



Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign



April 17, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Senate Majority Leader
907 Legislative Office Building
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
952 Legislative Office Building
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie,

We are writing on behalf of early childhood and public school educators, parents, and advocates across New York State to urge you to **NOT cut funding for the state's prekindergarten, preschool special education and child care programs when you-review and reopen the state's 2020-2021 budget on April 30.**

Right now, pre-K and preschool special education programs across the state are offering remote learning, keeping in touch with children and families to continue children's learning and support. In many communities, these programs offer young children access to essential food programs as well. **The services are a critical component of ensuring that our children can continue to be supported during the unfolding pandemic and beyond. In many communities, these services are also a key part of the supports for essential workers with preschool children.**

We appreciate that state leaders recognize the importance of full day quality pre-K and made investments to expand these services in recent years. We applaud the state for continuing the current pre-K funding to date,

which ensures that program staff will be compensated during the period that programs' doors are closed and teachers are supporting their students remotely. The state's wise decision to mandate that pre-K be delivered in both public schools and community settings leverages this investment, to produce further benefits for the state's children and families. About 57% of pre-K services are offered in community-based organizations, such as Head Start and child care programs, which leverages the investment to better meet the needs of the state's working families and expands access to more comprehensive services.

In addition, the state's **pre-K program is a valued resource for immigrant children, even those from undocumented or mixed status families, who have no other way to secure the learning, care, nutrition and health care afforded in pre-K.**

The state's **universal pre-K program also includes critical opportunities for many children with developmental delays or disabilities** to learn alongside their typically developing peers and receive supplemental services. **Preschool special education programs support children with more significant disabilities to meet their educational needs.** Supporting these children in their preschool years is critical, given the evidence that offering this support in these years has the greatest impact for children with disabilities, and saves the state and taxpayers money in the end, by reducing the need for more costly intervention in the K-12 years.

We are **concerned that the stress that local school districts will face because of the flat funding and continuing rising costs, pre-K programs will be put on the chopping block. We urge the state to ensure that pre-K programs will continue to receive at least the current level of funding and serve at least the same number of children.**

Since 1997, we **vigorously advocated for an expansion of pre-K to ensure that all children benefit from a quality early experience preparing them for success in school and beyond.** Yet 77,000 four-year-olds across the state still lack access to the full-day pre-K promised in 2014. Rising numbers of young children in deep poverty and growing numbers of multilingual learners in small cities, suburbs and rural areas are still left behind. **With current pre-K funding rates frozen, in some cases for several decades, many districts desperately need increased resources just to sustain current services. We need a far more robust investment in current pre-K to meet quality standards, especially funding to recruit and retain qualified and effective teachers.** Many legislators, public school and early childhood leaders joined us in the call for increased investment in pre-K for the coming school year.

We recognize the state now faces unprecedented economic challenges, and the state budget provides deadlines for adjustments in light of revenues, starting later this month. But we can't sacrifice our children's future. **We must protect the state's pre-K programs and secure them for the future.** The State's **pre-K programs are a vital resource** for all young children and **of additional significance for immigrant children, those with disabilities and those who are homeless.**

Furthermore, **in the coming months, as the State makes a decision about tuition rates for preschool special education programs, we urge you to increase these rates to address the shortage of seats.** Although the state has a legal obligation to ensure a preschool special education class seat for every child who needs one, the state currently has a shortage of hundreds of seats due to inadequate state funding. **The state must ensure that, when schools reopen, there is a preschool special education class seat available for every preschooler whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) mandates one. Preschoolers with more significant disabilities must not be left at home when their peers return to class.**

As you have acknowledged many times, **the state's early childhood education programs are a proven strategy for putting children on a path to success in school and beyond.** We urge you to protect the current investment in prekindergarten in the coming year, to ensure every child promised a seat still has one in the coming year, and to protect and expand access to child care.

We join state leaders in advocating for an appropriate level of Federal investment in New York. We are urging the state to consider strategies to increase revenues to address the urgent needs of our state's children and families.

Respectfully submitted by the Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign and the Winning Beginning NY coalition in collaboration with the following campaigns and organizations.

[Kids Can't Wait Campaign](#)
[Empire State Child Care Campaign](#)

(Note: Organizational sign-ons still in formation)

1199/SEIU Child Care Corporation, Bronx
A Better Balance
Advocates for Children of New York
Alliance for Quality Education
All Our Kin
Center for Children's Initiatives
Chautauqua Lake Child Care Center
Child Care Council @ CUNY
Child Care Council of Suffolk
Child Care Council of Westchester
Child Care Council-Nassau
Child Care Resources of Rockland, Inc.
Child Care Solutions, Inc, Syracuse
Children's Aid
Chinese American Planning Council
The Children's Agenda
Citizen Action of New York
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families
Day Care Council of New York City
Early Care & Learning Council
Early Childhood Alliance, Onondaga
Harlem Children's Zone
InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc.
The Long Island Pre-K Initiative
Middle Country Central School District
New York Association for the Education of Young Children
The New York Immigration Coalition
Prevent Child Abuse New York
Read to Succeed Buffalo
Rochester Childfirst Network
Schuyler Center for Analysis & Advocacy
St. Joseph's Universal Prekindergarten Programs
UJA-Federation-NY
United Neighborhood Houses
Westchester Children's Association
YMCA of Greater New York
YMCA of Long Island

cc: Assemblymember Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee
Senator Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Matt Golden, Deputy Director of Budget Studies for Education and Higher Education, NYS Assembly
Georgia Ascianto, Education Committee Director, NYS Senate
Betty Rosa, Chancellor of Education, NYS Board of Regents
Regents Lester Young and Luis Reyes, co-chairs, Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup
Regent Christine Cea
Regent Wade Norwood
Regent Roger Tilles
Shannon Tahoe, Interim State Commissioner of Education & Interim President of State University of New York
Marybeth Casey, Assistant Commissioner, NYS Education Department
DeSylvia Dwyer, Supervisor, Office of Early Learning, NYS Education Department
Christopher Suriano, Assistant Commissioner, NYS Education Department
Suzanne Bolling, Supervisor, Preschool and Nondistrict Unit, NYS Education Department
Jim Malatras, President, SUNY Empire State College
Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to Governor
Paul Francis, Deputy Secretary, NYS Health and Human Services
Dan Fuller, Deputy Secretary of Education
Michael Mastroianni, Assistant Secretary of Education
Kerri Neifeld, Assistant Secretary for Human Services
Kelli Owens, Executive Director of the Office of Prevention of Domestic Violence
Renee.Rider, Executive Director, Council on Children and Families
Sheila Poole, Commissioner, NYS Office of Children and Family Services
Janice Molnar, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Child Care Services, NYS Office of Children and Family Services
Jamie.Frank, Associate Commissioner, NYS Office of Children and Family Services
Patty Persell, Project Director, Council on Children and Family Services
Roberta Reardon, Commissioner, NYS Department of Labor
Michael Hein, Commissioner, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance