



TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN NEW YORK CITY

Over a year ago, Covid-19 disrupted so much in the lives of New Yorkers, not the least of which has been the education of students from preschool to the age of 21. Among those students most impacted, New York City's nearly 238,000 students with disabilities, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx, have lost countless hours of critical instruction and key special education supports mandated for them under federal law. Now with relief in sight, the members of the ARISE Coalition offer 10 recommendations aimed at addressing the fallout of the pandemic on students with a range of disabilities from preschool to the age of 21. With money received under the American Rescue Plan, the City should:

1. **Summer Supports:** Welcome a wider range of students to summer programming than ever before – including all K-12 students with disabilities regardless of whether their IEPs require 10 months or 12 months of special education services, as well as students with disabilities set to age of out of school this year who need more time to earn a diploma or get transition supports. Summer programming should offer academic support, one-on-one or small-group evidence-based literacy instruction and intervention, and appropriate specialized placements. Furthermore, summer school this year must offer additional and appropriate opportunities for social-emotional learning and the development of life skills in all settings – self-contained and inclusive – for our students with disabilities. Summer school must also offer opportunities for enrichment – allowing all students in attendance to enjoy the additional hours spent at school. To the greatest extent possible, we recommend that students be offered the opportunity to attend all summer programming in person.
2. **High Dosage Tutoring:** Provide high dosage tutoring for all students, including those with disabilities, who would benefit from additional support as a result of the pandemic. Tutoring should take place in one-on-one or small group settings, and tutors must receive specialized training in working with students with disabilities.
3. **Literacy Support:** Building off an initiative the DOE began last summer, the DOE should pair IEP teachers and Universal Literacy Coaches already trained to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction with small groups of students who need specialized support in reading over the summer and during the school year – whether students are learning remotely or in person. The DOE should purchase literacy curricula grounded in the science of reading and fund training related to the curricula. Finally, the DOE should ensure that Universal Literacy Coaches, who were moved to classroom teacher positions this year, resume their focus on literacy next year.

4. **Compensatory Services**: Develop a plan to determine the extent of special education supports and services each student missed since March of 2020 and the effect of the services missed and to provide make-up instruction and services. Such a plan should include hiring or contracting with additional special education teachers and related service providers over the summer and during the school year. The plan should be developed no later than May 2021 so that compensatory services can be in place at the start of the expanded summer 2021 program and continue to be fully implemented at the start of the school year in September 2021.
5. **Evaluations**: Expand the use of in-person evaluations upon initial referrals for special education and requests for reevaluations. While the DOE transitioned to reviews of student records as the main evaluation method during the pandemic, the DOE must ensure in-person evaluations are available as more students return to school. Members of ARISE and the families they support have had difficulty getting in-person evaluations and have had requests for in-person evaluations denied by schools and Committee on Special Education (CSE) offices, which are relying too heavily on “comprehensive data driven assessments” that are proving inadequate to identify the current needs of students from preschool through completion of their time in high school.
6. **Staffing Shortages**: Address staffing shortages for school-aged special education – in particular around Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes and bilingual special education settings. The city must address glaring staffing issues, working closely with local teaching programs and with community groups supporting multi-lingual speakers.
7. **Paraprofessional Support**: Provide paraprofessional support for students with disabilities learning at home who require this service and for students learning in person whose IEPs require transportation paraprofessionals to and from school buildings. To address any shortages, the DOE will need to recruit and train additional staff to work as paraprofessionals and, notably, to incentivize current paraprofessionals to support transportation needs for students learning in person. To the degree that new hires are necessitated, we recommend looking to family members and individuals from students’ communities since it can be difficult to find paraprofessionals willing to travel hours to and from students’ homes. Further, in order to recruit new and appropriate support staff, the DOE must find ways to employ those transportation paraprofessionals who are not currently working in schools during the hours the students are in school. We have worked with families this year whose students were unable to attend school in-person simply because they were unable to get to school for extended periods of time without the support of a paraprofessional for riding on the bus. Furthermore, the DOE should provide ongoing training, support and supervision to paraprofessionals to ensure that they are able to provide effective support to all students – regardless of whether those students are attending their programs in person or remotely.

8. **Placements for Preschool Students with Disabilities:** Provide every preschool-aged child requiring placement in a special education class with an appropriate seat pursuant to their IEPs. For these students, specialized instruction is critical. Prior to the pandemic, the City had a significant shortage of seats in preschool special education classes. The City must open more classes run by the DOE or community-based organizations and provide salary parity to teachers working in preschool special education classes located within community-based organizations to ensure that those schools can hire and maintain staff trained to support children. All children whose families desire them to return to school in-person next year must have a seat available to them; That includes our youngest students with disabilities.

9. **Students with Disabilities Aging out of School:** As with last year, allow students with disabilities who would otherwise age out of school upon turning 21 to remain in school, receive transition support services, and get ongoing assistance from their Transition College Access Center (TCAC) during the 2021-22 school year. To that end, all families should receive notice of the services and support their TCAC can provide, be given the contact information for the TCAC in their borough and be provided with a copy – electronic or hard copy – of the DOE’s Family Guide to Transition Planning. Unlike this past year, the City should allow 21-year-old students placed by the DOE at state-approved non-public schools to return to school just like their peers at district schools and should fund these placements.

10. **Supporting Social-Emotional and Behavior Needs:** While excellent instruction is a critical piece of ensuring students feel successful and comfortable in their classes, students have social and emotional needs for which the DOE must provide appropriate support. We recommend the City offer in-school behavior supports and enhanced social-emotional supports for students struggling as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has wrought social-emotional challenges to most of the City’s inhabitants, amplified for all students and for students with disabilities. The City should rollout a systemwide 2-tiered approach to support all students’ social-emotional and behavioral needs through trauma-informed whole-school approaches and targeted, intensive mental health supports for those struggling the most. We recommend that the City work with community-based organizations and mental health agencies already steeped in this work to provide support as needed through evidence-based approaches.

Furthermore, as the City develops its plan for using the American Rescue Plan education funding, it should ensure that all components of the plan are fully accessible to students with a range of disabilities and tailored to meet the needs of students with disabilities. For example, community-based organizations running after-school, summer, or tutoring programs with this funding should receive the training, support, and resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and students who have a right to transportation due to their disabilities should receive transportation for any supplemental programming outside of the student’s regular school hours or school building.