



# Citywide Council on Special Education

**2020 – 2021  
Council  
Members**

April 28, 2021

From: The Citywide Council on Special Education

To: Chancellor Miesha Ross-Porter  
Deputy Chancellor Austin, FACE  
Deputy Chief Academic Officer Christina Foti

Re: Budget Recommendations for Special Education Services

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**For the Universal Benefit of Students Enrolled in All NYC Public Schools.**

## **1. Smaller Class Sizes**

Recommendation: \$1 Billion

NYC schools are due to receive between \$2.25- \$2.6 billion per year for the next two years via the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. One of the allowable uses of those funds specified in the law is to lower class size. We are urging that the Mayor and NYC Council designate \$1 billion of these funds towards hiring additional teachers to lower class size, focused especially on the early grades and in schools whose surrounding communities bore a disproportionate impact of the pandemic.

That amount could pay for the salaries of about 10,000 new teachers, which could reduce class size in as many as 40,000 classrooms – as adding a new teacher lowers class size for all the other students in a school in the same grade or subject except in those instances where overcrowding already exists. In cases of overcrowding, we defer to our recommendations mentioned in the section **Expand Accessibility in Schools \$750 million capital**

## **2. Program to Replace Learning Bridges**

The program would be created to support families who are working parents and rely on schools for primary childcare. The program would provide additional funding for personnel to staff and support students who are part of long term school closures or when schools are placed on an indefinite pause. Along with funding for personnel, the accessibility to students with special needs to enroll and be accommodated and paraprofessionals for those who require them must be included. This, and additional training on SWD accommodations should be based out of a community

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organization, and general training on working with SWD for DOE employee run programs. In an optimum setting, a D75 site would be created for D75 trained personnel in an accessible location to accommodate D75 families and students with advanced needs.

### Improve Special Education Services

Prior to the pandemic, DOE did not meet State mandated special education requirements. The deficiency in services has been further compounded by school closures and remote learning. Large investments in special education services can help to ensure students do not lag behind in educational milestones.

#### 1. **Compensatory Services.**

Recommendation: TBD

According to DOE's report on special education services, as of January 2021, nine percent of identified students with disabilities do not receive any special education services, and 37 percent are only receiving half of the services to which they are entitled in their Individualized Education Program (IEPs). DOE should assess the need based off of existing data and fund additional special education teachers and therapists i.e., speech, occupational, and physical therapists, counselors, psychologists, etc in the Fiscal 2022 budget to provide the make-up instruction and services and give current staff the chance to work over the summer. Makeup instruction and services must be easily accessible to all special education students, without administration and begin this summer. In addition, DOE should develop and fund a plan in Fiscal 2022 and in the outyears to increase evaluation for special education services and address growth in enrollment in special education services by providing more programming

#### 2. **Parity for Special Education Pre-K Providers and Expand Special Education Pre-K.**

Recommendation:\$85 million

An \$85 million investment would fund pay parity for special education providers as well as add enough special education pre-K seats for all eligible children. Special education pre-K is jointly funded by the City and the State, and the State sets reimbursements rates for schools. The State has failed to increase the tuition reimbursement rates for years, resulting in more than 30 community-based organizations in the City closing their special education pre-K programs due to inadequate funding. Increasing the tuition reimbursement rate is necessary to expand special education pre-K capacity and to raise pay rates of special education pre-K providers to parity with their general education counterparts. Parity will improve staff retention and stabilize special education pre-K programs. "\$589 million for Early Education Initiatives funds ongoing demand for early education capacity including Pre-K for four-year old children and 3-K for three-year olds. In addition to expanding the pre-Kindergarten capacity within new buildings, these funds will allow for the identification of new locations and provide 684 new pre-Kindergarten seats. The new 3-K for All

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mayoral initiative expands the reach of the Pre-K for All Initiative by providing over 1,800 early childhood seats to three-year old children across the City. These funds will create classrooms within existing buildings and new locations.”

Although not funded in the Fiscal 2022 Preliminary Budget, DOE plans to operate 3K programs in every school district by next year, sooner than previously planned. This expansion excludes the addition of legally required special education pre-K seats. Prior to the pandemic, the City had projected a shortage of 1,000 to 2,000 special education pre-K seats. The demand for preschool special education classes will likely increase in the coming months, as children with disabilities who missed months of services during the pandemic are identified as needing more intensive intervention.

