Ensure Every Child is Ready to Succeed in School and Life

Make Early Learning a Top Priority in the 2018 Elections

2018 Elections Toolkit
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Citations and references for all data and research in this toolkit are available on request from bhelcomb@ccinyc.org.
INTRODUCTION

_Election Season = Opportunity to Make Early Learning a Top Priority_

Every election season presents a critical opportunity to put early care and learning on the radar – and even at the top of the public agenda, as an urgent priority – for policymakers, the media and the public in a visible and meaningful way.

New York’s 2018 elections – already underway – promise to be a particularly rich opportunity, with a race for Governor and every seat in the legislature in play. So are many seats at the local level. In addition, there are also elections for Congress and one U.S. Senate seat in the General Election on November 6. It is a time when the candidates – our future policymakers – are keen to engage with voters’ concerns, respond to questions, and set priorities to distinguish themselves and win media attention and make promises for what they will do if elected.

And once elected, they can be held to those commitments.

We are now at a critical moment – on the eve of primaries for state office in September – and quickly headed for general elections in November.

New Yorkers have never been more energized about the need to invest in quality child care, pre-K and other learning opportunities. Our early childhood campaigns and coalitions have never been more engaged, had more energy and enthusiasm or had more allies for our agenda across New York.

**The evidence is on our side.** Investments in quality child care, pre-K and other early learning opportunities more than pay for themselves, produce better educational and lifetime outcomes, strengthen families.

**The need is urgent, real and runs deep in local communities all across the state.** More than 81,000 4-year-olds – 79 percent of those outside of New York City – still have no full-day pre-K. A shocking 80 percent of families eligible for assistance paying for child care are denied support, so are 95 percent of families eligible for home visiting.
Public support is bipartisan and resounding. 85 percent of voters say there should be increased funding for child care to support low- and middle-income children while their parents work or attend school. That includes 74 percent of Republicans, 79 percent of Independents and 97 percent of Democrats.

Now we need to show up. We need to be visible in our communities, telling candidates “I support early care and learning, and I vote!” We need to move forward, build on the momentum, taking strategic actions, large and small, but everywhere. We need to be sure that early care and learning is brought to the main stage – always raised in debates, forums and campaigns, even when it is not on the formal agenda. By showing up and making our voices heard, we have the power to make child care, pre-K and other early learning investments a priority for candidates at every level of government.

Where to start? What to do? This toolkit offers a guide to what to do, whether you have the time and resources to run a coordinated campaign in your community, or are just looking for strategies to raise the profile of early childhood issues during the election. Now more than ever, every vote, every voice and every action counts – for those of us eager to make sure our elected leaders and policymakers support the investments and policies that ensure every child is ready to succeed in school and life.

MORE QUESTIONS?
Ask League of Women Voters

Not sure who the candidates are in your community? Where to Vote? How to register? Want to find a debate?

The League of Women Voters of New York State has the answers.
MAKING THE CASE: BE PREPARED TO PERSUADE

Few candidates are up-to speed on early care and learning. They may have a general idea that children’s issues are popular. And increasingly, the need for child care is in the news. The latest research on brain development is also widely known. You are likely to find, in fact, that many candidates are generally happy to say they support all children and programs that serve children.

But few offer active leadership, or even specific plans about how they will ensure all children have access to proven and successful programs. And many may not see the need for further investment.

With headlines already touting the state’s Universal Pre-K program, they may think all children already have access. They may believe only very poor families need or benefit from child care. And there are so many issues and priorities. Why should they make high-quality child care, pre-K and other early learning investments a top priority?

To break through, you need to be persuasive. Luckily, the evidence is on your side.

Below, a few key facts that resonate with candidates and voters about why New York needs to make early care and learning a top priority.

Unmet need:

• **Full-day pre-K is far from universal.** 81,000 four-year-olds across the state – nearly 80 percent of those outside the city – still have no full-day pre-K, despite growing demand from parents and school districts.

• **The cost of child care in New York among the highest in the nation, out of reach for most families, more expensive than tuition at SUNY and CUNY.** This essential expense also rivals rent and mortgage payments in many family budgets. Yet 80 percent of families eligible for child care assistance are denied support, because state leaders have failed to make the investment. Middle-class families are offered only a small tax credit, too small to make a difference.

• **The shortage of child care for babies and toddlers is especially acute and impacts all families.** There is just one regulated slot for every 10 children in need of one.

