



**Testimony of Center for Children's Initiatives**

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing  
2019-20 Executive Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Honorable Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee  
Honorable Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee  
Honorable Helene Weinstein, Chair, Assembly Ways and Means Committee  
Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee**

**Submitted by  
Betty Holcomb, Policy Director**

**February 6, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the 2019-20 Executive Budget Proposal for Elementary and Secondary Education. I am the Policy Director for The Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI). Since the passage of the first UPK legislation in 1997, CCI has worked to support the expansion of high quality pre-K as a proven strategy for preparing children for success in school and later life. The evidence to support investment in quality early childhood education grows stronger by the year. Investments in high-quality full-day services more than pay for themselves and are proven strategies for reversing the growing income inequality in New York State, the most extreme in the nation. We do this work of course in partnership with public education and early childhood advocates.

We are committed to a the highest quality program serving threes and fours full day delivered in diverse settings including community based early childhood programs and the public schools as a foundation for an effective P-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy to prepare and support children's learning. The breadth of our partnerships are included at the end of my testimony. Our testimony today draws on that experience and the shared agenda carried by these campaigns and partnerships. We are testifying today about the Pre-K expansion, but it is clear that to meet the needs of young children and their families, the state must increase its investments in both child care and pre-K.

**We come to you today with a deep concern that the State has slowed new investments so significantly that it will take more than 57 years to meet the state’s promise of a quality early learning opportunity to every four-year-old in the state.**

### **2019 EXECUTIVE BUDGET: \$15 MILLION FALLS SHORT**

**The Governor’s proposal to add just \$15 million for pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds falls dismally short of meeting the rising need and growing demand for pre-K around the state. More than 100 districts gave formal notice of interest in adding pre-K services in the 2018-2019 school year.** However, state funding for expansion left the majority behind, along with tens of thousands of preschoolers.

**Last year’s investment in full-day pre-K, also \$15 million to support pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds, resulted in new services for just 1583 children. That included just 930 new full-day seats for 4-year-olds.<sup>1</sup>**

Currently, **80,000 four-year-olds across the state still lack access to full-day pre-K despite years of pledges and unmet promises from New York’s leaders.** In 2014, Governor Cuomo promised to fund every school district ready with a plan for quality full-day pre-K and to make high-quality full-day pre-K an option for all the state’s four-year-olds within five years. Rising numbers of young children in deep poverty and growing numbers of multi-lingual learners in small cities, suburbs and rural areas still left behind, as well as children still waiting in urban communities. These realities make a larger investment imperative for 2019.

With current pre-K funding frozen, in some cases for several decades, many districts desperately need increased resources and support to sustain current services, meet quality standards and convert part-day services to the full-day that most benefits children.

In 2014, the significant state investment of \$340 million—with \$300 million earmarked for the City’s bold Pre-K for All initiative – was groundbreaking, and resulted in the successful and highly regarded program in New York City providing an early learning opportunity for every four year old and the city is now expanding that opportunity to threes. The city received well-deserved national attention for this.

The state’s total investment in pre-K now totals \$842 million and supports part-day and full-day services for more than 120,000 3- and 4-year-olds across New York.

**But with each passing year, the promise to 4-year-olds outside New York City rings more hollow, with state policymakers scaling back funding for expansion to nearly a halt.**

