



September 12, 2018

Dear Speaker Johnson, Chair Dromm, Chair Treyger, Chair Gibson, and New York City Council Members:

We write as members of the ARISE Coalition¹ and Parents for Inclusive Education (“PIE”)² to thank you for including funding for school accessibility in the City’s FY 2019 budget and to ask for your help to ensure that the City include a major investment in the FY 2020-2024 School Construction Authority (SCA) Five-Year Capital Plan to make at least one-third of schools accessible to students, parents, and teachers with physical disabilities.

We know that City Council Members played a key role in ensuring that the adopted FY 2019 budget included \$150 million over three years to make more schools accessible. We appreciate your recognition of the importance of this issue. The \$150 million is a significant step that will help create more opportunities for students with physical disabilities and will move us further toward the inclusive and diverse City that we, as New Yorkers, truly value.

We also recognize that far more work remains. Twenty-eight years have passed since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and over 40 years have passed since the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which mandates inclusion. Yet, only one out of every five city schools is fully accessible to students, parents, staff, and other community members with physical disabilities. As a result, students with physical disabilities find themselves automatically shut out of the majority of schools because of architectural barriers. Most students with physical disabilities cannot attend their zoned elementary schools with their neighborhood peers. Those students, instead, are forced to travel significant distances in order to attend elementary schools they can access. In fact, three of NYC’s 32 school districts currently have no fully accessible elementary schools at all. Additionally, there are matriculating high school students who find themselves with very limited choices when participating in the Department of Education’s often-touted high school choice process because of the severe shortage of fully accessible high schools. Their peers without disabilities have far more schools from which to choose. In fact, six of the

¹ The [ARISE Coalition](#) is a coalition of parents, advocates, educators and academics who have been working together for a decade on systemic issues around special education. We work to bring about policy changes that will improve the day-to-day experiences of and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities in New York City public schools.

² [PIE](#) is a group of parents, educators, and advocates working together to make inclusion a viable option for all students with disabilities in New York City. With members throughout the five boroughs, PIE is the only group in New York City dedicated solely to advocating for the inclusion of students with disabilities.

32 school districts currently have no fully accessible high schools. These realities directly contradict our City's core values.

Given the dismal state of school accessibility, we ask that the City ensure that at least one-third of schools are fully accessible by the end of the next five-year SCA Capital Plan in FY 2024. We estimate that reaching this target would require an additional \$750 million over five years (for a total of \$850 million with the \$100 million already allocated for FY 20 and FY 21). While we would like to see the school system fully accessible to individuals with physical disabilities, this funding would go a long way toward integrating students with physical needs into NYC's schools and would have a significant impact on their lives.

Individuals with physical disabilities need better access to the City's school system. To achieve this goal, the FY 2020-2024 SCA Capital Plan must include the appropriate resources to make at least one-third of schools fully accessible. Please fight with us to ensure the provision of an additional \$750 million to improve the accessibility of the public schools. It is time to provide students with physical disabilities the same opportunities as their nondisabled peers and create a school system where all are welcomed and included.

Sincerely,

Adaptive Design Association, Inc
Advocates for Children of New York
Bronx Independent Living Services
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Citywide Council on Special Education
Community Education Council District 9
Cooke School and Institute
Early Childhood Direction Center at New York Presbyterian Hospital
Everyone Reading
Goddard Riverside Community Center, Star Learning Center
INCLUDEnyc
The Law Office of Steven Alizio, PLLC
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.
New Alternatives for Children
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Parent to Parent New York, Inc.
Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project
Teach for America - New York
United We Stand
Vibrant Emotional Health



Naomi Abraham, Esq., MSW
Brian and Suzanne Albert, Parents
Steven J. Alizio, Esq., M.S.Ed.
Mark Alter, PhD, Professor of Educational Psychology, New York University
Dr. Jessica Bacon, Assistant Professor, Montclair State University
Rebecca Bauer, Parent and Advocate,
David C. Bloomfield, Professor, Brooklyn College and The CUNY Graduate Center
Anthony A. Caponera
Nora Cohen, Parent and P.I.E. Member
April Coughlin, School of Education, SUNY New Paltz
Susan Crawford
Maggie R. Downham, Advocate
Deirdre Garrett-Scott, Parent IEP Member District 3
Brendan Houg-Lee, Parent
Lisa Isaacs, Esq.
Lisa Pena Humes, Parent
Lannetta C. Jeffers
Nicole Job, BK Borough President Appointee, Community Education Council 17
Revere Joyce, Advocate
Joseph Karam
Stacey Kennard, Esq.
Rebecca Kostyuchenko, Esq., Parent
Kim Madden, Parent
Deborah Miller
Amy Ming Tsai, Council Member for Citywide Council for District 75 and Parent of District 75
Diana Mendez, Parent Advocate
Marc Anthony Mendez, Self-Advocate
Elise Murphy
Michelle Noris, Parent, Engineer/Director - Access for All
Megan Ohlssen
Idalia Ortiz
Celia Oyler, Professor of Inclusive Education, Teachers College
Srikala Naraiyan, Associate Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University
Heather Sciacca, Parent
Jennifer Sellar, Parent
Iriss Shimony, Parent Advocate
Karen Spraggs, Parent
Shino Tanikawa, Parent Advocate and member of Community Education Council for District 2

Jasmine Tay, Parent
Mary Ann Tsourounakis -Parent/Advocate
Dr. Emanuel Tsourounakis -Parent/Advocate
Dr. Helen Tsourounakis
Sophia Tsourounakis, MA
George Tsourounakis
Zoe Tsourounakis- Self Advocate
RueZalia Watkins
Josh Weitzman, Parent, Inventor/Maker - Tell Us Abey
Francisco Witemberg Cabral, Parent



September 12, 2018

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

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We are very pleased that the adopted FY 2019 budget included \$150 million over three years to make more schools accessible. We appreciate your recognition of the importance of this issue. The \$150 million is a significant step that will help create more opportunities for students with physical disabilities and will move us further toward the inclusive and diverse City that we, as New Yorkers, truly value.

We also recognize that far more work remains. Twenty-eight years have passed since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and over 40 years have passed since the enactment of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which mandates inclusion. Yet, only one out of every five city schools is fully accessible to students, parents, staff, and other community members with physical disabilities. As a result, students with physical disabilities find themselves automatically shut out of the majority of schools because of architectural barriers. Most students with physical disabilities cannot attend their zoned elementary schools with their neighborhood peers. Those students, instead, are forced to travel significant distances in order to attend elementary schools they can access. In fact, three of NYC’s 32 school districts currently have no fully accessible elementary

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Individuals with physical disabilities need better access to the City's school system. To achieve this goal, we urge you to include an additional \$750 million in the FY 2020-2024 SCA Capital Plan to make at least one third of schools fully accessible. It is time to provide students with physical disabilities the same opportunities as their nondisabled peers and create a school system where all are welcomed and included.

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