



Op-ed for District 4
Prepared by Vanessa Aronson
Candidate for New York City Council

What's So Special About Special Ed?

A whole lot.

Before I decided to run for the New York City Council, I was a teacher. So I saw the educational system from the inside out. A lot of it is very good, but like so many institutions, many of the kids who need some sort of special education program slip through the bureaucratic cracks. For example, about 40% of New York City students who, by federal law, are entitled to some special education services, don't get any. That's 40% too many.

And that's one of the reasons there have been a number of class action lawsuits against the New York City Department of Education: it fails to provide the proper support services to students with special needs.

To add to the difficulties, The federal Department of Education has given New York City public schools one of its lowest ratings, "Needs Intervention." That's not something you'd expect from a school system as good as the one we have here in New York.

Here's the main reason New York City schools get such a low rating when it comes to special ed services: There aren't enough teachers with a Certification in Special Education. While there is a general shortage of teachers in New York City, the shortage of special needs educators is beyond critical.

NPR recently reported that part of the problem is due to special education teacher burnout. Beyond the personal toll of trying to meet the needs of special ed students, special ed teachers have to contend with long hours, an endless pile paperwork, and a serious lack of resources. And as unlikely as it seems, we are such a litigious country, special ed teachers have the added fear of law suits.

This all leads to high turnover, which makes everything much worse considering we already have a shortage of special ed teachers to begin with. So what do we do? We have to do better. Much better.

To truly serve our ever growing population of students with special needs, the New York City Department of Education has to begin and maintain an aggressive campaign to recruit and retain teachers with Special Education certification. There any number of inducements we can offer including subsidies or grants for continued training, as well

as aiding or completely covering the expenses of certification. This means the Department of Education needs to shift its budgetary priorities. Currently, the DOE allocates only four percent of its budget to servicing students with special needs. Four percent. Considering that special ed students make up about 10% of our student population, that is not nearly enough.

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. Let's work together to make sure every one of our children gets the education they need. Especially those with special needs.