• **On average, New York’s early childhood educators earn less than $26,000 a year, without health or retirement benefits.** Yet early childhood educators are at the heart of quality early learning programs, and getting children off to a good start.
The investment more than pays for itself:

- The evidence for state investments in early learning is clear and compelling. Nobel laureate economist James Heckman continues to make headlines with his breakthrough research showing a remarkable return on investment – 13 percent a year – over the course of a child’s life cycle.

- A review of 22 highly-regarded and “well-constructed research studies,” led by a researcher at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, concluded the benefits of early education persist for years, boosting graduation rates and reducing the need for expensive remedial and special education placements.

- Taxpayers see a return of at least $7 – 10 for every dollar invested.

- Parents can be more productive workers and increase their earnings.

- Employers can attract and retain employees, with affordable child care and pre-K the new “must-haves” for middle-class families.

Public support is overwhelming:

- Support for essential investments in quality early childhood education from birth to five is bipartisan and remarkably solid in this era of polarized politics: 89 percent of voters in a recent national say it is important to make early education and child care more affordable for today’s families. That includes 82 percent of Republicans, 85 percent of Independents and 97 percent of Democrats.

- Voters of all incomes see a critical lack of quality, affordable early education in their communities. Respondents making over $100,000 a year are just as likely as those who make $40,000 a year to say only a few programs in their communities offer quality options.

New York’s strong and growing early childhood coalitions and campaigns can provide additional tools and resources to build the case, including handy one-pagers to leave behind and specifics on all aspects of early care and learning, prenatal to age 8. In addition, several organizations have prepared quick overview of the most recent research and policy developments in New York and nationally.
REACHING THE CANDIDATES

There are a variety of ways to engage all candidates on early care and education: Meeting with them, organizing or hosting your own events on the issue, attending their events and debates, sending them information, fielding candidate questionnaires and publicizing the results, with special commendation to those who make specific commitments to investments and key policies.

Each of these actions will be most impactful and effective when you do it with other allies and partners, demonstrating strong support and a large constituency for early care and learning. Every candidate is counting the votes and looking for signs of strong voter interest, as they set priorities. The coalitions and campaigns which helped support this election toolkit have already developed local networks and grassroots support in local communities to help with mobilization. Many are already working with local and statewide allies whose agendas include early care and learning, such as education, paid leave, women’s groups, child health and welfare, business and labor leaders. Immigrant rights groups and those championing the needs of children with disabilities, special needs and homeless children also see our issues as critical.

Some groups and local organizations also have experience in organizing candidate debates or forums, such as universities, public broadcast stations, civic groups or even libraries. Offering your assistance to support a public event to educate voters and get candidates on the record can help ensure that early care and learning is on the agenda.

Similarly, such allies and partners can assist in arranging meetings with candidates, if you don’t already have a relationship. Remember that candidates always love to be photographed with children – and hosting an event at a local program can be an inviting scenario – and an opportunity to engage media as well. Scheduling an expert to speak on the latest research, from brain development to support for dual language learners can also make for effective event, one that attracts candidates and showcases the important value of high-quality early care and learning.

The Primary Goal: Get Candidates on the Record

If you don’t have the capacity or energy to organize meetings and events yourself, you can still play a critical role in making early care and learning a priority: Asking questions in public settings puts candidates on the record, and puts the issues on the election agenda.

Most candidate events, debates and forums offer the opportunity for the public – and in some cases, local experts and advocates – to ask questions to clarify the positions of candidates on a wide range of issues.

It’s good to ask for a plan, and press for as many specifics as possible, if you get the chance. Getting candidates on the record about a time table, the level of investment, specific strategies and actions, is important to winning real commitments for the future, should that candidate win. Specific plans and commitments also up the ante for all candidates to make early care and learning a priority.
When you do ask a question, be sure to let candidates know if you represent a group or others in the community as well – to show that many voters make these issues a priority. You can also offer to be resource on the issue, especially if you bring along briefing materials and leave a few short infographics behind.

**Key Questions for Candidates**

Below, some topline questions to ask, compiled by the coalitions and campaigns who contributed to this toolkit: (See Appendix Materials for additional ideas for questions, from the perspective of parents, families, educators and the early childhood workforce.)

