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New Anti-Bullying Initiative to Offer Telephone Hotline After School Hours

Service Will Eventually Include Text Message and Online Chat Assistance

A new anti-bullying campaign launched today will offer students counseling by mental health professionals for incidents both inside and outside the classroom. The service will begin Wednesday afternoon (Oct. 19, 2011) by offering a telephone hotline in the afternoon and evening, and next January adding assistance through text messaging and online chat.

The BRAVE (Building Respect, Acceptance, and Voice through Education) campaign is being launched by the UFT in collaboration with the Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA-NYC), the New York City Council, and community groups. It will connect students with clinicians and mental health professionals who can provide supportive listening, crisis intervention, suicide risk assessments and advice on crisis de-escalation.

UFT President Michael Mulgrew said, “Every student deserves a safe and nurturing learning environment. We joined with the City Council and the DOE to create the Respect for All program, which provides training for staff and students in resisting bullying, and manages the reporting of bullying incidents in schools. Our hotline and additional training through the BRAVE campaign will add to this by providing a place kids can turn to when school is over.”

“Bullying is a growing issue in young people’s lives, and the Mental Health Association of New York City is proud to be a partner in the BRAVE line. We are thrilled to extend our expertise to help kids manage the emotional challenges that arise from bullying and cyber-bullying by adding this innovative initiative to our family of confidential crisis services that includes LifeNet, the addiction Hopeline, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline,” said Giselle Stolper, President and CEO of MHA-NYC. “We look forward to working with UFT to help make the BRAVE campaign a life saving resource to the 1.1 million public schoolchildren that call this city home.”

“The City Council has long been committed to ending bullying in our schools,” said Council Speaker Christine Quinn. “That’s why we created the Respect for All initiative in partnership with DOE in 2007, and why we held a cyber-bullying summit this summer, but there’s always more we can do. It takes a village to fight bullying and the BRAVE campaign expands training for educators and resources for students, both of which we know are effective

ways to reduce bias-based harassment. It's efforts like these that help New York City remain a national leader in bullying prevention."

"Every day, young people are all too often subjected to the harmful effects of bullying. They see it, they hear it, and of course they fear it," said City Council Education Committee Chairperson Robert Jackson. "I applaud UFT's BRAVE initiative which so well complements the goals of the New York City Council's Respect for All policy by providing a wrap-around approach to this devastating phenomenon. This initiative will make it easier for a student to have the courage to seek the help they need before it becomes too late. "

"Principals and teachers work every day to build safe and respectful school cultures and implement activities that support the Respect for All initiative," Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott said. "The new BRAVE campaign builds on this support for anti-bullying programs."

"I am excited to partner with the UFT, New York City Council, New York City Department of Education, Mental Health Association of New York City, and community groups, and I believe this initiative will have a positive impact by providing our school children with a needed resource in the fight against bullying. I want to commend President Michael Mulgrew and the members of the UFT for creating this initiative," said Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes.

"Serious criminal acts can result from harassing tweets or texts within and around schools," Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., said. "Being smart on crime means addressing cyber-bullying at its inception and providing appropriate tools to curb it. Since I took office, we have conducted nearly 60 cyber-bullying presentations in Manhattan schools for students and parents. The services provided by the UFT's BRAVE program will enhance our crime prevention efforts by pro-actively addressing cyber-bullying in our schools."

"I commend the UFT for taking this initiative to help victims of bullying in our schools. The anti-bullying hotline will be a tremendous resource for students who are being intimidated. It will compliment the implementation of the Dignity for All Students Act, a measure my colleagues and I proudly supported. This law becomes effective next year, and it will prohibit harassment against students in school so that all of our young people can learn in a setting that is respectful, safe and free of bullying," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

"To give our children the world class education they deserve we must first give them a school environment free of harassment and discrimination. The BRAVE campaign is another step forward in making our schools safer, and our students stronger and better prepared for a bright future. The Democratic Conference, guided by the passion and leadership of my close friend Senator Tom Duane, has worked tirelessly to support anti-bullying initiatives and will continue this fight until all children have a safe and respectful school environment," said State Senate Democratic Leader John Sampson.

"As the sponsor of the Dignity for All Students Act, I enthusiastically support the UFT's commitment to establishing and operating the anti-bullying hotline. Far too many students suffer from daily acts of intimidation, and they frequently have no one to turn to for help. Thanks to the UFT, students who are being harassed will now be able to receive professional assistance. The hotline and the Dignity for All Students Act let the victims know they matter

and deserve the same level of respect and civility afforded every other member of their school's student body. They also send the message that a school culture that tolerates bullying is unacceptable," said Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell.

"Bullying is one of the greatest obstacles facing our students today and any effort that will help provide students with the safe environment they deserve is welcome. School should be a place where all children have the opportunity to realize their potential and I applaud the UFT for taking action to help them do so. Most importantly, I applaud everyone involved for showing those who are bullied that they are not alone," said Senator John Flanagan, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

"Bullying, whether in the schoolyard or in cyberspace, inflicts short and long-term harm and poisons the learning environment of a school. The BRAVE Campaign empowers students, teachers, and parents to fight the problem of bullying and provide support to victims," said New York City Comptroller John C. Liu

"As parents, my wife Chirlane and I do everything we can to keep our kids safe. But we know it takes support both inside the classroom and out to prevent bullying," said Public Advocate Bill de Blasio. "BRAVE is a powerful initiative that lets any student know that help is never more than a phone call away. I applaud and thank the UFT for this important step in the fight to keep every child safe."

Students can call for services in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese and other languages via real-time translation. It will operate Monday through Friday from 2:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The phone hotline will be active beginning today and the online chat and text message service will launch January, 3, 2012.

The campaign will also hold monthly workshops for parents and school personnel in every borough, and encourage schools to develop anti-bullying programs. BRAVE will focus on topics like recognizing and preventing bullying, cyber-bullying, LGTB bullying, conflict resolution techniques, peer mediation and student communication skills.

The campaign will encourage schools to design, or enhance, their anti-bullying programs by partnering with community groups and mental health professionals and parent workshops will be held in every borough to involve local parent and community groups.

The BRAVE Campaign will be funded by a UFT grant of more than \$50,000 in its first year.

Hotline: 212.709.3222

Monday through Friday from 2:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.