



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn since 1971

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services

### Re: Summer 2022 Programming Readiness

March 4, 2022

Congratulations, Chair Stevens and all the new Council Members on the Committee on Youth Services, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about summer 2022 programming readiness. My name is Randi Levine, and I am the Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For 50 years, Advocates for Children 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. Every year, we help thousands of New York City parents and students navigate the education system. We focus on students whose needs are often overlooked, such as students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless or in foster care, students with mental health needs, and students with involvement in the juvenile or criminal legal systems.

Unfortunately, time and time again, we have seen the students we serve left out of programs that are touted as being universal. Merely saying that a program is *for all youth* does not make it so. Assessing summer programming readiness is not only a question of whether programs are set to be up and running but also ensuring the City has an intentional, targeted plan to provide specialized support to youth who need it so they can fully participate in summer programming.

Given our limited time, we will give just a few examples of the barriers we have seen in the past and recommendations for change:

- Last summer, students with disabilities were turned away from Summer Rising programs, with the explanation that programs were not equipped to meet their needs, despite the City's legal obligation to provide accommodations and supports to students with disabilities so that they can fully participate. Given how short the summer program is, this year, the City needs to roll out a process for requesting and approving accommodations with enough time to ensure that the individualized support each student needs is in place for the first day of summer and that no young person is turned away.

#### Board of Directors

Eric F. Grossman, *President*

Kimberley D. Harris, *Vice President*

Harriet Chan King, *Secretary*

Paul D. Becker, *Treasurer*

Carmita Alonso

Matt Berke

Matt Darnall

Jessica A. Davis

Lucy Fato

Robin L. French

Brian Friedman

Caroline J. Heller

Jamie A. Levitt

Maura K. Monaghan

Jon H. Oram

Jonathan D. Polkes

Veronica M. Wissel

Raul F. Yanes

#### Executive Director

Kim Sweet

#### Deputy Director

Matthew Lenaghan



Advocates for Children  
of New York  
Protecting every child's right  
to learn since 1971

- Last summer, students with disabilities and students who are homeless who require bus service were told they could only get bus service for the academic portion of Summer Rising – meaning they had to leave the program hours before their peers and miss out on afternoon enrichment activities, in violation of their legal rights. This summer, the City should ensure that all students who need bus service to get to school have bus service or a comparable door-to-door alternative to get to and from the full day of summer programming that does not rely on parents having to transport their children or lay out money for transportation when their children have a right to transportation provided by the City.
- Last year, we heard from families who did not know about Summer Rising and other summer programs. This year, the City should launch a strengths-based outreach plan to ensure families of historically marginalized groups of students know about summer programs and have needed support in enrolling, including targeted outreach and support to families living in shelters and immigrant families. The City should also take intentional steps to make registration as simple as possible.
- This year, as in past years, the **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) application** and instructions are available online only in English —posing a barrier to the thousands of young people whose primary language is a language other than English. The City should ensure that SYEP information and applications are available in at least the 9 most common languages, that the application asks if youth need language support at their placements, and that youth receive the language support they need to participate regardless of their home language.
- We also want to ensure that students get the academic support and the social-emotional support they need over the summer. Even before the pandemic, fewer than half of NYC students were reading proficiently with alarming disparities by race, disability, language, and housing status. We urge the City to use the summer to provide students with the evidence-based reading intervention they need. As another example, DYCD and the DOE should work together to connect SYEP experiences to the classroom, providing students with academic credit for skills they learn on the job.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that all youth have the opportunity to participate in summer programming. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.