



151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001
www.arisecoalition.org

**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Finance
Re: New York City Council Fiscal Year 2016 Executive Budget**

June 9, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

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.

ARISE members want to see the DOE increase literacy rates for students with disabilities significantly. 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 nearly \$3.2 million over the next five years to support literacy development for students with disabilities in his budget proposal. That funding represents a great start, but only a start. We urge the Council to fund not only the \$655,000 proposed for FY 2016 but to consider that as a down payment on 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, The Go Project, Goddard Riverside Community Center, Olga Gonzalez, Jay Gottlieb, New York University, Paul Hutchinson, Revere Joyce, The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, Aurelia Mack, Matthew Mandelbaum, Shelly McGuinness, 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., 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.

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

Students with disabilities represent a substantial and growing population in our city's schools. Over 18% of students in New York City public schools have IEPs, which means they are supposed to receive special education services. In 2014, less than 7% of those students between 3rd and 8th 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 with a score sufficient to 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 we believe necessary 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 \$655,000 in the current Executive Budget is a great start, but it's not really enough to make much of a dent. We hope the City will fund this initial investment and see it as 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.

We also want use this opportunity to voice support for the Council's request of \$14.2 million for staffing increases at the Regional Committees on Special Education, which support the growing number of preschool students with disabilities as well as students with special education needs in private and charter schools. Increased staff at those offices is necessary to reduce delays in evaluating students, holding IEP meetings, and ensuring students are receiving appropriate special education services. We were disappointed that the Executive budget did not include this funding and encourage the Council to ensure that this funding is in the final budget.

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