



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## Hundreds of Preschoolers with Disabilities Waiting for Preschool Special Education Classes in New York

*State's Newly Announced Rate is Grossly Inadequate to Address this Crisis*

**June 11, 2019 (NEW YORK CITY)** — Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) issued the following statement in response to Governor Cuomo's announcement that the State is approving only a two percent increase in rates for preschool special education programs for the 2019-2020 school year:

New York State is currently violating the rights of children who need preschool special education classes.

The State Education Department released a [memo](#) on May 29, 2019 showing that New York City alone needs **422** additional preschool special education class seats, as well as hundreds of additional seats in preschool special classes in integrated settings, for children with disabilities. Yet, the very next week, the State announced it would approve a meager two percent rate increase for these programs—far less than the rate increase recommended by the New York State Education Department, New York State Assembly, New York State Senate, advocates, and providers to address the shortage of programs and help ensure there is a seat for every child who needs one.

“Hundreds of preschoolers are waiting for seats in legally mandated preschool special education programs,” said Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York. “We have heard directly from dozens of families desperate for their preschoolers to get the help they need, but who have been sitting at home for months waiting for a seat. The newly announced rate is grossly inadequate to address this crisis.”

“My child has already been waiting five months, and the district has told us there are no seats available until September,” said Christine Agosto, the parent of three-year-old Dillon, a child diagnosed with autism. “My child needs help. But he's been at home all year instead of in class because there are not enough seats for the children who need them.”

Prior to the 2015-2016 school year, the State did not provide any increase in reimbursement rates for preschool special classes or preschool special classes in integrated settings for six years, keeping the rate stagnant with no cost of living adjustments. Since that time, the State has approved only a two percent increase each year. In recent years, more than 60 preschool special education programs have closed around the State—many of them citing inadequate rates.

AFC, along with 69 other organizations, issued the [attached letter](#) calling on the Governor to increase rates for preschool special education programs by at least five percent to address the shortage of programs.

“The State has pointed to declining enrollment numbers, but enrollment numbers don’t reflect the hundreds of children who are waiting for seats as programs continue to close,” said Randi Levine, Policy Director of Advocates for Children of New York. “Hundreds of preschoolers with disabilities are waiting for Governor Cuomo to take action.”

### **About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)**

*Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.*