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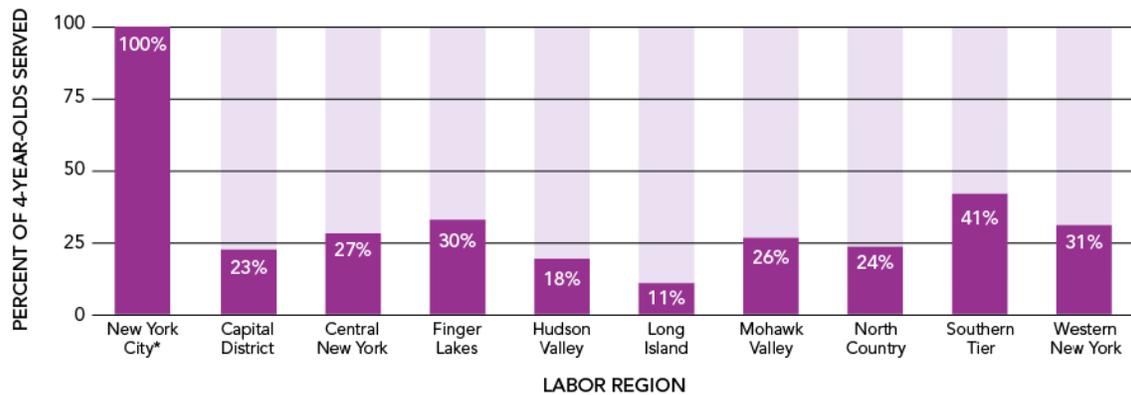
<sup>1</sup> Data on pre-K seats added in 2017 provided by the Office of Early Learning, New York State Education Department.

## **Striking Regional Inequities in Access Persist**

Indeed, the strategy for pre-K investment since 2014 has done little to address the inequity between New York City and the rest of the state. The City now enrolls 70,000 4-year-olds in full-day pre-K in a program open to all and with close to 60 % of those children enrolled in early childhood programs in the community. Yet, districts around the state ready to add full-day pre-K for 4-year-olds compete with each other for scant funds and parents often compete through lottery for very limited places. The disparities are especially stark, when considered region by region around New York State.

### **57 YEARS TO FULL-DAY PRE-K FOR EVERY 4-YEAR-OLD?**

#### **Current Access to Full-Day Pre-K by Region**



Pre-K enrollment data provided by New York State Education Department (NYSED). The number of 4-year-olds expected to enroll in full-day kindergarten is based on the following assumptions: 85 percent of children attending kindergarten, minus children enrolled in 4410 special education schools.

\*NYSED estimates that New York City currently serves about 91 percent of all 4-year-olds expected to enroll. The City has adopted an official policy of universal access, however, with the promise of a full-day seat to every 4-year-old who seeks to enroll.

A total 77 districts fielded formal proposals to the state in 2018. Fifty-two scored high enough to receive a grant. Only 32 districts were awarded funds to expand pre-K services. (See chart on p. 12) The bottom-line: 20 districts with a plan to add quality pre-K were denied funding because of inadequate state investment.

Many others especially smaller districts needed support and technical assistance to field a quality proposal. They simply lack the staff and expertise. What they do not lack is serious interest in offering pre-K.

That fact is a source of growing frustration, even outrage, for families, educators and community leaders who recognize the power of pre-K to empower their youngest learners and put them on a path to success in school and life. Long Island is a case in point, with 23,000 4-year-olds still without pre-K. Need is growing among the Island's preschoolers,

with a 9 percent increase in poverty among children under the age of 6. About a third of the region’s 125 districts gave formal notice of interest in adding pre-K services. Nine fielded full-blown proposals. Yet only one, Roosevelt School District, received a grant to add 72 seats for 3- and 4-year-olds, with just 54 more full-day slots for 4-year-olds.

**That’s just 54 more full-day pre-K seats for the Island’s 23,000 4-year-olds expected to enroll. Long Island remains the most under-served region in the state.**

We cannot afford to lose generations of young children. They are only four once. They will never get a second chance. Moreover, increasingly, their needs are more acute.

**RISING POVERTY, RISING DIVERSITY ADDS TO URGENT UNMET NEED – AND IMPERATIVE TO INVEST IN PRE-K OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK CITY**

Changing demographics across the state, especially rising poverty and growing numbers of immigrant families with children who are dual language learners (DLL’s) make the case for increased investment an imperative, if state leaders are serious about putting New York’s rising generations on a path to success in school and life.

**STATES GROWING DIVERSITY OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY**

Labor Region	Percentage of 4-year-olds of DLLs* in each region
Capital District	13%
Central New York	15%
Finger Lakes	18%
Hudson Valley	38%
Long Island	43%
Mohawk Valley	13%
North Country	10%
Southern Tier	7%
Western New York	15%

Data on Dual Language Learners by age and economic region provided by Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census pooled 2011-2015 American Community Service Data.

