



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 Youth Services

Re: Summer Rising 2022/ Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) 2022

October 25, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Summer Rising and the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). My name is Randi Levine, and I am the 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. Every year, we help thousands of New York City parents and students navigate the education system. We focus on students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless or in foster care, students with mental health needs, and students with involvement in the juvenile or criminal legal systems.

Unfortunately, time and time again, we have seen the students we serve left out of programs that are touted as being universal. Merely saying that a program is *for all youth* does not make it so. As the City prepares for summer programming for next summer, there needs to be an intentional, targeted plan to provide specialized support to youth who need it so they can fully participate in summer programming.

Given our limited time, we will give just a few examples of the barriers we have seen in the past and recommendations for change:

- We heard from families whose students with disabilities did not have the accommodations and supports they needed to participate in Summer Rising programs in place for the start of the summer, despite the City's legal obligation. Given how short the summer program is, the City should roll out a process for requesting and approving accommodations with enough time to ensure that the individualized support each student needs is in place for the first day of summer and that no young person is turned away.

- We heard from families whose children were unable to participate in afternoon enrichment activities because the DOE provided bus service only at 3pm—and not at the end of the day at 6pm. While the DOE offered a prepaid rideshare service for

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families to use at 6pm, it was rolled out just before the start of the summer – without time for families to make informed decisions about their children’s summer participation – and required a parent to accompany the student in the car. This summer, the City should ensure that all students who need bus service to get to school, including students with disabilities, students living in shelter, and students in foster care who have a right to transportation, have bus service or a comparable door-to-door alternative to get to and from the full day of summer programming that does not rely on parents having to transport their children.

- We also heard about the difficulty of finding available Summer Rising seats for children living in shelters given how quickly seats filled. The City should launch a strengths-based outreach plan to ensure families of historically marginalized groups of students know about summer programs and have needed support in enrolling, including targeted outreach and support to families living in shelters and immigrant families, and should ensure there are seats available for students whose shelter or foster care placement changes after the enrollment period.
- This past summer, the **SYEP application** and instructions were available online only in English —posing a barrier to the thousands of young people whose primary language is a language other than English. The City should ensure that SYEP information and applications are available in at least the 9 most common languages, that the application asks if youth need language support at their placements, and that the City allocates funding to make sure youth receive the language support they need to participate regardless of their home language. The City should also ensure that students who are undocumented have the opportunity to participate.
- We also want to ensure that students get the academic support and the social-emotional support they need over the summer. Fewer than half of NYC students are reading proficiently with alarming disparities by race, disability, language, and housing status. We urge the City to use the summer to provide students with the evidence-based reading intervention they need. As another example, DYCD and the DOE should work together to connect SYEP experiences to the classroom, providing students with academic credit for skills they learn on the job.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that all youth have the opportunity to participate in summer programming. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.