

SECURING THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK'S CHILDREN

*Taking the Next Steps Toward
Truly Universal Prekindergarten*



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INTRODUCTION

With the strong leadership of Governor Andrew Cuomo, solid support from the state legislature, the Regents, and the New York State Education Department, and the unwavering commitment of Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City, New York State has made significant strides over the past year in expanding access to high-quality full-day prekindergarten across the state. With this important momentum and committed leaders, the state is now in a position to make prekindergarten truly universal. But to do so, several aspects of the existing legislation must be modified, and the funding system must be stabilized at an adequate level.

To show how to accomplish this, the Center for Children’s Initiatives (CCI) and the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College (CEE) have revised the statewide roadmap for “Making Prekindergarten Truly Universal in New York” that we originally published in October 2013.¹ We incorporate the new funding and quality standards initiatives that the governor and the legislature adopted this year and propose the modifications and reforms that are now needed to merge these advances into a coherent, sustainable, universal system. The ultimate goal, as we argued in our original roadmap, is to recognize the right of every three and four year old to high-quality, full-day prekindergarten.

In the pages that follow, we lay out the steps down that path, year by year, starting with important modifications of the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program in the state’s 2015 budget, and moving toward a guarantee of full access to full-day prekindergarten. The state should continue to support the service in both public schools and community-based settings, to assure families have a broad range of options to meet their needs.

¹ Rebell, M., Wolff, J., Kolben, N., and Holcomb, E. (2013, October). *Making Prekindergarten Truly Universal in New York: A Statewide Roadmap*. New York, NY: Center for Children’s Initiatives and the Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College. More than 100 experts including early childhood professionals and those in the K-12 education system vetted the roadmap. Please see this earlier report for a detailed history of New York’s prekindergarten efforts, an in-depth analysis of prekindergarten finance systems in other states, and complete information about New York’s current pre-K regulations.

BOLD STEPS FORWARD

Since the original CCI/CEE roadmap was released last year, New York State has made substantial progress toward achieving the goal of truly universal full-day prekindergarten, emerging once again as a national leader in this area.

The state has built on its original and pioneering Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program, now funded at \$385 million. That program, launched by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver as a key education reform in 1997, continues to offer state funding for part-day pre-K through an allocation formula. More than 440 districts continue to participate.

In 2013, Governor Cuomo sponsored a new \$25 million competitive grant program, with a new focus on how the state could provide full-day placements and drive quality improvement in pre-K settings. About 345 districts could apply for the new Priority Full-Day and Expanded Half-Day Prekindergarten (Priority Pre-K) program, in an effort to target the limited investment toward the highest-need children. Twenty-six districts took advantage of the new funding to either convert existing part-day seats to full school day, or add entirely new full-day or part-day seats.

In 2014, the momentum built to support the boldest expansion yet, drawing attention around the nation.

- Governor Cuomo proposed, and the legislature adopted, a new plan to offer full-day pre-K to all four year olds in the next five years. The state committed \$1.5 billion to the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program (Full-Day Pre-K). The legislature authorized \$340 million per year in competitive grants for each of the next two years as the first step in reaching the goal of universal service.
- State leaders earmarked \$300 million of the new Full-Day Pre-K funding for New York City in each of these two years, supporting Mayor de Blasio's commitment to provide access to full-day prekindergarten to all four year olds in New York City by school year 2015-16.
- For the school year 2014-15, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) promptly issued a request for proposals for the new Full-Day Pre-K program and included strong quality standards, new funding rates to support quality programming, and an important emphasis on investment in the infrastructure that districts must make to ensure high-quality programs.
- In late August 2014, 81 grants were awarded, with 54 going to school districts including New York City and 27 to independent programs.

Work Still to Be Done

Each of these actions has moved New York State closer to realizing its expansive vision for truly universal early childhood education. However, there is still significant work to be done. The recent initiatives were added to existing programs, each with their own regulatory and funding frameworks, as well as their own eligibility requirements, payment strategies, and funding levels. As a result, New York's prekindergarten efforts have become fragmented and overly complex. There are now three separate funding streams, UPK, the Priority Pre-K program, and the new Full-Day Pre-K program. All three essentially are grant programs, and none of them provides a permanent, guaranteed pre-K funding mechanism.

Together, the programs represent a total state investment in pre-K of over \$750 million. The state added 37,000 new full-day seats this year alone, but New York's pre-K programs still reach less than half the state's four year olds.



MOVING TOWARD A COHERENT PRE-K SYSTEM

New York is now in a position to build on the benefits and investment in the new initiatives and move toward a coherent system that provides appropriate, sustainable, and guaranteed funding for high-quality pre-K. There is leadership and momentum now to take the critical final steps needed to address key issues in current pre-K funding and over time create a true P-12 system that will integrate pre-K into the state's existing public education financing system. Our original roadmap showed how this goal could be achieved over an eight-year phase-in period. The additional funds committed by the state in recent years for Priority Pre-K and Full-Day Pre-K make our proposal even more relevant and render the achievement of truly universal full-day pre-K a credible prospect.

The new Full-Day Pre-K program significantly expanded access to full-day pre-K for four year olds. But it also added an entirely new competitive grants program to the state's pre-K efforts, and the newest program includes provisions that pose serious impediments to achieving universal service. In the 2014-15 school year, for example, substantial funding is allocated to New York City, but all school districts outside the city must compete for a limited funding pot of \$40 million total. In addition, the new program includes other serious barriers to expansion.

