



Reporters Corey Mitchell and Denisa R. Superville discuss and analyze what's happening in the nation's school districts and dissect trends in education leadership and management.

Education Week

Chicago Pledges \$26 Million to Add Social Workers, Special Education Staff

By Denisa R. Superville on July 16, 2018 5:31 PM

The Chicago school district and the city plan to spend \$26 million to hire 254 social workers and special education case managers for students in high-need schools.

Full-time social workers will be placed in 160 schools, and 78 schools will receive one or two special education case managers in the 2018-19 school year, the district said in a press release Monday.

Schools with large populations of students in poverty or temporary housing, or a lot of English learners or refugees will reap the largest benefits, according to the district.

The 94 special education case managers will ease the workload of teachers and counselors, who had previously received a stipend to take on special education case management.

The case managers will focus on ensuring that students receive the services required by their Individualized Education Plans or IEPs, according to the district.

The Chicago Teachers' Union has been calling for more social workers, psychologists, certified school nurses, and case managers but said the proposed staff increase falls short of what's needed. The union said the city will need to hire nearly a thousand social workers to meet the recommended ratio of student to social worker.

Brandon Johnson, a middle school teacher, CTU organizer, and candidate for the Cook County Board of Commissioners, said during an afternoon press conference that the response to calls for additional nurses, psychologists, and counselors was inadequate. Ratios of student to support staff are still unacceptably high, he said, with more than 2,500 students for every nurse, he said.

"Given the state of Chicago right now, the amount of trauma that our students, and our parents, and our teachers are experiencing, day in and day out—with six more murders

just this weekend, a city that is [in] unrest—this mayor has demonstrated that not only is he inadequate, but he is incapable of leading and responding in some of the most difficult times that this city has seen," he said.

Janice Jackson, the district's CEO, said in the announcement that the "significant investment to promote equitable access to trained support staff will help ensure additional resources are directed to the city's highest need communities so that all students can have a fair shot at a high quality education."

"We cannot allow a student's life circumstances to determine whether or not they will access a high quality education," Jackson said. "By providing our highest need schools with dedicated social workers and case managers, we can make a significant difference in the lives of the students who need our support the most."