**Child Care**

- Would you make investment in child care a top priority in the coming year?
- Do you have a plan to assist families in meeting the high cost of child care?
- New York has many child care ‘deserts,’ that is areas with no regulated child care or so few providers that there are more than 3 children for every licensed slot. What actions would you take to expand the supply of quality care across the state and eliminate these child care ‘deserts’?
- The shortage of care for babies and toddlers is especially severe – just one licensed slot for every 10 children under the age of 3. What would you do to address this acute shortage?
- On average, the annual income of child care workers across the state is less than $27,000 a year and few receive any benefits on the job, not even health care or a retirement plan. What is your plan to improve compensation and benefits for the early childhood workforce?
- How would you engage business leaders to help address the state’s shortage of quality, affordable child care?

**Pre-K**

- Four years ago, the Governor and the legislature promised to make quality, full-day pre-K available to all 4-year-olds across the state within five years. Today, 81,000 four-year-olds, most of them outside New York City, lack access to full-day pre-K. What are your specific plans to fulfill that commitment?
- Last year, state officials only added $15 million for pre-K expansion for the whole state, But there are 81,000 4-year-olds still without full-day pre-K. Will you promise to support a larger investment in pre-K in your first year in office?
- State leaders have pledged a continuing expansion of pre-K, but they have failed to invest in developing a qualified early childhood workforce to staff the expansion. What are your plans to make sure New York has a qualified and appropriately compensated teacher at the head of every pre-K classroom?
- Teachers in community-based pre-K program earn far less than teachers in public schools, even when they have the same experience and credentials. The gap can be as much as $20,000 or more, and the disparity grows over time. What are your plans to address this inequity?
• Community-based early childhood programs serving preschool children with special needs are rapidly losing teachers to public schools, especially in New York City, where the pay and benefits are much better. The staff shortages are growing so severe and the funding is so inadequate that a growing number of special education programs are closing around the state. What would you do to address this growing crisis for children with special needs?

**Home Visitation**

• Home visiting programs that provide education and assistance for mothers and babies have been shown to improve health, get children ready for school, reduce child abuse and neglect, and improve the economic stability of families. Given this success, what would you do to ensure that these voluntary programs are available to all families who would like these services?

• Only about 5 percent of the children ages 0-5 living in poverty have access to these successful home visiting programs. Since these are the most important years in a child’s development and these programs have proven effective at improving outcomes for children, would you prioritize these programs to ensure all children have access to these valuable supports?

**Children with special needs**

• Research shows that Early Intervention services – supports for babies and toddlers with significant developmental delays or disabilities – can be a game-changer for many children. For example, a child who is having difficulty learning to talk or walk may get the help they need. But New York has cut the rate it pays to the Early Intervention professionals who provide these services. In fact, the state has cut the rates twice since 2010, and now many programs are closing, making it difficult for children to get services in a timely manner when they can have the greatest impact. Would you commit to increasing the reimbursement rates for Early Intervention services by at least 5 percent in your first year in office, and working toward a broader plan to improve access to these critical services?

• Many young children under five screened for and diagnosed with disabilities or developmental delays cannot get the Early Intervention or preschool special education services they need because the state has failed to appropriately invest in these services, leading to a service shortage. What would you do to expand access to Early Intervention and preschool special education services?

You can also pose more specific questions, from the vantage point of individual parents, educators and others deeply impacted by investments and policies in early care and learning, to drill down to the specific concerns and draw out more specific commitments and plans. (See Appendix Materials)
ENGAGING THE MEDIA

Outreach to the media – large and small outlets – from the local paper to the largest TV station or radio show to a local newsletter – amplifies our message, broadens our reach – and most critically, get the attention of candidates. It is the oxygen they need, the fuel that fires their campaigns and showcases and elevates our issue.

These days, that also includes all things social media, from Facebook to blogs to twitter. And most especially twitter, where you can instantly connect to candidates, elected officials, journalists and bloggers, and make use of its enhanced ability to carry links to reports, statements and even videos and virtual campaigns.

Even a simple letter to the editor can take flight, reach a wide audience and help you communicate with a broader audience. Op-eds, which take a little more effort, are also an excellent tool, and can be shared widely after publication.

Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

These are widely read, easy to submit and short enough for anyone to write with passion. Every newspaper, newsletter and online publication has its own rules for what they publish – and whether such a letter needs to be a response to its own coverage – or whether they are open to general concerns of the community – especially during the election season. Most are no more than 150 to 200 words long. If the publication writes regularly on education, children and/or families, your letter is more likely to be published if you reference their coverage. However, many local papers welcome letters that clearly aim to raise an issue they have missed. An op-ed can be longer, up to 400 words. Blogs on your website might also get shared on social media.