Remaining Impediments to a Coherent System

1. Schools districts are reimbursed for costs incurred for the program only after the school year has ended. This has precluded the majority of school districts from applying for grants under the new program because they lack sufficient reserves in this time of state aid shortfalls and property tax caps. As a result, they are unable to cover the up-front costs of the program. (The original UPK program and Priority Pre-K provide standard reimbursement schedules that provide most funding during the current school year.)
2. Without assurances of adequate, guaranteed, long-term funding, many districts will be reluctant to initiate a costly new program that they may have to fund entirely from their own resources in the future.

3. The per-student funding levels provided (\$10,000 for classrooms with a certified teacher) are an improvement for most districts, but do not recognize factors affecting classroom quality other than teacher certification, and are insufficient to cover the full cost of a quality program.
4. Community programs that have been rejected from a district's consolidated funding application are permitted to apply directly to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for funding. If funded by NYSED, they may operate programs under NYSED's review, rather than through district supervision. While it is important that the state continues to mandate that districts reach out and include community programs in their consolidated applications, this arrangement undermines effective administration, coordination, and oversight of early childhood education at the local level, as well as impedes local efforts to develop a coherent strategy for implementation across the community.
5. The authority of NYSED to administer the Full-Day Pre-K program expires on June 30, 2016, but no provision has been made as to how the program will be administered after that date.

These new challenges add to the complexity of the state's pre-K efforts. Even as the new Full-Day Pre-K program rolls out, New York continues to provide funding under separate rules and in different per-student amounts for its original UPK program, with over 100,000 four year olds enrolled, mostly in half-day programs. About two-thirds of the state's districts are eligible to participate. That funding is provided through a state allocation formula, which gives districts roughly half of the district's per-pupil aid for K-12 (with a minimum per-pupil rate of \$2,700). For the past few years, state funding for UPK has been frozen at about \$385 million annually. The state's separate Priority Pre-K program, which was initiated in 2013-14, continues to be funded at \$25 million per year. Only high-need districts receive these funds, which were awarded through a competitive grant process. The per-student rates for Priority Pre-K are double the rate for the original UPK program.

The state now needs to establish a single, stable, transparent and appropriately-funded prekindergarten system.

BUILDING PERMANENT, COST-BASED PRE-K FINANCING

To fulfill New York State's longstanding and important commitment to universal prekindergarten and align it with recent substantial increases in funding for full-day seats, and to recognize the right of every three and four year old child to access to quality early childhood education, the state now needs to establish a single, stable, transparent system for funding prekindergarten. In the next four years, New York must move to a rational, cost-based formula model to ensure an adequate, sustainable, permanent funding mechanism for pre-K.

CCI/CEE's 2014 analysis and our 2013 roadmap report included an examination of promising pre-K financing models across the nation, as well as an in-depth review of New York State's pre-K programs. The evidence from New Jersey's Abbott preschool experience and its model for statewide implementation provided the most compelling and relevant prototype for building a more effective funding model in New York State. The Abbott preschool experience is also relevant because it established pre-K as a core educational service necessary to meet that state's constitutional obligation to provide every child with a quality education. Because of the constitutional context from which it emerged, preschool funding in New Jersey was rights-based, and its operating premise was that all three and four year old children in the Abbott districts must be fully funded. The New Jersey program also required the state to adopt and enforce high-quality standards, to provide full-day programs, and to provide supplementary after-school social services and health services as necessary.

We continue to be committed to ensuring an effective, high-quality full-day universal pre-K program for all children in New York. The governor, the legislature, and the Regents are also committed to this goal. To achieve such a system, on an adequate, equitable, stable, and transparent basis, New York State needs to revise its current statutory and regulatory frameworks to (a) guarantee access for all three and four year olds; (b) phase in the reform over eight years, building on the Full-Day Pre-K program; (c) create a true P-12 state education finance system for adequate,

stable, and sustained funding; and (d) base funding on actual costs of the elements of a high-quality program, infrastructure and system supports. In addition, it must include transportation, facilities, social services, and services for dual language learners and students with disabilities.

Guaranteed Access to Full-Day Pre-K for All Children

New York should acknowledge and affirmatively act on the right of all three and four year olds to attend a publicly funded, high-quality full-day prekindergarten in a public school, charter school, or in an early childhood program in the community. Access to such programs should be guaranteed, and information about the availability and advantages of full-day pre-K should be affirmatively disseminated and promoted, but parents should still retain the discretion to decide whether their children should actually take advantage of these programs.

Although parents should also be free to choose a half-day option if that better fits their child's and family's particular needs, the full long-term benefits of early education can only be achieved by providing universal access to full-day services and the basic right should be defined in terms of access to full-day programs. Increased expenditures will be required to support this right of access, and the state's new five-year \$1.5 billion commitment will provide a substantial portion, but not all, of the funding that will actually be needed for the initial stages of implementing a truly universal pre-K system. This investment will be more than repaid over time by the increased

lifetime income that the beneficiaries of these programs will earn and the increased taxes they will pay, as well the reduced expenditures that schools and society at large will need to pay for special education, remedial academic, and social and health costs.

