

Where is my Pre-K? Looking at Pre-K Access on Long Island

Quality Prekindergarten for every child is a strategy that is proven to work from decades of research. The evidence shows quality pre-K programs are important in helping to close the achievement gap as well as to arm children with the skills and tools necessary to succeed as adults. Thanks to the leadership of the New York State Assembly Majority, New York State has been a pioneer in providing access to quality pre-K to four-year-olds for a long time, establishing the Universal Pre-K program in the late 1990s. However, these programs have generally only been half-day in 2014, Governor Cuomo promised to provide a “blank check” to all districts that wanted to offer full day pre-K. New York City received funding to provide full day pre-K to all the four-year olds that want to attend. However, the rest of the state received only modest state funds to provide full day pre-K to its four-year-olds. Outside New York City, only 6% of four-year-olds gained access to full day pre-K since 2014. On Long Island the vast majority of high needs children have no access to full day pre-K programs. Long Island is an area with stark socioeconomic differences, with school districts that are racially segregated and overwhelmingly low income. Investing at least \$125 million in expanding quality full day pre-K across the state, would benefit the high need districts on Long Island immensely.

The question on Long Island parents’ minds is:

Where is my Pre-K?

Long Island has 120 school districts. Of those, 10 are considered high need districts by the State Education Department. In those high need districts with 71% of the students from low income families and 85% black and Latino, but only 26% have access to full day pre-K. That leaves 3,451 children in these districts without full day pre-K.

| 4-year olds in Full day Pre-K in High Need districts | 4-year-olds with NO Full-day pre-K in high needs school districts on LI | 4-year-olds in High Need Districts on LI | Low income students in high need school districts on LI | Black and Latino students in high need school districts on LI |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| 26% | 74% | | 71% | 85% |
| 1,249 ¹ | 3,451 | 4,700 | | |

Only, four of the ten designated high need school districts have full day pre-K. One additional high need district has a small number of its four-year-olds in full day. While quality half day pre-K programs have many benefits for the children attending, they are often not accessible to working parents who cannot transport their children to and from the half day programs, which leads them to decide against putting their children into pre-K.

TEN HIGH NEED SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACCESS TO PRE-K

¹ Uniondale has full day pre-K which is funded by the Preschool Development Expansion grant which funded by the Federal government. This federal funding created 144 new full day pre-K seats. Without the federal grant, the percentage of 4-year-olds served in high need districts go down to 18%.

The table was constructed with NYS Education Department data.

| District | Total number of 4-year-olds | UPK or Half Day | Full Day Pre-K | Federal Preschool Development Expansion (Began 2015-16) | Expanded 3/4 Pre-K (Began 2015-16) | Total number of students in Full day Pre-K | Percent Economically Disadvantaged | Percent Black and Hispanic |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Hempstead | 595 | 312 | | | | 0 | 66 | 96 |
| Uniondale | 488 | | | 144 | | 144 | 70 | 98 |
| Roosevelt | 267 | | | | | 161 | 76 | 100 |
| Freeport | 419 | 303 | | | | 0 | 64 | 89 |
| Westbury | 447 | 287 | | | | 30 | 98 | 96 |
| Copiague | 317 | 0 | | | | 175 ² | 72 | 80 |
| Amityville | 209 | 143 | | | | 0 | 77 | 90 |
| Wyandanch | 167 | 0 | | | | 105 | 95 | 98 |
| Brentwood | 1,284 | 760 | 126 | | 252 | 504 | 85 | 91 |
| Central Islip | 507 | 219 | 43 | | 24 | 130 | 73 | 92 |
| Total | 4,700 | 2,360 | 169 | 144 | 276 | 1,249 | | |