A few tips: Make it timely, writing it right after child care, pre-K or other early childhood issues have been in the news. That can be a local news story, a hearing in the legislature, an announcement by a leading public official or a new report making headlines. It’s also a good idea to keep it personal, since people remember stories better than statistics. Emphasize why you’re writing and why the issue matters to you. During election season, all key issues are news, and you can simply speak from your heart to voters and candidates about why early care and education must be a top priority. Need ideas? Try these templates created as a starting point for parents, early childhood and public school educators.
**Editorial Board Meetings**

Candidates and voters are likely to pay close attention to editorials in their local newspapers, and for good reason. These pieces, put together by the newspaper’s editorial board, are written by the ranking members of the newspaper staff, often penned by writers with deep knowledge of specific issues.

Editorial boards meet frequently with local community and business leaders, candidates, policymakers and anyone else who can serve as a resource on issues that matter to their readers. Generally, newspapers rely on advocates and experts to request a meeting, and most often, advocates propose the meeting as a way to give the newspaper ideas on coverage, suggestions for articles – and during election season, insights on candidate proposals.

It usually takes some effort to get a meeting, unless your organization already has a connection to the newspaper. It’s a good idea to put together a group, given that such meetings can be an intense give – and take – and last an hour or more. You can request the meeting via email or a letter to editorial page editor, with a quick description of what you’d like to discuss, why its important and timely. You can also do a little detective work, learn which editorial writer covers the area most related to early care and learning. Often, that is the writer covering education, children or family issues.

Before you go to the meeting, make sure you know your material, are prepared to answer questions, especially challenging ones. Be creative in your approach, and be ready to surprise and interest the paper with new angles, breaking research and trends in the community. For example, many school districts now face changing demographics, have more diverse needs among the children and rising poverty. Early childhood education can be a critical investment in putting children – and working parents – on a level playing field, even in suburbs.

After the meeting, be sure to leave materials, including fact sheet and reports, on the issue. And be sure to send a thank you note, which offers another opportunity to make your key points – and address any questions or concerns that you were unable to address during the meeting.

If your letter, op-ed is published, or if you are quoted in a news story, it’s time to share: Post it on Facebook, tweet it out and send to your most valued contacts – and to every candidate.

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**Children who attend high quality early learning programs are much more likely to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.**
**Social media**

These days, there is no more surefire way to reach candidates, journalists and other advocates faster than a tweet. Make sure you follow all the candidates running for office in your area, including those running for Governor, legislature and for Congress and Senate. The National Women’s Law Center has created a Top Ten Sample Tweets for child care, which can be used anytime. Our partner campaigns and coalitions, including the Campaign for Children in New York City, and the statewide Empire State Child Care Campaign and Winning Beginning NY coalition regularly send out tweets tailored for NY.

And don’t forget that a **quick video can be a powerful tool** for organizing the field, spreading your message and broadening your capacity to get out the vote. Sharing such videos with campaign staff is also an easy way to get the candidates’ attention: **It can serve as a quick briefing** as this video from the Long Island Pre-K Initiative shows, easily viewed at any time, anywhere – while they are on the run. Be sure to post it on You Tube to extend your reach.
DOs AND DON’Ts FOR NONPROFITS

Nonprofit organizations have wide latitude to participate in nonpartisan voter and candidate education activities during election season. The most important rule: No activities, including outreach and organizing, can favor a particular candidate or political party.

It’s smart to know the ground rules, with these key points in mind, if you are a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization.

What nonprofit organizations CAN do:

• Outreach and briefings to candidates, as long as you provide the same materials for every candidate running for a particular office. You may not create new materials tailored to a particular candidate’s needs.

• Sponsor a debate or forum, as long as you invite all qualified candidates, every candidate has an equal opportunity to speak and the moderator is neutral.

• Try to persuade candidates to agree with you on issues and make those issues part of the campaign.

• Operate a nonpartisan voter registration or “get out the vote” effort.

What they CAN’T do:

• Support specific candidates or parties running for elected office. That includes support or opposition to a declared candidate.

• Endorse a candidate or contribute to a campaign. Individual members of nonprofit organizations or individual staff can donate or volunteer on their own time, but they must clearly identify themselves as individuals acting on their own.

• Sponsor joint fundraising events or solicitations with candidates or political groups or parties.