A necessary corollary of guaranteed full-day prekindergarten programs is guaranteed access to full-day kindergarten for the graduates of these programs. The substantial budget cuts of recent years have caused a few districts to cut back from full-day to half-day kindergarten programs. Other

districts that have been providing only half-day kindergarten have failed to expand their programs to provide full-day services. The state should prohibit any school districts currently operating full-day kindergarten programs from cutting back their hours. In addition, consistent with the Regents' policy position to establish the compulsory school age at five, the state should require those few districts currently operating half-day kindergarten programs to convert them to full-day — within a year of their full phase-in of full-day pre-K for four year olds.

EIGHT-YEAR PHASE-IN

To promote effective statewide implementation, the full reform should be phased over an eight-year period (approximately the same period as proved necessary for effective implementation in New Jersey's program), starting this school year (2014-15). All four year olds will have access to high-quality full-day pre-K in school year 2019-20, and all three year olds will have access in school year 2021-22.

During the first four years of the phase-in, the state will continue to support the existing Full-Day Pre-K program at the \$10,000 per-student levels approved by the legislature, but move toward adoption of an allocation formula based on actual costs as the investment increases.

PHASE 1: EXPANDING ACCESS TO FULL-DAY PRE-K

Current Year – 2014-15: Begin implementation of the new Full-Day Pre-K program as set forth in the current legislation. Continue funding for UPK and Priority Pre-K until 2018-19 (Year 5).

Year 2 – 2015-16: Expand and revise the Full-Day Pre-K to remedy certain shortcomings in the current legislation.

The Full-Day Pre-K program will be revised to (a) increase funding by \$150 million for districts outside New York City to expand access to full-

day pre-K for 15,000 more children in these districts and, in addition, fully support New York City's plan to get to universal service in the 2015-16 school year; (b) ensure that districts are reimbursed on a periodic, predictable schedule for costs expended in the year they are incurred;² (c) grant clear priority to districts with large numbers of high-need students; (d) provide technical assistance to high-need districts to assist them in promptly launching high-quality pre-K services; and (e) require all community programs to be part of a consolidated district application.

² Because schools initiating new programs in 2014-15 under the Full-Day Pre-K program will be reimbursed during 2015-16 under the current legislation, providing current payments to meet school districts' cash flow needs will require a one-time double payment in the 2015-16 budget. Fortunately and fortuitously, the New York State Division of the Budget has estimated that the state will end the current fiscal year with a \$6.2 billion surplus, due largely to major windfall financial settlements. This means that a one-time catch-up expenditure for Full-Day Pre-K will be feasible during 2015-16. In fact, it would reflect sound fiscal management, since the extra catch-up payment would not involve committing the state to any recurring expenditures in future years.

PHASE 2: TRANSITIONING TO UNIVERSAL SERVICE

Years 3 and 4 – 2016-18: Convert the Full-Day Pre-K program from a competitive grant to a regular state-aid grant program targeted specifically to high-need school districts.

Continue the already-approved per-student funding levels of \$10,000 for classrooms with certified teachers for all programs, in both schools and community settings, that meet appropriate quality standards. The supplemental funding included in the Full-Day Pre-K program should be available to support quality improvements. Start-up funding should also continue to be available as necessary.

NYSED will be adequately funded to provide effective oversight of all pre-K services. NYSED will undertake a thorough study of the actual cost of providing pre-K services that meet state quality standards in different parts of the state. NYSED will also be funded by the legislature to undertake a systematic study of facilities, professional development, and transportation needs throughout the state.

School districts that provide appropriate full-day pre-K programs during these years should also receive transportation aid and building aid in accordance with the existing state aid programs that provide such funding for K-12 programs.

PHASE 3: REACHING UNIVERSAL ACCESS FOR FOUR YEAR OLDS

Year 5 – 2018-19: All four year olds in high-need districts must be guaranteed access to an appropriate full-day prekindergarten program.

Year 6 – 2019-20: All four year olds in all districts must be guaranteed access to an appropriate full-day prekindergarten program.

All five year olds must be guaranteed access to a quality full-day kindergarten program.

Starting in Years 5 and 6, funding for pre-K should be provided as regular state aid for education, through the state's foundation aid system. The full per-capita cost of providing a quality full-day pre-K program should be calculated in accordance with the actual cost of providing a quality full-day pre-K program based on NYSED's cost analysis and provided initially as an identifiable allocation reserved for and spent only on pre-K services. The funding for pre-K, however, should be provided to school districts as part of the overall state aid to education, to move the state effectively toward a P-12 system and allow for appropriate planning and alignment of services to assure better educational outcomes for children.

Also in phase 3, school districts should contribute a local share of the pre-K appropriation, in accordance with the district's relative wealth, as they do currently under the K-12 state education finance system. By Year 6, all school districts will be required to ensure access to full-day programs for all four year olds. School districts will be guaranteed a minimum of \$10,000 in state aid for each pre-K slot for which they had received \$10,000 in state aid during Years 1-4 until the system is fully phased in during Year 8.

PHASE 4: EXPANDING ACCESS TO THREE YEAR OLDS

Year 7 – 2020-21: All three year olds in high-need districts must be guaranteed access to an appropriate full-day prekindergarten program.

Year 8 – 2021-22: All three year olds in all districts must be guaranteed access to an appropriate full-day prekindergarten program.

