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United Neighborhood Houses Statement on New York City School Closures *Students, families, and essential workers suffer most from lack of proper planning*

NEW YORK – November 19, 2020 – As City leadership confronts a second wave of COVID-19, UNH Executive Director Susan Stamler commented:

“Students, families, and the essential workers who support them are experiencing déjà vu: As New York City sees its worst COVID-19 spike since the onset of the pandemic this spring, our city’s leaders are repeating their mistakes when it comes to the safety and education of students and their families. Closing public schools mid-week with limited guidance for families, staff, and childcare providers is irresponsible and dismissive of the hard work taking place in our communities to bring the transmission rate down while offering safe and enriching spaces for our city’s youth.

“Poor planning and communication create an uncertainty that is unacceptable eight months into the pandemic, especially when it disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color that have been hit hardest by COVID-19. Expecting community-based Learning Labs, child care and pre-K programs to return to business as usual without comprehensive and clearly communicated plans in place in the event of potential citywide school closures is frustrating. It is time for the City and State to treat the vital work being done by the nonprofit sector with respect and to ensure they have the resources to serve their communities.

“Furthermore, we must question our city’s priorities when we have thresholds for closing schools but not for closing other industries. In the spring, New Yorkers went to extraordinary lengths to lower transmission rates. It is time for our city’s leaders to pursue all options to keeping our transmission rates low, before community spread gets out of hand, while recognizing that positive COVID-19 tests in public schools have been significantly lower than the general population to date.

“Despite financial limitations, confusing and sometimes contradictory direction from City agencies, and the absence of reliable and consistent distribution of health and safety supplies for the essential human services workforce, settlement houses have found ways to secure and distribute PPE to communities across the city as well as food, technology supports, and other resources to keep our vulnerable neighbors prepared and cared for. It is children and families who suffer the most from the city’s indecision and disorganization. The city must plan ahead with all New Yorkers in mind.”

About United Neighborhood Houses

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 44 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York’s settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels. For more information, visit <http://www.unhny.org/>.

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