

enabling students to participate in the classroom. Inclusion may also mean that students need behavioral supports and/or intervention plans to help them. Inclusion requires the DOE and each school to plan effectively and expand its practices to meet the needs of all students. And, inclusion requires that schools have both the funding they need to serve their students and the flexibility to use that funding to meet the individual needs of their student population, including students with disabilities.

In New York City, there are a number of schools that foster inclusive communities where students with disabilities thrive alongside their nondisabled peers. However, in a school system of seventeen hundred schools there are far too few schools that fulfill this need. As the City Council listens today to the DOE, parents and advocates speak about how to improve special education instruction for students with disabilities, we urge Council Members to remember the importance of students with disabilities receiving appropriate special education services and supports in the general education classrooms alongside their nondisabled peers. As stated above and research has substantiated, such opportunities will have a direct impact on improved test scores, graduation rates, and post graduation experiences, including preparing students to attend college.

In closing, we ask you to closely consider three main areas:

1) We urge the Council to question the barriers for why more schools are not inclusive and how the DOE can further aid schools to support students in inclusive settings by providing appropriate services and supports so that a broad range of students with disabilities can be successfully included in general education classrooms and schools. Such supports include the provision of assistive technology, behavior plans, testing accommodation and other academic assistance. For example, it is important to look at whether students are currently being assessed for the use of assistive technology in an effective manner and how the use of technology is being supported and delivered to students. Best practices require this.

2) We also encourage you to look at the information given to parents and to question our school system's policies and practices' regarding what information is publicly disseminated. An important component of including students with disabilities is ensuring parents are partners with schools in the education process. To do this most effectively, parents need deeper and more timely information about existing inclusive education and instructional expertise at the school level.

3) Finally, we ask you to pay special attention to the "choice" process for middle and high schools. As you may know it is an application process that is well intentioned to provide students with choices in their school options. However, for students with disabilities, far too few schools are equally equipped or willing to serve all students, and there are far too few choices for students who need physically accessible schools. This

application process needs to be further evaluated with an eye towards creating a true choice process for all students with disabilities.

In conclusion, creating inclusive school communities will impact the educational outcomes of **all** students and create education equality for students with disabilities. In many respects, inclusive education is a civil rights issue as it allows students to be full members of their communities and, in turn, prepares them for real world experiences. As always, PIE welcomes any opportunity to further discuss and collaborate on ways to improve our City's public school system and, of course, and the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Thank you for considering our testimony today.

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