



Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: DOE's Provision of Special Education Services

January 30, 2025

Good afternoon, members of the City Council. My name is Alex Elegudin. I direct the Postsecondary Readiness Project at Advocates for Children of New York, and I am testifying today on behalf of the **Transition Alliance**, a coalition of more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving transition planning for students with disabilities in New York City. Together, we represent students, parents, advocates, and professionals working to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind as they prepare for life after high school.

Federal law requires the DOE to ensure that every student with an IEP has a transition plan by age 15. Yet, we know from our work with families that these plans are often vague, incomplete, or not individualized to the student's interests and abilities. Transition planning is meant to be a bridge to adulthood, but for too many families, that bridge feels incomplete—or missing altogether, and they are left to navigate this process on their own, without adequate guidance or support from their schools or the DOE.

While the DOE asks schools to designate Transition Team Leaders, their availability and knowledge vary widely, as these roles are part-time and often assigned to a staff member as an add-on to the full-time position they already hold.

We are also concerned about barriers that students with disabilities are facing in accessing the DOE's career pathways. The DOE has made a significant push toward career-connected learning and post-secondary readiness through programs like FutureReadyNYC and Career and Technical Education (CTE). While these programs have the potential to provide valuable opportunities, too often, students with disabilities are being left out.

For example, the DOE has not provided clear guidance on the inclusion of students with disabilities in FutureReadyNYC, a new, up-and-coming program offered in hundreds of schools. The section in the DOE's FRNYC program guide on students with disabilities has been blank since the program's launch over a year ago. Without this guidance, schools are left to figure it out on their own—or worse, exclude these students altogether. There is little transparency or accountability when it comes to the enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary readiness programs. This lack of inclusion has real consequences. Work-based learning experiences are critical for preparing students with disabilities for the workforce; yet many are missing out simply because the systems in place are not designed to support them.

Another major gap is travel training—teaching students how to navigate the public transportation system. Families have expressed how valuable travel training would be for their children—not just for long-term independence, but for immediate needs like getting to internships, classes, or jobs. The DOE's travel training program through District 75 is small and only serves a limited number of

students. For the majority of students with disabilities, there are no resources to help them learn how to use public transportation safely and confidently.

To address these issues, our recommendations include the following:

1. **Individualized Support:** Every school should have a trained staff member, like a Transition Team Leader, who can provide individualized guidance to families throughout the transition process.
2. **Expanded Access to Career-Connected Learning Programs:** Programs like FutureReadyNYC and CTE must actively recruit and support students with disabilities. Clear guidance and accountability measures are needed to ensure these programs are truly inclusive.
3. **Proactive Parent Outreach:** The DOE should take a proactive approach by reaching out to families of transition-aged students, offering workshops, and providing direct support.
4. **Travel Training Expansion:** The DOE should create a citywide travel training program to serve all students with disabilities who need travel training, not just those in District 75.

Transition planning isn't just a bureaucratic requirement—it's a lifeline for students with disabilities and their families. It can be the difference between a student graduating with the tools they need to thrive in adulthood and one who is left behind. We urge the City Council to hold the DOE accountable for creating a transition planning system that works for every student and family.

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