists and begin delivering trauma-informed group work, to students at 350 schools in the neighborhoods hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in late October, each Specialist will serve up to five schools, and, in addition to direct services, will provide mental health education to caregivers and school staff to help them address students' mental health needs and strengthen community and family ties.

The Specialist program, like the Consultant program, will be implemented by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in partnership with DOE, with programmatic oversight from ThriveNYC. The \$8.7 million Fiscal Year 2021 budget for the Consultant Program will be

entirely converted to support the Specialist program, with the new direct service model requiring no additional costs. The Mayor's Fund has raised \$35,000 to cover the cost of training curriculum and material to transition the program. Data on the program's reach and impact will be regularly published on [ThriveNYC's data dashboard](#).

Second, a first-ever formal partnership between NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) and the City's public schools will directly connect 26 schools in the neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 to outpatient mental health clinics, where children and adolescents can receive ongoing therapy, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and other clinical services. A designated staff person will be appointed in each school to coordinate directly with H+H, ensuring that referrals happen quickly and easily for students in need. Schools will also receive training to better understand when a referral to ongoing mental healthcare at H+H may help a student.

In the last six years, the City has significantly expanded onsite mental health services in schools, including adding clinics to over 200 high-need schools across the City. For some students with ongoing or acute mental health needs, schools may need to connect students to community-based providers. The new H+H initiative, Pathways to Care, closes this critical gap in care, expediting referrals and connection to community-based services for students in the neighborhoods that have experienced high levels of trauma and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. This new partnership will use existing resources, without the need for a new budget. Pathways to Care will be implemented by H+H and DOE, with programmatic oversight from the Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC.

While schools are operating both in-person and virtually, students and their families will be able to access services through both of these new programs both onsite and via tele-mental health.

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 academic success and mental health of our students are completely intertwined, and this direct support to our hardest hit communities will be invaluable in supporting our students as we continue to navigate this pandemic," said **Schools Chancellor Richard A. Carranza**. "These initiatives give schools reliable and easily accessible care, and I thank the Mayor and First Lady for their unwavering dedication to the health and wellbeing of our students."

"Whether it was the impact of months of isolation, coping with loss due to COVID-19, or anxieties associated with the pandemic, it is critical that students receive the proper mental health support now, and we're proud to be partnering with other City agencies to make this a reality," said **NYC Health + Hospitals Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Charles Barron, MD**. "School-aged children and young adults are at a pivotal stage of development and it's important to provide the most comprehensive mental health services conveniently so they can overcome the stresses and trauma felt by so many during this pandemic."

"From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, children have coped with stressors at home, family illness and loss," said **Dr. Daniel Stephens, Deputy Commissioner for Family Child**

Health for the New York City Health Department. "Schools offer a supportive environment where children and families can receive mental health care and connections to necessary resources. I am proud to partner with DOE, H+H, and Thrive NYC to provide these critical mental health services."

"So many students in our schools are coping with the profound emotional toll of the COVID-19 pandemic - from grief, loss and trauma to anxiety and isolation," said **Susan Herman, Director of the Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC**. "With these new strategies, the City is acting swiftly to bring more mental health support to the children and young people who need it most right now. I thank all the clinicians and mental health workers who are meeting this extraordinary moment with creativity and resolve."

"Young New Yorkers have been facing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemics on all fronts--in school, at home, and in their communities. Individualized attention and support is key to ensuring they remain mentally and physically healthy and resilient," said **Toya Williford, Executive Director of the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City**. "We are proud to leverage the strength of our partnerships to help provide the necessary support and care to the children of this city."

"Now, more than ever, students and families need support for their mental health and well-being," said **Sideya Sherman, Executive Director of the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity and EVP for Community Engagement & Partnerships at NYCHA**. "These new initiatives will bring much needed mental health services and connections to outpatient clinical services, to schools in the communities hardest-hit by COVID-19. Through interagency collaboration, the City is taking proactive steps to meet the social and emotional needs of young people."

"The American Psychological Association applauds this plan to provide much-needed care to New York City's school children," said **APA CEO Arthur C. Evans, PhD**. "We know from our polling research that the youngest generation is experiencing the most stress of all age groups as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic so extra attention to their mental health needs will be critical to their future development."

"New York City's children have lost so much to COVID, beloved family members have died, school has been disrupted, and normal and needed activities with friends have been on hold for months and months," said **Linda Rosenberg, Executive Director of External Relations, Columbia University Department of Psychiatry**. "Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray's decision to use existing resources to add mental health services to hundreds of schools in the neighborhoods hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic is right and just. In a crisis of this dimension and duration, we must attend to the present while building for the future, and our children are the future."

"Children and young adults have been the ones most deeply affected by the pandemic across a variety of mental health indicators, including anxiety, depression, and self-harm or even suicidal thinking," said **Paul Gionfriddo, President and CEO of Mental Health America**. "At Mental Health America, literally millions have come directly to us or our local affiliates for help since the start of the pandemic. It is essential that we support them where they are – in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools. This great initiative can serve as a model for the nation and remind

communities that no matter how many resources they have, it is essential to direct as many of these as possible to supporting the mental health of our children during these incredibly challenging times.”

“The mental health impact of COVID-19 on our city’s youth is significant,” **said Kimberly Williams, President & CEO of Vibrant Emotional Health.** “These initiatives provide the necessary school and community services to support the emotional wellbeing of New York’s students.”

"At United States of Care, we firmly believe that all five major entry points through which people access mental health need to be improved, including the education system, so that students can access the care they need when they need it," **said Emily Barson, Executive Director of United States of Care.** “We appreciate the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, and all those across the nation that have made it a priority to support students' mental health and well-being during this unprecedented pandemic, particularly in those communities hardest hit by COVID-19.”

###