\*Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are young children, birth to school-age, who live in a home where they are exposed to a language other than English.

New York State now ranks third in the nation in welcoming immigrants, 43% of children birth to 8 now DLL’s, that is, living in a home where they are exposed to a language other than English. Governor Cuomo and other state leaders have celebrated the state’s new diversity, creating a state office for New Americans in 2013, and proclaiming New York a “state of immigrants” in 2017.

**Suburbs adjacent to New York City – especially the Hudson Valley and Long Island – now rival the City in their diversity; with 43% of four-year-olds in the Hudson Valley are now DLL’s, and 38% of those on Long Island.**

Without an investment in quality, full-day pre-K, inequity rises, and grows for children right through high school. **“Reducing disparate outcomes for our children is a heavy lift without equitable access to high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences for all students,” Constance D. Evelyn, Superintendent Valley Stream 13.**

With quality pre-K, which includes appropriate supports for DLL’s, and respect for their home language, this gap can be reduced or even erased. In fact, the latest research shows that DLL’s bring special strengths to learning, and are even more creative problem-solvers, when they are supported and welcomed into high-quality early education.

New York’s bedrock vision for pre-K explicitly recognizes early childhood education as foundational to success in today’s global economy. Languages are most easily acquired in the early years, and research shows that waiting until kindergarten or later can be counterproductive, even harmful, to children’s success, undermining their confidence and language skills later on.

### **Meager Investment in Pre-K = Harsh Consequences for Children with Special Needs**

Expanding pre-K also meets the urgent need to expand opportunity for children with disabilities, whose options are rapidly shrinking. Top policymakers have recognized pre-K as a critical pathway to better serve the 10 to 15% of children with disabilities. Research shows that diagnosing and offering appropriate support to children with special needs in the early years can improve their educational success—and reduce the need for more expensive remedial education later on.

Research also shows, and state and federal laws require children with disabilities have access to early education, and be served in the “least restrictive environment,” one which allows them to learn with other children of all abilities. Without universal prekindergarten classes, such opportunities simply do not exist for most children. Special education funding is declining, limiting any option for the support that could put them on a path to success.

It is important to increase support in preschool special education for children with disabilities who require the highest level of services. **In 2019, the state should increase reimbursement rates for Preschool Special Education by at least 5% and invest in strategies to reduce the excessive turnover among teachers in these programs to ensure a seat to every preschooler in need of one.** The state is failing to meet its legal obligation to ensure these students are served. Today, more than 700 children in New York City alone and hundreds more around the state are without the educational opportunities they are entitled to receive.

The failure to invest in the state’s universal pre-K program adds to the consequences for children with disabilities who could benefit from quality early learning opportunities in integrated settings. “The opportunity for preschool students with disabilities to be educated with their typically-developing peers diminishing by the day, according to Chris Treiber, from the InterAgency Council for Developmental Disabilities. “Keeping the promise to make pre-K truly universal with a full-day service for all preschoolers is essential, if New York State is to ensure that preschool students with disabilities have opportunity to attend high-quality inclusive early childhood programs.”

The Board of Regents recognizes this urgent need, as well, and is calling for funding to support new models for integrated classes in as full-day pre-K expands. The Governor in his 2019-2020 budget message also recognized the need for more opportunities for children with disabilities to attend pre-K with their more typically developing peers. We **support the Regents recommendation for the state to add \$6.7 million in a pilot program to establish a new model for integrated classes serving both typically developing children and those with disabilities.**

## **PRE-K: A WISE INVESTMENT AND SOME PROGRESS**

The evidence to support the investment in quality early childhood education only grows stronger by the year: Investments in high-quality full-day services more than pay for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

We applaud the steps taken in the past several years. This includes access for 3’s to pre-K, funding of full- day pre-K, proposals to consolidate the now disparate funding of pre-K classroom and the reopening of access to new pre-K funds to all school districts in the 2017-2018 budget.

