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ARISE Coalition Recommendations on Supporting Students with Disabilities and Their Families January, 2025

The recommendations below are offered by the members of The ARISE Coalition to move the New York City public school system to a place where it can more fully and fairly serve the needs of all students with disabilities. ARISE is a group of over 120 member organizations and individual parents and professionals who have been working together since 2008 to address systemic concerns affecting New York City's students with disabilities. ARISE members aim to foster improvements to the daily experiences of youth with disabilities and the families that support them and to the long-term outcomes for all youth receiving special education services in New York City. In a system where over 200,000 students are receiving special education services through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) during their preschool and school-aged years, the city must do all possible to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

Below are our recommendations around: special education instruction and the delivery of related services; transportation; evaluations; parent and caregiver involvement; access to afterschool activities; school accessibility; and transition planning.

Special Education Instruction and Related Services

To address gaps in delivering mandated special education programs and services, NYCPS should:

- Ensure that children under 5 receive all their mandated IEP services at the early childhood programs they attend.
- Provide sufficient funding and additional resources to enable increased staffing and/or market reimbursement rates for contracted/independent providers.
- Implement strategies to recruit additional professionals to provide services within the school buildings.

- Promptly notify families if students are not receiving mandated services, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- Offer immediate alternatives, such as Related Services Authorizations (RSAs) or Weekend Academies, if services are not provided within four scheduled sessions. Families should have choices among alternatives, assistance in identifying providers, and transportation support when students are required to travel outside of their schools and homes for those services.
- Include clear instructions for families when providing RSAs along with information about when the list of providers was most recently updated or, in the alternative, move the list to an online and well-maintained database with additional information about current availability, as well as skills and certifications of individual providers.

Transportation

NYCPS must address longstanding transportation issues to ensure equitable and efficient service. Key improvements should include:

- Expediting the rebidding of bus contracts and improving service quality.
- Expanding bus service to include after-school and weekend programs, design efficient and shorter routes, and avoid mixing students of vastly different ages on the same bus.
- Addressing shortages in drivers, attendants, paraprofessionals, and nurses by offering hiring incentives.
- Providing better training for in-school transportation coordinators.
- Enhancing the Via app, clarifying communication channels, assigning specific contacts for resolving transportation concerns, proactively offering rideshare options when available, and streamlining processes for submitting requests or documentation for accommodations.
- Publishing data about the number of transportation-related complaints submitted per quarter, including details around categorization of complaints, time to resolve, and solutions provided.
- Changing the policy whereby students are currently marked late or absent from school when buses arrive late or don't show up.

Evaluations

- NYCPS must ensure timely evaluations.
- Upon failure to timely complete evaluations, or disagreement over the sufficiency of evaluations done at the school level, NYCPS must either provide immediate re-evaluations or provide Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs) at current market rates to avoid unnecessary and potentially damaging delays.

Parent and Caregiver Involvement

NYCPS should provide comprehensive opportunities for all parents and caregivers, including those of students with IEPs, to engage meaningfully in their school communities. Specifically:

- Whole-building activities must be inclusive, addressing physical and language accessibility while fostering a welcoming environment for all populations, including those in co-located buildings.
- Invitations for parent and caregiver involvement should emphasize collaboration, recognizing both parents and caregivers as well as school staff as experts in supporting student development.
- Families must be empowered to advocate for their children's needs, but schools must retain responsibility for fulfilling their obligations to students with disabilities.
- Schools should share clear, accessible information about students' and parents' rights, support options, and specialized programs. This information should be disseminated through multiple channels, including but not limited to public service announcements, emails to entire school populations, backpacked notices, and postings in shared spaces at schools and district offices.
- Family-facing communications must use clear and straightforward language.
- Family-facing communications must always be translated into multiple languages to meet the diverse needs of NYC families.
- Additional resources, including social workers, school psychologists, and parent coordinators, should be made available and accessible to assist families effectively in every school, inclusive of preschools, serving students with IEPs.

Afterschool Access

The City must guarantee that students with IEPs, including those requiring specialized busing, have equitable access to afterschool programs.

Accessibility

New York City should increase funding for school accessibility projects by allocating an additional \$450 million in the 2025–2029 Capital Plan, bringing the total to \$1.25 billion and, thereby, aim to make at least 50% of school buildings fully accessible by 2030.

Transition Planning

The ARISE Coalition supports the recommendations of the [Transition Alliance](#). In support of those, NYCPS should support students with disabilities in preparing for life beyond high school by:

- Expanding access to work-based learning and vocational programs such as Future Ready NYC and CTE classes for all students with disabilities, including those who are new to the country.

- Enhancing communication with families about transition planning, ensuring materials are available in multiple languages and easily accessible online and in key offices.
- Increasing transparency around District 75 transition programs, providing families with a full understanding of available options.
- Conducting frequent and detailed transition assessments to align recommended programs and services with students' IEPs.
- Offering non-academic support, such as social-emotional development resources and travel training, to help students navigate transitions successfully.
- Preparing students for post-high school changes by connecting them to resources like Access-VR, OPWDD, and college accessibility offices well in advance of graduation or aging out.