

NEW YORK, NY (June 18, 2020) – Today, a coalition of parents, students, educators, mental health providers and advocates – including Legal Services NYC, the Parent Action Committee, NYU Metro Center, Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York, Vibrant Emotional Health, and others – releases a new report that provides a first-of-its-kind Roadmap for replacing NYC schools’ longstanding and problematic punitive responses to behavioral issues, including overuse of suspension and police, with healing-centered practices that allow students with trauma to heal, grow, and learn.

Now more than ever, students across the city are grappling with past and present trauma, including a global health pandemic and national reckoning with anti-Black violence by police. This report provides recommendations on concrete steps NYC schools can take to replace punitive structures with a healing-centered approach and provides parents/caregivers, students, and advocates with best practices to initiate the transition and sustain whole-school changes.

The Roadmap provides guidance for initiating these practices in the Bronx, the borough with the highest rates of childhood poverty in the country and where students face disproportionately high levels of childhood trauma.

Read the Executive Summary and Full Report [here](#).

“I am a mom of children with special needs. When my oldest son was small, he had his first experience with trauma in school,” said **Grisel Cardona, Parent Leader, New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee**. “He urinated on himself and five staff members circled around him. The school’s response scared him, triggering an angry tantrum. His wrist was injured in the process. Instead of helping my son and responding to his needs with empathy, the school administrator and lawyers told me my son could not come back to school. They pushed him out completely. My son has experienced so many traumatic incidents in school, and that trauma has never left him. We need our schools to make real change and to be supportive of students’ needs instead of punishing them and pushing them out. Healing-centered schools and the practices in this Roadmap can help us make that change.”

For decades, Bronx students have attended schools that punished or neglected their trauma-related needs. Students and parents/caregivers report that NYC schools’ punitive responses to behavior, such as frequent suspensions and police intervention; as well as racial trauma and bullying, problematic classroom dynamics that trigger trauma, and staff responses that minimize or neglect students’ academic and social-emotional needs, often exacerbate students’ existing trauma or lead to new trauma. As a result, students’ socio-emotional well-being and academic outcomes have suffered.

This report lays out a roadmap for NYC schools to adopt healing-centered educational practices that have been proven to positive outcomes for students’ social-emotional well-being, staff wellness, parent/caregiver trust, and school culture. In the case study of Schenectady City School District, which has transitioned to a trauma-sensitive program over the last several years including removing police and instituting a suspension diversion program, the schools have seen one-third fewer conflicts between students and reduced dropout rate.

As New York City reevaluates punitive structures and institutions across the City that have for so long perpetuated racial injustices and disparate socio-economic and justice outcomes for Black and brown New Yorkers, this report offers New York City a path forward and an opportunity to meaningfully address the racial inequities that have for so long plagued its education system.

Key recommendations for NYC Schools include:

- Removal of punitive and criminalizing school structures that undermine healing, including School Safety Agents, metal detectors, and criminalizing language;
- Adopting Suspension diversion programs
- Best practices to advance anti-racism through Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education, anti-bias education, peer reviews of staff responses to behavior, and community-building using restorative justice practices and other strategies;
- Targeted strategies to support students with specific needs related to bullying, behavioral crises, or housing instability;
- Individual healing-centered responses to behavior, including best practices for empathetically re-directing students who engage in disruptive behavior, strategies to help staff understand the roots of challenging behavior, and preventive strategies that staff can use to reduce disruptive behavior

The reports also provides students, parents/caregivers, and educators with best practices on how to initiate and sustain whole-school change to a healing-centered environment, including:

- How to get buy in from members of the school community, including principals, superintendents, staff, students, parents/caregivers
- How to build a “Transformation Team” to start conversations and facilitate long term plans
- How to shift current school practices, policies and cultures to adhere to a healing-centered model

- Education and trainings for staff, community and students to help people understand trauma and its impact

The Healing-Centered Schools Working Group includes Legal Services NYC, the Parent Action Committee, NYU Metro Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, Dignity in Schools Campaign-New York, Vibrant Emotional Health, New York Psychotherapy & Counseling Center, the YA-YA Network, Counseling in Schools and many individuals.

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“There are no shortcuts to addressing the root causes of mental and behavioral health issues,” said **Public Advocate Jumaane Williams**. “Implementing a Healing-Centered approach at the school level will help kids deal with trauma and will also give them the tools necessary to better care for themselves as they transition into adulthood. As we reimagine our City and its educational system we have this opportunity to lead with the kind of transformational change that will create a better social-emotional environment that promotes learning.”

“I am excited to leverage this report in our work in the Bronx to deepen healing centered practices,” said **Meisha Ross-Porter, NYC Department of Education Executive Superintendent for the Bronx**. “This proposal developed by the Healing Centered working group is aligned with our borough wide goals to interrupt suspension disproportionality and develop school practices rooted in healing and repairing relationships. The roadmap also creates a clear pathway to acknowledge the importance of school and community partnerships in advancing this work forward.”

