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**Testimony of The ARISE Coalition for New York City Council
Committee on Education and Committee on Finance**

Re: Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget – Education

May 20, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is May DePierro. I am Policy Associate at Advocates for Children of New York and am testifying today on behalf of the ARISE Coalition – a group of over 120 member organizations and individual parents and professionals who have been working together since 2008 to advocate for systemic improvements to support New York City’s students with disabilities. Our mission is to improve day-to-day experiences and long-term outcomes for all youth receiving special education services in New York City.

While we are pushing for improvements in a number of areas, I will focus my limited time today on the need for increased investments in preschool special education and school accessibility.

Add \$70M for Preschool Special Education Evaluations, Staffing, Services, and Classes

First, we are relieved that the Mayor’s Executive Budget maintains funding for the new preschool special education classes opened this year, but are disappointed that the budget does not include any additional resources to address the ongoing shortages of preschool special education evaluations, services, or classes. At a time when hundreds of children are waiting for seats in their legally mandated preschool special education classes and thousands of preschoolers are waiting for their services to begin, the ARISE Coalition joins with dozens of organizations in urging the City to add at least \$70 million for preschool special education evaluations, staffing, services, and classes. We appreciate the City Council’s work to address these challenges.

Add \$450M to the FY 2025-2029 Capital Plan to Make More Schools Accessible

Second, only around one third of New York City schools are fully accessible to students, parents, teachers, and community members with physical disabilities. More than three decades after being signed into law, the Americans with Disabilities Act still exists in name only for the child who cannot attend their neighborhood school because every entrance sits atop a flight of stairs, the parent or grandparent who has to miss every concert because the auditorium cannot accommodate their wheelchair, or the school social worker whose employment opportunities

are constrained by the lack of accessible bathrooms. Students without physical disabilities miss out on the chance to make friends with a student from their neighborhood who uses a walker or to learn from a teacher with heart disease.

The 2025–2029 Capital Plan currently includes \$800 million for school accessibility projects, an amount that represents a *decreased* commitment to improving school accessibility once inflation is taken into account.

We thank the Council for calling to increase this investment by \$450 million and strongly urge the City to include this funding in the adopted budget with the goal of making at least 45% of school buildings fully accessible by 2030.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.