

August 3, 2010



Dear Parents,

As members of the [ARISE Coalition](#) we are writing to bring you up-to-date on the Department of Education's reform to better educate students with disabilities in community schools. The Department of Education (DOE) announced their [plans](#) and identified guiding principles for the reform last February and has been working since then to ready [265 of NYC's public schools](#) to use more [flexible classroom options](#) to support students with disabilities in community schools, while also working to improve outcomes for their students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The ARISE Coalition is made up of parents, educators, advocates, and others concerned with securing better experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities in New York City. While we are eager to see the DOE improve special education in the City's schools, we are also watching closely to monitor how it plays out in our schools for our students and their families, and to make sure that things are actually improved under the reform.

Who is leading this effort?

The [Division of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners](#) at the DOE is spearheading the reform.

How long will it take for reform to get to all New York City Schools?

The DOE is rolling out the reform over the course of the next two years – with 265 schools participating in the 2010-2011 school year and all the remaining public schools participating in the 2011-2012 school year.

How will I know when changes are coming to my child's school?

Families of students currently enrolled in the [265 schools](#) should have received at least one communication from the schools' principals accompanied by a cover [letter](#) from Deputy Chancellor Laura Rodriguez notifying them that their schools had been chosen to be part of the new initiative.

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What should I expect to see in my child's school this fall?

Families with students who have IEPs in one of the [265 schools](#) should expect changes this fall. In some schools they may be dramatic; in others less so.

- All students are still entitled to receive the services on their IEPs.
- Your child's IEP should be reviewed by the IEP team at your school to make certain that he or she is being educated in the most appropriate and least restrictive environment in which he or she can progress. Don't forget, you are a critical part of that team.
- IEP teams may decide to modify the supports and services an individual student receives.
- Students best served by District 75 programs should expect to continue to be served there.

What should not be happening in the name of reform?

The reform should not be used to justify inappropriate cuts in special education services. You should not see:

- IEP or program changes until an IEP meeting, which you participate in, has been held.
- Sudden or large scale moves of students out of the school.
- A move to less restrictive settings without additional supports and services necessary to make that placement successful. The reform should not mean a mere reduction of special education services and supports.

What should I do if something goes wrong in the process?

The reform in no way changes the rights you have as a parent under law when your child is getting special education services.

- You should still be an active participant in the development of your child's IEP.
- You have the right to receive updates and reports about your child's experiences and progress in school. Those can be used to monitor the effects of any changes made as part of the reform as they pertain to your child.
- You continue to have the right to agree or disagree with the suggestions of the school in the development of the IEP and the supports, services, and placement recommendations made for your child. If you are not comfortable with the changes proposed to your child's plan or placement, you can, and should say so.
- If you and the rest of the IEP team cannot come to agreement, you can still turn to mediation or litigation as means to resolve disagreements.

How do I get help?

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To learn more about parents' rights you may want to carefully study the DOE's own [Parent's Guide to Special Education Services for School Aged Children](#) or look at the [ARISE Coalition's resource page](#) for links to guides and brochures from the advocacy community.

How do I have a voice in making things work better?

We are eager to see special education improved in New York City and better outcomes for youth with disabilities who have been left behind repeatedly as the rest of the system progresses. We want to hear from you as the year unfolds; especially those of you in the [265 Phase 1 schools](#). We want to know how things change in your school, assuming they do change with regard to the delivery of special education supports and services. We want to know when the reform succeeds in making your school more welcome to students with disabilities and their families and when it does not succeed. We want to know how your children fare under the reform. With your stories we can make our advocacy efforts on behalf of students with disabilities even stronger. To share your experiences you can email us at mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org or (212) 822-9523.

Best,

Maggie Moroff
Coordinator of the [ARISE Coalition](#)