

The graphic features a 2x2 grid of colored quadrants: top-left is red, top-right is orange, bottom-left is green, and bottom-right is blue. Each quadrant contains a solid curved line and a dashed curved line of the same color. The text 'NYC Youth Demands' is centered across the grid in white. A horizontal dashed line is positioned between the top and bottom rows of quadrants.

# NYC Youth Demands

Organizing Organizations:

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, Children's Defense Fund – NY, Dignity in Schools – NY, Integrate NYC, NYCLU, Youth Power Coalition

**Our vision** for education in New York City includes safe, restorative, healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must pursue policies that value and respect the dignity of students, caregivers, and their communities. This requires providing schools equitable resources, adopting a culturally responsive curriculum, preventing trauma, repairing harm, and promoting restorative practices.

Today, New York City is far from this vision. Our schools face troubling realities:

- NYC has the most segregated school system in America. According to the New York City Council, in our public schools, 74.6% of Black and Latinx students attend a school with less than 10% white students. Additionally, 34.3% of white students attend a school with more than 50% white students.<sup>1</sup>
- Only 77.3% of the 1.1 million children in the DOE system will graduate on time and only 55% of NYC high school graduates will graduate college-ready.<sup>2 3</sup>
- 1 in ten NYC public schools students is houseless.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, in a nation in which 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker,<sup>5</sup> New York City has more school safety agents (SSAs) than any other school district in the U.S. The presence of police in our schools has disproportionately impacted students who are low-income, Black, and Latinx, who are more likely to be the subject of exclusionary discipline and police response at school than their white peers.

Our work requires the leadership of our City's officials, including the City Council, the Mayor's Office, the Public Advocate, and the Department of Education. Our vision also requires the active participation of students and families, who are calling on the City's leaders to be anti-racists and to fight for racial justice and equity. Our officials must ensure that our schools are safe, high-quality, holistic, and globally transformative, educational experiences for all students regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or gender.

For this to be successful, it will require strategic legislative action, budget commitments, and leadership within youth-serving agencies of the City to disrupt the status quo. Inertia and generations of inequity in our school system can no longer continue. Our city legislators cannot continue to prioritize sustained surveillance, criminalization, and incarceration. Legislators must *instead* address, provide, and assist with both resources and structural shifts to end houselessness, housing insecurity, food insecurity, segregated and unequal schools, continued detention and suspensions, separation of families, and more.

In order to create an education system that no longer fails to serve our youth and marginalized communities, legislators must take action – especially as we approach two pivotal election seasons. Failure to establish platforms and strategies that clearly address the needs of NYC's most marginalized students and families will result in failed campaigns. Meeting these demands is long overdue.

This paper outlines our blueprint for change in New York City. We demand:

**STRUCTURAL  
SHIFTS:**

- Police-Free Schools
- An end to all structures that systemically push students out of classes as part of policing culture
- Fully-funding our schools so as to center student success and socio-emotional support
- Expanding and transforming youth civic power

**CULTURAL  
SHIFTS:**

- Educators center trauma-informed approaches
- City leaders reimagine, fund, and staff meaningful student and community-led safety strategies.
- Schools that center healing
- Expanded, evidence-based training for school teams so as to eliminate the criminalization of marginalized students

**PEDAGOGICAL  
SHIFTS:**

- Schools institutionalize & fund comprehensive sex education in NYC; culturally responsive education; and civic education
- Equitable distribution of technological resources to all students
- Language access for families and students
- Equitable access for students and families with disabilities and/or who are neurodivergent

## **Our Policy Recommendations**

### **(1) Police Free Schools**

We must remove school safety agents (SSAs), uniformed police officers, metal detectors, surveillance equipment, biometric facial surveillance, and all other equipment and personnel associated with policing from schools. Police free schools mean schools free from policing, surveillance, and cultures, habits, and tools that continuously control and oppress youth.

When we say police-free schools, we are demanding not only that police infrastructure, culture, and practice be removed from schools, but also that this system is replaced by youth, parent, and educator-led solutions that center liberation and restorative justice. Policing resources must be reinvested in initiatives promoting restorative justice, conflict resolution, and social and emotional learning that were included in the City's 2019 school climate package.<sup>6</sup>

To advance this policy agenda requires that the City:

- Remove policing personnel from our schools, whether under the supervision of NYPD or the Department of Education
- End all structures that systemically push students out of classes as part of policing culture
- Discontinue the NYPD Youth Initiative and the Transit Bureau Officers
- Remove metal detectors and surveillance equipment from schools
- Reimagine, fund, and staff meaningful student and community-led safety strategies
- Create voting positions for youth on School Leadership Teams, Community Education Councils, and the Panel for Education Policy

## **(2) Fully Fund and Adequately Implement Restorative Practices**

The City adopted restorative justice as a key tenet of its school climate reforms in 2019. The intent behind restorative practices is to enable all people to remedy conflict or harm together, and prevent unwelcome behavior by facilitating relationship-building, acknowledging the root issues, setting clear behavioral expectations, and sustaining a positive school climate. Unfortunately, there is no clear timeline for bringing this model into all of the City's schools, and limited resources for training, staffing, and youth engagement in the process to make it effective.

The City must:

- Construct an implementation plan for citywide restorative practices in all elementary, middle school, and high schools based on established best practices
- Approve and publish a transparent, multi-year budget which would enable the complete and transformative implementation of restorative practices in schools
- Center youth leadership in school implementation plans

### **(3) Fully Fund Student Support Staff**

To be successful students need support to navigate the education system all the way through graduation. Currently, New York City does not meet nationally recommended standards for appropriate therapeutic support staff-to-student ratios. The current national recommendation is 1:250<sup>7</sup> while in New York City the ratio is 1:371.<sup>8</sup> There are only 4,525 guidance counselors and social workers serving 1.1 million students across the city. The National Association of Social Workers suggests a 1:50 staff to student ratio for students with intensive needs.<sup>9</sup>

The City must make investments in student support staff (counselors and social workers), and, to the extent possible, ensure that support staff hired and assigned to particular schools come from the community being served.