Adequate, Stable, and Transparent P-12 Education Finance System

New York must create a true P-12 state education finance system that ensures adequate, stable, and sustained funding to support high-quality prekindergarten services. The steps included in our plan address and resolve the current challenges, most notably that the current level of pre-K funding is insufficient. The state must correct the reimbursement structure of the new full-day UPK program by ensuring districts receive allocations upfront on a predictable payment schedule, as is the case with the UPK and Priority Pre-K programs. At present time, many school districts do not think it is fiscally sound to launch or expand programs without adequate upfront state funding.

Even if the current funding for all three of the existing state-aided pre-K programs were to be combined, the total funds available would not be sufficient to support high-quality full-day access for all children. The state's adopted 2014 Full-Day Pre-K program, for example, appropriated \$340 million per year for the programs first two years, which is funding New York City and 53 additional districts to expand full day pre-K. There is an expectation, but no guarantee, that another \$820 million will be made available for the next three years to fulfill the governor's vision for a \$1.5 billion expansion. Even without considering the impact of inflation during the five-year period, the governor's commitment would fall \$200 million short of the amount necessary to support all existing commitments that need to be maintained through Year 5.

Furthermore, the program's per-student funding rates are not sufficient to cover the reasonable expenses of a quality program. State aid is based on a \$10,000 appropriation for each student in a class having a certified teacher. However, no cost studies have been undertaken in New York to

establish whether the \$10,000 per-student rate for full-day programs with certified teachers is sufficient. Previous estimates in New York, as well as other states, indicate that such a rate does not cover all the necessary components of a high-quality pre-K education, meeting the needs of all children including dual language learners and those with special needs. The current actual per-capita costs for quality full-day pre-K programs in New Jersey, a state with cost-of-living levels comparable to New York, are between \$13,000 and \$14,000 per student.

Finally, while the \$340 million appropriated in the 2014 state budget is a bold step forward, the state must invest more robustly to keep the promise of truly universal service. There will be no funds whatsoever available to allow the other 638 districts in the state to add Full-day Pre-K in the next five years. Governor Cuomo has pledged to school districts throughout the state, "As quickly as cities bring [pre-K] on line, we will fund it. Whatever they need, we have the funding ready."³ To carry out the governor's bold pledge will require an additional investment and a long-term guarantee of funding.

In addition, New York's pre-K programs have no guaranteed funding base. State aid for the UPK program, now called "allocational UPK" by state educational officials, is calculated to a certain extent in relation to K-12 foundation-funding amounts. But it is still technically a grant program, and districts not already in the program are now not even permitted to apply. The Priority Pre-K program operates as a limited \$25 million competitive grants program that requires new appropriations each year. The new Full-Day Pre-K program is open to all districts, but also operates as a competitive grant effort with funding is capped at \$40 million for all districts outside of New York City.

³ "We're going to have a statewide pre-K program funded by the state. That's what we said we're going to do and that's what we're going to do," Cuomo said. "I said all along that we'll fund the need... And as quickly as cities can bring it online, we will fund it. Whatever they need, we have the funding ready" (Brian Lehrer Show, WNYC, March 10, 2014). See also, "The state will pay for it, and the state will be proud to pay for it," Cuomo said. "It's a priority. We believe in children. We believe in pre-K. We believe in education. Let's put our money where our mouth is" (Governor's Budget Address, Jan. 21, 2014).

Each of these initiatives requires a separate annual appropriation, and, unlike grant programs in many other states, New York has yet to create a dedicated funding stream for early childhood education, such as a lottery or tobacco or beer tax, as many other states have done. Although the state has indicated that it will continue to fund the Full-Day Pre-K program for three years beyond the initial two-year period for which definite appropriations are already enacted, there is no guarantee that additional funds will be appropriated to continue the expansion. As we noted in our 2013 roadmap report, history shows that the state has not kept its promises for multiyear funding in the past, and districts are aware that they cannot count on these funds until the actual appropriation is made. The state education department has, accordingly, warned those applying for these grants that all future payments will be “subject to the annual appropriation of funds in the State budget for this purpose.”⁴

This funding instability has major consequences for the future of prekindergarten in New York State. Indeed, the uncertainty of the state-aid level from year to year was the reason many school districts gave in the past when they chose not to participate in the original half-day UPK program during the brief period when the state allowed all to apply. Uncertainty about future funding was also cited as a major reason that the vast majority of districts chose not to compete for the new Full-Day Pre-K funding this year. Further, school officials say that the lack of predictable funding

undermines sound program planning and effective implementation. Without appropriate, predictable aid, school districts have faced tough choices – either to cut back or eliminate programs that had been initiated or to turn to local taxpayers to carry the burden through unanticipated tax increases.⁵

Districts outside New York City also reported they simply lacked the resources to front the funding for pre-K and wait for reimbursement. This was particularly challenging for high-need districts with large numbers of children in need of the services, considering the large sums that would be needed to pay for a pre-K expansion while the district awaited state reimbursement.

In summary, it is clear that the state’s current pre-K funding system has grown so complicated over time, changing with each new expansion of the program. The methodology now is so complicated that it is comprehensible only to a few fiscal policy experts. Anyone who examines the rationale for calculating pre-K aid will find more than three pages in the statute books that are hard to decipher. School districts and interested members of the public must rely on “data on file for the school aid computer listing produced by the commissioner,” which lists two sets of rates for each district, without an explanation how the amounts listed were actually calculated. The Full-Day Pre-K program risks evolving into similar additional funding complexities and inequities, unless the changes recommended in this proposal are adopted.

