

PRESS RELEASE

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Early Childhood Advocates to Governor: Don't Break Promise on Statewide Pre-K!

The state's leading coalition for early care and learning calls on Governor Cuomo to stand by his word and put New York on track toward universal Pre-K. Recent media reports regarding budget negotiations suggest the final budget may allow Pre-K funds to be used for other purposes and that the Governor suggested that school districts would have to spend the money first and get reimbursed later. This is unacceptable – school districts simply do not have the fiscal capacity to spend first and get reimbursed later. The Governor must insist that Pre-K funding be preserved for Pre-K in the final state budget and that all districts can access funding once they are ready.

Just two months ago, Governor Cuomo said, "...we believe in children, we believe in Pre-K, we believe in education, let's put our money where our mouth is and let's make it a reality." With fewer than half of eligible four-year-olds enrolled statewide, it is critical to protect current funding and new investment for Pre-K. If the Governor allows Pre-K funding to be used for anything other than the expansion of full-day high quality Pre-K, he will be backtracking on his promise. School districts that serve some of our poorest communities and would benefit from Pre-K the most don't have the funds to implement a Pre-K program without the state money the Governor promised. As the Governor said when he met with upstate mayors, four-year-olds in Syracuse and Buffalo are just as deserving of Pre-K as children in New York City; it is up to him to make sure that happens.

Early care and learning advocates statewide are calling on the Governor to keep his promise to universal Pre-K statewide and ensure all four-year-olds get the same support from the State.

"In a perfect world, New York State would fund Pre-K through 12 fully and fairly and low-income districts would not be left behind," said **Kate Breslin, CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**. "Unfortunately, we don't live in that world yet. It's time for New York's leaders to catch up with the science on brain development and focus on getting all kids into high quality full-day Pre-K. The Governor's suggestion about requiring fiscally troubled school districts to pay upfront for Pre-K and get reimbursed later is illusory; many schools are flat out broke."

Michael A. Rebell, Executive Director, Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University says: "The Governor promised in regard to full-day Pre-K expansion that 'we will fund all the cities to the extent they can operationalize an effective plan and when they can operationalize that plan.' This means that school districts must be able to draw on the funds as soon as they have presented feasible plans for implementing quality programs. And it cannot mean that the additional funds the state has promised for full-day Pre-K expansion can

be taken from the already inadequate funding for K-12 programs. Art XI of the state constitution requires the state to provide adequate funding for all K-12 programs *and* for all Pre-K programs."

David Voegele, Executive Director, Early Care & Learning Council said: "Funding in the state budget for pre-kindergarten expansion needs to be targeted solely for that purpose. Allowing funds to be used elsewhere in the education system will undermine the foundation of learning that is so crucial for success at all levels of education. All programs should be held to universal quality standards. Our network of CCR&Rs is well positioned and ready to promote a diverse delivery system, assist school districts and communities with the expansion of UPK."

Jenn O'Connor, NYS Director, Council for a Strong America said: "It is critical that ALL children have access to high-quality Pre-K – whether they live in New York City or another part of the State. It is also essential that dollars remain dedicated to Pre-K without district flexibility to be utilized for other educational purposes. While many school districts have a need for increased funding, undermining the quality, equity and universality of Pre-K is not the answer. Finally, districts should not be required to spend their own money first and wait to be reimbursed later. For districts that are already struggling, this would simply render Pre-K a non-starter... not the universal program the Governor promised."

David G. Hunt, President, Hunt Corp said: "As a businessman, I am concerned with our labor force of the future. Nothing is more important in preparing our kids in the global economy than getting them started on the right foot – and that means universal Pre-K. We need to invest that money now. The returns will be enormous."

Stephen D'Amico, United Way of the Greater Capital Region Board Member says: "Funding set aside for Pre-K programs needs to remain dedicated to developing these programs as we have learned just how important they are to early development and education. This is an area that continues to struggle with funding despite overwhelming evidence of the return on investment it provides."

Marsha Dumka and Mary Jo Brach, Co-Chairs ECDI, Rochester, NY said: "It has come to the attention of the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) that there is consideration by the Legislature to allow Pre-K funding to be shared with other district programs. We strongly request that this not happen. We have fought so hard for so many years to ensure that our youngest children, in high needs districts have access to quality early learning programs. This move would most certainly decimate the Pre-K funding and these programs. With over 95% of districts already offering full-day Kindergarten, the need does not justify the reduced access to our four-year-old children. "

Jane Brown, Executive Director of Child Care Resources of Rockland, Inc. said: "Suggesting that funds for Pre-K expansion be available for K-12 purposes is pitting four-year-olds against 5 to 18-year-olds which is totally unacceptable." The Pre-K expansion funds must be used for the education of four-year-olds! The younger the learner, the more cost effective the investment. Please provide the needed funds for the K-12 students but not on the backs of our four-year-olds."

Dana E. Friedman, Ed.D., The Early Years Institute Founder and President said: "With fewer than half of the districts on Long Island offering Pre-K, funds are needed to expand Pre-K in new districts. Furthermore, the population of children is exploding in our high needs districts,

many of which have waiting lists for Pre-K. It is critical that State funds for Pre-K be invested in more and better Pre-K – which will ultimately benefit K-12.”

Winning Beginning NY is a statewide coalition working to inform policy makers and the public about the many benefits of early care and learning including home visiting, child care and Pre-K. The coalition aims to build a broad-based constituency to make investment in quality early care and learning a top public priority in New York State.

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