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A Diverse System Delivers for Pre-K: Lessons Learned in New York State

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A Diverse System Delivers for Pre-K: Lessons Learned in New York State

Today, policymakers with an interest in school success no longer debate why states should provide pre-kindergarten; that case has been made successfully to voters, educators, and researchers.[1] Instead, policymakers now wrestle with how to get the job done. Increasingly, they turn to what those in the pre-k field call 'diverse' or 'mixed' delivery, which uses both community-based and school sites to provide pre-k services.[2] This report examines the experience of one state – New York – using a diverse system to deliver pre-k services and provides lessons for other states as they build and expand their pre-k programs.

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Introduction

New York pre-k provides a particularly rich example of diverse delivery because the model blends not only public school and non-school, community-based sites but also staff, supervision, funding streams, professional development, and assessment and learning expectations across the full spectrum of early childhood programs. Indeed, the Universal Prekindergarten initiative has turned New York into a virtual laboratory for early education policy. State education officials, public school administrators and teachers, local pre-k directors, academics, public policy researchers, and early education advocates have identified new strategies for promoting quality in all settings. In particular, they have created opportunities for joint professional development for teachers in public schools and community-based settings, sharing the best practices in early literacy as well as promotion of healthy social and emotional development. The results are impressive. By 2006, more than 60,000 children were attending pre-k classes at sites as diverse as schools, child care centers, and even settlement houses. The rich variety in sites created an equally rich variety of choices for families, from part-day to extended-day programs. The educational services were added to community sites at no cost to families. At last count, 60 percent of these children were enrolled in non-public school settings. In New York City alone, the Department of Education works with 600 different early childhood programs in the community. Public school officials have a new appreciation of pre-k as an integral part of public education and a more intimate understanding of how it can lift student achievement. Most importantly, public and private dollars are used more efficiently across all settings.[3]

The pre-k experiment has been so successful that New York's Board of Regents adopted a policy supporting broad expansion of pre-k services to reach every three and four year old in the state.[4] In addition, the Regents proposed a new approach to the state's school funding formula, one that would both recognize pre-k as an essential public education service and support delivery of pre-k at both school-based and community sites. The Regents argued that children need pre-k to compete in today's global economy.

The lessons presented here are drawn from interviews with public education officials, educators, administrators, community directors, researchers, consultants, and advocates in addition to key research undertaken since the program began. This report is not intended to suggest that the New York model is the best or only approach. Instead, those engaged in the New York process readily concede that their effort is very much a work-in-progress, and they offer their insights as a means to assist policymakers and advocates in other states, especially those ready to launch a system using diverse sites and resources. Most importantly, they emphasize that many complexities lie just beneath the surface of such an approach: issues and concerns that have yet to receive serious attention from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. To date, much of the literature has conceived of the use of diverse sites as a route to expanding capacity, rather than a process that brings new partners to the pre-k enterprise. The New York experience points to the need to directly address the issues that arise in a broad-based collaboration across systems. Both the public schools and community programs must wrestle with issues that arise as individual sites begin to mix funding streams, professional development, and learning standards.

Consensus must be reached on competing regulatory standards, educational philosophies, and even disparate resources and support. A site that seeks to add pre-k services to an existing Head Start, child care, or pre-k special education program instantly confronts questions about everything from health standards to financial reporting. In New York, such concerns have sparked state education officials to call for new efforts to identify issues and to better coordinate oversight and funding by state agencies with a stake in early childhood services.

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The National Context: An Evolving Approach

To date, surprisingly little has been written on the mechanics of 'mixed' or 'diverse' delivery of pre-k programs, that is, how to launch, monitor, and maintain high-quality pre-k in a system that spans school- and community-based classrooms. The Center for Law and Social Policy, in "All Together Now,"[5] took the most systematic look at national trends to date. The annual survey of state pre-k programs, "The State of Preschool," published by the National Institute for Early Education Research, adds more detail on individual state pre-k programs.[6]

The existing research highlights the most daunting challenge in diverse delivery so far – the difficulties that community-based programs find in recruiting and retaining certified teachers. If policymakers fail to address this critical workforce issue, it may be difficult to sustain quality pre-k services over the long term.

As of 2006, 29 states have instituted some version of diverse delivery, using both public schools and community-based providers.[7] There is no consensus, however, on just which state agency should be at the helm of pre-k services that operate across governmental boundaries. Pre-k services themselves are seen variously as school-readiness initiatives, as part of early childhood development, or as an integral part of the state's public education system. New York defined pre-k as an integral part of school reform; in fact, the pre-k program was initiated as an explicit part of school reform, and thus, the State Education Department stands at the pre-k helm. Other states have created an independent agency to administer pre-k services. About one-third of the 740,000 children[8] in state pre-k programs nationwide now attend class in community settings. In several states, including New York, the percentage is much higher.

It's easy to understand why systems that incorporate diverse sites are so popular. They hold the promise of accomplishing many critical goals at once, including broader access, faster start-up time, more efficient use of public and private investments, and improved quality across all settings. Yet, such an approach also seeks to make partners out of providers with competing interests and agendas, creating issues that have yet to be addressed in much of the literature on public pre-k policy. Among the most salient concerns are:

- How can public school superintendents be encouraged to take on the job of overseeing services delivered outside public school buildings with the inherent challenges of ensuring quality, effective contracting, and professional development?
- How can state officials align expectations for children's learning across all settings and ensure all children make progress on common educational goals?
- Why should independent providers collaborate? Will public pre-k be competition for their customers, that is, parents who now pay fees for their services?
- How can community programs recruit certified teachers when public school salaries are so much higher?
- Will there be sufficient capacity, either in the public schools or in community-based settings, to serve this new population of children? Where will the resources come from to support additional capacity?

