



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

For Immediate Release:

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Over-Age Middle School Students At Risk of Dropping Out Due to Shortage of Programs

NEW YORK CITY, September 10, 2014 – More than 50,000 middle school students – a quarter of the students in New York City's public middle schools -- have been left back at least once, and more than 8,500 students have been left back at least 3 times. Despite their significant academic and social-emotional needs, there are fewer than 450 seats in programs for over-age middle school students in the City's traditional public and charter schools.

Today Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) is releasing a report, [Sixteen Going on Seventh Grade: Over-Age Students in New York City Middle Schools](#), to bring attention to the unique needs of over-age middle schoolers and to provide the New York City Department of Education (DOE) with recommendations for improving outcomes for this population.

“Thousands of these students have been retained repeatedly, but without the additional support they needed to move on to the next grade,” said Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York. “They’re stuck in limbo until many of them give up and drop out. Researchers have documented that dropout rates are two to eleven times higher among previously-retained students than their on-track peers. As the DOE focuses long-overdue attention on middle schools, we need new strategies to restore educational opportunity for the students struggling repeatedly to meet grade-level standards.”

“For the last year, I have tried to find a program for my 17-year-old eighth grade son to attend. He was too old for one over-age alternative program, not accepted at another, and the third option was too far from home,” said parent, Ingrid Lamont. “Daniel is currently not attending any program and I am so worried about his future if we don’t get him into school soon.”

The report urges the DOE to act promptly to create and expand alternative program options for over-age middle school students. The report also recommends further revising promotion policies at all grade levels; making promotion appeals more accessible to families by creating an appeals form and designating central-based staff to assist in difficult cases; and fostering information-sharing by establishing central-based supports for schools serving over-age students.

“My clients are frustrated by the lack of educational options available to them. Many over-age middle schoolers are not eligible for any of the DOE’s alternative programs and are faced with the option of staying in schools where they are incredibly uncomfortable or dropping out before they make it to high school,” said Ashley Grant, Staff Attorney for Advocates for Children of New York.

AFC reports that in 2011-12, the most recent school year for which data is available, while 70% of all New York City middle school students identified as Black or Hispanic, nearly 83% of middle school students who were at least one year over-age identified as Black or Hispanic. Furthermore, over-age middle school students were twice as likely to have special education needs. In addition, nearly 60% of NYC students entering middle school over-age are concentrated in just 25% of the City’s middle schools and large populations of over-age students are located in high-need communities in Brooklyn and the Bronx. There is also a correlation between over-age status and school attendance: after the sixth grade, even one-year over-age students have lower attendance rates than their on-track peers, and attendance rates continue to decrease as students drop further and further behind. Moreover, educators and advocates report a strong correlation between significant disruptions in schooling and over-age status.

Oluwatoyin Ayanfodun, who runs Tomorrow’s Leaders NYC, a non-profit organization in Brooklyn that focuses on over-age middle school students, said, “I created this program because there are very few programs to help students who are over-age. Most of the students I work with have been held-over numerous times and have never been provided additional academic supports or been evaluated for special education. Many are suffering socially and are extremely embarrassed to be stuck in classes with much younger kids.”

[To read the full report, click here.](#)

[AFC’s Guide for Over-Age Middle School Students](#) informs families about the legal rights of NYC students and about programs for over-age middle school students.

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since its founding in 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has been protecting the education-related needs of children most at risk of academic failure or school-based discrimination due to such factors as poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, language barriers, immigration status, homelessness, or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system. AFC’s mission is to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. AFC uses integrated strategies to advance systemic reform, empower families and communities, and advocate for the educational rights of individual students. www.advocatesforchildren.org

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