



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be Delivered to the New York City Council Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education

**Re: 2-K in New York City
October 7, 2026**

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Thank you for the chance to talk about 2-K and the opportunity for the City to build a truly inclusive and accessible program that meets the needs of all children and families. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and the Director of Early Childhood Education at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 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 families navigate the education system, starting from the time children are born.

We want to congratulate the City and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) on the launch of 2-K this September. We know how meaningful the opportunity is for the two thousand toddlers and families who are benefitting from the program this year. Not only does participating in 2-K offer toddlers the chance to interact with peers and develop early learning skills, it also eases a financial hardship for families seeking child care. We hope that 2-K offers these families a warm welcome and successful start to their journey through the City's public school system.

As the City expands the program in the coming years, it's critical that the City create an inclusive program that meets the needs of all toddlers. We are focusing our limited time today on the inclusion of children with disabilities as, in prior early childhood expansions, we have seen them left behind, and a program cannot be universal unless it meets the needs of children with disabilities.

For children ages 3-5, NYCPS offers not just 3-K and Pre-K general education classes, but also more specialized settings for children with more significant needs, including full-day Special Classes in Integrated Settings (SCIS) and special education classes, which offer smaller class ratios, more individualized attention, and instruction provided by a special education teacher. However, such models do not exist for two-year-olds.



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While many children with developmental delays or disabilities can be supported in their 2-K program with the help of existing program staff and coordination with Early Intervention (EI), it is important to note that EI, run by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), provides services to toddlers with disabilities for only a fraction of the day and does not ensure that children get the supports and accommodations they need to participate in a full-day NYCPS 2-K program. Therefore, while coordination with EI is critical, the City must also consider the resources, supports, and program models needed to serve children with more significant disabilities and intensive needs that require specialized care, such as children with complex medical needs or children with severe autism who are unable to communicate or follow instructions.

We are pleased that the City has made clear that children with disabilities are welcome in all 2-K programs and appreciate the work the City has done so far to coordinate with EI and to create an accommodations request process for children in 2-K who need support beyond what EI provides. As the City expands 2-K, we encourage it to build on this work, including by taking the following steps:

- **Monitor and strengthen current efforts to serve children with disabilities in 2-K, including the process for requesting and approving accommodations and supports, as well as coordination with EI.** The City should assess current practices, identify lessons learned during the first few months of 2-K, and identify existing gaps in supporting children with disabilities. As the program significantly expands in the coming years, the City must ensure that procedures implemented this year are streamlined, scalable across all programs, and strengthened, including efforts to conduct staff training, request and secure accommodations, coordinate with EI, and support children transitioning to preschool special education. While the City has taken positive steps, there is a lot more work to do in these areas.
- **Set aside dedicated resources specifically to meet the needs of children with disabilities, including for accommodations and supports not covered by EI.** The City should set aside funds so that 2-K providers have access to professional development, learning materials and equipment for children, staffing support, and other resources to ensure they have the training and capacity to meet the needs of children with disabilities during the full program day.
- **Identify specialists or additional staff who should be hired to ensure programs can fully serve children with disabilities.** We appreciate that NYCPS has a network of professionals like instructional coordinators, leadership coaches, and inclusion specialists that support the City's early childhood programs. However, even with these resources, we regularly hear concerns from providers that they need additional staff or support to meet the needs of children with disabilities in their program, and we hear from families whose early childhood programs are stating they don't have the knowledge or capacity to meet the needs of their children. As new programs are added and capacity grows, the City must ensure it has sufficient staff to provide oversight and support so that programs can fully serve children with disabilities, including identifying any new roles and positions that must be created to meet this need.



- **Leverage the expertise of community-based organizations (CBOs) that already serve children with disabilities by, for example, encouraging center-based EI and preschool special education programs to apply for 2-K or contracting with them to support other providers.** We encourage the City to contract with these programs to open 2-K classes, and to partner closely with these experienced EI and preschool special education CBOs by meeting with providers, visiting existing programs, and considering ways these specialized providers can help train and support staff with limited experience working with young children with developmental delays or disabilities. Center-based EI programs, in particular, have extensive experience and expertise in serving infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities to provide group instruction and individual therapies. However, the programs they offer only operate for a couple of hours a day. The organizations that operate these programs can be an incredible asset for the City and families whose children attend an EI center for their mandated services for part of the day and then would like to participate in 2-K for the remainder of the day.
- **Ensure families are properly matched with program sites that are physically accessible for them.** The City must ensure it offers a sufficient number of fully accessible sites, that program listings clearly indicate which sites are physically accessible to families with disabilities so that families can apply to programs that meet their needs, and that families who need accessible sites receive one.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.