



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: Oversight - Educational Access in NYC's Juvenile Detention Centers.

November 17, 2025

Board of Directors

Kimberley D. Harris, *President*
Paul D. Becker, *Treasurer*
Eric F. Grossman, *President Emeritus*
Carmita Alonso
Matt Berke
Whitney Chatterjee
Matt Darnall
Jessica A. Davis
Brian Friedman
Jamie A. Levitt, *past president*
Maura K. Monaghan
Jon H. Oram
Jonathan D. Polkes
Victoria Reese
Ashish Shah
Misti Ushio
Veronica M. Wissel
Executive Director
Maria M. Odom
Chief Operating Officer
Melkis Alvarez-Baez
Deputy Director
Matthew Lenaghan

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Rohini Singh, and I am the Director of the School Justice Project at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 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. Each year, we help thousands of families navigate the education system. Our work includes supporting court-involved youth in overcoming the significant challenges of accessing educational and special education services, both while they are in placement and as they transition back to their communities.

Young people in juvenile detention, placement, and adult jails need intensive, targeted educational services and therapeutic interventions. Ensuring strong educational programming in court-ordered settings is essential, not only for rehabilitation while in custody, but also for successful reintegration into the community. This morning AFC released a report: ***Reconnecting to Opportunity: Advancing Educational Equity for Court-Involved Students***, which offers an analysis of data from Local Law 21 passed by this Council in 2023. The data and our experience demonstrate that there is significant work to be done to address the needs of court-involved youth.

In total, Passages Academy served 810 young people between the ages of 13 and 20 at some point during the 2023–24 school year and 1,040 students over the course of 2024–25. The majority of students served by Passages belong to demographic groups that have historically faced barriers to education. Key takeaways from our analysis of the data include:

- Youth in juvenile detention or placement in 2023–24 and 2024–25 were almost twice as likely as their peers to have learning disabilities and more than *17 times* as likely to be labeled as students with emotional disabilities.
- At least half of students in juvenile detention or placement scored at the fifth percentile or below in reading upon entering Passages in 2023–24, meaning they performed *worse than 95% of their grade-level peers*; in 2024–25, at least half of students were reading at the twelfth percentile or below upon enrollment.



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

- One in six students with disabilities did not receive their *legally required* Special Education Plan within 30 school days of enrolling at Passages.
- Over half of students who transferred to an NYCPS school or program after being discharged from detention or placement missed more days of school than they attended after transitioning back to the community.

Our report calls on the City to take several critical steps to better support students – before they enter detention or placement, while enrolled in Passages Academy, and as they return to their school communities:

First, we urge the City to provide students with critical services in their school communities to help them succeed in school with the added goal of preventing future contact with the juvenile or criminal legal systems, including by:

- Ensuring every school has a school-based mental health clinic or a partnership with a community-based mental health provider.
- Hiring at least one behavioral specialist per district.
- Creating more therapeutic school options and specialized programming within NYCPS for young people with behavioral or emotional challenges and expanding the number of schools and grade levels served by PATH, an existing specialized program that provides intensive social, emotional, and behavioral support for students with disabilities.
- Ensuring all middle and high school students struggling with reading receive intensive intervention.

Second, advocates have raised the alarm regarding the condition in secure detention facilities and the numerous barriers for students to attend school in these facilities. The City must ensure students are able to regularly attend school during their time in detention or placement and receive the special education services or English as a New Language instruction they need. For example, the City should hire additional school psychologists, related service providers, and special education personnel to ensure students with disabilities receive timely special education plans, evaluations, and services.

Finally, the City must improve the transition process for students coming out of detention or placement to ensure students can access appropriate educational programs and support their reengagement in school upon their return to the community. Many of our clients leave placement without a clear educational plan and placement, and parents struggle to navigate these systems on their own. To this end, the City should increase the number of transition specialists in secure detention facilities and train staff in NYCPS Family Welcome Centers on the unique needs of court-involved youth and the full range of educational options available.

Our full report is available at [*Reconnecting to Opportunity: Advancing Educational Equity for Court-Involved Students*](#). Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you for highlighting this important topic.