Given these core issues, the *how* of a diverse system rests finally on the sometimes-elusive ability of people to collaborate. Where programs in New York have succeeded, it is because everyone came to the table with open minds and a willingness to learn and to see the strengths that different parties brought to the effort. Often, participants have had to abandon preconceptions and invent wholly new approaches as they go. "I've been in this field for decades and I didn't expect to learn anything new," says Sister Ursula McGovern, director of Saint Dominic's Home, which runs several pre-k classes. "But I am learning so much that I didn't know about how to teach language and literacy. It's exciting."[9] Her testimonial describes the real gold in New York's system of diverse delivery: that collaboration on such a grand scale has changed early childhood practices across the state.

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The New York Model

New York's Universal Prekindergarten initiative has several key features, which sparked innovation and new thinking, all of which could be relevant to policymakers in other states.

First, lawmakers established the Universal Prekindergarten Program as an explicit part of school reform. The 1997 legislation also called for reduced class sizes and full-day kindergarten.[10] Thus, the new pre-k services did not have to fight for status as educational services as is the case in many other states. Nor were they stigmatized as a remedial service or offered only to low-income families.

Second, lawmakers set a mandatory threshold for inclusion of community-based programs by earmarking 10 percent of the funds for such providers. Only one other state, West Virginia, requires a specific percentage of community providers be included. Other states have *allowed* community programs to participate, but did not *require* it.

Third, the law also supported two-and-one-half hours of *services*, rather than a strictly defined *program* model, and allowed existing providers, including private nursery schools, child care centers, and Head Start providers to add the new pre-k services. The idea was to assure that every four year old in the state had access to pre-k.[11] Early childhood providers could add educational services, or more commonly, enhance educational services they already offered, with the infusion of new pre-k funds. Thus, Head Start programs could expand from half day to full day. Other programs could buy equipment, give teachers a raise, and serve more children. And many did.

Fourth, the law gave enormous flexibility to local communities to design the services. The law offered only a rough blueprint for program content and left the rest to new pre-k advisory boards, which were to include representatives from both the public schools and community-based programs. Governance rested clearly with the public education system, with school districts holding the power of the budget via contracts with community providers, but the distribution, shape, and content of those services was to be decided by the advisory board, guaranteeing all interested parties a seat at the table. The result was a new collaboration between public school officials and early childhood educators based in the community. Surprisingly, many had never even met before.

At the time, the New York initiative was historic because it represented only the second time a state had endeavored to create voluntary access to pre-k for all its four year olds. (In 1995, Georgia became the first state in the nation to establish a pre-k system open to all four year olds.)

Unfortunately, due to politics in New York, the program was flat funded from 2001 through 2005. In 2006, the state legislature passed a new appropriation of $50 million. The state now offers pre-k services to about one-third of eligible four year olds. However, the New York model still proved to be a remarkable engine of change not only because of its promise for transforming early childhood services but also because of its roots in school reform. Even the local media now refers to the initiative as a new gateway to public school.[12]

Certainly, practitioners in the most successful districts feel the change on the ground. Recently, for example, pre-k directors in the Bronx learned that their school superintendent offered a vision of public school that starts at age three, during 'Week of the Child' festivities. "He stood right here, in front of parents and teachers and elected officials, and he pointed to the pre-k work on one wall and the high school work on the other, and he said, 'What you are looking at is the new continuum of public education. It starts with pre-k and continues right on through to 12th grade," Linda Blackstock, an administrator for Region l reported, "He gets it!" [13]

The Universal Prekindergarten Legislation

In 1997, the New York State legislature passed the Learning, Achieving, Developing by Directing Education Resources (LADDER) Act, which included the new pre-k services. Lawmakers envisioned a gradual rollout of services, starting with $67 million in 1998. High-need and larger districts got first priority, but the intention was to reach all four year olds by the 2001-02 school year, with an annual investment of $500 million. Key provisions of the law dictated that:[14]

- Districts must hold at least one meeting to inform the public about the new pre-k initiative and to find out if there is interest in the service;
- Interested districts must convene a new pre-k advisory board to conduct an inventory of existing services and community needs, to map out a district-wide strategy, and to apply for a grant;
- Improving language and literacy would be a primary goal, but the services must also foster healthy social, emotional, and physical development;
- Developmentally appropriate practices and child-centered learning would be emphasized; and
- Curricula and expectations for children's progress and acquisition of skills should be aligned with those of local elementary schools.

State education officials, local educators, advocates, and early childhood providers who had championed the initiative in the legislature instantly leaped into action. The activities produced remarkable results the first year. About 18,000 children enrolled across the state; nearly 14,000 in New York City.

