



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For immediate release

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Response to the Release of the NYC FY 2027 Executive Budget

May 12, 2026 (NEW YORK CITY) — *Maria Odom, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement in response to the release of the New York City Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget.*

We thank Mayor Mamdani for restoring and baselining funding for Learning to Work and for early childhood outreach in his Executive Budget. This funding, which was scheduled to run out in June, represents roughly 70% of Learning to Work's total budget, and we are grateful that students and schools will be able to count on the program — which provides support to over-age, under-credited youth to help them earn a high school diploma and develop a post-secondary plan — in years to come. We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore and baseline funding for restorative justice; the Mental Health Continuum; the Sensory Exploration, Education, and Discovery (SEED) Program; and immigrant family communications and outreach, all of which are also supported by funds set to expire in June 2026 but were left out of the Executive Budget. These important initiatives are currently benefitting thousands of New York City students and families.

While it is critical to ensure that students do not lose access to existing programs, we urge City leaders to go further and make new investments in areas of unmet need — investments that will help save money in the long run. For example, the best way to decrease spending on special education due process cases is to ensure that families of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) never need to exert their due process rights in the first place. To that end, we are pleased to learn of a planned investment in special education and look forward to learning details about how these funds will be used. Instead of forcing families to fight for the support their children need, the City should work to eliminate the shortage of service providers, expand access to intensive reading intervention, and hire behavioral specialists so that our public schools can better serve students with disabilities from the get-go.

Based on the outstanding needs we see in our work with students and families across the five boroughs, we urge City leaders to:

- Add at least \$100 million to eliminate related service backlogs and address the provider shortage. In 2024–25, more than 7,500 students who needed speech therapy never received a *single session* of this service and 5,400 students ended the school year still waiting for their legally mandated counseling services to start. As recently as this March, only 63% of preschoolers with

IEPs were receiving their full mandated related services and nearly a quarter (24%) were receiving *none* of their mandated services at all. We are grateful that the Mayor already extended and baselined last year's long-overdue investment in preschool special education, but the job is not yet done. Providing special education services to students across all grade levels is not optional.

- Invest in intensive one-on-one or small group reading intervention for middle and high schoolers.
- Hire at least one behavioral specialist per district to support schools in meeting the behavioral and mental health needs of their students.
- Establish the position of English Language Learner (ELL) instructional specialist to ensure ELLs receive appropriate academic instruction and support and tackle persistent disparities in educational outcomes, like the more than 30-point gap between ELLs and never-ELLs in grades 3–8 math proficiency rates.
- Provide interim transportation for students in the foster system awaiting school bus service so they do not have to transfer schools or repeatedly miss class due to lack of transportation.
- Expand travel training to help students with disabilities learn to navigate public transit independently, thereby increasing access to internships, work-based learning, and post-secondary opportunities and reducing reliance on yellow bus service.
- Make more school buildings physically accessible to students, educators, families, and community members with disabilities. More than 35 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, roughly two-thirds of New York City schools are still not fully accessible to people with disabilities.

We look forward to working with the Mayor and City Council as the budget process continues.

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York 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 who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.