

Testimony of the Children's Defense Fund – New York
Before the Committee on Education

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Dacia A. Read
Sr. Public Policy Associate



Children's Defense Fund – New York
15 Maiden Lane, Suite 1200 New York, NY 10038
(212) 697-2323 www.cdfny.org

Good Morning. My name is Dacia Read. I am a Sr. Public Policy Associate at the Children's Defense Fund – New York. Thank you to Councilman Dromm and the other members of the City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify today.

The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start* in life, and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. It is with this mission in mind that CDF-NY brings a holistic approach to advocating for children at each stage of their youth. Across New York State, we act as a resource and partner for children, families and organizations, and are recognized as an authority in the endeavor to protect children and strengthen families. Our unique approach to improving conditions for children combines research, public education, policy development, community organizing and advocacy activities, making us an innovative leader for New York's children in the areas of health, education, juvenile justice and early childhood development.

Through our national Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign, CDF-NY works to replace school discipline policies and practices that push children out of schools with social and emotional supports that encourage a positive school climate and improve educational and social outcomes for children.

Guidance counselors are critical to reaching these goals. Able to provide a range of support services from academic and college counseling, to behavioral supports and other guidance interventions, guidance counselors, as defined by Introduction 403, provide skilled capacity to schools to address urgent issues contributing to students' well being, safety and success. The development of data points on guidance counselors across the five boroughs is crucial for determining appropriate future investments in guidance counselor placement and training. Introduction 403 is an important first step toward ensuring that guidance counselor capacity is sufficient to meet students' needs.

CDF-NY applauds and supports Introduction 403, as well as the spirit of the legislation to support college and career readiness. In furtherance of that spirit, we ask this Committee to consider the following two recommendations in relation to the legislation to ensure that it maximizes its full potential by developing data points on the critical role guidance counselors play in managing school discipline, in addition to traditional college and career counseling.

First, we propose that in addition to explicitly requiring reporting on academic, college and career counseling provided by school guidance counselors, Introduction 403 also explicitly require reporting on the following two types of services provided by guidance counselors:

- 1) Discipline Intervention, including but not limited to specific guidance interventions and restorative practice.
- 2) Transition Services for youth transitioning back into schools from suspension or juvenile placement.

Both of these types of services can be easily reported on, and are critical to building a supportive school culture for students by addressing their social and emotional needs in response to issues like bullying, trauma and other discipline-related interruptions of students' schooling.

Secondly, we propose that in addition to requiring reporting on guidance memorandums issued by the department regarding college preparedness, Introduction 403 also require reporting on any guidance memorandums or training provided to guidance counselors by schools or the DOE on restorative practice, positive behavior intervention supports, transition services and other guidance interventions to address bullying or discipline issues.

The City of New York – the DOE and community advocates – will stand in a significantly strengthened position if data points are collected related to the numbers and types of trainings provided to guidance counselors in schools by allowing for targeted efforts to supply needed training and community-support.

Well-trained, sufficiently supported guidance counselors are key to college and career readiness, not only for children who are preparing college applications in high school, but for children who need positive supports and discipline interventions in any grade on their pathway to college. Data points, by school, on numbers of guidance counselors, the college counseling and discipline supports they provide, and the type of training and support they receive from the department, are critical to informing sound policies and the provision of resources for guidance counselors across the City.

We are hopeful about the positive impact Introduction 403 can make on schools and students, and we look forward to working with the Council to support all children in staying in school, out of court, and on a pathway to college and career success with the help of sufficiently supported guidance counselors, and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.