Most notable of all, enrollment at community-based sites far surpassed the legislative mandate of 10 percent. Today, more than half of the state's children attend pre-k classes at community sites. In New York City, the percentage is even higher.[15]

Benefits of Diverse Delivery

After eight years of operation, educators and researchers studying the implementation find that considerable benefits accrue to children, families, and communities – and across many types of school districts, from those in small cities to those in the suburbs to the million-student district known as New York City. Among the most notable benefits:[16]

- The number of children attending public pre-k programs increased dramatically;
- Teacher salaries increased in many community-based programs, a critically important development given that research links teacher compensation to quality of instruction;[17]
- More teachers sought certification in early childhood education;
- Parents reported high levels of satisfaction;
- Kindergarten teachers reported children arrived better prepared for school;
- Community programs enhanced services and facilities;
- Developmentally appropriate practices increased across all settings;
- Special needs children had more opportunities to attend pre-k with regular education students;
- Programs reached out to and enrolled children from immigrant families;
- Services expanded for English language learners, including professional development opportunities for teachers;
- Expectations for children's learning became more closely aligned across the full spectrum of early childhood programs;
- Children had an easier transition to kindergarten because community programs and public schools collaborated more closely on curricula and transitional activities; and
- Educators began to work across all settings to develop and disseminate best practices.

Lessons Learned

So how did New York move from a legislative proposal to concrete action? What worked and what failed as the state created an entirely new framework for pre-k services? What challenges remain? Here are the key lessons shared by practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

Require Delivery in Both Schools and Community Settings

In New York, advocates contend that the new law, with its mandate for collaboration, moved diverse delivery forward in a way that few other approaches could have done. The very process of getting a bill passed invited thoughtful, passionate debate about the use of public and private resources and about competing visions of whether pre-k was a separate program or an expansion of existing services, and it ultimately demanded bipartisan consensus on an approach. Once enacted, the law provided the framework for diverse delivery. It's possible that such a mandate to provide pre-k in diverse settings may come from another source. In New Jersey, it was from the state's highest court. While there are many strategies to ensure the inclusion of community settings, New York policymakers, advocates, and educators argue that it's hard to make serious collaboration happen unless it is absolutely required. These elements of the mandate were found to be most critical:

Set a minimum percentage for inclusion of community programs. Superintendents have reported in many forums that most don't have experience or educational background in early education. Attitudes, however, are slowly changing as research showing that pre-k can lift student achievement gains wider currency. The National Association of Elementary School Principals recently began to actively educate administrators on the value of early education, issuing a new guide, "Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities," which champions pre-k as a core part of public education.[18] Teachers' colleges and new teacher-certification requirements, which in New York identify birth to second grade as the foundational years of public education, are also helping to change attitudes. In New York State, districts that already had an in-house pre-k program have been among the most ardent promoters of the new collaborations. Yet, even districts with early education coordinators and a long history of providing pre-k services concede it took a mandate to get them out in the community. "Those programs just weren't in my line of vision," says Chris Vogelsang, director of early education for the Syracuse public school system. "Now I see that all children come to me eventually, so I must pay attention to what happens in all settings."

Similarly, it's doubtful that community providers would have come to the table without a mandate. "Originally, my concern was that by becoming state funded, we'd lose control of what our philosophy and practices were about," one community provider told researchers.[19] But that didn't happen. Instead, via the collaboration, the schools and community providers learned from each other. As the legislature considered enacting the Universal Prekindergarten bill, many early childhood activists actively lobbied against housing it in the New York State Education Department for similar reasons. They worried K-12 educators would not adopt developmentally appropriate practices or give them a voice in the process. Most had never dealt with the State Education Department.

Similar tales abound in New Jersey, where organizations representing community providers frequently clash with state and local education officials over both process and practice.[20] Yet, once that state's highest court required the lowest-income school districts to provide pre-k services and then ruled that local school districts must work with community providers, collaboration commenced. Today, nearly 70 percent of children in New Jersey's *Abbott* pre-k program attend classes at community-based sites.[21]

Money should flow through school districts to ensure that pre-k is seen as a core educational service.

Like 12 other states, New York chose to house its pre-k program in the State Education Department.[22] As noted above, many early childhood advocates initially opposed that arrangement, contending schools were not yet 'ready' for young children and would be tempted to 'push down' homework, drills, and group-led instruction instead of child-centered, developmentally appropriate practices.[23] They argued such practices would be at least ineffective, and at worst, downright harmful to young children, turning them off of learning. "We don't want to make pre-k boot camp for kindergarten," one early educator stated.[24]

State education officials, however, believed that putting the local districts in charge was the best way to build accountability and quality into the new collaboration. "The contracts are the lever of change," says Cindy Gallagher, coordinator of early education and reading initiatives for the State Department of Education, the vehicle for local school officials "to define roles and responsibilities, be explicit about educational goals and quality controls, shared curriculum and professional development." With school reform as the driving force behind the effort, Gallagher and other policymakers wanted to be sure pre-k would be aligned with the goals of every district and would spread the use of research-based practice to lift children's skills.

The schools also have the resources and community presence to fuel broad-based change in practice. In Schenectady, NY, for example, Linda Cookingham, director of the Child Day Care and Preschool Program, says the new pre-k curricula spread beyond children in state-sponsored pre-k classrooms to reach many more. "Use of the pre-kindergarten curriculum gave us a stronger academic focus not only during the pre-kindergarten portion of the day but throughout the day. Also, we began to use that same curriculum in our second, non-pre-kindergarten classroom."[25]

Special funding for planning and initial implementation is critical.