• Contribute any cash or in-kind support to a particular candidate. That includes loans or paying to attend partisan political events, including dinners and other fundraisers.

• Post information on its website that promotes a particular candidate. Websites are a formal form of organizational communication, and all posts must be nonpartisan.

More questions? Consult your organization’s attorney or see the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s Guide to DOs and DON’Ts of Electoral Advocacy for a more detailed guide.
CONGRESS AND SENATE MATTER TOO

On November 6, New Yorkers will join others around the country in the much-touted mid-term elections for federal office. Every Congressional seat in New York is in play, along with one U.S. Senate seat and there is much at stake. The federal share of funding for child care, Head Start, home visiting, early intervention – as well as many other health, education and other family programs – is substantial and foundational.

Federal dollars account for at least 75 percent of the cost of subsidized child care services outside of New York City, and 100 percent of most Head Start programs. In New York City, the federal investment covers about half the cost of subsidized child care.

This year, New York benefited from an historic increase in federal child care funding – when Congress appropriated an additional $97 million for New York.

Tens of thousands of children and families depend on these critical services – and the funding will be up for a vote this fall.

It is critical that all candidates running for federal office make early learning a priority – and with many hotly-contested seats for Congress across New York, these races constitute another important opportunity for us to be sure it is.

Federal funding and policy – and certain key issues impacting young children require special messaging, to assure this funding stays in place, and grows. National advocates have created guides to these elections and the key issues impacting children, including the “readiness gap” that appears before children start school, questions for candidates and other useful information – to add to your toolkit for electoral action:


The Child Care Now Campaign at the National Women’s Law Center offers tools, data and key points to make on child care and early learning.

The #ThinkBabies campaign at Zero to Three offers key data points, sample LTE’s and other tools to elevate the needs of babies and toddlers in the 2018 races.

Child Care Aware, which represents the nation’s child care resource and referral agencies, offers updates on federal funding and key policy issues impacting parents and programs.

The Campaign for Afterschool Toolkit from the Afterschool Alliance also offers a range of tools and data.

Join America for Early Ed, a campaign sponsored by the National Association for Education of Young Children, which now reaches millions with its social media and active advocacy campaign.
POST-ELECTION: REACHING OUT TO THE NEWLY-ELECTED

Once the election is over, a new phase of our work begins: It’s time to follow-up with the newly-elected officials and engage them in the process of governing – and making early learning a top priority as they govern. It’s time to keep the pressure on, starting with the transition teams and plans for the future and following right through budget and legislative season.

Don’t Wait: Get Active and Engage Your Networks

Newly-elected public officials are eager to make their mark. And those returning to office are eager to rise. And for all elected officials, the action starts the day after the election. New governors create bold new blueprints and transition plans. Re-elected executives – and new leaders in the legislature – are also eager to make quick progress on the promises they made.

Make sure you stay connected and inform their plans:

• Congratulate newly-elected officials and offer to meet with them, and be a resource on early care and learning.

• Review their public statements and commitments, and be sure to include any made on early care and learning in your first note to them, as you request that meeting.

• Connect with your partners, campaigns and coalitions, and organize a post-election meeting to set strategy and next steps to move key agenda items.

• Work to be a resource, offer your expertise and get to know the newly-elected’s key staff and transition team, especially the staffer who will focus on early care and learning.

• Prepare template letters for others to use so they can also follow up with winning candidates and keep the pressure on to make early care and learning a top priority.

These post-election actions will help us all develop and support new champions for our youngest learners, and move the agenda for the future.
The Ready for Kindergarten Campaign prepared these additional tools to support your advocacy during this election season.

Additional Questions for Candidates – Getting to Specifics
Posing questions to candidates from the perspective of individual parents, early educators, school officials, and other community members and leaders can both educate candidates about the need and impact of policies, and get them speaking more concretely about their plans.

Letters to the Editor
Build our voice, using these templates – easy to download, cut and paste and share with your local newspaper, newsletters, blogs, websites and other online media.

Useful Links and Additional Resources
Connect with state and national advocacy and research organizations to build our voice.

Keep the Promise
Our chart shows the regional inequities in access to full-day pre-K as of September 2018. You can also use our one-pager, Every Child Deserves Access to Quality Pre-K to call attention to the need for more equitable resources for community programs offering pre-K.
Additional Questions for Candidates – Getting to the Specifics (cont. from p. 6)

Posing questions from the perspective of individual parents, early educators, school officials, the leaders in child care programs can help to both educate candidates about the need and impact of policies – and get them talking more specifically about the policies and investments.

