



**Continue to expand Pre-K for All New York's Children while strengthening the early childhood/child care sector**

In 2020, 85,000 four-year-olds were not in full-day pre-K programs. Currently, approximately \$805 million are distributed to school districts running pre-K programs across the state. The state must continue the momentum and move to include appropriate resources for culturally responsive and sustaining pre-K that supports each child, including those with developmental delays and disabilities, emergent multilingual learners and those who are homeless. Particularly at this point when families continue to struggle with the ongoing pandemic and when needs of children and their families go unaddressed, we must continue to build our early care and learning sector, bridge the systems of care and learning and ensure that young children have access to the nurturing learning environments they need to succeed.

***Invest \$500 million to continue to expand access to quality full day pre-K for all children in the state by providing at least \$10,000 per child. Funding for the next pre-K expansion should include enhanced rates to meet quality standards.***

New York State currently (2020) has a maximum set-aside of \$850 million to provide a combination of half- and full-day pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. In recent years, the state added funding to expand pre-K outside of New York city. NYC expanded access to all four-year-olds in 2014 after the state invested \$300 million in the program. In the last enacted budget (FY 2022), the state added another \$210 million for 2022 and 2023 to expand the program.

Even though the expansion of pre-K to two thirds of four year-olds in the state is an enormously significant positive step toward ensuring that all children have access to quality full day preschool, some issues persist. These include the lack of transportation, wrap around services, and more importantly, the lack of adequate pay for teachers working in community based organizations that contract with school districts to provide pre-K programs. Many of these issues persist partly because of the siloed approach the state has toward early care and learning.

The evidence is overwhelming. It shows that pre-K and early care and learning programs are not only some of the most effective educational strategies for addressing inequality, they also are some of the best ways to ensure that parents and guardians can be part of the workforce. For every dollar invested in early care and learning and pre-K, the return on investment is \$3 to \$7. Every year, the state spends an enormous amount of funding in special education, in remediation, and in incarceration, all of which are decreased when children have access to a quality full day pre-K program. **By providing at least \$10,000 per child to all districts that currently have or need to implement pre-K, the state can begin to ensure that children are put on a path of success early on. Further, with more than half of all pre-K services offered in community programs, the state, in collaboration with local districts, needs to do more to promote equity in funding between public school and community-based programs.**

***Invest \$10 million to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers in all economic development regions across NY State.***

The State must provide funding to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers to support Pre-K and early childhood education/childcare. These centers will support the improvement of existing programs and the roll-out of quality, culturally responsive and sustainable early childhood programs. They will strengthen coordination of efforts between school districts, child care providers and other early education programs, and services in the regions that focus on improving outcomes for children and families. These centers are especially critical in suburban and rural areas with numerous small school districts.

Additionally, the state must increase the percentage of pre-K slots that need to be in community-based organizations, including family based programs. This will ensure that school districts continue to work with the early childhood/childcare programs, ensuring continuity of development and learning for children, alleviating the transportation issue that many families face (because pre-K transportation is not offered by school districts as it is not paid for by the state), but more importantly, allowing families the choice to keep their children in the environment they are used to attending and going to through the fewest transitions possible.

Make policy changes to facilitate early childhood/child care programs becoming eligible to contract with school districts to provide pre-K.

- Extend the study plan option.

Pre-K lead teachers without certification must have a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood or a related field and a written study plan approved by an accredited college or university for obtaining a teaching license or certificate valid for service in

the early childhood grades. This includes: Early Childhood (Birth – Grade 2); (n-6); or (Pre-K-6) certification.

Depending on their date of hire, lead teachers who meet these qualifications must obtain the necessary early childhood certification as follows:

**Whichever is later:**

- By June 30, 2023; or
- By three to five years from their date of hire as a lead teacher in a city-contracted pre-K class.
- Please ensure that written lead teacher study plans are up to date and reflect the completion of all requirements by the applicable deadline.
- Allow for curriculum appropriateness as sufficient requirement for program
- Use teacher experience instead of degree or certification

At the same time, the state must:

- Increase compensation and give access to benefits for all child care providers.
  - Provide entry-level compensation that ensures self-sufficiency, based on standards such as the United Way’s ALICE threshold and adjusted for regional cost of living.
  - Provide compensation commensurate with experience and increase appropriately as providers accrue credentials.
  - Strengthen career pathways and provide appropriate professional development opportunities for all providers. This means improving infrastructure and coordinating the organizations that offer coaching and consultation.
- Reduce red tape for families and providers.
  - Combine state and federal Pre-K funding into a single source.
  - Develop a statewide or regional enrollment system that facilitates enrollment in all funded child care and Pre-K programs, regardless of funding source or modality.
- Establish a state-level body that is charged with planning and coordinating child care and Pre-K standards, policies, and resources. The committee should include OCFS, SED, child resource and referral agencies, and providers/ parents from child care, Pre-K and Head Start. It should:

- o Develop principles, policies, and practices to guide state and local planning and align program standards, requirements and monitoring across child care and Pre-K.
- o Review proposed Pre-K expansion grants annually in light of community needs, equity and existing Head Start and child care resources at the local level.
- o Revive local planning councils to coordinate the equitable allocation of child care, Pre-K and Head Start resources in response to supply and demand, and develop a statewide data system and other resources to facilitate community-wide planning.
- o Develop policies and provide training and technical assistance to encourage blended funding at the program level.
- o Establish consistency in payment levels across Pre-K and child care based on cost estimation models

### ***Increase funding for preschool special education programs***

As the State continues to invest in and expand Pre-K, it must ensure that preschool students with disabilities are not left behind. Preschool special education programs provide high-quality education services to preschool students with significant developmental delays and disabilities who would not be appropriately served in general education Pre-K classrooms. Unfortunately, inadequate State funding over the years has forced dozens of programs to close and led to a shortage of seats in these programs, leaving preschool children with disabilities without the services they need and have a right to receive. The pandemic has only added financial challenges that have made it even harder for these programs to continue operating. In New York City alone, there is a projected shortage of more than 900 seats for the spring 2022.

We are pleased that Governor Hochul announced that the Executive Budget would include funding to provide preschool special education programs with an 11% rate increase in FY 23. We support this rate increase, which will help ensure that preschool special education programs stay open and can provide high-quality services.

While the FY 23 rate increase is much needed, the State must also take steps to support the long-term stability of preschool special education programs. We support the Board of Regents recommendation that the budget include \$1.72M to design a new rate-setting methodology, with stakeholder input, to update the way payment is calculated, and to suspend the annual “reconciliation” process to provide interim relief to programs while the rate-setting methodology is redesigned.

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***The Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign sees child care and pre-K as companion, not competitive, investments and fully supports the agenda for child care and home visitation developed by Empire State Child Care Campaign, the Winning Beginning NY coalition, and the Kids Can't Wait Campaign. It is important that there are simultaneous investments in birth to three care and education programs, especially those that are often less likely to be engaged with district pre-K programs, as they are an essential foundation to healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development of New York's children.***