New York's advocates, educators, and state education officials now say it's crucial to have funding earmarked for initial planning and implementation. Unfortunately, the New York State legislature failed to create such funding. Educators and policymakers proved it is possible to launch a pre-k program on the sheer energy of those who believe in it and want to make it happen, but that approach made the project far more challenging. The initial local advisory boards, comprising a broad cross-section of community leaders, early education programs, advocates, researchers, and citizens' groups certainly helped win support in the early education community. Without such engagement, many districts may not have participated.

Lessons Learned

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But the effort would have benefited from paid, professional staff with the resources to conduct needs assessments, prepare guides, provide technical assistance, and design the basic forms and materials needed to support blended funding and coordinated services. By comparison, other pre-k efforts reveal the promise of investing in planning and implementation up front. The Los Angeles County First 5 Commission, for example, set aside $2 million for planning and implementation, which it used to convene experts, consider various policy alternatives, and set a course to roll out a countywide effort.

Planning for facilities and capital expansion is important.
The issue of how to provide financial support to expand community-based services still remains unresolved in New York State, as elsewhere. Much complexity lurks beneath the surface, since, unlike public schools, many programs rent space, do not have long-term leases, and have little access to capital. As a result and because of rules and regulations governing capital expenditures, many existing strategies for funding new school capacity will not work in this environment. At the same time, many private providers could rent additional space, convince private landlords to shoulder the costs for renovation, or expand to make use of underutilized capacity in existing centers. Advocates have proposed some intriguing new approaches, such as building space for pre-k programs into community planning and economic development and using public school construction funds for projects that include pre-k centers.[26]

Consistent, Sustainable Funding

Finding adequate, reliable, sustainable funding is an ongoing challenge for any public pre-k initiative, but using a system of diverse delivery further complicates the effort, since the collaborating partners come to the table with different governance, finance mechanisms, and support systems. School districts have business offices and human-resource and professional-development offices, but most other community agencies operate without such supports. No state has the answer yet, but New York's efforts to date point toward some promising solutions.

Support diverse delivery with the school funding formula.
Currently, New York supports its pre-k services with categorical grants drawn from general revenue funds. This mechanism for pre-k funding sets specific funding levels and enrollment targets for each year, both of which proved helpful in the launch of the program. The initial targets set useful, achievable goals, which helped engage both schools and community-based organizations. However, over time, this approach proved frustrating, since it made pre-k funding part of the annual budgeting process and, thus, less predictable. Indeed, in the face of a weak economy in 2001, lawmakers began to flat fund the program, stalling expansion plans for five years. As a result, enrollment did not grow, and policymakers and advocates began to seek a more stable approach to funding, calling for pre-k to be funded like any other K-12 grade, with the goal of making state aid available based on actual enrollment. In 2005, the state Regents began serious examination of new ways to make pre-k funding stable and available to all districts in a way that would support a diverse-delivery system. They called for an additional infusion of $99 million the first year with further investments to follow for four years.[27]

New York's educators, policymakers, and pre-k advocates have also learned that it is wise to pursue multiple strategies to reach their goal. Thus, Child Care, Inc. and Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, two organizations leading the push for pre-k for all in New York State, filed an *amicus* brief in the state's long-running school-finance lawsuit. The brief sought to establish a pre-k claim in the case, identifying it as the foundation of the "sound, basic education" guaranteed to all children in the New York State constitution.[28] This strategy of joining in an education-equity lawsuit holds the promise of further establishing pre-k as an essential part of public education in the state, creating another platform for public awareness of the value of early education, and winning new financial resources.

New Jersey was the first and most notable success in this arena; many other states have since pursued this course. A favorable court decision creates pressure on the state legislature to invest the necessary funds and support pre-k services. In 1998, New Jersey's highest court ordered state officials to begin offering pre-k services to all children in the state's most impoverished school districts. The *Abbott* preschool program now serves about 36,000 three and four year olds at an annual cost of about $200 million. Other states have similar educational adequacy cases in progress.[29] In New York, the state's court of appeals has already issued an order for $5.6 billion in new aid to New York City, and advocates have used that ruling as a platform to press for more educational funding for all districts across the state. The court ruling has focused on the right of every child under the New York State Constitution to have "access to a sound, basic education" and this provided another important anchor for advancing the argument for pre-k for all to be provided in diverse settings. New York City officials have embraced funding for pre-k for all three and four year olds, at both school-based and community-based sites as part of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) settlement.[30] The city made a down payment on that promise in late 2005, adding 1,000 children to the pre-k program.

Community partners in a system of diverse delivery must have equal resources; otherwise, a two-tier system of early education may evolve.

Creating a level playing field for community providers and the public schools remains one of the biggest challenges in New York as in other states using the diverse approach.[31] Without equal resources, community-based providers can't compete for certified teachers or have the highest-quality learning materials and classroom environments.

In New York, the bottom line is a growing gap in resources between community-based and school-based programs. In New York City, the average differential now runs to about $1,200 per child.[32] The disparity has been further exaggerated by flat funding of the Universal Prekindergarten program in recent years. After seven years without a cost-of-living increase, community-based programs are experiencing a 21 percent real cut in state funds.[33]

Resolving the problem of equity between the public schools and community programs can translate into big benefits for children. At least one statewide study reveals that when community providers receive higher levels of funding, they are more likely to raise the quality of services.[34] As noted in detail below, the issue of attracting and retaining certified teachers is a particularly critical part of this issue.

