



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth and Committee on Education

Re: Summer Rising

October 30, 2024

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

As an organization that focuses on students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who are homeless or in foster care, we have seen Summer Rising provide summer programming to students who did not have access previously. The centralized application process with priority for certain high-needs students, the roll out of an accommodations process for students with disabilities, and the integration of the program into New York City Public Schools have helped students who were previously left out of the City's summer programming to enroll and get needed support to participate.

At the same time, there is more work to do to ensure that the students with the greatest needs are able to fully participate. Among other challenges, last summer, we continued to hear from families whose children were asked to leave the full Summer Rising program or the afternoon enrichment portion due to their needs, including a rising first grader with autism living in a shelter who was told, after two days, that he could not return to Summer Rising, putting the child's learning and the parent's job at risk.

Based on our experience working with families, we recommend that the City:

- Roll out the 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. The City should also



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ensure that staff is prepared to serve students with a range of needs and that additional support is available if needed.

- Continue to give priority in admissions to students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and students with 12-month IEP programs and return to the practice of setting aside seats for students who enter shelter or foster care or change placements after the application deadline.
- Continue the policy of having an application window so that admissions is not first-come, first-served.
- Return to the simple application form used for summer 2023 instead of using MySchools, which is far more challenging to use, and provide an application option that does not require internet access.
- Develop and implement a more robust outreach plan targeted to reaching students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and immigrant students and supporting them in applying to and enrolling in Summer Rising.
- When selecting sites for Summer Rising, ensure sites are fully accessible for students with physical disabilities; place programs in sites that will also house summer special education classes; and maximize the number of sites that are convenient for students living in shelters.
- 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, instead of afternoon bus service being available only at 3pm—hours before the end of the Summer Rising day.
- Provide families with information about transportation, including bus service and prepaid rideshare, as well as Summer Rising Accommodations Plans, as early as possible so that families can make informed decisions.
- Ensure that students get the academic support, including evidence-based reading intervention when needed, and the social-emotional support they need over the summer.

We look forward to working with you to ensure youth have the support they need to access and participate meaningfully in summer programming. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.