



October 8, 2009

I am Maggie Moroff, the Coordinator of the ARISE Coalition. We are a group of parents, educators, and other supporters of students with special needs in New York City. We have come together to provide a collective and powerful voice on behalf of students receiving special education services. We seek to compel systemic reform to improve special education, promote greater transparency and accountability of the education system, and assure more positive outcomes and options for all NYC students. The members and supporters of the ARISE Coalition are particularly concerned with the continued and long-standing treatment of students with disabilities and their families in New York as second-class citizens. Through our experiences, we have been repeatedly struck by the fact that students with special needs continue to be left behind their peers and denied benefits available to others.

Programs that receive Contracts for Excellence money must, by law, predominately serve students with the greatest educational needs, including students from poor households, English Language Learners (ELL) and students receiving special education services. Students with disabilities frequently cut across all those categories. Yet, the DOE's plans for spending Contract dollars failed to include, or even consider, a substantial percentage of New York City's students with the most profound disabilities, those educated by District 75.

District 75, New York City's district for students with the acute special education needs, serves approximately 23,000 youth with disabilities. However, while the community school districts are slated to receive money under the City's current Contracts proposal, absolutely none of the Contract dollars requested has been allocated to District 75. We have been told that the high-needs calculations done to determine who should receive Contracts funds in New York City were based on data that explicitly excluded District 75. While we recognize that there is much disagreement on whether or not District 75 should continue as a stand-alone entity, the fact remains that just over 13% of all students with disabilities in New York City are currently served by District 75. To disregard this group of needy students in determining who should have access to this money is unconscionable. While the ARISE Coalition is not taking a position on how much money should go to District 75 under the Contracts, we are stunned that the DOE has opted to leave out completely this vulnerable population specifically targeted by the Contracts for Excellence legislation.

Supporting Organizations and Individuals: Advocates for Children of New York Inc., AHRC New York City, Cathy Albisa, David C. Bloomfield Brooklyn College CUNY, Bronx Independent Living Services, Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled Center for the Independence of the Disabled, The Cooke Center for Learning and Development, Richard and Lora Ellenson, Families Helping Families, Ben Fox, Carol A. Greenburg, Paul Hutchinson, Aurelia Mack, Diana Mendez, The Learning Disabilities Association of New York City, The Mental Health Association of New York, Metropolitan Parent Center of Sinergia Inc., National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, New Alternatives for Children, New York Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York Performance Standards Consortium, Parents for Inclusive Education, Parent to Parent of New York State, Parent to Parent of Staten Island, Raphael Rivas, Resources for Children with Special Needs, Cathy Rikhye Ed. D. Department of Curriculum and Teaching Teachers College Columbia University, Jo Anne Simon P.C., United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, United Federation of Teachers, United We Stand, , RueZalia Watkins

There is much improvement that could be made with regard to District 75 in several of the program areas identified for targeting by the Contracts - in particular teacher and principal quality, and high school/middle school restructuring. Without offering anything approaching a comprehensive list of how funds could be used to benefit the diverse population of students receiving services from District 75 - all along the spectrum of need - we provide here a few suggestions of how Contract money might be used to benefit significant numbers of students in District 75:

- Funds could be used for professional development for all teachers and administrators - special education and general education in co-located sites—around the full range of options for serving students along the entire continuum of need;
- Money could be used to purchase additional educational materials for students with a variety of needs including assistive technology and augmentative equipment to assistive in providing basic educational interventions for all appropriate students;
- District 75 could use Contract funds to examine ways to reduce the time that students with challenging behaviors stay in District 75 schools and explore best practices for, when appropriate, returning such students to community school districts with adequate supports; or
- The DOE could use Contract funds to ensure that District 75 students slotted to take standardized assessments can have access to the full range of credits and diploma options, as most students assigned to District 75 currently have little hope of achieving a Regents or local diploma.

I am available at any time should anyone wish to discuss this issue further or to set up a larger conversation about the matter with the members of the ARISE Coalition.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be heard on this issue.