Lessons Learned

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Develop a Qualified Workforce

Getting qualified teachers into pre-k classrooms remains a challenge in most states, but again, taken in the context of a diverse-delivery system, it presents special challenges to policymakers.

Workforce issues, exemplified by teacher shortages caused by poor compensation, are paramount in a system of diverse delivery. Research shows that having a certified teacher in the classroom is the key to high quality in any pre-k program. New York standards for certification are among the highest in the nation, requiring fully certified teachers to have a master's degree. New York also offers a birth-to-second-grade credential for certification. Yet there's still a shortage of credentialed teachers and few have opted for the birth-to-second-grade certification. The use of a diverse system to deliver services makes the impact of that shortage all the more complicated for community-based providers. They are now in direct competition with the public school programs that are supposed to be their partners, and the public schools can pay teachers an average of $10,000 more annually.[35] Pre-k directors at community sites report that this disparity has transformed them into a training ground for the public schools where individuals completing work on their credential obtain substantial classroom experience working with young children. Once certified, teachers leave to take higher-paying jobs in the public schools. The continuous reports from individual programs about the challenges clearly indicate that they face high turnover and difficulty in recruitment. New York State has provided a short-term solution, allowing teachers already in the classroom to remain on the job while working toward certification. Other states have taken a similar tack to sustain public pre-k until the workforce grows.

Yet, it's clear that states using diverse sites and funding streams must come up with a better long-range solution. Crucial to resolving this issue is recognition by state officials that all early childhood teachers in high-quality programs need to be compensated at the same rate as public school teachers and that it is the state's obligation to provide adequate funding for higher salaries and professional-development opportunities for pre-k teachers who want to work in community-based settings within the state-funded pre-k system. In New York, advocates have recently put forward a pilot program to address these concerns, the PreK Workforce Incentive Plan. The proposed legislation would provide support for teachers seeking certification, as well as a novel teacher-equity compensation fund districts could use to help equalize resources between community sites and the schools.

Diverse delivery requires equal access to professional development across all settings, including teacher mentoring. New York lawmakers, unfortunately, did not include funds for professional development in the Universal Prekindergarten initiative, which state education officials and most practitioners now lament as a key flaw in the state's system.

A field as new as state-funded pre-k merits separate, focused, professional development for pre-k educators. Research that informs best classroom practices is emerging right alongside the launch of services. Likewise, new teacher certification programs and requirements based on the new findings are only now rolling out of the nation's teacher colleges. Thus, teachers and administrators across all settings need ongoing professional development, coaching, and mentoring.

Some New York districts offer exemplary professional-development practices. In the Bronx, several districts work closely with Bank Street College of Education

and New York University, nationally renowned leaders in early education, to shape ongoing professional-development opportunities, including lectures, observations, videotaping, coaching, and mentoring. Teachers from the schools and those from community-based sites attend the sessions together and share their insights. "I used to think the best teachers had the most children's work all over the walls," says one director in New York City. "But after learning about the research, I see the process of creating is what matters and sometimes less is more."[36]

In upstate communities, similar stories abound and illustrate the power of the new pre-k effort to impact practice across the entire community. In Syracuse, for example, Chris Vogelsang, citywide director of early education for the public schools, holds training sessions not only for the public school and community-based staff offering state-funded pre-k but also for independent providers and parents who want to learn more about how young children learn and best practices for the classroom. Peggy Liuzzi, who directs a child care resource and referral agency in the area, says the effort has sparked such deep collaboration that it's possible to now see the Syracuse effort in early childhood education as one big, coherent system that only needs to fully align curricula, practices, and resources.

Develop an Infrastructure of Support

A pre-k system that uses diverse sites requires a specialized infrastructure to foster collaboration among government agencies to support quality services across all settings. Certain aspects of the New York system needed particular attention:

Government leadership to ensure quality when programs blend funding streams.
Once providers begin to integrate pre-k services into community-based programs, state officials need to provide leadership to see that the new pre-k funding is used to support one single goal – the creation of high-quality early learning experiences for children. Without their eyes on this prize, providers find themselves trying to manage the complex accounting and financial reporting requirements themselves, and even having to resolve conflicts that might arise between different funding streams. Across New York State, the ability to add pre-k services to existing programs, such as Head Start and child care, fostered remarkable innovation, creating new options for families.

The Future of America Learning Center in the Bronx reveals the promise of this approach, especially how pre-k funding can be used to enrich educational offerings and expand access for children. Pre-k here is offered in the context of an existing child care program, which opens at 6:45 a.m. and stays open until at least 6:00 p.m. on weekdays, meeting the needs of working parents. These extended hours create access to the state's pre-k services for children who would otherwise be unlikely to enroll. Half-day or even school-day programs create a logistical nightmare for working parents who may need services for up to 10 hours a day. In door-to-door and telephone surveys, low-income and working parents reported needing more than a half-day pre-k program.[37] That's no small barrier to access in New York or elsewhere, given that more than half of all children in pre-k now have parents who work full time.[38]

Lessons Learned

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Providing pre-k services in community settings offers another big benefit: continuity and stability in children's early learning experiences. Most children in the Future of America Learning Center's pre-k program first arrived at this center as toddlers or even infants and now treat the place like home. They know the teachers and classmates, the rituals and routines, which research now shows is critical to healthy social and emotional development.[39]

This center, like so many others in New York City, blends many funding streams including child care benefits from employers; state, federal, and local child care subsidies; pre-k special education funding; and state pre-k funds to create a seamless day of high-quality services. Creating such a scenario, however, took extensive support from the local public school districts, as well as other public agencies, to sort out business and accounting practices and to create access to support services, such as professional development, to keep quality high. In the long run, it will be important for state officials to lay out consistent and clear rules on how new pre-k funding can be blended with other funding to enhance services. Without such guidance, the task is not only daunting for individual providers, but there is also a risk that some government agencies might try to use new pre-k funding to supplant an existing investment and even threaten the quality of an existing program.

