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**Testimony of The ARISE Coalition for New York City Council
Committee on Finance**

Re: Fiscal Year 2023 Budget - Education

May 25, 2022

Good afternoon. I am Maggie Moroff. I work as both the Senior Special Education Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children and as the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition. I am here today on behalf of the ARISE members to talk about the importance of ensuring that COVID-19 relief funding allocated last year to support students with disabilities is spent as intended; that all education initiatives funded in this year's budget include meaningful access for students with disabilities and provide appropriate supports to those students from day one; and that preschool special education teachers at community-based organizations see the pay parity they require in order to ensure that all students needing preschool special education placements have a place to attend school.

A New York City Comptroller's report released last month revealed that as of the start of March, the DOE had spent only 12% of the \$251 million in federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated for FY 22 to provide extra support to students with disabilities and to create additional seats for preschool students with disabilities.

I wish I could say that the 12% came as a surprise to our members. While the DOE allocated funding to schools to offer after-school or Saturday Special Education Recovery Services (SERS) to students with disabilities, and launched the Sensory, Exploration, Education, and Discovery (SEED) program for students with sensory challenges, we have heard from many families whose children were unable to access those services or who were not offered services in the first place. We have been recommending the DOE provide make-up services for the instruction and services students with disabilities lost during remote learning, consistent with the DOE's legal obligation. Further, we have advocated for improved delivery of those services. We've called repeatedly for: clear information for families about the availability of recovery services – something our members have found to be inconsistent throughout city schools; expanded services for all students with disabilities regardless of age, grade, language needs and schools attended including preschools, charter school and state-approved non-public schools; targeted

instructional interventions at all SERS programs; and guaranteed busing for students with IEP mandates for transportation so they could remain after school at the SERS programs and access the SEED program. Unfortunately, without these changes, the SERS programs were not appropriate, available, or feasible for many students with disabilities this year. We want to be certain that the DOE uses the COVID-19 relief funds allocated for special education services for FY 22 and FY 23 to support students with disabilities, some of the students left furthest behind during the pandemic - and that unused special education relief funding is not reallocated for a different purpose. We ask for your help doing so.

We also want to make absolutely certain that all education initiatives funded in this year's budget, such as the \$33 million to launch a new career pathways program included in the Executive Budget, are explicitly made available to all students, including those with disabilities who make up approximately 1/5 of the total student population but who have historically been left out of initiatives such as career and technical education. To make that a reality, students who require special education accommodations and modifications will need access to supports. Without an intentional effort to design the new program with the needs of students with disabilities in mind, those students will effectively be cut off from the benefits of the initiative. This is true of all new initiatives the city rolls out and funds in this year's budget. In addition, as the City examines Fair Student Funding weights, we want to ensure that there is adequate funding to meet the needs of all students with disabilities now and going forward.

Finally, we support paying preschool special education teachers working at community-based organizations on par with their 12-month DOE counterparts. Without that pay parity, far too many preschool-aged students with disabilities will remain without much needed specialized placements and the gaps between them and their more typical peers will continue to grow. We thank the City Council for including this important priority in your response to the preliminary budget and urge you to ensure that the needed funding is included in the final budget.

Thank you for your time today. I am available now and any time in the future to answer questions about ARISE and about our budget recommendations. I can be reached at mmoroff@advocatesforchildren.org.