

Comments of

**The New York Association of School
Psychologists**

on the

2020-21 Executive Education Budget Proposal

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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 millions of school-aged children with whom they work. 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 individuals conduct screening and evaluations to identify, cognitive strengths and needs to assure 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 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.

It is against this backdrop of experience and expertise that we provide these comments on select portions of the Executive's Education Budget.

Master Teacher and Counselor Awards

While school psychologists recognize the invaluable contributions made by other district pupil personnel, we must emphasize the distinction between school psychologists and colleague school guidance counselors, or "counselors". Certified school psychologists are, in fact, mental health practitioners and providers of psychological services within the school setting. School guidance counselors, or "counselors" as referenced in the Executive Budget, "prepare students to participate effectively in their current and future educational programs as age appropriates and ... address multiple student competencies including career/college readiness standards and academic and social/emotional development standards." (Commissioners Regulations, section 100.2 (j)) These personnel focus on student's education progress and career plans, and assist students in developing and implementing postsecondary education and career plans. These personnel are not, however, trained psychologists with the education and experience necessary to

“establish mental health professional learning communities throughout the State” – the stated objective of the \$1.5 M Executive appropriation **proposed** in support of the newly revised Master Teacher and Counselor Awards. (Aid to Localities Budget)

We believe certified school psychologists are an invaluable resource which have the potential to make significant contributions in the advancement of the Executive proposal to establish vital mental health professional learning communities.

We urge the Executive and Legislature to specifically identify certified school psychologists in all contexts as relates to the provision of mental health services to children.

Accordingly, we recommend that the Executive’s refined Master Teacher and Counselor Award Program be further expanded to include school psychologists.

More specifically we urge the Executive and Legislature to specifically identify certified school psychologists within the context of the several programs supported in the Aid to Localities Budget including the:

- \$15 M for services and expenses of **school mental health programs**; and
- \$500,000 made available to support the **School Mental Health Resources and Training Center**.

Legislative Agenda

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:

- **A. 1182 (Rosenthal)/ S. 4340 (Carlucci)** – providing for licensure of school psychologists; and
- **A. 5373 (Ortiz)/ S. 4217 (Jackson)** – 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 the community, while identifying additional funding streams for districts.

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We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments.

