



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: Supporting Multi-Language Learners in Early Childhood Education Programs September 29, 2026

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Thank you for the chance to discuss the importance of supporting emergent multi-lingual learners and their families across the City's early childhood education programs. 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 appreciate that the City has committed to expanding early childhood care and education programs, including by launching 2-K earlier this month. As New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) continues to grow 2-K and strengthen existing programs like 3-K and Pre-K, it is crucial to support the thousands of young children and families in New York City who speak a language other than English in their home.

Among other things, the City should:

- Conduct more robust targeted outreach in multiple languages to immigrant communities encouraging families to apply to 2-K, 3-K and Pre-K, helping ensure families get the information and hands-on support they need to navigate the complicated application and registration processes;
- Provide detailed information in the MySchools.nyc directories for families looking to apply to programs that offer instruction and support in their home language, including specifying what "Enhanced Language Supports" are available at each program;
- Increase efforts to ensure that programs know about and are using translation and interpretation tools to communicate with families in their preferred language; and



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- Invest in additional Dual Language Pre-K Programs and explore ways to age them down so that more young children can receive bilingual instruction.

The City must also ensure that it is meeting its legal obligation to evaluate and serve young children with developmental delays or disabilities who speak languages other than English. Unfortunately, at AFC, we hear from families who wait weeks or months to get evaluations in languages other than English, including recently learning about a family who has been waiting for an evaluation since April because NYCPS has not found a bilingual evaluator or a Bengali interpreter.

After being evaluated and found eligible, only about a third of preschoolers with disabilities receive their mandated bilingual programs and services. According to data from NYCPS, of the 4,003 preschoolers who had a right to instruction or services in a language other than English during the 2024-25 school year, 65% (2,603 students) did *not* receive the bilingual program or services they had a right to receive.

As the City continues to make investments in early childhood education and considers ways to expand the workforce and create an early childhood education pipeline, it is critical to address the need for bilingual evaluators, special education teachers, and service providers to meet needs of emergent multi-lingual learners with disabilities.

AFC also supports Resolution 650, opposing the federally proposed changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and joins the Chair in calling on the federal government to protect and grow access to high-quality education for young children. In addition to changes noted in the resolution that would negatively impact emergent multi-lingual learners, we are also concerned about the harm to young children with disabilities and children in shelter if these changes were to go into effect.

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