



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Dan Juan
973-914-5519

Youth Equity Stewardship And Mindful Schools Form Joint Program For Paterson Public Schools

For the 2023-2024 school year, Corwin Press and Mindful Schools have created a joint program addressing equity in schools across the Paterson Public Schools district. The program will combine elements of Corwin Press' Youth Equity Stewardship (YES) program and Mindful Schools' practices. This is the second time that the YES program, founded and conducted by Wade Antonio Colwell and Benjie Howard, has been used in the District and will involve the participation of a different cohort of schools. The pilot joint program is being funded for one year as part of a \$125,000 grant from The Cigna Group Foundation's *Healthier Kids For Our Future* initiative. Cigna Group Foundation has supported Mindful Schools programming in the District for three years, this year marking its first time supporting YES. The program will have student leaders collaborate with their advisors and one another to make positive changes at their five respective schools. The second cohort, comprised of Joseph A. Taub Middle School, International High School, School No. 28, School No. 16, and School No. 24, had their program kick-off on November 14.

The YES program is designed to help students plan and deliver professional development for their respective school's faculty and administration. Each marking period, all five schools will return to School No. 16 to meet for YES Days to discuss projects and review their progress. In this new collaboration, Mindful Schools primary focus is support for the advisors. Argos Gonzalez, Head of Instruction for Mindful Schools, and his colleagues will meet with the advisors after each YES day to debrief and provide guidance regarding their school-based YES sessions.

Back in June, the first cohort of schools wrapped up a YES two-year program. Schools involved in the first cohort were Charles J. Riley School 9, Dr. Frank Napier School of Technology, John F. Kennedy High School, Eastside High School, and Rosa L. Parks High School of Fine and Performing Arts. The results of the program have made an impact on the relationship between teachers and students.

"The YES Program has helped our students understand how they can interact with each other in a more compassionate way," said Laura Fitzgerald, an advisor for the Rosa L. Parks contingent. "For teachers, it has helped us better understand how to consider what the students may be experiencing outside of the classroom and consider how we may assist within the classroom, both academically, emotionally and socially."

Mindful Schools' Head of Instruction Argos Gonzalez said, "We know that students absorb the stress of adults, and that young people learn better in environments that are emotionally supportive. When teachers 'put on their oxygen mask first' and regulate their own nervous systems, they become more effective in modeling and sharing transformative practices with youth."

Assistant Superintendent Cicely Warren introduced the YES program to Paterson and has championed making Mindful Schools programming available across the district. "We believe relationships are at the core of everything we do in our district: academics, social- emotional learning (SEL), mental health," she said. "The

District wants to support our staff in nurturing their own personal well-being while also giving them tools to better connect with our students and be in service to our community's needs.”

“Mindfulness and empathy should be part of a core set of principles in modern education,” said Superintendent of Schools Laurie W. Newell of Paterson Public Schools. “The District recognizes this and that is why we are excited to have this program expanded. School staff are the frontline of education and it’s important that the District administration recognize their need for self-care and do something about it. Teacher burnout has been a substantial problem for many years and wellness training can help our schools in retaining our children’s educators. On the other hand, we need to recognize that our students have a valid voice in their education and relationship with their educators.”

Photo 1: Students from Joseph A. Taub Middle School listen to the presentation given at the kick-off YES Day at School No. 16 on November 14, 2023.

Photo 2: YES program founders (L-R) Wade Antonio Colwell and Benjie Howard speak to the students gathered in School No. 16’s gymnasium for the kick-off YES Day on November 14, 2023.

Photo 3: (L-R) Mindful Schools’ Schoolwide Implementation Manager Laura Schrier and Head Of Instruction Argos Gonzalez speak to the students gathered in School No. 16’s gymnasium for the kick-off YES Day on November 14, 2023.