



**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education**

**Re: New York City Council Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget**

**March 25, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Committee today.

My name is Maggie Moroff. I am the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition. We are parents, educators, advocates, and academics who work together to push for system-wide changes to improve day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes for youth with disabilities in New York City.

Along with other concerns the Coalition has raised with the DOE over the years, ARISE members have been advocating for the DOE to significantly increase literacy rates for students with disabilities. While the current DOE seems to share this goal, they need sufficient resources to make that a reality. That is why we were happy to see the Mayor include \$3.2 million to support literacy development for students with disabilities, including students with dyslexia, in his proposed budget. This funding, to be spent over the next 5 years, represents a great start, but it's only a start. We urge the Council to fund this initiative as a down payment on what we hope will be a longer-term commitment to ensuring that every student in NYC learns to read proficiently.

**ARISE Coalition Members:** Adaptive Design Association, Advocates for Children of New York, AHRC New York City, Cathy Albisa, Mark Alter, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education & Human Development, New York University, David C. Bloomfield, Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, Bronx Independent Living Services, Bay Brown, Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled, Brooklyn Defender Services, Center for Hearing and Communication, Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York, Citywide Council on Special Education, Citywide District 75 Council, Coalition for Educational Justice, The Cooke Center for Learning and Development, Ziograin Correa, Sr., M.S.Ed., Helene Craner, Ruth DiRoma, Disability Rights New York, Education Rights Project of the Partnership for the Homeless, Richard and Lora Ellenson, Everyone Reading, Inc., Families Helping Families, Ben Fox, Friends of the Children New York, The Go Project, Goddard Riverside Community Center, Olga Gonzalez, Jay Gottlieb, New York University, Carol A. Greenburg, Paul Hutchinson, Revere Joyce, The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, Aurelia Mack, Matthew Mandelbaum, Shelly McGuinness, Bob McLoughlin, Diana Mendez, The Mental Health Association of New York, Metropolitan Parent Center of Sinergia, Inc., National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, Dana Neider, New Alternatives for Children, NYC Special Education Collaborative, New York Charter Parents Association, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York Legal Assistance Group, New York Performance Standards Consortium, Jaclyn Okin Barney, Esq., Parents for Inclusive Education, Parent to Parent of New York State, Parent to Parent New York, Inc., Suzanne Peters, Samantha Pownall, Cathy Rikhye, Ed. D., Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, Raphael Rivas, Resources for Children with Special Needs, Miguel L. Salazar, Jennifer and Peter Sellar, Iriss Shimony, Jon Sigall, Jo Anne Simon P.C., Karin Spraggs, Mark Surabian, MA, ATP, Instructor, Assistive Technologies, Pace Graduate School of Education, United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, United Federation of Teachers, United We Stand, Constance Van Rolleghe, RueZalia Watkins.

Students with disabilities represent a substantial and growing population in our city's schools. Nearly 18% of students in New York City public schools have IEPs, or special education plans. In 2014, less than 7% of those students between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades who participated in standardized testing scored 3s and 4s on their ELA exams. Furthermore, only 31% of high school students with disabilities who took the ELA Regents Exam passed that exam in the 2012-2013 school-year. Without a passing score on the Regents exam, students cannot graduate from high school with either a Regents or a Local diploma. After leaving school, unemployment rates for people ages 21-64 with disabilities are more than twice what they are for their peers without disabilities. In New York State, while only 32% of people with disabilities are employed, 76% of their more typical peers find work.

More can and must be done by the DOE to support students with special education needs. Studies show that when students with disabilities receive age-appropriate, intensive, systematic, evidence-based interventions, their literacy skills progress. If students, including students with IEPs, are taught in literacy-rich environments that include explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, as well as small group instruction when assessment demonstrates the need for further intervention, improvements follow.

Last fall, the members of the ARISE Coalition identified a number of specific reforms that we believe are necessary in order to improve literacy rates for students with disabilities. We have urged the DOE to articulate a long-term plan that will build capacity across the school system for teaching all students, including students with disabilities, to read. Key pieces of any long-term plan must include the following:

- Beginning in pre-kindergarten, students must receive evidence-based core literacy instruction designed to prepare them to become competent in the 5 pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).
- Beginning at least with kindergarten and continuing through middle school and high school, schools need to provide on-going screening for reading ability, and those students not reading on level must receive additional, evidence-based, targeted intervention with on-going progress monitoring.
- Students requiring additional evidence-based intervention must be provided with opportunities to receive it not only during the school day, but after school and during the summer months.
- By using augmentative communication devices, assistive technology, age-appropriate materials, digitalized texts and other multi-media to promote dynamic teaching and learning, schools should make use of technology to support literacy development and content instruction for all students, regardless of their ability to use spoken language or access the curriculum through paper and pencil alone.
- Schools must partner with parents in literacy instruction, providing strategies to use at home and engaging in on-going dialogue about the needs and progress of individual children. The DOE also has an obligation to provide information to parents on how to access needed screening and interventions for their children.

The changes we recommend require the City to invest in the literacy of our children. The \$3.2 million in the Mayor's proposal is a great start, but when spread over 5 years and over more than 186,000 students with IEPs in public school-aged programs, that works out to just over \$3 per public school student with an IEP per year -- not really enough to make much of a dent. We encourage the city to start with this money, but make it a down payment on future funding to improve literacy rates for students with disabilities and make significant, meaningful and lasting change in the way we prepare our students with disabilities for life beyond public school.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I am available to answer any questions you have now or in the future.