



A Memorandum for District 4
Prepared by Vanessa Aronson
Candidate for New York City Council
[\[Watch Vanessa Talk About This Issue\]](#)

Shortage of Special Education Services

Nearly 20 percent of New York City public school students have Individualized Education Plans, or IEPs, which indicate that these students are entitled to special services in school, such as extended time on standardized tests or speech pathology services.¹ These students are entitled to these services by federal law, more specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, a recent report by the NYC Department of Education (DOE) showed that as many as 40 percent of the students who should be receiving these services may not be getting them in New York City.²

This is not a new problem. The federal Department of Education has given NYC public schools one of its lowest ratings, “Needs Intervention,” in regards to the services provided to students with special needs.³ In fact, over the past decade there have been a number of class action lawsuits against the NYC DOE for failing to provide services to students with special needs.^{4 5}

¹ Part B State Performance Plans (SPP) Letters and Annual Performance Report (APR) Letters. U.S. Department of Education, 28 June 2016. Web.

<https://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbspap/allyears.html#ny>

² Local Law 27 of 2015 Annual Report on Special Education. NYC Department of Education, 29 Feb. 2016. Web. <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/6035782C-F95D-4224-8372-F2B1F7E9A226/0/LocalLaw27of20152292016FINAL.pdf>

³ Hung, Chienyi Cheri, Nirvi Shah, Christina Samuels, Rachael Delgado, and Ruth Lincoln. "State Ratings in Special Education." *Education Week*. Editorial Project in Education, 20 July 2015. Web. http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/infographics/36idea_map.html

⁴ Cheng, Pei-Sze. "Class Action Lawsuit Alleges City's Department of Education Fails Special Needs Students." *NBC New York*. NBCUniversal Media, LLC., 5 Nov. 2014. Web.

<http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/New-York-City-Department-of-Education-Lawsuit-Students-With-Disabilities-281687471.html>

One reason for the deficit is the shortage of teachers in New York with a certification in Special Education. While there is a general shortage of teachers in New York City, there is a critical shortage of special-needs educators.⁶ In fact, there's a shortage across the country. NPR recently reported that it's partly due to burnout: on top of meeting their students' needs, special ed teachers have to contend with long hours and endless paperwork.⁷ This leads to high turnover, especially when there aren't enough special ed teachers to begin with.

In order to serve the growing population of students with special needs in New York, the DOE must embark on an aggressive campaign to recruit and retain teachers with Special Education certification. This should include subsidies or grants for the continued training and support of current teachers as well as for the expenses of certification. This prioritization should be reflected in a shift in the DOE's budgetary priorities. Currently, the DOE allocates only four percent of its budget to servicing students with special needs, which is incongruent with the percentage of the student population with IEPs.⁸

The bottom line: any teacher can tell you that special education training is not a waste of time or resources. When teachers are trained and supported, we are wisely investing in the future of our city.

⁵Ohlandt, Kevin. "New York City Parents File Class Action Lawsuit Against NYC Department of Education." *Exceptional Delaware 2017*. N.p., 02 Oct. 2015. Web. https://exceptionaldelaware.wordpress.com/2014/11/06/new-york-city-parents-file-class-action-lawsuit-against-nyc-department-of-education-dedeptoed-destateboarded-kilroysdelaware-ed_in_de-apl_jax-netde-delaware-edchat-edude/

⁶Saunders, Sylvia. "Severe Teacher Shortage Looms for New York State." *NYSUT*. New York State United Teachers, 20 May 2017. Web. <https://www.nysut.org/news/nysut-united/issues/2017/june-2017/severe-teacher-shortage-looms-for-new-york-state>

⁷Hale, Lee. "Behind The Shortage Of Special Ed Teachers: Long Hours, Crushing Paperwork." *NPR*. NPR, 09 Nov. 2015. Web. <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/11/09/436588372/behind-the-shortage-of-special-ed-teachers-long-hours-crushing-paperwork>

⁸2016-2017 School Budgets & Fair Student Funding. NYC Department of Education, n.d. Web. http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/DFPM_Home_Page/cec_fsf_deck.pdf