Below, a few examples. Use your imagination to expand this list – by adding a business leader, clergy, law enforcement official and others from your community who can elaborate even further on the need for these investments in the short and long-run.

**Child care – Parent/Family**
- I recently learned I am eligible for a child care subsidy, which would have been a godsend. But when I submitted a formal application, I was I could not get on because there is simply no more state funding for child care vouchers this year. What is your plan to help parents like me?
- The cost of child care for my family is now more than our rent – more than $15,000 a year. What will you do to help make child care more affordable for working families in NY?
- We have just one child now but want to have another. But child care for just one child is now the biggest item in our budget. We don’t know if we can afford to have a second. What is your plan to help families like mine?
- How do you propose to support working parents who cannot afford child care but can’t get a subsidy because they earn “too much” money?
- I had my daughter in March, and fully expected to return to work in November. But there is very little licensed or regulated care for babies in my town. I am now on several waiting lists, but I recently learned there may not be an opening in any program for months. What is your plan to expand the supply of quality care for babies and toddlers?
- I appreciate that New York now has paid leave and minimum wage. That has helped my family. But when I had a baby last spring, I intended to go back to work within 6 months. I had no idea that child care for a baby would cost more than $17,000 a month – and there would be so few licensed slots. What is your plan to expand the supply of quality care for children under 3?
- I recently applied for assistance paying for child care and learned that I could get a voucher to help with the costs. At first, I was excited, but then I learned that the co-pays in my county are so high – more than $100 a week. What is your plan to make child care more affordable?

**Child care programs/early childhood workforce**
- I’ve run a child care program for many years, and currently have a waiting list for spots in my program. The families I serve rely on subsidies, and they can’t afford to pay another penny for care. I love the work and want to keep serving young children and their families. But the state’s reimbursement rates for child care have been frozen for several years, even as my costs rise. I am having trouble keeping my doors open. What is your plan to stabilize and support programs like mine?
My child care program is well known for its high quality and we have been around for years. I know the key to quality comes down to the staff I can hire. I also know the research shows that children benefit from having stable, positive relationships with the staff who care for them. But I am finding it harder and harder to attract and retain qualified staff. There are fewer and fewer people coming into the early childhood field. It is a real crisis. What is your plan for developing an early childhood workforce?

I am a teacher in an early childhood program in my community and love the work, but I only make about $30,000 a year. I know I could earn more if I went back to school to get my teacher certification. But I can’t afford the tuition. What would you do to help early educators like me?

Child care programs like mine are now competing with the local fast food restaurants, like McDonald’s, for workers. And the child care programs often lose out – they simply can’t match the pay as the state’s minimum wage increases. What is your plan to help child care programs meet this challenge?

Pre-K – Parent/Family Access – Equity with NYC

Four years ago, I was thrilled when I heard state leaders pledge to make full-day pre-K available to all 4-year-olds. My child was just a year old then, and I assumed he’d be in pre-K this year, for sure. But my school district still has only part-day pre-K, despite the promises. What, specifically, will you do to make pre-K truly universal?

Last year, state officials only added $15 million for pre-K expansion for the whole state. But there are 78,000 4-year-olds still without full-day pre-K. Will you promise to support a larger investment in pre-K in your first year in office?

The state pledged to make full-day pre-K available to every 4-year-old in NYS by 2019. Economists say this would be an incredibly wise decision, with taxpayers saving up to $7 for every $1 invested. What would you do to step up the investment in pre-K and make sure every preschooler is served?

My school district is eager to offer early childhood education to our community, and we were ready to apply for the promised funding for full-day pre-K. Will you pledge to increase the investment in pre-K in your first year in office?

My district just added pre-K, but they don’t provide transportation, so I can’t use it. I was even offered a seat, and turned it down. I just couldn’t make the logistics work. When I spoke to the district, I learned that pre-K does not get aid for transportation, like the K–12 system does. What would you do to address this need?
Pre-K – Community programs offering pre-K

• I run a community-based program and we have a contract with our school district to offer public pre-K. We are pleased to offer pre-K, and our parents are enthusiastic about our program – especially because we can offer year-round and extended day services that working families need. But the district do not provide us enough funding to pay our teachers as much as those working in public schools. As a result, we lose many of our teachers to the public schools as soon as they get certified. With the expansion of pre-K, it has gotten even more challenging to retain teachers. I believe teachers in all settings, with similar credentials should be equally compensated. What would you do to address this inequity?