⁴ A total of 84 and school districts 87 other eligible entities submitted applications under the 2014 competitive grant RFP for Full-Day Pre-K funding. The state recently awarded funding to 54 school districts and 27 individual early childhood programs with the goal of serving 37,000 children.

⁵ Even those districts that might seek to support a program by increasing local property taxes would now be impeded from doing so by the cap that the state has imposed on property tax increases. See Educ. Law §2023-a.

Introduction of Local Share to Support Quality

The state has committed to paying \$10,000 per student for all students in classrooms with certified teachers under the Full-Day Pre-K program. That level of state aid should continue to be provided at a minimum by the state for all students enrolled during the first four years of the phase-in period. This amount is not, however, likely to cover the full cost of a quality program, especially in regions of the state where the cost of living is high. School districts participating in the program during those years, therefore, will probably need to supplement this state aid with some amount of local funding in order to meet quality standards.

Our phase-in plan introduces the local share in school years 2018-19 and 2019-20 (Years 5 and 6), as the program becomes mandatory, first for high-needs districts and then for all districts. At that stage of implementation, school districts would be required to contribute a share of the total program costs, in accordance with the district's relative wealth, as they do currently under the K-12 state education finance system. However, districts would be guaranteed at least \$10,000 in state aid for every full-day pre-K slot previously funded under the Full-Day Pre-K program.

Adequate Resources for K-12

By Year 8, funding for pre-K would be fully integrated into the K-12 state aid system to create a stable, consistent system for financing P-12 education into the future. As indicated earlier in this paper, the per-student pre-K allocation would initially be provided as discrete and identifiable aid that must be spent on pre-K services.

The adoption of this new financing strategy must be contingent on the state meeting its obligation to provide, on a sustained basis, the full amount of funding necessary to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education for all students, as

ordered by the Court of Appeals in *CFE v. State of New York* by 2018-19 (Year 5 of the implementation). Otherwise, school districts will not be in a position to contribute local shares.

The state must also address the challenges that the property tax cap creates for districts to have the capacity to expand prekindergarten. Current law imposes a cap on the amount local school districts can raise local rates each year, unless they seek and get the approval of a supermajority of voters.⁶ This cap makes it difficult, if not impossible, for many school districts to raise sufficient local funds to sustain the new full-day prekindergarten programs properly and maintain an effective K-12 program. In the short run, the state must either exempt the costs of expanding prekindergarten from the property tax cap or provide additional state aid to cover the costs.

The state must also recognize that in order for graduates of high-quality prekindergarten programs to maintain and improve their academic gains, the elementary and secondary schools they eventually attend must also have adequate resources. For the past three years, the state has begun to increase its aid to school districts, and, for the past two years the legislature even set aside – at least temporarily – the arbitrary cap on state aid it had written into the state education law. But the current levels of state aid are still well below requisite levels needed to satisfy the mandate to provide every child in New York State with the opportunity for a sound, basic education, and the state still maintains a variety of unconstitutional devices, such as the “gap elimination adjustment” (GEA), and the overall cap on state aid—that must be eliminated. We expect the state to continue to reduce the GEA and eliminate the other unconstitutional distortions to the state aid system over the next few years.⁷

⁶ This provision does not apply to New York City and the other fiscally dependent Big Five school districts.

⁷ Plaintiffs in *New Yorkers for Students' Educational Rights (NYSER) v. State of New York*, (S. Ct. N.Y. Co., and Index no. 650450/2014) are asking the court to invalidate all of these impediments to ensuring adequate funding.

Valid Cost Analysis Assessing All Costs of High-Quality Programs

To ensure that adequate resources are provided on a stable basis to support high-quality programs, New York should ultimately base its funding system for prekindergarten students on a valid cost analysis — as it did with the original K-12 foundation formula — rather than on abstract assumptions about what these programs might or should cost. New York will need several years to develop a database of actual program costs of full-day pre-K programs operating in accordance with consistent high-quality standards and requirements. However, by no later than the 2017-18 school year (Year 4), NYSED should conduct a professional-judgment study of the full costs of operating a cost-effective, high-quality full-day prekindergarten program. The panels of geographically diverse educators and business administrators who undertake these analyses should consider, among other things, relevant evidence that will be available at that time of the actual costs of various public school, community, charter school, and Head Start programs operating in all parts of New York State. Costs to school districts for affirmative outreach activities to encourage students to enroll in these programs should be part of the equation.

These panels should determine costs for operating a public-school pre-K program for students in general, as well as extra weights for students from low-income households, dual language learners, and students with disabilities. The panels should also determine the appropriate rates for public school, community-based and Head Start programs, which includes the costs of qualified teachers and staff.

Full funding for pre-K programs should encompass all necessary costs for high-quality programs and should include transportation, social services, health, and family engagement services, as well as services and supports for dual language learners and students with disabilities enrolled in inclusion programs.



The state should also ensure sufficient funding for the infrastructure and systems supports necessary to build out high-quality programs. The supplemental funds that the state education department has allowed programs to include in their competitive grant applications for the Full-Day Pre-K program in 2014-15 should be continued and expanded to cover all of these costs in school years 2015-16 through 2017-18 (Years 2-4). Thereafter, these costs, as necessary, would be included in the actual cost-based funding rate that will be put into effect.

