Preschool Special Ed Expanding

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York City Department of Education (DOE) Chancellor David Banks recently announced an expansion of early childhood education special-education seats across the five boroughs, in partnership with community-based providers, that will make an early childhood education special-education seat available for every child living with a disability by the spring of 2023.

Previously, the early childhood education system did not have a strategic or intentional focus on serving young children living with disabilities and their families. Through a citywide contract enhancement process, New York City Public Schools is addressing this inequity by expanding the number of seats reserved for students living with disabilities across early childhood education and increasing pay for educators and providers.

“I know from personal experience what it’s like not to have had the supports I needed to learn and thrive as child,” said Adams. “For far too long, our young students living with disabilities have struggled in a system that hasn’t been fully able to meet them where they are. Today, we’re changing that.

“For far too long, children with disabilities and their families have been overlooked by a system that was not built with them in mind,” said Banks. “Our vision for early childhood education sees all children. My team has particularly been focused on young children living with disabilities. We are deeply committed to establishing early childhood education that works for all New York City families – a truly accessible, high-quality and sustainable program that equitably serves our children living with disabilities.

Previously, early childhood seats for children living with disabilities were few and limited, and their educators were paid less than their general education peers. As part of Banks’ long-term vision to re-imagine early childhood education and special-education programming in New York City public schools, all children will have access to educators and resources that meet their needs as soon as they enter the classroom.

To ensure that early childhood education programs are prepared to meet the needs of the city’s most vulnerable children, the first set of special education contract enhancements will be implemented across 65 provider contracts.

As part of this process, approximately 3,000 seats across the sector will benefit, including 400 new seats to meet needs. By this spring, an additional 400 new seats are planned for a total of 800 new seats, and additional seats will be stabilized by the contract enhancement process.

Additionally, special education contract enhancements will earmark $130 million for early childhood education special education providers over two years;

Align early childhood education special education programs with the city’s 3-K and pre-K general education programs by extending the school day from five hours to six hours and 20 minutes and providing extended care and learning for children and support for working families;

Extend general early childhood education site supports such as professional development opportunities to early childhood education special education providers;

Increase access to services in the least restrictive environment by enabling providers to offer special class in an integrated setting (SCIS) classrooms;

Establish funding to help programs recruit, train and retain staff to support special education seats across the early childhood education landscape;

Allocate funds for teacher and staff salaries in accordance with new services and lengthened school days; and

Bring increased pay and pay parity to teaching staff in special education programs to match that of their peers in general education in 3-K and pre-K.

This announcement comes on the heels of Banks’s renewed vision for special education programs in New York City public schools, which celebrates and expands successful programs, provides new professional learning opportunities to students and empowers family and community members as partners in this work.