



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## 100 Organizations Urge Mayor de Blasio to Meet the Need for Preschool Special Education Classes

### *3-K and Pre-K Are Not “For All” While Preschoolers with Disabilities Go Without Needed Classes*

**April 12, 2021 (NEW YORK CITY)** — Today, more than 100 organizations sent a [letter](#) to Mayor de Blasio making the point that 3-K and Pre-K will never be “for all” until the City addresses the continuing shortage of seats in preschool special education classes—a shortage that has left young children with disabilities who have a legal right to such a class sitting at home or in settings that cannot provide the support they need.

While the Mayor recently announced plans to expand 3-K to every school district this September, the City is falling far short of providing preschool special education classes to all children who require these smaller classes with trained special education teachers. Prior to the pandemic, the City was projecting a shortage of 1,000-2,000 preschool special class seats, with a disproportionate need in the Bronx. While COVID-19 has led to a temporary decline in preschool special education referrals this year, the City *still* has a current shortfall of hundreds of seats in the classes that serve preschoolers with the most significant needs. And the demand for preschool special education classes will likely only increase in the coming months, as children with disabilities who missed out on months of services during the pandemic are identified as needing more intensive intervention.

“While the Mayor has announced an expansion of 3-K, my child has been waiting for three months for a seat in his legally required preschool special education class,” said Dilia Tejeda, the parent of three-year-old Devyn. “I know how important it is for my child, who is on the autism spectrum, to get help now, and do not understand why the Mayor would announce a 3-K expansion without also addressing the shortage of seats for children with disabilities. Why is my child not a priority?”

Contributing to the shortage has been the closure of preschool special education programs run by community-based organizations (CBOs). Instead of assisting CBOs, the City recently made the problem worse by excluding preschool special education teachers from an agreement to raise the starting salaries of 3-K and Pre-K teachers at CBOs to that of public school teachers, leading teachers of preschool special education classes to pursue higher-paid teaching jobs elsewhere.

With the City poised to receive a historic increase in education funding, including \$6.9 billion from the federal government, the groups are calling on the Mayor to ensure a preschool special education class seat for every child who requires one and to extend supports offered to 3-K and Pre-K programs, including salary parity for teachers, to preschool special education programs run by community-based organizations.

Last week, the New York City Council recommended that the City invest \$85 million in this year's budget to address the shortage of preschool special education classes and provide salary parity to preschool special education class teachers.

"We are tired of waiting for the City to address the needs of preschoolers with disabilities while the Mayor announces expansion after expansion of other programs," said Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York. "A dark cloud will hang over the Mayor's legacy on early childhood education unless he ensures there are seats for all children, including those with the most significant disabilities."

The letter is available at [https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on\\_page/sign-on\\_letter\\_preschool\\_special\\_ed\\_4.2021.pdf](https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/on_page/sign-on_letter_preschool_special_ed_4.2021.pdf)

**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.*