

Strengthen Families and Promote Family Economic Security: Expand Access to High-Quality Early Learning

New York is making strides toward a universal high-quality full-day prekindergarten program, but more support is needed, especially for districts outside of New York City. Although the 2015-16 Executive Budget proposes slight increases in Pre-K funding, the \$365 million investment represents flat state funding from last year, a \$25 million federal grant, and an additional \$25 million to expand Pre-K to 3-year-olds in high-need districts. The Executive Budget does little to ensure universal access for four-year-olds, expand access to Pre-K programs outside of New York City, or fix the cumbersome reimbursement system.

Why Universal Pre-kindergarten Matters

Research shows that the early years in a child's life when the brain is developing, is a critical period in shaping a child's full potential, including vital academic, social, and cognitive skills. Benefits of early learning include:

- **Cognition:** Improves school performance, raises math and language abilities, sharpens thinking and attention skills, reduces special education placement, and lowers school drop-out rates.¹
- **Social and emotional development:** Improves and strengthens interactions with peers, decreases behavior problems, encourages exploratory behavior, and helps adjust to demands of formal schooling.²
- **Long-term results and cost savings:** Increases lifelong earning potential, achieves better academic outcomes, lowers rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration, and improves job recruitment and retention of working parents.³

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2015-2016

Improve Access to Early Learning:

Add \$150 million to expand access to quality early learning opportunities for school districts outside NYC.

Fix the allocation methodology so districts do not have to spend resources they don't have first.

Support NYC efforts to fully implement Pre-K.

Statewide Funding: Additional money for districts outside of NYC will support the implementation of a successful statewide Pre-K program. Last year's budget allocation for districts outside NYC of \$40 million was distributed between 62 school districts and community-based organizations.⁴ This funding is inadequate to expand statewide access to Pre-K.

New York's Allocation Methodology: The latest Pre-K grants require districts to spend the money to operate a program and seek reimbursement at the end of the school year. This is an impediment to many districts that do not have resources upfront and face other threats to their K-12 education budgets. Schools must have access to timely funding in order to implement quality full-day Pre-K programs.

Investing in high-quality early education provides children with opportunities that are the foundation for success in school and in life.

Endnotes

¹ New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute. "Why is early Childhood Education Important" http://www.earlychildhoodnyc.org/resources/aboutECE_whyImportant.cfm

² Ibid

³ Op. cit

⁴ New York State Education Department. "Preliminary Awardee List: 2014-2015 Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program" August 18, 2014. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/funding/2014-15-statewide-universal-full-day-prekindergarten/nysupk-2014-15-awardee-list.html>