



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 New York City Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget

January 16, 2025 (NEW YORK CITY) — *In response to the release of Mayor Adams' Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement:*

The budget released today fails to sustain key education programs supported by expiring one-year city funds and does not make the investments our students and school communities need.

While we are pleased to see additional needed resources for Early Intervention for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities for this year, we are particularly concerned that the budget includes no additional resources to help the thousands of children waiting for preschool special education evaluations and services right now. Last year, more than 14,400 preschoolers with disabilities ended the school year without ever receiving the full set of services the City was legally required to provide, and in recent months we have continued to hear from families whose children are waiting for critical services like speech therapy to begin. For too long, the City has tolerated a system in which at least a third of preschoolers with disabilities go without the support they need—a blatant violation of civil rights and a wasted opportunity to intervene at a key moment in a child's development.

While we appreciate that the City added funding in last year's budget to open new preschool special education classes this year, benefitting hundreds of children, there are still children waiting for classes today; the funding for the new classes is set to expire in June; and this funding does nothing to help address the shortages of services and evaluations. Making New York City the best place to raise a family means ensuring that when parents are worried about their young children's development, they can get the evaluations and services they need, including accessible and appropriate early childhood programs. No parent should have to pay out of pocket or miss work because their child is being denied essential services that are their right. The City must invest the resources needed to meet its legal obligation to provide all preschoolers with disabilities with the classes and services they need.

As the budget process moves forward, City leaders must also avoid taking steps backwards and ensure, at a minimum, that important existing education programs remain funded at their current

levels. We appreciate that last year, in the face of expiring federal stimulus funding and city funding, the Administration and City Council made significant investments to sustain impactful programs that would have otherwise been rolled back or eliminated. However, a number of these initiatives were funded for *one year only*, meaning they are once again at risk of severe cuts as soon as July. While the Mayor's Preliminary Budget extends funding for Summer Rising and Learning to Work for another year, many other programs providing critical support to students and their families were left out. The City must restore and baseline funding for these programs—which include 3-K and preschool special education classes, the Mental Health Continuum, community schools, immigrant family outreach, restorative justice, and more—as soon as possible to help ensure their long-term stability. Families need to know if they can count on their child having a 3-K seat in the fall or a preschool special education class seat in July; school staff need to know whether their students will continue to have access to mental health services; community-based organizations need to know if they will be able to maintain existing partnerships with schools.

While maintaining current funding for education programs is important, it is not sufficient. Working with families, we see pressing needs every day that continue to go unaddressed. As the budget process moves forward, we urge City leaders to make additional investments to provide preschoolers with the services and evaluations they need, expand access to one-on-one or small group reading intervention; enhance services at school-based mental health clinics; and make more schools fully accessible.

AFC's full FY 2026 budget agenda with additional information about these priorities is available at <https://advocatesforchildren.org/policy-resource/budget-priorities-2026/>.

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.