Ongoing technical assistance to all providers across all settings.
Since delivering public pre-k in diverse settings is so new in New York State, school officials and community-based providers both need help with many aspects of service delivery from enrollment and marketing to ongoing business practices. New York State did not provide funding for these services, but the need was so visible that advocates stepped in to provide additional support. In New York City, practitioners, academics, and advocates came together and created a working partnership known as the Early Childhood Strategic Group to help sort out the issues involved in implementation of the Universal Prekindergarten initiative across the complexities of that city's spectrum of early childhood programs. They focused substantial attention on issues related to blended funding, among others.[40] The group held forums, facilitated meetings among practitioners and public officials, and prepared handbooks to help integrate services and funding, to lift quality across community-based early childhood programs and schools, and to build strong working partnerships.

Certainly, all states using diverse delivery could benefit from establishing best practices for integrating services that could be used by all practitioners across the early childhood spectrum. Interestingly, the New York State Board of Regents has identified this as a crucial issue going forward, and called on key state agencies – the Departments of Education, Health, and Mental Health – to collaborate more closely.[41]

Infrastructure needs vary community by community.
New York's experience proves that a system that includes diverse sites, in both public schools and community settings, can work well in any school district and works best when local districts have the flexibility to design a system that meets the particular needs of their communities. Those needs vary widely, depending on how many community-based providers are involved, the nature of the district, and existing resources.

A rural district with only one or two pre-k classes, for example, may only need a part-time staff person to handle the issues that arise as funds are blended, site monitoring goes forward, and professional development unfolds. In New York City, where individual districts must contract with scores of community-based providers, far-more-sophisticated infrastructures are needed. Typically, an early education coordinator oversees the effort, but districts have hired administrative staff and master teachers and assigned professional-development and business staff to work on the program.

The strength of the New York approach is that diverse delivery can work well across rural, suburban, and urban districts. The weakness is that state lawmakers did not fund or offer guidance on this aspect of the program, which can obviously turn into a major challenge in large districts with many community-based partners.[42]

Lay the Groundwork for Productive Collaboration

Making a system work across the usual organizational boundaries is always difficult, as any expert in organizational effectiveness can attest. Diverse delivery makes the task all the more challenging.

Mutual respect is the cornerstone of successful collaboration.
In New York, the districts that fostered the most productive collaborations were those that treated community-based providers as real partners. One early education coordinator actively reached out to local community programs, visiting their sites, learning about their services, and actively recruiting them to join the pre-k effort. Just as critical, the district made every aspect of the new initiative, even budgeting, as open and collaborative as possible. "The District has played an invaluable role in creating a collaborative leadership structure," says Joyce James, executive director of the Susan Wagner Day Schools, "in introducing an open, equitable and transparent budgeting process."

Community-based providers need their own voice.
At the same time, state policymakers say it is important to engage community-based providers at every step of the process to foster true collaboration. For that to happen, it is helpful for private providers to create their own, independent organization or association to voice their concerns, educate policymakers, and share their learning. Obviously, this is a task that must be taken up by the community providers themselves, but public officials at every level of the pre-k program insist that collaboration improves when community-based programs sort out their perspective, issues, and interests and bring them to the table in an organized way.

Lessons Learned

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In New York City, local providers founded both a community-based organization (CBO) Network, to share news, concerns, and advocacy issues, as well as a Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Providers Association, to negotiate the specific terms of contracts. Both the providers and school officials contend that the existence of such advocacy groups strengthens practices by identifying issues and helping to resolve them before they sour productive collaboration. "I think it's essential to have independent representation of the community organizations," says Eleanor Grieg-Ukoli, director of early education for the New York City Department of Education.

Diverse delivery needs buy-in from school superintendents, principals, and teachers.
Achieving that mutual respect must start with buy-in from public educators, especially superintendents and elementary school principals. These educators frequently have much to learn about the relationship between pre-k and K-12 education, since few have ever had a course in early education and may not be familiar with the latest research on how pre-k can boost student achievement. Advocates in New York have worked closely with professional associations representing school boards, teachers, and school administrators to win them over and add pre-k services in their districts.

Local control can spark both innovation and commitment to pre-k.
New York's bottom-up approach to pre-k goes a long way toward explaining the current energy and vitality of New York's effort, even in the face of five years of flat funding from the legislature. Local school officials and community providers embraced the opportunity to integrate talents, resources, and educational approaches, from the bottom up. Providers, parents, school officials, and academics volunteered their time to plan district-wide pre-k initiatives, address blended-funding strategies, and design professional-development and teacher-mentoring programs. Jane Brown, director of Child Care Resources of Rockland, Inc., a child care resource and referral agency in Rockland County, NY, for example, began to visit school superintendents in her area as soon as the law was passed, encouraging them to offer the new pre-k services. She helped local school districts identify community-based partners, and she volunteered to facilitate contracts, market to families, and do the paperwork to enroll children. Today, her agency still does the lion's share of the administration for four districts, which now serve about 930 pre-k students. "It's been a great collaboration. The districts are small, didn't have space, and they've been very grateful to us for stepping in. It's one less thing for them to worry about," says Brown.