**Bottom-Line: Increase the Pre-K Investment in the 2019 Enacted Budget to expand access to high quality for the state’s 3- and 4-year-olds.**

Given the dramatic needs and changing demographics of the state’s youngest children, the funding continue to be available to any district ready with a plan to meet the needs of and prioritize at-risk children in their communities. We support the Governor’s new priority for homeless children. State leaders should build on his proposal by including:

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<sup>2</sup> For complete references to the research case for pre-K, and other data in this report, in our attached report, “Opportunities Foreclosed, Equity Denied. New York Youngest Learners Still Left Out! Make Quality Early Learning Top Priority,” released January 2018, available at [ccipolicy.org](http://ccipolicy.org), which includes both national and New York-specific data and supports the case we make here.

## \$150 MILLION TO EXPAND ACCESS TO FULL-DAY, QUALITY PRE-K

- ***\$125 million to expand access to pre-K full day and part day for both three- and four-year-olds.*** Funding levels should be sufficient to assure quality in all settings, appropriating at least \$10,000 for four-year-olds and \$12,000 for three-year-olds to support quality standards known to produce better educational outcomes for children.
- ***\$25 million in supplemental funding to enhance quality and eliminate barriers to expansion, as districts expand pre-K.*** The pre-K program has established high regulatory standards, but the State has not invested sufficiently in necessary infrastructure and quality strategies as pre-K expands. The \$25 million investment should include funding for three critical purposes. (1) Evidence-based strategies to attract retain and support qualified teachers in all settings, including improved compensation as well as professional development, coaching and mentoring. (2) Funding for the other essentials of implementation, including start-up funding to equip new classrooms, and transportation costs. (3) Investment in regional technical assistance centers to support districts that need the support to meet the highest quality standards and partnerships between school districts and community programs.
- **Securing all current pre-K funding to support services in New York City and in other districts dependent on state or federal competitive grants**
- **Increase the reimbursement rates for Preschool Special Education by at least 5% and invest in strategies to reduce excessive turnover among teachers in these programs to ensure a seat for every preschooler in need of one.**

## REFORM PRE-K FINANCING

- **Continue to consolidate the pre-K funding, with funding for additional slots distributed by allocation,** like other education funding, with funding levels sufficient to ensure high quality in all settings.
- **Enhance pre-K rates and distribute funding by allocation in the next expansion.** This includes funding levels for **qualified and appropriately compensated teachers and staff in both community programs and public schools,** as well as **necessary infrastructure and supports, such as transportation, facilities and professional development,** like other education aid.

## **Pre-K Financing To Sustain Quality Pre-K**

**The state still lacks a financing strategy to sustain existing programs and establish appropriate funding levels for new seats added in the future.**

Two years ago, state leaders took the critical first step to consolidate the state's multiple pre-K funding streams. The 2017 agreement for consolidation does provide a promise to continue existing pre-K funding, and to move, one year at a time, toward a single pre-K program. However, that approach effectively abolished per-pupil rates, essentially freezing districts in place with disparate funding levels, for part day and full-day services and offers only partial implementation of the promised full-day pre-K for all 4's. **Some are frozen at funding levels as low as \$2700 per child and have been shut out of the expansion of full-day pre-K,** even as parents and educators clamor for full-day pre-K.

**The state should establish an aid formula for pre-K, distributed via annual allocation like other education funding, with funding levels based on the true cost of meeting quality standards, including support for qualified and appropriately compensated teachers in all settings,** those working in public schools and those in community-based early childhood programs. **Our recommendations for the short- and long-term include investment strategies to strengthen that system and assure equity across all settings.**

In 2019, state leaders should ensure the new seats outside New York City, are funded at \$10,000 per child or double the districts half-day Universal Prekindergarten allocation, whichever is greater, until an aid formula is established, based on the study of actual costs.

