



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn since 1971

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

### Re: Meeting the Needs of All Students with Disabilities

September 21, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For 50 years, Advocates for Children 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.

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We appreciate that the City Council is holding a hearing on the important topic of meeting the needs of all students with disabilities. Every day, Advocates for Children hears from parents struggling to get their children with disabilities the education they need. In the past two weeks alone, we heard from more than 200 parents. We want to share just a few examples. Through our Education Helpline, we heard from:

- A parent who recently learned that her three-year-old child has autism and wants her child enrolled in the preschool special education class mandated by her Individualized Education Program (IEP) but was still waiting for a placement from the DOE, which has a shortage of preschool special education classes even as it has expanded “3-K and Pre-K for All.”
- A parent who learned from her child that he is in a large class, in violation of his IEP, which requires a small special education class. Meanwhile, the student says he doesn't understand the work and feels overwhelmed.
- A parent who borrowed a neighbor's phone so she could call us, saying she was desperate for help as she recently moved into temporary housing in a different borough and needs a closer school. When she tried enrolling her child, whose IEP mandates a special education class, multiple schools turned her away.
- A parent whose ninth grader is reading on a first-grade level and asked about private schools because, year after year, she has been unable to get help from her child's public school.
- A parent whose school responded last year to her child's behavioral challenges by placing him in the office where he watched videos and asking the parent to pick him up early.



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- A parent whose primary language is Spanish who had questions about her child's services because she has only received paperwork in English.
- A parent living in a shelter whose child has a significant disability and missed the first weeks of school because the DOE did not have a bus route in place. And a parent who has been unable to work full time and is experiencing financial hardship because she is transporting her child while waiting for the DOE to arrange for the paraprofessional he needs on the bus.
- A parent whose child uses a wheelchair and was assigned to a classroom on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of a walk-up building. The child has been out of school since last fall.
- A Spanish-speaking parent whose child needs a wheelchair-accessible District 75 placement. The family lives in the Bronx, but the DOE could only find a seat in a different borough. Then, days before the school year began, the parent received a call informing her that the school's elevator is off limits to students, leaving the child with no school.

This is just a small sampling of the children and families that came to our attention in the past two weeks. And make no mistake—we get these calls all year round. Shortages of preschool special education classes, inadequacy of literacy instruction and behavioral support, problems with transportation, lack of accessibility, failure to provide translation and interpretation – these are all serious obstacles that students with disabilities and their families continue to experience every day on the ground. The City must do better. We look forward to working with you to do so including through the recommendations included in our [\*Vision for NYC Schools\*](#), which we are attaching to our testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.