The lack of funding for transportation has substantially hampered enrollment in pre-K programs, particularly in the rural parts of the state, and/or imposed substantial additional costs on local school districts. Children in districts with fewer local resources available to support the cost of transportation, or those with parents or guardians who are unable to transport them, will be less likely to attend pre-K programs. Therefore, consistent with the premise that pre-K programs should receive a cost-based allocation correlated

with the per-pupil funding provided for K-12 students, formula-based aids for transportation, building aid, textbooks and computers, and other needs should also be extended to cover pre-K students as an integral part of the revised state-aid system beginning in 2016-17 (Year 3).

The amount of funding for pre-K programs should include access to necessary social services, basic health and mental health services, and family support that many children from low-income households need in order to be able to take advantage of educational opportunities. Although cooperative arrangements with governmental and community agencies providing these services should be sought in order to optimize services and minimize costs, additional funding reasonably necessary to provide these services and/or to ensure proper coordination between community providers and the educational programs must be part of the basic foundation funding.

New York State has a growing number of preschool students with disabilities receiving publicly funded prekindergarten services largely in nonpublic settings, and costs are rapidly escalating in this area. By ensuring access to full-day programs for all three and four year old children, and including in the weighted calculation the projected costs of providing services for children with disabilities, a rights-based universal prekindergarten program will encourage greater enrollment of children with disabilities in public school and community programs. This should result in more integrated and inclusive experiences with the general school population for students with disabilities and substantial savings for state and local governments, as an appropriately weighted, transparent foundation funding system is able to provide appropriate services for these children and replaces the complex and costly reimbursement system currently used to pay private providers.

THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

For New York to realize its vision for a truly universal and high-quality prekindergarten, we will need more than adequate funding and a sound financing strategy. State leaders must also create a strong regulatory framework and a solid implementation plan that includes investment in the infrastructure necessary to build out and support high quality programs in all settings. And that plan must move the state toward a more coherent approach to pre-K. Currently each of the separate funding streams for pre-K has different standards, funding levels and implementation requirements. Our plan seeks to move the state toward a single, coherent program open to all three and four year olds, as part of a continuum of education, P-12.

To reach that goal, pre-K must be of sufficient quality and the funding must cover all the essential resources and supports necessary to foster children's learning and development. These regulatory standards and infrastructure supports that we propose align with QUALITYstarsNY, the state's quality rating and improvement system for early childhood programs from birth to kindergarten.

ESSENTIAL REGULATIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PREKINDERGARTEN

To ensure that all children have access to high-quality prekindergarten as part of the opportunity for a sound basic education, the state must strengthen its current prekindergarten regulations to provide the following essential elements in all programs, including those in both public school and community settings.⁸ The cost-based state aid for prekindergarten must provide each school district with sufficient funding to ensure that all standards can be met. To reach that goal, the phase-in financing should also include the supplemental funding offered in the Full-Day Pre-K program, which supported investments in both public school and community programs to reach quality benchmarks.

Sufficient Classroom Hours

All districts should provide access for all children to full-day (six hours and 20 minutes) prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, aligned with the public school day, operating five days a week, on a 180-day schedule. Where needed, extended hours should be provided to meet the needs of children and of working families, primarily by leveraging Head Start, child care, and other available funding sources.

Appropriate Class Sizes

Classes with substantial numbers of students needing more intensive support, including dual language learners, and students with disabilities, should be capped at a maximum of 15 students with one teacher and one teaching assistant. All other classes should have no more than 18 students with one teacher and one teaching assistant.

Sufficient, Well-Qualified Highly Effective Teachers, Administrators, and Other Personnel

Instructional Staff

All pre-K teachers in all settings should have a B-2 instructional certificate or certification for teaching students with disabilities or dual language learners valid for service in the early childhood grades by 2017. The state should ensure sufficient financial support, including scholarships and loan forgiveness, to help uncertified teachers become certified, but there should be no further extension of the deadline for certification for all teachers.

⁸ Our recommendations draw on and build from existing state regulations governing UPK, Priority Pre-K, and the Full-Day Pre-K program. Our 2013 roadmap report lays out in detail the current New York State pre-K regulations and requirements.

Teaching Assistants

Within five years, all teaching assistants should be required to have at least Level 1 teaching assistant certification. New York should move toward requiring a child development associate (CDA) degree or the equivalent for teaching assistants. The requirement should include a minimum of 12 college credits in early childhood, as well as classroom experience.

Master Teachers

To create and maintain program quality by supporting classroom teachers and administrators, the state should require that school districts provide programs in all settings a sufficient number of certified, experienced, and appropriately compensated master teachers, including, as appropriate, bilingual and inclusion specialists. The maximum ratio should be one full-time master teacher who supports the work in a maximum of 15 pre-K classrooms. The state should require that master teachers have the following qualifications:

- A master's degree and B–2 certification;
- Three to five years' experience teaching in general education pre-K programs;
- Experience providing professional development to classroom teachers;
- Experience in implementing developmentally appropriate curricula;
- Experience with performance-based assessments; and
- Master teachers with a specialization in bilingual education should possess bilingual or English as a second language certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.
- Master teachers with a specialization in inclusion should possess special education certification and either possess or pursue early childhood certification.

Administrative Staff

The state should revise its regulations to ensure a sufficient number of well-qualified district-level supervisors and administrators, school and center administrators, and administrative support personnel to coordinate a high-quality pre-K program in all settings.