Tap local expertise to create technical assistance centers to support all providers.
The Center for Early Childhood Professionals at Bank Street College of Education is among the more noteworthy of New York's support-system efforts. Serving as a vital link to both school- and community-based programs seeking to learn more about research-based practice, the center provides professional development and mentoring to pre-k classrooms across New York City. Local control also allowed districts and even individual providers to design services that meet the particular needs of children in their communities. There is, as Mon Cochran, professor of human development at Cornell University and a leading scholar on implementation of pre-k across New York State notes, a sense of "community ownership," that naturally arises from this approach to implementation.

Bottom Line: Diverse Systems Can Deliver

Given the benefits, New York educators, providers, policymakers, and advocates ardently champion diverse delivery. The January 2006 policy statement from the Board of Regents, "Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community," which envisions pre-k services for all three and four year olds, underscores the growing enthusiasm for this approach.

Many in New York say the job would be much easier with more resources and more attention to the challenges outlined in this paper. In particular, they will testify to the urgent need for state resources to create a qualified workforce and to expand services. They are also keenly aware that publicly funded pre-k for all is still very much in its infancy, with some of the most pressing questions still to be answered.

Certainly, diverse delivery is fraught with many challenges. The public education system still knows little about the early childhood community and about community-based early childhood programs. At the same time, many early childhood professionals harbor skepticism about the public schools' ability to take on early childhood education. Many fear loss of autonomy and resources. So, it is not surprising that many public school officials are reluctant to take on the responsibility of delivering pre-k services in diverse settings. Many enter into the enterprise initially as an expedient solution: They don't have space for pre-k in the schools, and the community programs do.

The challenge of collaboration between the public schools and the early childhood community is further complicated by the fact that the early childhood community has no infrastructure to call its own, as the public schools do. Instead, community programs operate relatively autonomously, with official oversight generally restricted to health and safety issues. Many early childhood educators have long regarded their services as educational, indeed, critical to children's development, but only recently have the public and school officials come to regard their programs as educational. Finally, all partners in the delivery of early childhood services must negotiate the challenges that arise when programs blend funds from multiple sources, each with its own guidelines, restrictions, and mandates.

Still, New York's experiment in building diverse delivery has already accomplished much. With each passing day, New York's educators and advocates are learning more about how to make delivery of services in diverse settings work as a comprehensive system of early care and education, anchored in the state's system of public education.[43] The approach has the potential to radically restructure early childhood services in a way that yields considerable benefits for children, families, and communities. The field has much to learn from the experiences in New York, which demonstrate that you can work in different ways and build new and important connections between the public schools and community-based organizations in the process of moving toward pre-k for all.

Appendix

Key Steps on New York's Path to Diverse Delivery of Pre-k Services

Given diverse delivery's potential as an engine of change, policymakers in other states may want to adopt the New York model. Where to begin? Most critically, the initiative must spring from a vision of early education as an essential part of public education and seek to embed that vision as a core component of the way services are delivered across all settings with the twin goals of broadening access and lifting quality. In other words, policymakers must envision diverse delivery as something more than just added classrooms. What follows are the key principles that guided the New York effort and the key strategies used to realize each one:

Core Principle	Strategies
Define pre-k as an essential part of public education with a percentage of the funding earmarked for community-based providers.	1. Embed pre-k in statewide education policy and reform at every opportunity. 2. Actively engage public education officials at every level to support and promote early education. 3. Actively engage community-based providers to support and shape the initiative from the outset to ensure long-term participation. 4. Invest in initial planning and creation of local advisory boards to create public awareness and buy-in from all stakeholders. 5. Document what is being learned with the goal of supporting and replicating best practices.
Create a sustainable, reliable funding strategy to support services in all settings.	1. Identify the true cost of providing quality services in all settings, including funding for professional development, technical assistance, and quality assurance. 2. Develop a plan to equitably fund services in all settings. 3. Develop strategies that allow providers to blend funding streams to enhance and increase services. 4. Consider sources of sustainable funding, such as the school funding formula, which might be adapted to support diverse delivery of pre-k services.
Create a well-compensated, qualified workforce.	1. Create opportunities for all teachers in the field to obtain certification. 2. Create a system of commensurate compensation for teachers across all settings. 3. Create professional development opportunities and ensure access for teachers in both the schools and CBOs. 4. Create a teacher-mentoring system.
Develop an infrastructure to support diverse delivery.	1. Create funding for necessary administrative support and communication across settings. 2. Develop a system to offer technical assistance to all pre-k programs. 3. Develop systems to collect data and support implementation. 4. Develop standards for accounting and fiscal monitoring across all settings. 5. Support the creation of systems for program assessment across all settings.
Lay the groundwork for successful collaboration.	1. Create local pre-k advisory boards that include CBO representatives. 2. Support the development of leadership in the CBO community. 3. Create opportunities for professionals across all settings to meet regularly to create common understandings of methods, goals, and mission.

