

April 14, 2025

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Meeting the need for preschool special education classes and services

Dear Mayor Adams:

As organizations working on behalf of children and families in New York City, we are writing to ask you to include funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget to ensure the City can meet its legal obligations to preschoolers with disabilities. Specifically, we urge you to:

- (1) Extend and baseline the \$55 million for preschool special education classes that is set to expire in June and ensure there is sufficient funding to provide classes for all preschoolers with disabilities who need them;**
- (2) Invest and baseline at least \$70 million to provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need; and**
- (3) Extend the enhanced provisions of the early childhood education labor agreement reached this fall to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations (CBOs).**

While we appreciate that the Fiscal Year 2025 budget included \$55 million in one-year city funds to open new preschool special education classes—funding that has provided seats for hundreds of children with disabilities who would otherwise be going without the classes they need—this funding is set to run dry just a few months from today. As the City works to open new classes this year, it is essential for schools to know as soon as possible whether the funding to sustain those new classes will continue next year and beyond. Even *with* this year’s investment, **more than 600 preschoolers with disabilities were waiting for a seat in a preschool special education class or a special class in an integrated setting** as of March 2025, in violation of their legal rights.

Moreover, the funding added for classes does not address the need for evaluations or the need for services for preschoolers with disabilities participating in general education or integrated 3-K and Pre-K classes. As of March 2025, **more than 7,900 preschoolers were waiting for at least one of their legally mandated services to begin, and more than half of those preschoolers (4,570 children) were receiving none of their mandated services at all.**

Providing these services is not optional. The Executive Budget should invest and baseline at least \$70 million to provide preschoolers with evaluations and mandated services by, for example, launching more New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) evaluation teams; hiring additional NYCPS service providers and teachers; and allocating funding to Pre-K Centers and schools with 3-K and Pre-K programs so that children receive their services where they go to preschool.

In addition, the City should extend the enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at CBOs. The City cannot return to a system in which preschool special education teachers—who work with children with some of the most intensive needs—are the lowest-paid teachers in the City. Continuing to exclude teachers of preschool special education classes at CBOs from the agreement would likely result in such educators leaving for higher-paid positions and even more children sitting at home in violation of their legal rights because CBOs will be unable to staff preschool special education classrooms.

New York City’s systemic failure to provide all preschoolers with disabilities with the classes and services they need is not only a violation of children’s rights; it is also morally and fiscally indefensible. By refusing to make the investments necessary to address the shortage of preschool special education classes, service providers, and evaluators, the City is preventing children from getting the help they need during a critical developmental period and making it all the more likely that NYCPS will have to pay for more intensive support later on. We should not have to fight year after year for the City to fulfill its basic legal obligations to its youngest students.

As you yourself said a little over two years ago, “Early learning is a key to success for young children, but it’s particularly important for children with disabilities. Early intervention ... changes lives. It changes lives for families, it changes lives for our children, it changes lives for our community.” And not only is preschool special education important and life-changing, it is also legally required. **We strongly urge you to include and baseline at least \$55M for preschool special education classes and at least an additional \$70M for preschool evaluations and services in the FY 2026 Executive Budget and to take all steps necessary to ensure every preschooler with a disability receives the classes and services they need.**

Sincerely,

A1 Universal Care, Inc.

ADAPT Community Network

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

ARISE Coalition

Association to Benefit Children

Astor Services

Belmont Community Daycare Center

Birch Family Services

Block Institute

Bronx Developmental Disabilities Council
Brooklyn United Children, Inc.
Bushwick United Head Start
CAMBA Inc.
Cam-Held Enterprises Ent Inc. DBA Just Kids Early Childhood Learning Center
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance
Community Resources Staten Island
Cooke School and Institute
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
East Side House, Inc.
Educators For Excellence - NY
Elizabeth Seton Children's School
Faith in New York
Good Shepherd Services
HeartShare
Helen Keller Services for the Blind
INCLUDEnyc
Inner Force Tots
InterAgency Council on Developmental Disabilities
Jenn Choi Advocates, LLC
Joan and Alan Bernikow JCC of Staten Island, Inc.
KAVI (Kings Against Violence Initiative)
Kennedy Children's Center

Kids-centric, Inc.
Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
Life Skills Preschool
Lifespire, Inc.
Little Meadows Early Childhood Center
Lutheran Social Services of NY
Make the Road New York
Marie Pense Center
Metropolitan Parent Center, Sinergia Inc.
New York Appleseed
New York Center for Child Development
New York Center for Infants and Toddlers
New York Center for Interpersonal Development, Inc.
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc (NYLPI)
New York State Alliance for Children with Special Needs
Nuestros Niños Day Care Center, Inc.
NYC Coalition for Children with Special Needs
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic
Optimal Care Services
Parents Supporting Parents NY
QSAC, Inc.
Queens Centers for Progress
Queens Community House-Childcare Network
Rivendell School

Roads to Success

Rose F. Kennedy Center, UCEDD University Center for Excellence in Developmental, Service, Training and Research

SCO Family of Services

Seton Foundation for Learning

Small Wonder Preschool, Inc.

St. Nicks Alliance

Step Up Therapy Services, PLLC

SteppingStone Day School Inc.

SY SEIT LLC

The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York

The Child Center of NY

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families

The Guild for Exceptional Children

The Parkside School

The PK-12 Education Policy Team at The Century Foundation

Therapy and Learning Center

UJA-Federation of New York

United for Brownsville

Vibrant Emotional Health

Volunteers of America-Greater New York

Volunteers of America-Greater New York Bronx Early Learning Center

Wediko, NY at The Home for Little Wanderers

YMCA of Greater NY