Staff working with students must employ trauma-informed approaches and implement policies that actively seek to address the impact of policing and criminalization on students, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students, and work towards healing the related trauma. School-based supports must center healing and improve access to more comprehensive health services *and* culturally-competent mental health service spaces for youth – especially youth of color, immigrant youth, queer youth, trans and gender non-conforming youth, youth with disabilities, and other marginalized youth.

The City must:

- Ensure that students receive the social-emotional supports outlined in the 2019 School Climate Package, which are needed to excel inside and outside of the classroom.
- Baseline City budget support to launch and sustain a mental health continuum to support students with significant behavioral health needs in designated neighborhoods around high-need schools to reduce reliance on NYPD officers and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) “child in crisis” response.
- Hire and deploy counselors and social workers City-wide and prioritize students from high-needs schools to reach the necessary school support staff at a ratio of 1:100. This ensures that resources are dedicated equitably to high-needs communities that have gone the longest without adequate support.
- Employ support staff who are trained to provide culturally competent support to students of diverse backgrounds and identities.

#### **(4) Invest in Training and Curricula**

Students learn best when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum and know that their identity is affirmed at school. This requires that our educators are equipped to be anti-racist, anti-sexist, and youth-centered *and* to offer high-quality, transformative, culturally relevant educational experiences to all.

Our schools should center trauma-informed approaches and commit to and implement policies that deliberately and actively seek to address the impact of policing on students, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students, then seek to work towards healing the related trauma.

The City must:

- Ensure that educators and support staff are trained to support the successful implementation of culturally responsive practices.
- Create and fully staff an Office of Culturally Responsive Education to ensure culturally responsive education is implemented appropriately throughout the entire school system
- Require culturally responsive education training be accessible and fully funded for all staff, parents, and students
- Support schools in their efforts to create spaces for student-led conversation, exploration, and leadership around race, culture, and other core identities
- Institutionalize and fund comprehensive sex education in all schools
- Institutionalize and fund civic education in all schools
- Center language justice in training for administrative, teachers, and support staff in schools, and provide schools with resources necessary for students and families to fully participate in their school communities.

## **(5) Establish Robust Transparency and Accountability**

We believe that the accountability and transparency measures below will help us embark on a path to realizing our vision of students in New York City. This includes:

- **Reporting Bill for Equitable Resources**

In order to ensure an equitable distribution of technological resources to all New York City public school students, specifically those who are underserved and high needs the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) will be required to maintain, sustain, and update a reporting system that will allow for the tracking of all devices to all students. The reporting system will be required to collect data broken down by school district, school, borough, gender, race, whether or not the student is in temporary housing, or alternative care in order for us to have the ability to address any disparities which may arise, targeting a specific group of students.

- **Reporting Bill for Student Therapeutic Support Staff**

A Student Therapeutic Support Staff reporting bill will allow for full transparency of the success and failures of therapeutic support staff in New York City public schools. This reporting bill will require the following data in order to achieve a holistic understanding of our system: demographic information on all support staff (counselors, social workers, therapist), student population served, types of services used, the total number of students utilizing services, and whether services were provided in lieu of discipline. This bill should coincide with administering student surveys to allow youth to share their experiences using these services.

- **Youth must be a part of School Leadership Teams and there need be a protocol for sharing information about School Leadership Teams**

Schools must be required to make an active push to inform the school community of opportunities to be a part of the School Leadership Team (SLT). This active push will be made directly to the student body and their families in order to ensure a diverse set of voices on a team that directly impacts the school.

- **Independent School Surveys**

The data should be maintained by an entity outside of DOE to ensure unbiased data maintenance. Also, student data disaggregated by identities and backgrounds and used to create an equitable school system *not* to pathologize and criminalize youth.

- **Youth Power reporting**

Schools must be required to regularly report on the civic power their students maintain – especially as it relates to voting bodies that administer the school budget and have decision making powers.

Organizing Organizations:

**The Brotherhood/Sister Sol**

**Children's Defense Fund – NY**

**Dignity in Schools – NY**

**Integrate NYC**

**NYCLU**

**Youth Power Coalition**

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<sup>1</sup> New York City Council, School Diversity in NYC. 2019, <https://council.nyc.gov/data/school-diversity-in-nyc/#:~:text=However%2C%20New%20York%20City%20public,more%20than%2050%25%20white%20students.>

<sup>2</sup> NYC's 2019 Graduation Rate Inches Up to 77% . January 16, 2020, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/1/16/21121757/nyc-s-2019-graduation-rate-inches-up-to-77>

<sup>3</sup> More NYC High School Students are College-Bound – and 'College Ready'. November 21, 2019, <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2019/11/21/21121750/more-nyc-high-school-graduates-are-college-bound-and-college-ready>

<sup>4</sup> The Children in the Shadows: New York City's Homeless Students. September 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/09/magazine/homeless-students.html>

<sup>5</sup> ACLU, Counselors and No Cops: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>

<sup>6</sup> *Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, Chancellor Carranza Announce Major Expansion of Social-Emotional Learning and Restorative Justice Across All City Schools.* June 20, 2019, <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/314-19/mayor-de-blasio-first-lady-mccray-chancellor-carranza-major-expansion-of/#/0>

<sup>7</sup> ACLU, Counselors and No Cops: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>

<sup>8</sup> ACLU, Counselors and No Cops: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students. 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>

<sup>9</sup> NASW. Standards for School Social Work Services, 2012