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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid, Advocates for Children of New York Commend the NYC Department of Education for Announcing New Team to Serve Children in Foster Care

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society and Advocates for Children of New York** commend the recent announcement that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) is [creating](#) a team dedicated to serving the unique needs of students in foster care. This announcement comes after Legal Aid and Advocates for Children released a [report](#) this year highlighting the urgent need for the DOE to launch an office focused solely on students in foster care.

At the time of the report, the DOE did not have such an office, team, or even a single staff member dedicated to supporting youth in foster care, a group of students particularly in need of specialized support. More than 30 organizations, including foster care agencies, groups of educators, and organizations representing children and parents in Family Court, had joined with Advocates for Children and Legal Aid in calling for a DOE team to focus on this group of students and equip schools with the knowledge and resources they need to serve students in foster care and their families effectively.

The need for these services in New York City is great: approximately 7,000 students spend time in foster care during any given school year. They are disproportionately Black and Latinx and come from the city's poorest communities. Only 42.2% of New York City students in foster care graduated on time in 2020, the lowest graduation rate of any student group and 36.6 percentage points lower than the rate for students not in foster care

The new team will serve as a point of contact for schools, families, and child welfare professionals with questions about students in foster care. They will be responsible for training and supporting school staff as to the rights of these students and their families, including their biological parents. They will support parent involvement with their children's education and implement new tracking to improve academic outcomes. They will also be responsible for all policies that relate to children in foster care and be tasked with improving opportunities and programming tailored to those students.

"Students in foster care are among the most vulnerable of New York City students, and they face tremendous challenges, ranging from trauma to frequent school changes, that can negatively impact their learning," said **Dawne Mitchell, Attorney-in-Charge of the Juvenile Rights Practice at the Legal Aid Society**. "The creation of a dedicated office for children in foster care within the DOE provides these students with essential services and helps ensure that their local schools have the training and resources that they need to meet these students' needs, allowing them to be successful in both academics and social-emotional learning. We look forward to working with the DOE to create a greater network of support for children and families in the foster system."

"For too long, students in foster care have been overlooked by the DOE — with no staff to answer questions about their specific needs, help schools understand their rights, or develop programs to support them," said **Kim Sweet, AFC's Executive Director**. "With the right support, school can be an important source of stability to students in foster care at a time in their lives when so much is unfamiliar and uncertain. We look forward to working with the incoming administration to maximize the positive impact of this new team on the lives of children in care."

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 140 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. www.legalaidnyc.org

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform. www.advocatesforchildren.org