



**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Finance Committee
on Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget**

May 23, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Maggie Moroff. I am the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition, a group of parents, advocates, educators, academics, and other stakeholders who have been working together for over a decade to push for systemic changes to improve day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities in NYC public schools. I am also the Special Education Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) from where we coordinate ARISE. I am here this evening to speak on behalf of ARISE in support of the City's proposal to include \$750 million over five years to make more schools accessible for students, teachers, and parents with physical disabilities, as well as the proposed special education investments in the Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget.

A data brief released last fall by AFC entitled "Access Denied: School Accessibility in New York City," laid out a dismal picture of accessibility in NYC public schools. Using information obtained from the DOE, the report's findings included:

- Less than 1 in 5 of the City's schools are fully accessible;
- In 28 of the City's 32 school districts, less than a third of schools are fully accessible;
- In seven districts, less than 10% of the schools are fully accessible; and
- Just over a quarter of the buildings housing District 75 programs are fully accessible.

ARISE members are grateful for the City Council's strong voice in support of improving school accessibility over the past few years.

Given the embarrassing state of school accessibility in New York City, we are excited that the Department of Education's proposed 5-year Capital Plan includes \$750 million to make more schools fully accessible. That investment in accessibility, the City's largest to date, will literally open doors to include and integrate people who are far too often excluded because of their accessibility needs. With that money, the DOE will be able to make capital improvements to render each community school district and District 75 considerably better prepared to offer fully accessible options to students, parents, school staff, and members of the community.

ARISE members are also encouraged by the proposed investment of \$33.4 million in new funding to improve special education services in the City. The need for additional staff – special education teachers, paraprofessionals, psychologists, social workers, and related service providers – is tremendous given the number of students with disabilities who currently go unserved or underserved in this city.

Coordinator: Maggie Moroff -- mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org -- (212) 822-9523

We are also encouraged to see the City building new programs for students with Autism in District 75 schools and students with print disabilities in the community school districts. There is no question that there's a lot of work to be done to make sure that all students with disabilities have access to an appropriate education in the City's schools, and this money will help move this important work forward.

We strongly urge the Council to ensure that the adopted budget includes at least \$750 million over five years to improve school accessibility, starting with \$150 million for FY 20, and at least the \$33.4 million in new funding in the Executive budget to improve the delivery of special education supports and services in New York City.

Thank you for your time and attention.