“For too long, NYC schools have ignored the impacts of trauma rooted in systemic oppression and punished students for trauma-related behavior. In many cases, school responses have retraumatized students, pushing them out of school, criminalizing them, and causing long-term detrimental impacts on their mental health and well-being,” said **Katrina Feldkamp, an Equal Justice Works Fellow sponsored by the Arnold & Porter Foundation at Bronx Legal Services**. “Students with trauma don’t need lengthy suspensions or more police intervention, they need staff who understand their lives and a healing-centered environment that supports and uplifts them. This report provides schools and communities with practical tools to deconstruct NYC schools punitive model, address trauma rooted in systemic oppression, and create the emotional, psychological, and physical safety students need to learn and thrive.”

“Now more than ever, New York City needs to invest in healing centered schools,” said **Kate McDonough, Director of Dignity in Schools Campaign New York**. “A key component of that is investing in restorative justice so that schools in the Bronx and throughout the city can create positive school climates and get to the root of an issue when harm occurs. This roadmap creates a pathway towards transformation of our school system.”

“It takes one event to create trauma, but it takes a concerned group of caring people to end it. It is crucial to bring awareness and action about trauma-informed and healing practices to our educational system,” said **Cruz Fuksman and Anthony Otten, New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center**.

“Young people across New York City need and deserve schools that are committed to healing, joy, and growth. By lifting up the need to decriminalize schools, eliminate school police and harmful practices, the roadmap provides the core principles and next steps to help transform schools into safer, more healing environments. This is an important building block for the work to provide healing environments for young people,” said **Ashley C. Sawyer, Girls for Gender Equity**.

“It’s wonderful to see this effort for culturally inclusive education prosper, especially now when our communities need it most,” said **Rey-Anthony LaRuy, Community Organizer at Bridge Builders Community Partnership**.

“For students and families fighting difficult mental and physical situations and their residual trauma, this Roadmap and the transformation of schools offer a hope that has never existed in their lives and communities,” said **RueZalia Watkins, Education Services Specialist, Vibrant Emotional Health**.

“We absolutely need healing centered and trauma informed practices to replace the existing paradigm which disproportionately targets Black and Brown students, criminalizes young people, and generally pathologizes behavior as opposed to creating an asset-based learning environment,” said **Joy Leonard, Program Director at the New Settlement Program for Girls & Young Women**. “Meeting students where they are at requires seeing them, not as blank slates to be filled with rote information, but as humans already possessing unique and complex histories that have informed their development, who are ready to engage in learning with people who are ready to also learn from them.”

“Healing-Centered practices would be a major change in the right direction of healing children’s trauma at school,” said **Tanesha Grant of Parents Supporting Parents**. “Black and brown students suffer trauma in many different ways and are often punished for it. This roadmap is an excellent way of nurturing the child instead of compounding the trauma the child is already suffering.”

"Now more than ever, this roadmap from the Bronx Healing-Centered Schools Working Group is a significant and meaningful guide for school and community leaders to build the right environments for students to return to in the fall," said **Alice Bufkin, Director of Policy for Child and Adolescent Health at Citizens' Committee for Children.** "The Roadmap provides an important framework for addressing trauma and all the ways we need to support students and their families, both to recover from this crisis and as a blueprint moving forward."

"In one of the most segregated public school systems in the country, NYC students have to grapple with a vast apparatus of punitive measures deployed between the walls of their classrooms. This array of punitive systems contributes to academic disparities in addition to criminalizing and pathologizing our leaders of tomorrow," said **Shaktii Mann of the YA-YA Network.** "This Roadmap presents a blueprint for healing-centered schools that not only draws on, but also innovates upon the countless years of research and advocacy dedicated to transforming school climate so students can thrive. Recommendations and taskforces in the past have often taken a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to centering healing and justice in the places that students go to learn. What's unique about the Healing-Centered Schools Roadmap is that it outlines a plan to engage all stakeholders in an ongoing school-based process to identify their particular needs and mobilize with the approaches that students deserve."

"Black and brown students and families in this city faced the harshest, devastating impacts of the pandemic. The previous inequities in the school system only revealed themselves and worsened. Our students cannot afford to return to the 'normal' where marginalized students suffered and faced further trauma when receiving their education," said **Huiying B. Chan, Research and Policy analyst at the NYU Metro Center.** "We need healing-centered schools with a culturally responsive-sustaining lens. Educators and district leaders must create school environments where students have the space to love, respect, and honor themselves, their people, their histories, and each other. They must be supported to heal, and develop their knowledge, skills, and vision to shape change in society as we sorely need it now. This must be the new normal for all schools moving forward and this Roadmap shows us one way to get there."

"This roadmap represents a vital step towards recognizing and repairing the ongoing and pervasive legacy of trauma and oppression that remains systemically seeped in the structure of an institution that at its best acts as one of the most powerful means of improving all of our futures, one child at a time," said **Dr. Jacob Ham, Dr. Philippa Connolly, and Erin Young, Center for Child Trauma and Resilience at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.**