

FOR CIRCULATION June XX, 2021

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

Re: Meeting the Need for Preschool Special Education Classes

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We are writing to ask you to **address the shortage of preschool special education classes and provide salary parity to teachers of preschool special education classes at community-based organizations (CBOs) this year.** While we appreciate that the City included funding in the Executive Budget for preschool special education, we are disappointed that there is no funding to address the shortage of preschool special education classes until Fiscal Year 23 and no commitment to salary parity for preschool special education class teachers even in FY 23. 3-K and Pre-K will never be “for all” until the City ensures a preschool special education class seat for every child who needs one.

While many preschoolers with disabilities participate in 3-K or Pre-K for All programs, some children with more significant disabilities have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that require more specialized settings—preschool special education classes that offer smaller class sizes and are led by teachers trained to educate students with disabilities. However, even as the City has committed to expanding 3-K to all 32 community school districts this September, it is falling far short of providing preschool special education classes to all children whose IEPs require them. In fact, recently released data show that, as of the end of the 2019-2020 school year, **1,215 New York City preschoolers were waiting for seats in legally mandated preschool special education classes in violation of their legal rights.**

The Executive Budget includes a new investment of \$22M in FY 22 for preschool special education, increasing to \$88M in FY 23. We are pleased to see an investment in preschool special education and strongly support several of the initiatives proposed for FY 22 such as adding 3-K integrated classes and hiring inclusion specialists, Early Intervention transition coordinators, and preschool special education administrators and community coordinators. We thank you for taking these important steps.

However, there is no funding slated until *FY 23* to address the preschool special education class shortage, which that has left preschoolers with disabilities sitting at home without services while their peers have increased access to early childhood education programs. Providing children with their mandated preschool special education classes is not optional, and the City cannot wait another year to provide children with the classes they have a legal right to receive.

Furthermore, while the Executive Budget would provide certain financial and programmatic support to DOE-contracted CBOs that run preschool special education classes starting in FY 23, the City has not yet committed to providing salary parity to teachers of preschool special

education classes, even in FY 23. Two years ago, the City reached an early childhood salary parity agreement to pay prekindergarten teachers at CBOs the same starting salaries as public school teachers, but excluded teachers of preschool special education classes at CBOs from this agreement. As a result, teachers who lead preschool special education classes at CBOs are now some of the lowest-paid educators in New York City, despite serving preschoolers with the most intensive needs. Under the City's salary parity agreement, other early childhood teachers will receive a salary increase in October 2021. Without a commitment to salary parity this year, we worry that preschool special class teachers will flock to general education classes, leaving children with disabilities without teachers and making the shortage of preschool special education classes even worse.

Preschoolers with significant disabilities should not have to wait another year for the City to make needed investments to meet their needs. We urge you to ensure that the final FY 22 budget includes funding to ensure a preschool special education class seat for every preschool-aged child whose IEP mandates one and to extend salary parity to teachers at preschool special education classes at CBOs this year.

Sincerely,

To sign on your organization, please complete this [online form](#). Thank you!