



**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Finance Committee
on the 2018 Budget**

May 24, 2018

Good evening. I am Maggie Moroff, the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition. We are a group of parents, advocates, educators, academics and other stakeholders who have been working together for more than 10 years. We aim to provide a collective and powerful voice in support of students with disabilities and learning differences in New York City public schools. Our goal is to bring about systemwide changes that improve day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes for these students. Today, we are here to urge you to ensure much-needed funding for improving school accessibility is included in the City's final FY 2019 budget.

We are gravely concerned about the dearth of accessible public schools in New York City, severely limiting the choices available to students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities. Three of the City's 32 community school districts have no fully accessible elementary schools (Districts 12, 16, and 21), four school districts have no fully accessible middle schools (Districts 7, 14, 16, and 32), and six districts have no fully accessible high schools (Districts 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, and 32). District 16 has no fully accessible schools at all.

As such, there is no equity in the admissions process for students with physical disabilities. Every time a student with physical differences applies to public school, the accessibility of school buildings becomes a primary concern in their decision-making process, often over and above the student's interests and talents.

While the Department of Education has categorized a number of schools across the City as "partially" accessible, individuals using wheelchairs often cannot access key spaces in many partially accessible schools. Some lack accessible bathrooms. Others require students using wheelchairs to use separate entrances than their peers. And at others, students using wheelchairs cannot access key rooms in the school, including libraries, science rooms, cafeterias, and music and art studios.

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In 1990, long before most of today's students were born, the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") was enacted. Two years ago, the U.S. Department of Justice issued findings that NYC was out of compliance with the ADA and lacked sufficient accessible school options for elementary students. Quite simply, the City must now provide individuals with disabilities access to a wider range of public schools.

2015-2019 Capital Plan allocates \$100 million over five years for improving school accessibility and \$28 million for ensuring that a number of schools can serve as accessible emergency shelters, that represents less than one percent of the total funding in the Plan. More importantly, the City has already spent most of that money, leaving the City without funds for significant work on accessibility this year.

The work can't wait while the City develops the next 5-year Capital Plan, which will not be done for more than a year. There needs to be a sufficient allocation of funds for renovation and construction to increase the number of accessible schools this year as well.

We are very pleased that the City Council's Response to the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget recommended allocating an additional \$125 million for school accessibility projects and want to thank you again today for doing so.

We urge you to stand steadfast and negotiate a final budget that includes at least an additional \$125 million for school accessibility. New York City will never become "the fairest big city in America" until all individuals with physical disabilities have equitable access to the City's schools.

Thank you for your time today.