

Dawn Yuster

Dawn Yuster is a civil rights lawyer with more than twenty years of experience advocating for racial, social, and mental health justice. Dawn's legal advocacy is informed by her own experiences in the mental health system and the many years of challenges she has faced finding services and supports that meet her needs.

As an expert on mental health, education, school discipline and police, and juvenile/criminal justice issues, Dawn is frequently asked to speak with the press and at conferences. She serves on the New York State Education Department Safe Schools Task Force, the New York City Mental Health Continuum Steering Committee, and the Executive Leadership Team of the Social Justice Policy Collective advocating for a Person-Centered Mental Health Services Act in New York.

Since 2013, Dawn has been the Director of Advocates for Children of New York's (AFC's) School Justice Project, which provides advocacy and legal representation to families of students with behavioral and mental health challenges, students facing school discipline and policing, and students in the juvenile/criminal legal system. Dawn also leads the organization's systemic reform work promoting trauma-informed, restorative, and culturally-responsive alternatives to unnecessary 911 and Emergency Medical Services calls and student transports to hospital emergency rooms, classroom removals, suspensions from school, police intervention, and arrests for student behavior that can and should be effectively supported and addressed at school. Dawn conceived and co-authored AFC's reports, *Police Response to Students in Emotional Crisis: A Call for Comprehensive Mental Health and Social-Emotional Support for Students in Police-Free Schools* and *Child in Crisis: Police Response to Students in Emotional Distress*. Dawn led the citywide campaign that resulted in New York City's investment of \$5 million for the Mental Health Continuum, an innovative, evidence-based model for supporting students with significant mental health needs by integrating a range of direct services and developing stronger partnerships between schools and hospital-based mental health clinics.

Previously, Dawn was First Deputy Director of the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs' Research and Investigation's Legal Unit, a public defense attorney at the Legal Aid Society, and an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union and the New York Civil Liberties Union.

Dawn graduated with honors from Northwestern University School of Law, Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Pennsylvania, and from the Bronx High School of Science. She is also a dancer who has performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.