• Teachers in community-based pre-K programs earn far less than teachers in public schools, even when they have the same experience and credentials. The gap can be as much as $20,000 or more, and the disparity grows over time. What would you do to address this inequity?

• Community-based early childhood programs serving preschool children with special needs are rapidly losing teachers to public schools, especially in NYC, where the pay and benefits are much better. The staff shortages are growing so severe that a growing number of special education programs are closing around the state. What would you do to address this new and growing crisis for children with disabilities?

• New York State has rapidly expanded pre-K, especially in NYC and Rochester. But the state has not yet created a plan to develop the early childhood workforce to staff the expansion. What would you do to build the early childhood workforce and make sure every child has access to a qualified and appropriately compensated teacher?

• Our state simply does not support the true cost of offering early childhood education. Pre-K rates are now frozen for all districts, with some districts locked into part-day rates established in 1997. I worry that our district will have to stop providing pre-K if the financing doesn’t improve. What is your plan to create a sustainable funding strategy for pre-K?

Pre-K – Small and Rural Districts – the need for technical assistance, transportation and other supports

• My district is rural and small. Many of us believe that pre-K would be an asset to children and families here. But we understand that pre-K funding does not support transportation—nor does it cover start-up and on-going professional development. What would you do to see that the children in our community have access to high-quality pre-K and the right kind of funding to support it?

• Would you support the Regents’ recommendation to fund several technical assistance centers to expand pre-K around the state?
Children with Special Needs – Parent/Program
• My child was recently diagnosed with some speech and hearing delays. I understand that these issues can be addressed through the Early Intervention program, and she should be given the supports she needs from specialists in the field. But I simply can’t find any specialists to provide those services, and my Early Intervention coordinator told me that she can’t find service providers either. What will you do to help families like mine?

• My child was recently given a special education plan stating he needs a preschool special education class – but there are no seats in programs that match his needs. There seems to be a shortage of preschool special education classes in my community. I am worried that he will not be ready for kindergarten if he does not get the support he needs now. What is your plan to meet the needs of families like mine?
Dear Editor:

As the parent (of a preschooler; of young children), I see many news stories about the challenges facing New York schools. There is more talk about pre-K and child care, but our state officials are still not doing enough to support young children and our families. Pre-K for four-year-olds expanded last year, but mostly in New York City only. Children here in (county, school district) are still waiting for a seat. Private preschool is expensive. In this economy, it is out of reach for many families, including mine.

Finding affordable quality child care is also a challenge for most of us. New York is now home to the most expensive child care costs in the nation. In (your community) child care for an infant can cost more than ($17,000 in a center in NYC, more than $13,000 elsewhere). On paper, the state offers help to families up to 200% of poverty. But here in (your county), the county simply runs out of money and simply stops offering subsidies before the end of the year.

You don't have to look far to find data that makes the case for investing in child care and pre-K. The evidence is clear and convincing. The benefits of investing in quality early learning programs are well-documented. Children are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to succeed, parents can be more productive at work and increase their earnings, employers can attract and retain employees, with affordable child care and pre-K the new “must-haves” for middle calls families. Taxpayers see a return of $8 on every dollar, in reduced need for costly remedial education and higher graduation rates.

Yet right now, our state budget includes NO new funding for quality child care or only a modest increase for pre-K. I hope you will join me in contacting your state legislator and urge them to fight to include these investments in the state’s final 2018-19 budget.

NAME
CHILDREN’S NAMES AND AGES
ADDRESS
EMAIL and/or PHONE NUMBER
#2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR: Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

As an early childhood teacher, I have the privilege of helping young children learn every day. They are like little sponges and after X years, they never stop amazing me. That is why I am deeply concerned about the future of Pre-K (and child care) in New York State and want to raise awareness about this underreported problem.

Across the state, I see programs finding it hard to keep their doors open and parents struggling to pay the cost of a quality program. Likewise, many of us in the field also suffer from low compensation and lack of benefits because the services are so under-funded. Many communities have long waiting lists for child care subsidies and pre-k seats, as many parents cannot afford private preschool in this tough economy. Every year, these children are missing an important window for learning. (INSERT ANY LOCAL DATA HERE) Now, with the state’s 2% property tax cap in place, even deeper cuts, or eliminating programs altogether, are coming — especially in less wealthy school districts.

