



**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committees on Education and Higher Education**

**RE: Teacher Preparation and Training**

**June 25, 2019**

Good afternoon. I am Maggie Moroff and I work as the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition, a group of parents, advocates, educators, academics and other stakeholders who have been working together for over a decade to push for systemic reforms to special education in New York City to improve the day-to-day experiences and the long-term outcomes for students with disabilities. I'd like to speak this afternoon about the need to train and provide on-going support to NYC's public school teachers so that they are prepared to provide all students, including those with dyslexia and other disabilities, with appropriate, evidence-based literacy instruction that is grounded in the science of reading. In particular, teacher preparation programs frequently fail to provide pre-service educators with the knowledge and training they need to be able to provide explicit and systematic instruction in the foundational skills of phonemic awareness and phonics, which research has repeatedly and unambiguously shown is beneficial for all students and absolutely essential for those with dyslexia.

It should be an educational priority – perhaps the top educational priority – for NYC to ensure that all students learn to read. Success in school — in math, science, social studies, and even the arts — depends on students being able to understand and use information from text. Students who struggle with reading tend to avoid it and over time fall further and further behind their peers reading on grade level. The further students fall behind, the more likely it is that they will leave school unprepared for adult life. ARISE members know that far too many of our students, with and without specific literacy-related disabilities, are in danger of leaving school without the literacy skills they need to succeed in the world after high school.

When we consider the serious implications of failing to teach students to read, it is clear that there is no time to waste. As the City moves to increase diversity of all kinds in our schools and our classrooms, it is essential that we equip teachers with the skills to teach literacy across the spectrum of learners. We can't blame students or their disabilities for the dismal outcomes we see in standardized tests or graduation and dropout rates. Rather, in most instances, students simply haven't been taught effectively, because, across grade levels, neither general education nor special education teachers have been adequately prepared to offer the systematic,

targeted, evidence-based literacy instruction their students need. This is unfair to teachers, who are left to try to figure it out on their own and then harshly judged when they don't know how to do something they've never been taught how to do, and unfair to students, who struggle unnecessarily and are inappropriately segregated into special education classrooms when they don't respond to the hodgepodge of instruction their schools currently use.

It's not too late to turn this problem around, however, and we're particularly glad that the Council is considering teacher preparation and training this afternoon. What ARISE members see when we look closely at the work in the schools with our students is a great deal of variability in teacher practice and effectiveness, which is backed up by studies that have found a lack of consistency in higher education programs that prepare future teachers. In far too many cases, teaching colleges adhere to philosophies about literacy instruction that are unsupported by the extensive research base on how children learn to read and that directly contradict the work being done by cognitive scientists at their own universities. We suggest that the City look carefully at places where it has the ability to influence teacher preparation and training, such as the NYC Teaching Fellows program, teacher training programs at CUNY, or possibly creating a paid apprenticeship program in literacy at the DOE. If teachers in pre-service certification programs receive explicit instruction themselves in how children learn to read and in evidence-based teaching methods, they'll come into the classroom far better prepared to teach all their students, including those with reading disabilities.

As far as on-going teacher support and in-service training, we strongly support the DOE's current efforts to improve literacy instruction for students in early childhood grades (the Universal Literacy initiative and a new pilot to offer intensive reading interventions over the summer to kindergarten and first grade students in a small number of schools, for example). However, we cannot neglect students currently in grades 3 through 12 who are still struggling with foundational reading skills because they never received appropriate instruction when they were younger. There needs to be a coherent plan to address the current variability in instruction and ensure that upper elementary, middle, and high school teachers also have access to the training and support they need to improve literacy instruction for older students and provide intensive interventions when necessary. Programs like the DOE's summer intensive reading pilot should be considered for expansion across all boroughs and offered to students in older grades as well, keeping in mind the importance of making sure that instruction is developmentally appropriate and highly engaging. Students should get the support they need to catch up, without feeling stigmatized or like they are being punished by having to attend.

ARISE members are confident that with adequate resources, dedicated teacher preparation, and a strong commitment from everyone involved, school staff won't be left alone to try to teach their students to read, students won't have to struggle or turn to private schools and tutors to advance their skills, and parents won't have to fear that their children, regardless of whether or not they have dyslexia or another disability, will leave school without learning to read.