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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**SAN FRANCISCO TO PROVIDE EXPANDED MENTAL
HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS**

With the support of a private donor, the City and San Francisco Unified School District will provide expanded mental health services for middle school students starting fall 2021

San Francisco, CA — Mayor London N. Breed and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Superintendent Dr. Vincent Matthews today announced that, with the help of a private contribution from an anonymous donor, the Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF) and the School District will be able to expand mental health services for SFUSD middle school students over the next four years.

Starting with three schools in the fall of 2021 and gradually expanding, the DCYF-SFUSD Middle School Beacon Centers Mental Health Initiative will provide culturally relevant mental health and wellness services for students. The Initiative will eventually serve students in 13 middle schools and three K-8 schools with existing Beacon Centers, which are operated in collaboration with community-based organizations. A combination of funding sources, including a private contribution from an anonymous donor of over \$15 million over the next four years, will allow SFUSD and DCYF to build upon existing models, including the High School Wellness Centers and Beacon Centers, to enhance and expand more full-service community schools.

“Even before COVID-19, our young people were experiencing challenges around mental health and wellness, and we’ve been investing in efforts to provide students with comprehensive support,” said Mayor Breed. “As a result of the pandemic and the challenges that have come along with it, our students and their families have been having an even more difficult time, and there’s a heightened need for more mental health services for our young people. With this generous contribution, we’ll be able to provide more San Francisco students with the level of care and resources they need to live healthy lives. As our students prepare to return to the classroom this fall, we want them and their families to know that our City and schools are ready to support them however we can.”

“We are dedicated to creating school communities that fully serve students’ well-being, growth and development. As we plan for all students to return to in-person learning in the fall, it is critical that our schools have the resources necessary to serve students’ mental, physical and emotional health as well as their academic progress,” said SFUSD Superintendent Dr. Vincent Matthews. “This donation will enable more access to timely mental health and wellness support



for thousands of young people. It is truly one of the best gifts anyone could give our students during this time of unprecedented challenges.”

More than half of all mental illness manifests before the age of 14 and reaching vulnerable children and their families through school-based or school-linked supports provides a viable and scalable way to address mental health challenges early. The DCYF-SFUSD Middle School Beacon Centers Mental Health Initiative will provide comprehensive support to thousands of middle school students and parents through enhanced comprehensive health education and direct clinical services. Strategies will be built around the existing partnership between DCYF Beacon Centers and SFUSD through a collaborative, youth-centered, school-based program model.

“This investment in supporting the mental health needs of our City’s middle school students is critical. As we emerge from the pandemic, the resilience of our youth and young people may be overestimated as they struggle through the challenges of distance learning, restricted social interactions, and an overwhelming sense of loss,” shared DCYF Executive Director Maria Su. “The collective efforts of the City, School District, and Beacon Community Schools will empower our middle school students and their families with access to much needed supports.”

Designed to support the implementation of the SFUSD’s Comprehensive Community Schools Framework utilizing the Beacon Model, San Francisco Beacon Community School programs are student-centered, grounded in partnership and focused on the needs of students, families, and the school community. The programs provide powerful learning, integrated health and social supports, and authentic family and community engagement to develop students’ cognitive, social, emotional, and civic capacities. Each Beacon Center is operated by a non-profit agency that works closely with their school’s leadership to provide targeted and time-sensitive services to students and families.

SFUSD has long been a leader in implementing systems to support the emotional and physical well-being of students, including implementing restorative and trauma-informed practices. This new middle school wellness services will also expand on San Francisco’s Wellness Initiative, a program that is currently integrated at 19 high school campuses. Wellness Centers provide safe, confidential settings where teens can access health experts and gain the skills, they need to cope with complex issues such as stress, trauma, suicidal ideations, bullying, depression, self-esteem, drug and alcohol use, sexual health, and relationships. Students learn positive, lifelong habits that contribute to their well-being and success, and ultimately, to the health of the communities in which they live. One of the first school-based program for adolescent health and wellness of its kind, the Initiative was made possible through a unique partnership between DCYF, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, and SFUSD. By leveraging the resources of each agency, student health is addressed from a citywide perspective.

SFUSD aimed to sustain access to services and support student mental health while school buildings were closed due to COVID-19 by conducting Social Emotional Learning activities in remote learning, offering technology equipment and support, providing meal drop offs, developing a hub for students to easily access support services and linkages to resources, providing student support sessions individually or in groups via video conference, and offering a



multilingual phone line to connect with families with limited English proficiency. SFUSD also implemented a district-wide family wellness check-in protocol to check in with families regarding student wellbeing and to offer support when needed. The District established Coordinated Care Teams, which deliberately organize student and family support activities and share information among all the participants concerned with a student's success and plans to build on this practice.

In January 2021, Mayor Breed announced San Francisco would provide new mental health resources for SFUSD students and their families who need behavioral health crisis support. The City expanded the Mobile Response Team, which provides personalized mental health and wellness services for children and youth who are referred to the program, including in-person interventions during the pandemic. SFUSD students are now eligible for services from the Mobile Response Team, and additional staff and behavioral health clinicians will enable the program to serve approximately 80 additional students and families.

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