



May 15, 2018

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

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We write as members of the ARISE Coalition¹ and Parents for Inclusive Education (“PIE”)² to urge you to ensure that the final FY 2019 budget includes the City Council’s recommendation for an additional \$125 million for school accessibility projects.

We are gravely concerned about the significant dearth of accessible public schools in New York City, severely limiting the choices available to students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities. Three of the City’s 32 community school districts have no fully accessible elementary schools (Districts 12, 16, and 21), four school districts have no fully accessible middle schools (Districts 7, 14, 16, and 32), and six districts have no fully accessible high schools (Districts 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, and 32).

Due to this shortage, in a school system that prides itself on providing students with choices when applying to high school, enabling them to explore specific interests and talents, there is no equity in the admissions process for students with physical disabilities. Every time a student with physical differences applies to high school, the accessibility of school buildings becomes a primary concern in their decision-making process, often over and above the student’s interests and talents.

While the Department of Education has categorized a number of schools across the City as “partially” accessible, individuals using wheelchairs often cannot access key spaces in many of these schools. We know of partially accessible schools with no accessible bathrooms. We know of others where students who use wheelchairs or walkers must enter the building through a separate entrance from their peers. At other partially accessible schools, students who use wheelchairs cannot access key rooms in the school, such as libraries, science rooms, cafeterias, and music studios—denying those students the ability to be fully included in the school’s program and to learn alongside their peers.

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.



More than twenty-seven years after the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) and two years after the U.S. Department of Justice issued findings regarding the shortage of accessible schools in New York City, the City must provide individuals with disabilities access to additional public schools. This work needs to start with a sufficient allocation of funds for renovation and construction to increase the number of accessible schools.

Unfortunately, the 2015-2019 Capital Plan allocates only \$100 million over five years for improving school accessibility and \$28 million for ensuring that a number of schools can serve as accessible emergency shelters. Together, that represents less than one percent of the total funding in the Plan. Furthermore, the City has already spent the vast majority of this funding, leaving little, if any, funding for accessibility projects in the coming year.

We are very pleased that the City Council’s Response to the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget recommends an allocation of an additional \$125 million for school accessibility projects. If adopted, this funding would allow the City to make another 15-17 schools fully accessible and to improve the accessibility of additional schools throughout the City through minor renovation projects. We were disheartened to see that your Executive Budget, once again, omitted this critical funding.

We implore you to work with the City Council to ensure the City’s final budget includes at least an additional \$125 million for school accessibility. New York City cannot be the fairest big city in America until students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities have equitable access to the City’s schools.

Sincerely,

Adaptive Design Association, Inc.

Advocates for Children of New York

Bronx Independent Living Services

Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York

The City College Partnership

Citywide Council on Special Education

Cooke School and Institute

Everyone Reading



Goddard Riverside Community Center, Star Learning Center

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The Law Office of Steven Alizio, PLLC

Mental Health Association of NYC

New Alternatives for Children

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

NYC Special Education Collaborative

Parent to Parent NY, Inc.

Partnership for Children's Rights

Teach For America - New York

United We Stand of NY

Naomi Abraham. Esq., MSW

Bess Abrahams, LMSW

Brian & Suzanne Albert, Parents

Dan Atkins, Parent

Maria Aller, Parent

Randy Aller-Reyes, Student

Mark Alter, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education & Human Development, New York University

Mason Barney, Parent

Jaclyn Okin Barney, Esq.



Susan Crawford, The Right to Read Project

Nora Cohen, Parent

Ziograin Correa, Parent

April Coughlin, School of Education, SUNY New Paltz

Amber Decker, Parent

Maggie Downham, Advocate

Paul Hutchinson, Ed.D., Parent

Lisa Isaacs, Esq.

Revere Joyce, Advocate

Stacey Kennard, Esq.

Rebecca Kostyuchenko, Esq., Parent

Lavinia Mancuso, Everyone Reading

Ellen Mc Hugh, Citywide Council on Special Education

Diana Mendez, Parent

Marc Mendez, Student

Amy Ming Tsai, Citywide Education Council for District 75 council member & Parent.

Maggie Moroff, J.D., M.S.Ed.

Michelle Noris, Parent

Viany Orozco, Parent

Celia Oyler, Professor of Inclusive Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

Lourdes Rivera-Putz, Parent and Advocate

Marilou G Santiago, Parent



Noel S. Santiago, Parent

Iriss Shimony, Parent

Karin Spraggs, Parent and Advocate

Srikala Naraiian, Associate Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University

Jasmine Tay, Parent

RueZalia Watkins, Advocate

Judith Wright, Parent



May 16, 2018

New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Johnson, Chair Dromm, Chair Treyger, 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 recommending an additional \$125 million for school accessibility projects in your Response to the Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Budget. We urge you to ensure this much-needed funding is included in the City’s final FY 2019 budget.

We are gravely concerned about the significant dearth of accessible public schools in New York City, severely limiting the choices available to students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities. Three of the City’s 32 community school districts have no fully accessible elementary schools (Districts 12, 16, and 21), four school districts have no fully accessible middle schools (Districts 7, 14, 16, and 32), and six districts have no fully accessible high schools (Districts 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, and 32).

Due to this shortage, in a school system that prides itself on providing students with choices when applying to high school, enabling them to explore specific interests and talents, there is no equity in the admissions process for students with physical disabilities. Every time a student with physical differences applies to high school, the accessibility of school buildings becomes a primary concern in their decision-making process, often over and above the student’s interests and talents.

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Unfortunately, the 2015-2019 Capital Plan allocates only \$100 million over five years for improving school accessibility and \$28 million for ensuring that a number of schools can serve as accessible emergency shelters. Together, that represents less than one percent of the total funding in the Plan. Furthermore, the City has already spent the vast majority of this funding, leaving little, if any, funding for accessibility projects in the coming year.

We are very pleased that the City Council’s Response to the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget recommends an allocation of an additional \$125 million for school accessibility projects. If adopted, this funding would allow the City to make another 15-17 schools fully accessible and to improve the accessibility of additional schools throughout the City through minor renovation projects. Unfortunately, the Executive Budget, once again, omits this critical funding.

We urge you to stand steadfast and negotiate a final budget that includes at least an additional \$125 million for school accessibility. New York City cannot be the fairest big city in America until students, families, and teachers with physical disabilities have equitable access to the City’s schools.

Sincerely,

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