The precedent and promise for this funding strategy is already established through several expansions of pre-K, including the \$340 million grant in 2014 and the state's implementation of the federally funded \$25 million Preschool Development grant that same year. The state's focus on high-need school districts also offered many participating districts at least 10,000 per child.

The results of such a strategy are also well established, with universal access now established in New York City and nearly universal enrollment in Rochester, where 97% of that city's 4-year-olds now in full-day seats.

To assure the aid for pre-K is appropriate and supports equitable access to early learning long term the Board of Regents' Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Learning called for the state to conduct a cost study to establish the actual costs of quality pre-K in New York. We support strategies to establish appropriate funding level, and we support all efforts to establish a long-term financing strategy to support high quality pre-K.

However, children cannot wait another year for the cost analysis to justify a new investment, with funding levels necessary for a quality program. They will be kindergartners. State leaders must act now to protect existing services and set a course for the future.

### **Investment Should Also Ensure Quality Implementation for 3-Year-Olds**

There is growing interest in adding pre-K for three-year-olds, in New York City and around the state. More than half of the new seats added in recent grants are for 3's. The evidence shows these younger children are best served when class size is capped at 15. But the state's regulations and funding levels do not distinguish between the rates and standards for 3's.

Community programs partnering in delivery of pre-K must follow regulatory standards set by their licensing agency. Child care programs, for example, must already meet this goal. New York City is already capping its class size at 15 in its roll-out of 3K for All.

In 2019, the state should cap class size for 3's and also set a separate rate for pre-K for three-year-olds of at least \$12,000 per child, to address the specific needs of 3-year-olds as set forth in the state's Early Learning Guidelines. That includes smaller class sizes as well as teacher preparation and additional social supports necessary for serving younger children. The state's current pre-K rates, based on the needs of 4-year-olds, simply do not recognize those costs.

Strong research documents the value of starting early with children especially those considered high-risk because of family circumstances. Offer two years of preschool can lead to larger gains for children. States can produce even better outcomes when the services start early and are aligned from birth to school-age. The state's current practice of using rates for 4-year-olds to support services for 3-year-olds does not support the true cost of providing quality services for younger children.

Additional investment in 3-year-olds at appropriate rates also offers the opportunity for the state to enhance resources for the many community-based programs that partner in delivery of pre-K in New York, such as Head Start and child care programs that serve younger children as well. Pre-K funding can add new resources to add children and augment resources, especially for programs dependent on parent fees or shrinking public investments in child care.

## **STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE PRE-K SERVICES**

The State has wisely chosen to deliver pre-K services through a mixed delivery system that includes child care and Head Start programs in the community. Today, more than half of all pre-K services are offered in early childhood programs outside the public schools. This essential strategy leverages existing resources and better serves the State's working families who often need extended hours and year-round care. Some of these programs offer the expertise and capacity to create integrated settings, so children with disabilities and typically developing children can learn together and from each other. Other community-based programs have experience and expertise supporting children and families whose primary language is a language other than English.

The State should offer more support to community partners with the capacity to offer integrated classrooms, support for multi-lingual learners, and developmentally appropriate programs for three-year-olds. Many also serve infants and toddlers, creating capacity for stable, continuous care and learning experiences that experts say can most benefit young children, improve educational outcomes and support the State's goal to create a continuum of early childhood education, birth to third grade.

However, the funding levels often do not reflect the value of these settings and the disparities in funding levels between schools and community-based programs destabilizes a critical part of the delivery system.

**Our 2019 agenda for prekindergarten includes several key recommendations to address these disparities, including the establishment of per-child rates for 3- and 4-year-old pre-K to support quality standards. Meeting this goal offers a strategy and pathway to enhance resources for many community partners and a starting point for equity across settings. Regional technical assistance centers can guide and strengthen collaboration between public schools and their community partners, supporting joint learning and leadership in pre-K implementation and assist school districts interested in providing pre-K services and expanding current services to benefit from best practices across the state.**

### **Vision for the Future: Quality Pre-K for All**

CCI has worked with the Campaign for Educational Equity to offer a roadmap to financing strategies and implementation to make high quality full day pre-K available to three and four year olds. We have also put forward an in-depth analysis of the research and legal arguments, as well as the national policy landscape, to support the establishment of pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds as part of the state's definition of a

sound, basic education, guaranteed by the state constitution. We have developed a vision and next steps the state should take to establish a single, stable, transparent and appropriately funded pre-K system, developed in consultation with early childhood and public education experts across New York State. We have partnered with the Ready for Kindergarten Campaign and the Winning Beginning NY coalition in advocating for a quality, appropriate pre-K program, and developed an agenda to meet that goal in each of the last five years.

