



**Testimony to be delivered to New York City Council Committee on Finance and the
Subcommittee on Capital Budget**

RE: Fiscal 2021 Executive Budget

May 21, 2020

My name is Maggie Moroff and I coordinate the ARISE Coalition, a group of parents, advocates, educators, academics, and other stakeholders focused on the day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes of students with disabilities in New York City public schools. Our members have been working together for the past 12 years to provide a collective voice in support of NYC's 220,000 students with disabilities. I'm here today to speak about the importance of ensuring that the budget protects mandated instruction and services and key supports for students with disabilities.

First, we cannot impress strongly enough how critical preserving Fair Student Funding is to our students with disabilities as the primary source of funding for instruction for all students, including students with disabilities, in non-specialized schools. We already hear from schools that they do not have enough funding to provide students with the Integrated Co-Teaching or special education classes mandated on students' IEPs. We understand the City's budget challenges, but the City must ensure students not only get their mandated instruction but get the support they need to make up for months of missed in-person services when school buildings reopen. The final budget must reject the proposed \$100 million cut to FSF.

Next, we are concerned about the proposed \$40 million cut to School Allocation Memoranda. While the City has not specified which programs will be cut, this funding stream pays for a number of supports important for students with disabilities including related services like speech and counseling; specialized programs like the ASD Nest program for children with autism, bilingual special education programs, and the new early childhood literacy program; supports for students in District 75 schools; and the Literacy for All program that is working to help students read on grade level by the end of 2nd grade.

Last year, the City Council and the Mayor made great strides in addressing the appalling state of school accessibility in NYC when they committed \$750 million to improving school accessibility in the 2020-2024 Capital Budget. As the City revisits the Capital Plan, we urge the Council to ensure that any revised plans protect the full funding the City committed to making schools accessible for students, teachers, and parents with physical disabilities. Thirty years since the

passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is critical for the City to continue addressing the appalling lack of accessibility that prevents so many with physical disabilities from entering and fully becoming a part of the community at the vast majority of New York City schools.

Additionally, our members are gravely concerned about the City's preschoolers with disabilities who require preschool special education classes, but do not have placements because of the current shortage of seats. ARISE members call upon the City to ensure a special education placement for every preschool-aged child with an IEP that mandates such a seat. Hundreds of preschoolers with disabilities were sitting at home in violation of their legal rights prior to the pandemic. When students return to school, every preschooler with a disability whose IEP requires a special class seat must have one. Logic dictates, and research shows that early childhood education can offer critical academic and social-emotional support to all students setting them up for future school success. We recognize that the current administration has worked hard to increase access to early childhood programs through 3-K and Pre-K for all programs, and for that we are grateful. However, we also note with great consternation that too many children with more significant disabilities who have IEPs requiring more specialized settings have essentially been left out of those efforts because there simply aren't enough seats in the special education classes they need – seats where those students can receive the targeted academic and social-emotional supports they require. The budget must include sufficient funding for the City to open more preschool special education classes or to support community-based organizations to do so. While we appreciate the salary parity agreement in last year's budget for 3-K and Pre-K teachers, the agreement left out preschool special education class teachers at CBOs, making it likely that they will leave preschool special education classes for other teaching jobs unless the City intervenes.

And lastly, during the months that students have been learning remotely, multitudes of students with disabilities have gone and will continue to go without many of the special education services they are legally entitled to receive. The Fiscal Year 2021 budget must include dedicated funds to ensure that those students will be able to receive those missed services as soon as feasible.

I appreciate the opportunity to have spoken with you today. I am, of course, available to answer any questions you may have about my testimony.



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