### **3. Create a Citywide Literacy Curriculum & Program**

Recommendation: \$50 million

To help teachers address the learning loss created by virtual learning, the City should allocate \$50 million to hiring reading specialists trained in literacy curriculum based on scientifically proven approaches to teach reading such as but not limited to Orton Gillingham, Linda Mood-Bell, and Wilsons.

### **4. Offer Small Group Tutoring**

Recommendation: \$100 million

DOE should allocate at least \$100 million to offer students extra instructional time and tutoring during after school hours and on the weekends to make up for the learning losses during this school year. Tutoring sessions for a cohort of five to ten students provided throughout the academic year should target students who had the most difficulty with remote school including English Language Learners. Access to extra help and tutoring should be widely available and provided by teachers, qualified community-based organization staff, and new partners and must be inclusive of students with IEPs in all ages groups

### **5. Expand Specialized Programs (AIMS, ACES, ASD HORIZON, D75, etc)**

Recommendation: \$20 million

With the success of the AIMS program, the DOE should budget \$20 million to expand the existing 96 seats to 200 seats with representation in higher need areas left underserved during the initial pilot program. The DOE should also look at enrollment in existing ASD Horizon and NEST programs and assess how to add additional classrooms to accommodate the demand and decrease the waiting list. DOE should offer a central budget for staff to apply for the NEST and Horizon certifications. ACES programs should also be expanded for our children who need more life skills training and for families looking for an alternative pathway for graduation. This recommendation is in addition to the proposed new capacity initiative stated in the DOE Capital Plan being presented to the PEP on April 28, 2021 as denoted here:

“This New Capacity Program proposes a \$7.80 billion investment for an estimated building adding 55,145 seats across the city, as well as over 2,300 seats for the new District 75 Capacity program. The program includes:

- 56 small Primary school buildings, grades pre-Kindergarten –5

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- 31 larger buildings which can be flexibly programmed for Elementary, Middle or pre-Kindergarten – 8 grade schools
- 4 Intermediate/High school buildings to serve Secondary or High Schools
- 2 PS/IS buildings with 1,612 seats will be funded for design in this plan and construction in the next plan.
- 2,344 District 75 seats in all five boroughs”

**6. Expand Accessibility in Schools \$750 million capital**

Recommendation:\$750 million

DOE’s Fiscal 2020-2024 Capital Plan allocates \$750 million for school accessibility projects. Doubling this investment would help achieve partial or full accessibility in about half of school buildings from the current target of 33 percent.

**7. Summer Education.**

Recommendation:\$70.4 million

Remote Learning has been attributed to learning loss. Students need literacy and math interventions, as well as social engagement activities. Investing \$70.4 million would provide summer education for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Priority should be given to students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students in foster care, students in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and students in temporary housing. In addition to instructional and recreational opportunities, DOE must provide English Language Learners with targeted instructional supports. Compensatory services for all students with disabilities must begin this summer. Summer education will help address learning loss issues prior to the beginning of the new school year, as well as aid in the transition to full in person learning in the fall.

**8. Extend Access to Social and Emotional Supports**

Recommendation:\$125 million

Addressing the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students is just as important as the instruction students receive in schools and guidance counselors and social workers provide vital services. Investing in mental health services, especially as students navigate the impact of COVID-19, is paramount as students prepare for in-person learning in the fall. Federal funding from ARPA and CRRSA can be used to address gaps and enhancements for these services.

**A. Social Workers and Guidance Counselors.**

Recommendation:\$110 million

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends a ratio of one social worker per 250 general education students in each school building. While DOE reports adhering to a 1:215 social worker to student ratio, it also reports having 304 social workers serving more than one school building. The Fiscal 2022 Executive Budget should add at least \$110 million to ensure that every public school has at least one full-time social worker and one full-time guidance counselor. DOE must then make a plan to ensure every school adheres to the national social worker to student ratio recommended by the NASW for general education students. Finally, DOE must ensure that every District 75 school has a

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school psychologist. These positions are in addition to restoring \$4.8 million for 38 social workers and \$11.6 million for 130 Single Shepherd guidance counselors, both which were cut in DOE's baselined budget. Adding this funding to the Executive Budget would allow schools to begin the hiring process to be prepared for the upcoming school year.

### **B. Invest in a Mental Health Continuum.**

Recommendation:\$15 million

The DOE should provide direct mental health support to students with a \$15 million investment in a mental health continuum as recommended by the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline. Developing a continuum of services in 100 high need schools would give students with significant mental health needs access to direct mental health services and behavioral supports so they can remain in school.

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