

City School District of Albany 2021-22 Legislative Priorities Support for Social-Emotional and Mental Health Initiatives

Supporting the social-emotional and mental health needs of our students and families has been a top priority for the City School District of Albany for several years. It has become an even more critical priority as we plan for the 2021-22 school year amidst the uncertainty and uneasiness that COVID-19 has caused in our community and throughout our society.

Social-emotional learning is ensuring that students are engaged in teaching and learning regardless of the instructional model, in-person or virtual instruction.

[One recent Gallup study](#) including 128 schools and more than 110,000 students found that student engagement and hope were significantly positively related to student academic progress (growth) in math, reading and all subjects combined, along with postsecondary readiness in math and writing. Focusing specifically on student engagement, the study found that schools in the top quartile of student engagement had significantly more students exceeding and meeting proficiency requirements than schools in the bottom quartile of engagement (Reckmeyer, 2019).

The current barrier that the district is facing is not exclusion from suspension, but maintaining engagement in the virtual environment. The virtual environment has created a new challenge: How do we as a district define participation and classroom attendance? Navigation in the new territory of remote learning has consumed significant energy and resources as we have focused on device obtainment and deployment; supporting student and parent/guardian understanding of expectations; and learning and corresponding via new platforms and expectations that have ultimately impacted a family's ability to establish a new normal.

Having the staff resources to support our students and families through this educational paradigm shift is critical. However, through a difficult budget cycle last spring and again in September as the economic realities of COVID-19 began to emerge, the district had to take unprecedented steps to reduce our budget and staffing. In a three-month period, these reductions included 16 behavioral specialists (19 to three); nine social workers (33-24); and five attendance staff (five to zero). The elimination of these positions has significantly impacted our ability to facilitate consistent best practices for attendance, fundamental supports and interventions.

With the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Albany has experienced a surge of violence in the community. Unfortunately, a number of current students and recent graduates have been

(more)

VISION STATEMENT

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

MISSION STATEMENT

We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

involved in these incidents. Student engagement and support through social-emotional learning and interventions is now more important than ever.

Moreover, the state's recent justice reforms – which our district fully supports and believes have been the right thing to do for New York's children – also have come with unintended consequences such as a dramatic increase in justice-involved students in our schools. Those students need additional services, and our district needs financial support to provide those services so that we can do our part to ensure that these well-intended reforms will have a positive impact on our community.

We recognize that these are difficult financial times statewide due to the pandemic. However, that also is why investment in social-emotional and mental health services is critical for our students and families. Anxiety and depression regarding increased financial instability and the potentially deadly consequences of COVID-19 are compounding the stress teens already encounter, especially in communities like Albany in which the impacts of poverty are already pervasive.

References

Reckmeyer, M. (2020, April 17). Focus on Student Engagement for Better Academic Outcomes. Retrieved November 16, 2020, from <https://www.gallup.com/education/267521/focus-student-engagement-better-academic-outcomes.aspx>