

NEWS RELEASE

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New Report Says NYC School Reforms Left Students with Disabilities Behind *ARISE Coalition Report Identifies Priorities for Reform*

The past seven years of education reform have not significantly improved outcomes, experiences or services for New York City's 160,000 public school students with disabilities, according to *Include! Educate! Respect!*, a report issued today by the ARISE Coalition. The report is a review of the reform initiatives and performance data as well as the experiences of parents under the leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein. It describes how Mayor Bloomberg's Children First reforms have left students with disabilities out and calls for the Department of Education (DOE) to focus on specific reform priorities.

"With seven years under its belt and possibly another term to go, this is the ideal time for the Bloomberg administration to tackle this complex but important issue," said Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York, the founding member of the ARISE Coalition.

The Coalition is a group of 33 parents, parent organizations, advocates, educators, and other supporters of students with special needs who have united to bring meaningful and positive reform to New York City's schools. (For a full list of the Coalition membership, see the ARISE Coalition website at www.arisecoalition.org.)

Include! Educate! Respect! gives the DOE and the Chancellor eight concrete recommendations that provide a road map for reform. Combining new initiatives with enhancements of already existing services and resources, the recommendations include a call for the NYC DOE to study and invest in successful instructional practices for students with disabilities, making NYC a model for educators throughout the country. They ask the Chancellor to issue an absolute mandate that discrimination in any form against students with disabilities will no longer be tolerated and, at the same time, urge the DOE to enforce existing law and policies ensuring that all educational plans for individual students with disabilities be fully implemented. Among the recommendations that arose directly from parents' stories, the report advocates for more accessible information for students and their families about programs, services and resources available for students with disabilities.

Maggie Moroff, Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition, says, "This report calls for a school system where all children, including students with disabilities, have an honest chance to learn and succeed."

The ARISE Coalition collected stories from parents across the city. These experiences and others like them informed both the idea for and the backbone of the report:

- Diane Berman and her husband, both educators, had to move from New York City to Long Island to finally get their son the supports and services his education plan required. Ms. Berman describes her son’s NYC teachers as “overwhelmed in a broken system, with no supports from above.”
- Diana Mendez has had to fight for the same, necessary services for her thirteen-year-old son every year. It took three years for Ms. Mendez to convince the DOE he needed the services in the first place, another two years for the services to be put into place, and since then, each year, Ms. Mendez is forced to request an impartial hearing just to continue the same services she has proven repeatedly that her son needs to progress. She says, “Parents have documentation indicating their child's diagnosis and recommendations that are written by service professionals, but these parents are still put through unnecessary impartial hearings and resolution meetings to get those services.”
- Judy LaLane’s pre-adolescent son was diagnosed with autism as an infant. She has had to battle the school system to get the respect, supports, and services they both needed all along the way. Despite her own family’s struggles, Ms. LaLane is hopeful that reform will come. She says, “There’s potential to fix the system, but we still have a long way to go. Many families fight for private school, but working with other parents, we can fix the public schools.”

Susan Dooha, the Executive Director of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, and a member of the ARISE Coalition says, “In the last eight years, we’ve seen the DOE’s apparent disregard for children with disabilities. Our kids are more likely to be pushed out, drop out or leave school without a diploma than to graduate. As the ARISE report makes clear, if NYC is to provide a quality education for our children then parents and their advocates must be included in a meaningful way. We just need the information, tools and opportunity to do so.”

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The full report can be downloaded from www.arisecoalition.org

For additional information, the following persons are available to talk to the press:

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