



# Budget Priority

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

*Protecting every child's right to learn since 1971*

## PROVIDE PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES WITH EVALUATIONS & MANDATED SERVICES

The first five years of life are a period of rapid brain development, making it all the more critical that children with developmental delays or disabilities receive intervention and support at the earliest opportunity, when services can have the greatest impact. Yet even as New York City has expanded access to early childhood education, thousands of preschoolers with disabilities have gone without the evaluations and special education services they have a legal right to receive. During the 2021–22 school year, **37% of preschoolers with disabilities—a total 9,800 children—did not receive all their mandated services.** For example:

- » **More than 6,500 preschoolers who needed speech therapy did not have a single session** of this service before the end of the year, including 33% of all children needing bilingual speech therapy.
- » **More than one in four preschoolers (26%) recommended for physical therapy never received it.**
- » **Almost 1,300 children never received their mandated part-time special education teacher (SEIT) services,** representing 19% of all preschoolers with this recommendation.

This year, we have heard from parents who have been unable to even start the process of obtaining services for their children because they cannot get an appointment for a preschool special education evaluation. We have also heard from many families whose preschoolers are still waiting—months into the school year—for their mandated services to begin because the DOE has been unable to find providers. **The City must ensure that young children with disabilities are not left waiting for the help they need and have a legal right to receive.**

*“My child is currently regressing, academically and socially, because he is not getting the appropriate support... [Services] need to start ASAP. The only one suffering is my son.”*

— Parent of a preschooler not receiving occupational or speech therapy at his school, February 2023

**New York City should invest and baseline \$50 million in Fiscal Year 2024 for preschool special education evaluations and related services.**

**The City should take steps such as launching more DOE evaluation teams; hiring more DOE service providers and teachers, rather than relying on outside agencies; and increasing payment rates for contracted providers to ensure children, including those who need bilingual services and those in underserved communities, receive their services where they go to preschool.**