Professional Development

Professional development and training specific to pre-K education should be required for all early childhood education administrators, school principals, master teachers, classroom teachers, and teaching assistants in all settings. All teaching staff should receive high-quality annual professional development. Such development should focus on topics such as the implementation of high-quality curricula, effective use of child observation and assessment, culturally competent classroom practices, recognition of developmental milestones, identification of possible developmental delays, and effective practices for dual language learners and children with disabilities. There should be a sufficient number of substitute teachers to allow full participation of classroom teachers with the goal of ensuring that each staff member can receive a minimum of 40 clock hours of professional development each year.

Professional development should be provided through multiple pathways and should be designed in accordance with an individualized staff development plan built on the identified needs of program staff and the developmental needs of children. Pre-K professional development should also align with professional development for the K-12 education system.

A Suitable Developmentally Appropriate, Evidence-Based Curriculum

The state should provide a set of recommended curricula that are aligned with the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core. The curricula should be developed through a transparent research and approval process. These recommended curricula should be reviewed every two years.

An Expanded Platform of Services to Meet the Needs of “At-Risk” Students

Currently New York State has a handful of requirements for providing social services to pre-K students but no comprehensive platform of services or funding designed to combat potential barriers to participation and learning in pre-K. The state should strengthen and expand these regulations and provide sufficient funding to ensure access for all at-risk students in all settings to comprehensive services, including but not limited to social services, health, mental health, early intervention and response to intervention (RTI) services, nutritional support, and parent/family engagement and support. These services should be tailored to individual child and family needs, with recognition that pre-K programs that serve high needs communities will need to provide a richer mix of such services than other districts. To the maximum extent possible these services should be provided in the home language of the parent or guardian. Wherever possible, these services should be obtained through coordination with appropriate governmental and community agencies.

Appropriate Services for Students with Special Needs

Students with Disabilities

Though the state now requires that all pre-K programs should promote inclusion of children with disabilities, far too many students with disabilities are nevertheless being served in segregated settings. The state must ensure that sufficient and appropriate personnel, materials, and equipment, including specialized master teacher support and access to high-quality related

and support services, are in place to meet the needs of children with disabilities and to promote inclusion programs in both public school and community settings.

Dual Language Learners

The state currently requires that pre-K programs be designed to ensure that participating English language learners are provided equal access to the program and opportunities to achieve the same program goals and standards as other participating children. These requirements should include certified bilingual teachers, master teachers, and teacher assistants, expanded training for teachers in all settings, as well as appropriate curriculum and assessments, and coordination with all other relevant school district programs.

Appropriate Instrumentalities of Learning

The state currently requires that pre-K programs have materials and equipment that allow for active and quiet play in indoor and outdoor environments, and opportunities to use a wide variety of information in print and electronic mediums for language development. The regulations also specify that instructional materials and equipment must be arranged in learning centers that promote a balance of individual and small group activities. While these regulations themselves are sufficient to provide appropriate instrumentalities of learning, programs lack sufficient funding and/or appropriate facilities to implement them.

A Safe and Supportive Environment for Teaching and Learning

The state should ensure sufficient and appropriate personnel to provide all children a safe and supportive learning environment. This requires, among other things, a sufficient number of social workers, family workers, and master teachers to support teachers in addressing the needs of children with challenging behaviors or learning difficulties, to engage families in supporting teaching and learning, and to create an environment that is free from bullying.

Adequate and Accessible Facilities

The state should ensure that all pre-K facilities have adequate space to provide suitable and developmentally appropriate learning environments for all children, including adequate barrier-free indoor and outdoor play space to accommodate a variety of gross motor activities that encourage children's physical and social development.

Sufficient Family Engagement and Support

The state should ensure that pre-K programs in all settings are able to support the active engagement of parents and/or guardians in the education of their children in a language they understand. This should include written communication, parent workshops, one-on-one meetings and opportunities for parents to

participate in program and school-level decisions. Parents should complete a program evaluation annually to help inform strategies for program improvement. In addition, parents should be provided with sufficient information about quality standards and requirements to make informed decisions about their children. In addition families and children should receive support for a successful transition into pre-K or kindergarten and into the early elementary grades.

Appropriate Assessment of Student Progress

The state must ensure sufficient and appropriate personnel and technology to provide and sustain adequate data systems. This includes ongoing training, and the technical support for assessing student progress and for using this information for continuous improvement of program quality.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT

The state must continue and build on its strong commitment to using a diverse system for delivery of pre-K services. This approach to service delivery makes the most effective and efficient use of existing investments, capacity, and expertise to support children's learning and development. In the next stages of expansion, both NYSED and local districts will need to take steps to strengthen the system to ensure children have access to a quality educational opportunity in every setting.

At the Local Level

Local school districts should have a process in place to review the development and implementation of universal full-day prekindergarten, overseen by a broad local stakeholder group that includes representatives from both the early childhood and public education community. Smaller districts may collaborate or choose to work with a BOCES on planning and

implementation to ensure local resources, capacity, and expertise on early childhood education are appropriately engaged to support the effort. That includes the ability to meet family needs and assure access to high-quality teachers and learning environments in both public school and community settings. The state should offer technical assistance and support to these local efforts, where appropriate, to encourage learning across the early childhood and public school communities, to promote and disseminate best practices, common expectations, and continuous improvement to support children's learning and success.

