



June 23, 2026

The Honorable Zohran Mamdani  
Mayor of the City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Mamdani,

On behalf of the Action for Reform in Special Education (ARISE) Coalition, we are writing to urge you to make investments to meet the long unmet needs of NYC's students with disabilities. Representing a powerful combination of experience and expertise, the ARISE Coalition comprises over 120 parents, academics, advocates, educators and allied organizations who have worked since 2008 to advance systemic solutions to the challenges faced by NYC students with disabilities and their families.

We are writing in response to your remarks last month addressing rising special education due process costs where you emphasized the need for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to *"deliver [NYC students] the kind of education that would mean their families don't have to consider going to a private school system to receive them."* We agree with this sentiment and would like to partner with you to ensure that students with disabilities can receive the programs and services they need in our City's public schools to the greatest extent possible. In fact, it is the City's legal obligation to provide every student with a disability with a free, appropriate public education through a combination of personalized instruction and sufficient support services for them to benefit meaningfully from the instruction. It is only when the City does not meet this legal obligation that parents pursue burdensome due process claims for private special education so their children can get the support they need.

We were, therefore, very pleased to see that your Executive Budget includes a new investment in preschool special education. This investment is urgently needed at a time when only 63% of all preschoolers with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are receiving their full legally mandated related services and nearly a quarter are receiving none of their services. However, these deprivations spread far beyond preschool special education. For example, in 2024-2025, more than 7500 NYCPS school-aged students who needed speech therapy never received a single session, and 5400 students ended the school year still waiting for the provision of their legally mandated counseling services.

While the Preliminary Budget added funding to open needed District 75 classes for children waiting for seats in violation of their rights, the Executive Budget does not include any additional investments to strengthen special education programs or services in public schools for students in grades K-12. Significant long-term investments for K-12 students with disabilities are needed to ensure all NYC students with disabilities are able

to receive the special education programs, services, and supports to which they are legally entitled.

Last year, our coalition released [a list of recommendations](#) to better serve the approximately 250,000 NYC preschool and school-aged students entitled to special education services mandated by their IEPs. Many of those recommendations require robust investments.

**To better support students with disabilities, we urge the City to:**

- ✦ Hire qualified teachers and providers required to provide mandated special education programs and services to students across grade levels at their schools
- ✦ Increase reimbursement rates for Related Services Authorizations, so students can receive mandated services from independent providers when their schools are unable to provide those services
- ✦ Ensure there are sufficient evaluators to provide timely special education evaluations for referred students
- ✦ Expand access to effective, targeted literacy intervention for students with dyslexia or other disabilities who need more support learning to read, including middle and high school students
- ✦ Ensure equitable and reliable transportation services, including addressing service delays and other inadequacies for students with disabilities
- ✦ Promote equitable access to afterschool programs, including providing busing after school for students with IEP-mandated bus service
- ✦ Promote opportunities for parents, caregivers, and students to meaningfully engage with their school communities through access to information, trainings, relevant resources and specialized support staff, including meaningful language access and culturally responsive communication so that all families, regardless of their primary language, can fully understand their rights, participate in decision-making, and access appropriate services for their children
- ✦ Expand access to work-based learning, vocational programs, transition assessments, travel training and additional programming to promote post-secondary success for students with disabilities
- ✦ Make school buildings accessible for students, families, staff, and community members with physical disabilities

Addressing gaps also requires the City to restore and baseline funding for programs serving students with disabilities that are set to lose funding this July, including the Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) Program, the Mental Health Continuum and Restorative Justice.

Each of the preceding recommendations represents an opportunity to close the kinds of gaps which lead families to pursue special education programs and services in private school settings. Building on your initial investment in preschool special education, implementing the recommendations above will enable the City to more fully address the special education needs of NYCPS students with disabilities. We strongly urge you to make the long overdue investments needed to give all NYC students with disabilities the education they deserve.

Sincerely,

*Chijindu Obiofuma*

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Coordinator, Action for Reform in Special Education (ARISE)