



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2013–14 Executive Budget
Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Hearing
January 29, 2013**

**Submitted by
Kate Breslin, President and CEO
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**

My name is Kate Breslin and I am President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA). The Schuyler Center is a 141-year-old statewide, nonprofit, policy analysis and advocacy organization working to shape policies that improve health, welfare and human services in New York State.

The Schuyler Center is a founding member of *Winning Beginning NY*, a statewide coalition of about 200 organizations and individuals representing early care and learning programs, parents, and advocates from a range of venues. WBNY focuses its efforts on children from the prenatal period to age 8. The Coalition is actively engaged in policy issues relating to early care and education in New York State.

The Schuyler Center advances policies and practices that strengthen early learning to ensure that students are as successful as possible in school and life.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

\$25 Million for Full-Day Pre-Kindergarten

The Schuyler Center applauds the Governor's inclusion of \$25 million investment into full-day Pre-K as a significant next step in expanding access to high-quality early learning and urges the Legislature to support it. The Schuyler Center has been a strong proponent of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) for many years as an essential component of the cradle to career pathway for success in life.

We are extremely appreciative of the Legislature's longstanding and strong support for UPK and the Assembly Speaker's leadership on and commitment to UPK.

The benefits of Pre-K are well known. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs, including pre-kindergarten, are more likely to find success in school, graduate from high school and earn more over their lifetimes. High-quality pre-kindergarten can improve educational outcomes, reduce disparities and save money. The achievement gap can begin especially early for the nearly **one in four (24.4%) New York State children under age 5 who live in poverty**. The school-readiness gap becomes an achievement gap when children enter school, and this gap can persist over children's school careers. **One out of three children in New York State starts Kindergarten behind in basic skills.**ⁱ

Eliminating these disparities is critical—for the children whose futures are at stake and for a labor market and society whose goals demand that children be prepared to begin school, achieve academic success, and ultimately sustain economic independence. The Executive Budget proposal to begin expanding full-day Pre-K in low-wealth districts can help address these disparities.

Universal Pre-kindergarten is now available to nearly 100,000 four-year-olds across the state through a \$385 million State investment. But the program serves less than half of all eligible children. The lack of a full-day option has hampered expansion.

The Governor’s plan for a robust full-day pre-kindergarten program, starting with the State’s highest need districts, represents a critical breakthrough in State education policy. The \$25 million included in the Executive Budget to expand full-day Pre-K is an important first step.

In addition to urging support for this funding, the Schuyler Center offers the following recommendations to build upon the potential of Pre-K as an essential strategy for boosting student achievement:

- **Include funding specifically for quality improvement (see below).**
- Include and make permanent the new full-day Pre-K initiative as part of State Pre-K aid, with a plan to increase the program over time.
- Protect UPK going forward by allowing unused funds to be reallocated to districts that can use them.
- Require the same investment in community-based (CBO) programs as in existing UPK aid. Currently, about \$200 million of the State’s \$385 million in Pre-K is invested in community-based programs allowing for an alignment of teaching and learning across child care, Head Start and Preschool Special Education and making sure that capacity and resources are maximized. This funding for full-day pre-kindergarten should include a mandate that investment in community programs be maintained.

Investment in Quality Rating and Improvement is Essential

It is essential that we expand access to early childhood programs, including Pre-K, for all children across the state and especially in low-income communities. At the same time, New York is long overdue to make a commitment to quality assurance that includes certified teachers, quality learning environments and effective teaching.

The evidence shows that children who attend high-quality Pre-K programs perform better in school and throughout life. High-quality Pre-K programs can be found in many settings: schools, churches, mosques, synagogues, Head Starts, and public and private child care centers. As New York invests in early education, it is essential that we invest in quality improvement to maximize the benefits for our children and our state.

New York State has designed a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early learning programs called QUALITYstarsNY. QUALITYstarsNY is a system that lays out expectations, helps create a blueprint for improvement, improves accountability, ensures that

early childhood program staff understand their achievable goals in the context of the plan and gives parents information about the early learning programs available for their children. The State needs to commit to funding QUALITYstarsNY in an ongoing way.

The New York State Education Department (SED) invested \$4 million in Race to the Top funds toward QUALITYstarsNY to provide a cogent and tested framework for ensuring quality and improving school success in Pre-K and other early learning programs.

Most states that have launched successful Pre-K programs have invested in statewide technical assistance, guidance to local districts, and solid professional development opportunities. New York State has yet to make this targeted and ongoing investment, to ensure that districts have the supports they need to operate programs that will succeed in promoting school readiness for the most at-risk children.

In addition to investing in access to full-day Pre-K, the State needs an intentional investment in quality rating and improvement.

Conclusion

We urge the Legislature to support the Governor's proposed investment in full-day pre-kindergarten in high-needs communities. To make the most of this investment in early learning, it is imperative that there be thoughtful investment to ensure high-quality in Pre-K programs. Targeted investment in access to **high-quality early learning**, including Pre-K, has the potential to generate school success, improve accountability, and save public dollars in New York's most at-risk communities.

¹ QUALITYstarsNY brochure, Early Childhood Advisory Council, New York State Council on Children and Families, http://ccf.ny.gov/ECAC/WG/Quality/Resources/ECAC_BrochureLowRes.pdf

Kate Breslin
President and CEO
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
518-463-1896 / kbreslin@scaany.org
www.scaany.org