Research now shows 85% of total brain growth occurs before age five. And children who attend pre-K are more likely to have better reading skills by third grade, versus those who just attend Kindergarten. Quality pre-K not only helps kids, but actually saves the state money by reducing costs for special education, grade repetition, welfare, incarceration and teen pregnancy.

That is why I am urging everyone — parents, grandparents, educators — to contact your state lawmaker and urge them to make sure the state’s final budget includes additional investment in quality child care and full-day pre-K. (TOWN/COUNTY) – local stats – waiting list, stories.

As a teacher, I see the power of supporting young children’s learning and development every day. It is one of the best investments we can make — not just for our children, but for our communities, our state and our economic future.

NAME
CHILDREN’S NAMES AND AGES
ADDRESS
EMAIL and/or PHONE NUMBER
Dear Editor:

With all the attention being paid to problems in New York schools, there’s an important story that isn’t being told: the state has flat-funded the very programs that can power children to success in school and beyond. There is ZERO new investment in child care and scandalously little in full-day pre-K for four-year-olds, even studies show these investments are a game-changer for children and communities. At the same time the need for these services is growing. (EXAMPLES)

With the 2% property tax cap in place, it’s ever more challenging to make sure our community has the resources we need to support young children and their families — unless lawmakers take action in THIS MONTH in this year’s budget. I have seen — first hand — how these cuts are affecting families in (CITY/TOWN) district. (LOCAL DATA FROM REPORT HERE).

One of the hardest conversations I have is with a parent who knows that quality pre-K will give a child advantages that last a lifetime, and that New York City now has Pre-K for All, while there is no new funding for pre-K in our district. For most, free pre-K is the only option — most parents I see are already working two or three jobs and can’t afford private preschool.

Yet each year our waiting list grows longer and the threat of more cuts looms larger. We are supposed to be an education leader. Why is New York State failing to keep its promise for pre-K?

Research shows 85% of total brain growth occurs before age five. And children who attend pre-K are more likely to have better reading skills by third grade, versus those who just attend Kindergarten. Most importantly, the investment pays off — by reducing costs associated with special education, grade repetition, welfare, incarceration and teen pregnancy.

If you’ve ever had the chance to visit a pre-K classroom, you would see children bursting with potential. It seems almost criminal to take that away — and a lousy strategy if we want New York to remain competitive in the decades to come.

NAME
CHILDREN’S NAMES AND AGES
ADDRESS
EMAIL and/or PHONE NUMBER
APPENDIX MATERIALS

Useful Links and Additional Resources

Advocacy Organizations
Advocates for Children
Alliance For Quality Education
Children’s Defense Fund-NY
Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York (NYC)
Campaign for Children (NYC)
The Children’s Agenda (Rochester)
Docs for Tots
Early Care and Learning Council
The Education Trust-NY
Empire State Campaign for Child Care
Every Child Matters
Federation for Protestant Welfare Agencies
Help Me Grow NY
National Alliance for Early Success
National Women’s Law Center
National Head Start Association
New York State Network for Youth Success
New York State Zero to Three Network
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Winning Beginning New York Coalition
Zero to Three

Child Development and Education Resources
Center for American Progress
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child Care Aware
Child Trends
First Five Years Fund
National Association for Family Child Care
National Association for the Education for Young Children
National Black Child Development Institute
National Center for Children in Poverty
National Institute for Early Education Research
NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute
New York State Association for the Education of Young Children
Parent-Child Home Program
Zero to Three National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families
READY FOR KINDERGARTEN, READY FOR COLLEGE CAMPAIGN

The Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign (Ready for K) seeks to mobilize public and policymaker support for strategic investments and policies in pre-K and child care in New York. The campaign works with a full range of early childhood and public education advocates across the state and also seeks to engage parents as well as new partners and champions emerging in the women’s, civil rights, family leave, labor and community organizing campaigns. The Campaign is led by a partnership of the Center for Children’s Initiatives, the Alliance for Quality Education, Citizen Action of New York and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. The campaign seeks to align our agenda with key coalitions, including Winning Beginning New York, as well the Empire State Child Care Campaign and the Campaign for Children in New York City. Ready for K’s sponsoring organizations meld expertise in elective policy analysis, advocacy and mobilization to win support for campaign priorities.

For more information on this report, contact Betty Holcomb, CCI’s policy director at bholcomb@ccinyc.org or visit www.ccipolicy.org.

Citations and references for all data and research in this toolkit are available upon request.