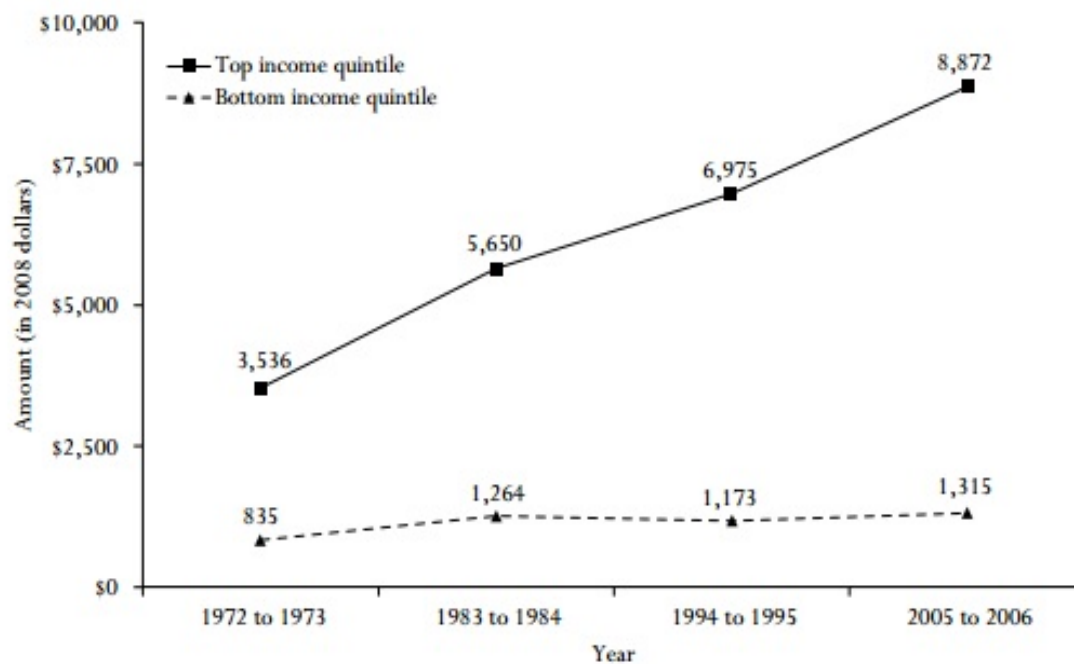
Children from low income backgrounds who attend quality full day pre-K are more likely to succeed in school and in their later life as adults. Decades of research show that ***quality pre-K improves children's odds of doing better at school, graduating at higher percentages, going to college, staying out of legal troubles, and earning more as adults.*** Brain science research also shows the importance of appropriate stimulation, nurturing, and interaction in children's earliest years. This includes both time with parents and with their early childhood teachers.

Low income families cannot spend as much on enrichment experiences for their children, a fact that makes high quality free full day pre-K programs much more vital to ensuring that children start kindergarten ready.

Only a lucky few children managed to get a full-day seat in the Governor's Pre-K programs since 2014. Waiting lists are growing in districts that offer the new program.

² Copiague converted its half day seats to full day in the beginning of 2016

FIGURE 1.6 *Enrichment Expenditures on Children, 1972 to 2006*



Source: Authors' calculations based on Consumer Expenditure Surveys (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, various years).

Duncan, G. & Murnane, R. (2011). *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*. Russel Sage

An overwhelming majority of Long Islanders, 74% of residents, support state funded full day pre-K.³ Long Islanders recognize the importance of attending quality full day pre-K by even greater numbers citing the positive benefits in later school and adult life. With such a widespread support, investing in more pre-K for the state's four-year-olds is a winning strategy. Full-day pre-K should not be limited to high need districts, it should be universally available. But the first priority should be to ensure it is available for all children in high need school districts.

It is time to fulfill the promise to our state's four-year-olds of quality full day pre-K. The Governor's current state budget proposal includes \$22 million for pre-K for three year olds, but so few four-year olds on Long Island and around the state have the full-day pre-K they were promised. It makes no sense to offer pre-K to three year olds if it is not available to them when they turn four. The Governor and the state should fulfill the promise of full-day quality pre-K for every four year old. In this year's state budget, the legislature should convert the Governor's program into one that prioritizes four year olds and should add an additional \$100 million for a total new appropriation of \$125 million. New York State needs to make sure that families do not have to wonder where their child's pre-K is. Making every child is ready for Kindergarten is a critical step to making sure they are ready for college.

³ <http://citizenactionny.org/2015/03/long-islanders-overwhelmingly-want-pre-k-for-their-children/17328>

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The Alliance for Quality Education was founded in 2000 as a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high quality public education to all students regard- less of zip code, income or race. Combining its legislative and policy expertise with grassroots organizing, AQE advances proven-to-work strategies that lead to student success and echo a powerful public demand for a high quality education.

The Center for Children’s Initiatives (CCI) , formerly known as Child Care, Inc., champions the right of all children to start life with the best possible foundation of learning, care and health. Realizing the long term benefits – for children, for families and for our society – CCI works to ensure investments in quality and supports for working families to give all of our children the opportunity for a bright future.

Citizen Action of New York is a grassroots membership organization taking on big issues that are at the center of transforming society – issues like: quality education and after-school programs for all our kids; guaranteed quality, affordable health care; public financing of election campaigns; dismantling racism and promoting racial justice; and a more progressive tax system.

PPEF was founded in 1986 to address critical social, economic, racial and environmental issues facing low and moderate income New York State residents. Our areas of work have included health care, education, after-school programs, voter participation, economic development and consumer issues. PPEF uses many tools in its work, including grassroots organizing, research and policy development, public education on a wide range of policy issues, and community outreach.

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