



**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Education
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**By Gary Edwards
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Good evening Members of City Council, my name is Gary Edwards, I am a senior in high school, an education advocate with the Children's Defense Fund of New York, and I am here today to testify about divesting from school policing and investing in restorative and supportive alternatives. I strongly believe that a student-centered budget can change the structures of our school environment and broader school system.

Students have made it very clear. We want more social workers and guidance counselors, we want less policing. We want more opportunities in school including afterschool programs, and we want fewer metal detectors. We want more resources that can help with students' academic performance, and we want lower suspension rates. We want more opportunities for students to participate in school decision making, like through student councils and student-led clubs, and we want to stop being ignored.

Students are all different, with different needs, and with different ways of participating in school. With metal detectors, it puts kids at a higher risk of being discriminated against or harassed, especially by cops. Police are a barrier to participation, keeping us outside of the learning environment we want to get to know, exposing students to situations where they are criticized and policed based on their actions or looks they may have. For example, there are many kids that can't sit in their seats so they have a tendency of getting up all the time. That immediately brings attention to the cops because they are going to assume that the student is automatically doing something mischievous. I witness this happening almost every day. This is completely outrageous. This must change.

A budget focused on students is a budget focused on bettering the learning environment. To begin with, students will feel less neglected and overall have a more impactful learning experience. We need more guidance counselors to make sure the real safety of our students is secure and respected. We also need more social workers to work with students, to find out why students are who they are, and help them through life.

Overall, funding these budget priorities will create a better future for our kids, starting right now. We refuse to go down the same path we've been on if we know ahead of time that nothing is going to change. We cannot continue to witness kids being suspended and policed when really they need support and resources. To all individuals at this hearing, we can transform our schools, our education system, and our City, to exceed beyond its limit.