

April 12, 2021

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor of the City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Meeting the Need for Preschool Special Education Classes**

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

As organizations committed to advancing education equity and supporting the academic and social-emotional development of all children, we are writing to express our concern 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.

Over the course of your administration, you and your team have championed increased access to early childhood education programs, but have left behind children with the most intensive needs and the programs that serve them. *At a time when New York City is receiving a historic federal investment and expanding 3-K Citywide, we urge you to ensure a preschool special education class seat for every student whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) mandates 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 (CBOs).*

As you know, while many preschoolers with disabilities participate in 3-K or Pre-K for All programs, some children with more significant disabilities have IEPs that require more specialized settings—preschool special education classes. Preschool special education programs offer smaller class sizes and are led by teachers trained to educate students with disabilities. Such classes are not only legally-mandated by these students’ IEPs, but provide students with targeted academic and social-emotional interventions during a vital developmental phase. However, even as the City has announced plans to expand 3-K to all 32 community school districts this September, it is falling far short of providing preschool special education classes to all children whose IEPs require them.

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 6- and 8-student classes, which serve preschoolers with the most significant needs. Without sufficient seats available, preschoolers with disabilities have been sitting at home or in inappropriate preschool settings, in violation of their civil rights, while families have watched their children’s academic and social-emotional development regress. The demand for preschool special 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.

We appreciate that in recent years, the Department of Education (DOE) has opened a significant number of preschool special education classes, increasing the number of seats in DOE Pre-K Centers and public schools. However, the City has a legal obligation to ensure that there are sufficient seats in preschool special education classes for *all* children with disabilities who need them. **Therefore, the City must either open more DOE preschool education classes or ensure that CBOs—who run the majority of these programs—do so.**

In addition, the fact that preschool special education teachers working at DOE-contracted CBOs were excluded from the salary parity agreement that is raising the pay of other CBO-based early childhood educators further compounds the problem. The City has already faced a wave of more than 30 preschool special education program closures in recent years, in part because low salaries make it difficult for programs to recruit and retain teachers. Because they were left out of the existing salary parity agreement, teachers who lead preschool special classes at CBOs are now some of the lowest-paid educators in New York City, despite serving preschoolers with the most intensive needs; these teachers may choose to leave their current positions in pursuit of higher-paid teaching jobs, including those that do not require special education certifications. **Unless the City provides CBOs operating preschool special education classes with supports comparable to those provided to DOE-contracted CBOs operating 3-K and Pre-K classes, including salary parity for preschool special class teachers, more of these programs may need to shut their doors, exacerbating the shortage of preschool special class seats.**

3-K and Pre-K will never be universal while preschoolers with disabilities are sitting at home without the classes they need because the City has refused to make needed investments. *We urge you to ensure a preschool special education class seat for every preschool-aged child whose IEP mandates one. In addition, to help prevent the closure of additional preschool special education programs and provide a unified and equitable early childhood education system, we urge you to extend 3-K and Pre-K program supports, including salary parity for teachers, to preschool special education programs in DOE-contracted CBOs.*

Sincerely,  
ACLD-Children's Services  
ADAPT Community Network  
Adaptive Design Association, Inc.  
Advocates for Children of New York  
AHRC New York City  
Alliance for Quality Education  
Alternatives for Children  
ARISE Coalition  
Association to Benefit Children  
Astor Services for Children and Families  
ATHelp.org  
Birch Family Services  
Block Institute School  
Brooklyn Defender Services  
Cam-Held Enterprises Inc. dba Just Kids Early Childhood Learning Center  
Caring Parents

Child Study Center of New York  
Children's Aid  
Children's Defense Fund - New York  
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York  
Citywide Council on Special Education  
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families  
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)  
Community Resources Preschool  
Cooke School and Institute  
Day Care Council of New York  
Dyslexia (Plus) in Public Schools Task Force  
Early Childhood Associates  
Eden II Programs - Little Miracles Preschool  
Educators for Excellence-New York  
Elizabeth Seton Children's School  
Emilia's Kids, Inc.  
Everyone Reading, Inc.  
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project  
Goddard Riverside Community Center  
Good Shepherd Services  
HASC (Hebrew Academy for Special Children)  
HeartShare Education Center  
HeartShare Human Services of New York  
Hispanic Federation  
ICCD  
INCLUDEnyc  
InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc.  
Jackson Developmental Center  
JCCA  
Jewish Community Center of Staten Island, Inc.  
Kennedy Children's Center  
Lawyers for Children, Inc.  
League Education and Treatment Center  
Liberty POST, PLLC  
Life-Skills Home Training Tutorial Program for Preschoolers, Inc.  
Little Meadows Early Childhood Center  
Manhattan Mothers & Others  
Marie Pense Center  
Martin De Porres Youth and Family Services  
MercyFirst  
Metropolitan Parent Center, Sinergia  
National Association of Social Workers-NYC Chapter  
New Alternatives for Children, Inc.  
New York Center for Child Development  
New York Center for Infants and Toddlers

New York Immigration Coalition  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
New York Zero to Three Network  
Northside Center for Child Development Day School  
NYC Coalition for Children with Special Needs  
NYS Alliance for Children with Special Needs  
NYS Occupational Therapy Association (NYSOTA)  
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic  
Parents for Inclusive Education (PIE)  
Parents for Responsive Equitable Safe Schools (PRESSNYC)  
Prevent Child Abuse NY  
QSAC, Inc. (Quality Services for the Autism Community)  
Queens Centers for Progress  
Rising Ground, Inc.  
Rivendell School  
Seamen's Society for Children and Families  
Sesame Sprout Inc.  
Small Wonder Preschool  
Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers, Inc.  
Special Education Law and Advocacy Field Clinic, Cardozo School of Law  
Special Support Services, LLC  
St. Mary's Hospital for Children  
Starting Point Services for Children  
SteppingStone Day School  
The Center for Independence of the Disabled -- NY  
The Children's Law Center  
The Education Trust--New York  
The Guild for Exceptional Children  
The Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services  
The Legal Aid Society  
The Lorge School  
The Metropolitan Parent Center of Sinergia, Inc.  
The New 3Rs  
The New York Foundling  
The Parkside School  
The Right to Read Project  
Therapy and Learning Center, Inc.  
These Our Treasures, Inc.  
UJA-Federation of New York  
United Cerebral Palsy of Queens d/b/a Queens Centers for Progress  
UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES, INC.  
United Neighborhood Houses  
United We Stand of New York  
Variety Child Learning Center  
Village Child Development Center  
Volunteers of America - Greater New York

Volunteers of America - GNY Bronx Early Learning Center  
Zone 126