At the State Level

State leaders must create a strong regulatory framework and a plan for providing the infrastructure necessary to support high-quality programs in all settings. This will require the state to make primary investments in the following

areas: (a) teacher preparation and support, (b) facilities expansion and improvement, (c) transportation expansion, (d) data systems expansion, (e) technical assistance to promote effective school district collaboration with community-based programs, (f) quality assurance, and (g) ongoing program evaluation. A broad stakeholder group that includes representation from both the early childhood and the public education communities should review this plan.

Teacher Preparation and Support

NYSED should undertake an analysis to identify the number of certified teachers that will be needed, and it should then develop and implement a plan to ensure that a sufficient number of certified teachers will be available to meet anticipated needs. The plan should include:

- funding levels that will support equitable compensation for all personnel, in both school and community settings;
- incentives, such as scholarships and loan forgiveness, to help current teachers to upgrade their credentials and to attract new teachers to the field;
- multiple pathways to certification, as with K-12 certification, including intensive summer and weekend classes, articulation between two-year and four-year academic programs, and providing credit for work experience in early childhood classrooms, to enable people from diverse backgrounds to obtain appropriate credentials;
- financial support to higher education institutions to motivate them to establish new credentialing, coaching, and mentoring programs; and
- development and sustained support for a network of master teachers to provide professional development for classroom teachers. In addition, the state must ensure that all teachers have appropriate training to

work with students with special needs, including dual language learners and students with disabilities. In regard to dual language learners, this requires recruiting administrative and instructional staff with appropriate linguistic and cultural skills. For students with disabilities, this requires recruiting and training more administrative and instructional staff with expertise in inclusionary programming.

Facilities Improvement and Expansion

The state must expand the number of classrooms designed appropriately to serve three and four year old children. In some communities, this will require the addition of new facilities as well as renovation of existing ones. To do this, the state must undertake a facilities needs assessment for universal pre-K.

Transportation Aid

To implement truly universal pre-K, New York must expand its system of pupil transportation to include three and four year old children comparable to that provided to K-12 students. Busses and other vehicles must meet the current federal safety standards for three and four year olds. This will require amendments to the education law to establish appropriate rules, standards, and specifications, as well as funding to ensure appropriate number of monitors, safety seats, and other child restraints.

Data Systems Expansion

The state must fully implement a pre-K-through-workforce-entry data infrastructure to support instruction, track children's progress, and identify effective strategies for promoting better learning outcomes. The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) has completed a detailed analysis of data currently available and needed in the early years, which can inform the process and be aligned with the K-12 data system.⁹

⁹ Early Childhood Advisory Council, *Building an Early Childhood Education Data System: A Proposal by the Data Development Work Group* (May 2013).

Technical Assistance to Promote Effective School District Collaboration with Community-Based Programs

The state must create, and ensure sufficient funding to implement, a technical assistance strategy to promote effective collaboration between school districts and community providers. The strategy should include resources for providing district personnel technical assistance on funding and contractual requirements, assisting districts in providing community programs fiscal and management support and in promoting a smooth transition for children and their families between the preschool and the K-12 public school systems. In addition, the state and school districts must develop coherent strategies for ensuring that extended-day options are available for working families. The new effort could work through a variety of mechanisms, including BOCES. Activities should include:

- create a team of coordinators to assist districts in promoting effective partnerships, professional development, and best practices;
- sponsor annual statewide meetings on collaboration across systems; and
- establish incentives to spur more effective collaboration between public schools and community programs.

Quality Assurance

The state must fully implement and ensure sufficient funding for a uniform approach to quality assurance for all early education settings. Specifically, the state should take the next steps in implementing a quality rating and improvement system statewide. For pre-K programs, the master teacher system should be a part of this continuous improvement effort.

Ongoing Program Evaluation

New York City has announced that it will undertake an in-depth evaluation of its full-day pre-K program, focusing on the system of supports and child outcomes. Several other districts have undertaken local program assessments, but there have been no formal, statewide evaluations of the 16-year-old pre-K program. The state should develop and implement a multidimensional strategy for ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of its pre-K program. Along with ongoing program review that can assess best practices and provide recommendations for continuous quality improvement, the evaluation strategy should include longitudinal studies of child outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Securing the future of New York's children requires that our state take the next steps toward truly universal prekindergarten. We now have the momentum and strong leadership needed to move to a coherent, sustainable, universal system that recognizes the right of every three and four year old to a high-quality, full-day prekindergarten program. To accomplish this will require a permanent, cost-based pre-K funding system and high-quality program standards and the infrastructure and systems necessary to support them. Building on the state's bold new initiatives this year, and following our roadmap, truly universal full-day pre-K can become a reality for all four year olds in high-needs districts within five years, all four year olds through the state within six years, and all three year olds within eight years.



To learn more about our work and download a copy of the report:
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The Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI) champions the right of all children to start life with the best possible foundation of care, health and learning. Realizing the long term benefits – for children, for families and for our society – CCI works to ensure investments in quality and supports for working families to give all of our children the opportunity for a bright future.



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The Campaign for Educational Equity (CEE) is a nonprofit research and policy center at Teachers College, Columbia University, that seeks to advance the right of all children to meaningful educational opportunity. CEE works to define and secure the full range of resources, supports, and services necessary to provide this opportunity to disadvantaged children.