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

**Re: Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget - Education**

**March 21, 2022**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget. Congratulations, Chair Joseph and all committee members here today on your seats on this tremendously important committee. I hope and expect that we will get to know each other well over the coming years, and I am pleased to be testifying before you today.

My name is Maggie Moroff. I am the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition, a group of nearly 50 organizational and over 70 individual members who have been working together since 2008 to push for systemic changes to improve access to quality programming, day-to-day experiences, and long-term outcomes for youth with disabilities and learning differences in New York City schools. You will be hearing from other ARISE members today as well.

I want to note that I am also the Senior Special Education Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children of New York, but I come before you today on behalf of ARISE.

Let me begin by saying that the members of ARISE welcome Chancellor Banks' recent remarks about the importance of improving literacy in New York City schools. The failure to teach an unconscionable percentage of our students to read at grade level over the past years and to offer interventions as needed across all grades and communities is longstanding and must be addressed immediately. We have been speaking with the current administration about this and I am here today to emphasize how critical funding will be towards that goal.

There is no room for mistakes here. In addition to making certain that all schools use evidence-based, culturally responsive curricula for core instruction, NYC needs to provide evidence-based interventions to all youth who have not made adequate progress in reading through quality core instruction. The City needs to provide intervention going forward for children in their early

years who need additional help learning to read and, importantly, to those older students who have not yet mastered foundational skills – either because they received poor or inadequate instruction in the past or because they have learning disabilities and differences that have gone unaddressed or ill-addressed to date.

The DOE has allocated \$250 million in federal COVID-19 relief funding for “academic recovery and student supports” for Fiscal Year 2023 but has not yet shared specific information on how those funds will be used. We feel strongly that the DOE should invest \$125 million to provide one-on-one or small group intervention to students who need more help learning to read from staff who have training in approaches that work. Ensuring that all students have access to evidence-based reading intervention, regardless of the school they attend, is going to make the difference for NYC’s struggling readers.

I would also like to express our concern that the current DOE hiring freeze will almost certainly impact the more than 200,000 students with disabilities in NYC schools – students who, by nature of their disabilities, require additional supports. Current vacancies for staff working with and on behalf of students with disabilities should be filled. Similarly, hiring freezes should not extend to the City’s Universal Literacy Initiative, which provides literacy coaches to schools to provide critical support to K-2 staff in the teaching of core literacy skills.

Finally, I want to echo the call of others here today for salary parity for preschool special education teachers working at community-based organizations. The City has a significant shortage of preschool special education classes in large part because the community-based organizations the DOE relies on to run these classes do not have the money they need to recruit and retain special education teachers. NYC must commit to paying all preschool special education teachers what they can earn in DOE schools. Without increased salaries, too many preschool students with disabilities around the City will remain home without the programs that can make a huge difference in their development during some of their earliest years, in violation of their legal rights.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am available now and any time in the future to answer questions about ARISE and about our budget recommendations. I can be reached at [mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org).