We offer testimony and our responses to the Executive budget, as well as recommendations for this year's enacted budget in the context of this ongoing work and our continuing partnerships which seeks to support state efforts to fulfill the promise for making quality full-day pre-K available to New York's children. That will require significant investment to increase access, a sustainable financing strategy and the infrastructure to support a quality program.

CCI also recognizes the need for appropriate investment in K-12 education aid, to ensure Pre-K is followed by a continuum of quality educational services that prepare children for college and careers, the K-12 public school system needs to have adequate and appropriate investment.

In addition, CCI supports the Governor's proposal for investment in Community Schools, a strategy that enhances support for New York's children and families, providing essential health, mental health, social services, family support and food programs to assure no child comes to school unable to focus on learning and their own development because these essential needs have not been met.

Taking these actions in the 2018-19 enacted budget will strengthen the state's Prekindergarten program. CCI stands ready to serve as a resource in moving a longer-term agenda forward to create a sustainable approach to financing these critical services, and at rates that support a quality educational service.

CCI co-founded and continues to lead the Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign, in partnership with the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the Alliance for Quality Education and Citizen Action. CCI also helped found and continues to serve on the steering committee of Winning Beginning, NY, the state's leading coalition for early care and learning and supports the agenda of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care. In addition, CCI partners with the Center for Educational Equity at Teacher's College in promoting universal access to pre-K as a constitutional right, a core educational service and foundation tier for the state's guarantee of a "sound, basic education." The CCI-CEE work includes careful analysis of financing strategies to

support quality standards and assure a quality implementation for pre-K, as the state moves toward a single pre-K program.

CCI also serves on the Board of Regents’ blue-ribbon committee on early learning, as part of the workgroup on financing strategies. We applaud the broad engagement of that group in seeking to assure New York State continues to build a full continuum of early learning and care, from birth to school age. We also work closely with organizations addressing the needs of dual language learners and children with disabilities. For more information, visit [www.ccipolicy.org](http://www.ccipolicy.org) or contact Betty Holcomb, CCI policy director at [bholcomb@ccinyc.org](mailto:bholcomb@ccinyc.org).

### 32 DISTRICTS THAT WON GRANTS FOR PRE-K IN 2018

District	Grant
Brocton CSD	\$297,951
Candor CSD	\$322,938
Cohoes City SD	\$137,761
Copenhagen CSD	\$167,702
Deruyter CSD	\$313,099
Dryden CSD	\$114,624
Duanesburg CSD	\$146,640
Dunkirk City SD	\$1,097,829
Forestville CSD	\$111,105
Gananda CSD	\$370,597
Geneseo CSD	\$97,200
Kingston City SD	\$686,572
Liberty CSD	\$213,414
Monticello CSD	\$204,486
Mount Vernon City SD	\$1,113,289
Niagara Falls City SD	\$662,502
Niagara-Wheatfield CSD	\$830,208
NYC Public Schools	\$2,289,646
Rochester City SD	\$2,088,179
Romulus CSD	\$52,632
Rondout Valley CSD	\$280,800
Roosevelt UFSD	\$968,150
Sackets Harbor CSD	\$113,616
Saugerties CSD	\$183,328
Schenectady City SD	\$407,435
Sodus CSD	\$176,625
Spencer-Van Etten CSD	\$162,826
Syracuse City SD	\$644,637
Troy City SD	\$337,845
Watervliet City SD	\$130,919
Westport CSD	\$151,200
York CSD	\$124,245