



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

Helping children succeed in school

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New Coalition Comes Together To Promote Special Education Reform In New York City's Schools:

New website launched to collect and share information

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The ARISE Coalition (Action for Reform in Special Education Coalition) is announcing a new website as a part of a coordinated effort to promote systemic reform to improve special education, promote greater transparency and accountability of the education system, and assure more positive outcomes and options for all students. The diverse coalition of organizations and individuals includes parent organizations, educators, advocates, academics, service providers, community-based organizations, specialized schools, and concerned, active individuals and parents.¹ The Coalition aims to provide a collective and powerful voice on behalf of students with special needs in New York City.

Coalition members have united around the conviction that students with special needs, who account for approximately 181,000 of the 1.1 million school children in New York City, have been left behind in the development of broad-based school reforms.

Kim Sweet, the Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York, the organization leading the effort, said, "Many of the newest initiatives around education in New York City, including the new small high schools and the school report cards, have excluded significant numbers of students with special needs when they were originally rolled out. Those of us concerned about the education of students with special needs need to come together to ensure that this population is not pushed aside in the future."

Explaining his individual and his organization's decision to join the Coalition, Raphael Rivas, the Youth in Transition Coordinator at the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled, and an individual with a disability who has been

¹The following members of the ARISE Coalition join in this announcement: Advocates for Children, AHRC or New York City, Cathy Albisa, David Bloomfield, Brooklyn College CUNY, 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, Paul Hutchinson, Auralia Mack, Diana Mendez, The Metropolitan Parent Center of Sinergia, Inc., The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, New Alternatives for Children, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, The New York Performance Standards Consortium, Parent to Parent of New York State, Parent to Parent of Staten Island, Parents for Inclusive Education, Resources for Children with Special Needs, Raphael Rivas, United We Stand, RueZalia Watkins.

through the school system himself, said, "Students should not be shortchanged of an educational opportunity because the Department of Education lacks expertise or resources, or because it is simply easier to exclude them."

The Coalition is launching a website, www.arisecoalition.org, to provide informational links and resources for parents, as well as to collect and share information about the day-to-day experiences of students with special needs and their families in dealing with the school system at every level. The coalition invites parents, students, educators, advocates, and all other interested parties to add their voices on behalf of youth with special needs by visiting the website and sharing their experiences.

Paul Hutchinson, a member of the Coalition, parent of a student with special needs, and consultant to other parents on educational rights issues, said, "We believe that together we can call attention to the need for change and begin to openly share information and new ideas to meet the needs of children with special needs. I believe that the ARISE Coalition stands ready to work together to make change for children with special needs as we enter a time that challenges the efforts of parents and educators."

The ARISE Coalition is supported by a generous grant from the New York Community Trust.²

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

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² Since 1924, The New York Community Trust has been the community foundation of the New York metropolitan area, now an aggregate of 2,000 funds created by charitable individuals, families, and corporations to improve the quality of life for all the area's residents. Grants made from these funds meet the changing needs of children, youth, and families; aid in community development; improve the environment; promote health; assist people with special needs; and support education, arts, and human justice. In 2007, The Trust made grants of \$166 million from assets of \$2.1 billion.