Endnotes

1 See, for example: Research and Policy Committee, *Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society: A Statement on National Policy* (Washington, DC: Committee for Economic Development, 2002), http://www.ced.org/docs/report/report_preschool.pdf. This in-depth report and advocacy piece draws together research and policy papers in an extended argument for more federal support for pre-k. See also the extensive reports from the National Institute for Early Education Research at http://www.nieer.org. New York advocates provide both polling data and research on the case as it's been made in New York State at http://www.winningbeginningny.org.

2 Rachel Schumacher et al., "All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-Kindergarten," in *Creating a National Plan for the Education of 4-Year-Olds* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2005).

3 For a broad discussion of the benefits across the state, see: Kristi Lekies, S., Taryn W. Morrissey, and Moncrieff Cochran, *Raising All Boats: Community-Based Programs as Partners in Universal Prekindergarten* (Ithaca, NY: The Cornell Early Childhood Program, Department of Human Development, Cornell University, 2005).

4 New York State Board of Regents. *Regents Policy Statement on Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community.* State Education Department. (2006), available from: http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2006Meetings/January2006/106emscvesida1.htm.

5 Schumacher et al., "All Together Now."

6 W. Steven Barnett, Hustedt, Jason T., Robin, Kenneth B, and Schulman, Karen L., *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2004), 224, http://nieer.org/yearbook2004/pdf/yearbook.pdf.

7 Schumacher et al., "All Together Now."

8 Barnett, *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*.

9 Sister Ursula McGovern, insights offered during a monthly meeting of pre-k directors from school Region 1, 2005.

10 *Universal Prekindergarten Program*, New York State Education Law § 3602-e, (1997), available from: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/upk%20Educ%20Law%203602-e.html.

11 The one exception to this rule was a fairly small universe of children, about 15,000, served by an existing pre-k initiative, the Targeted Pre-K program, a six-hour, school-based program, serving economically disadvantaged three and four year olds. That program started in 1965 and continues to this day.

12 See, for example: "Board of Regents Proposes Policy Requiring 5-Year-Olds to Go to School," *New York Sun*, Oct. 13, 2005. which describes the latest proposal for early childhood as making "free schooling available to all children starting at 3 years of age."

13 The pre-k directors met in April, 2005, for a regular monthly meeting with school officials. Blackstock shared this news during the meeting.

14 *Universal Prekindergarten Program*.

15 Figures from Office of Early Childhood Education, New York City Department of Education, 2004, http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/upk.html.

16 These benefits are culled from interviews conducted for this report and from the series of reports produced by the Early Childhood Strategic Group in New York City and Cornell's Early Childhood program, over the eight years of implementation, available from: http://ecsgnyc.org/pubs.html and http://128.253.161.178/che/HD/CECP/Research/preschool/UPK/index.cfm.

Endnotes

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[17] This particular finding is from Lekies, Morrissey, and Cochran, *Raising All Boats: Community-Based Programs as Partners in Universal Prekindergarten*, published as part of the Cornell series on implementation.

[18] National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*, In Fundamentals for Quality Early Childhood Education (Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Prinicpals, 2005).

[19] Sarah Watamura, *Implementing a State-Wide Prekindergarten Program: A Rural Case Study* (Ithaca, NY: The Cornell Early Childhood Program, Department of Human Development, Cornell University, 2004), http://128.253.161.178/che/HD/CECP/Resources/upload/ECReport_C_Rural1.pdf.

[20] For more background on tensions between public school and community-based providers, see: Betty Holcomb, *Case Study: Public Preschool in New Jersey Is One Roadmap to Quality* (New Brunswick: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2004), http://nieer.org/resources/files/NJCaseStudy.pdf. For the latest statistics on New Jersey's pre-k programs, see: Barnett, *The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook*.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Anne W. Mitchell, *The State with Two Prekindergarten Programs: A Look at Prekindergarten in New York State (1928 - 2003)*(Climax, NY: Early Childhood Policy Research, 2004), see especially: p. 23-24.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, *Steps to Universal Prekindergarten Guidebook*, vol. 2 (Albany, NY: State Communities Aid Association, 1998),

[26] See proposals put forward in Child Care Inc. and Low Income Investment Fund, "Development Incentives for Pre-K and Other Early Childhood Program Facilities" (reference sheet, The Early Childhood Strategic Group); and Association for Children of New Jersey and Education Law Center, *Abbott Preschool Facilities: Where We Are and What Needs to Be Done* (Newark: Association for Children of New Jersey, 2003), available from: http://www.acnj.org/main.asp?uri=1003&di=211.htm&dt=0&chi=2

[27] *Regents Policy Statement on Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community.* State Education Department.

[28] See: *Brief of* Amici Curaie *Child Care Inc. And Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy in Re: Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. et al. v. The State of New York et al.*, (2004), http://ecsgnyc.org/docs/Amicus.pdf.

[29] To learn more about the school finance lawsuits with a preschool claim, see: Starting at 3, *Case Law / Litigation* (Starting at 3, 2005); available from: http://www.startingat3.org/case_law/index.html.

[30] New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. *Reengineering Reform: Adopting a New Approach to an Old Problem, Report of the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Part II.* David Jones, Arthur Levine, and Anthony Alvarado. (2005), http://www.nyccouncil.info/pdf_files/reports/reenginerringreform.pdf. This report includes recommendations on how to invest funds from the lawsuit, which recommended full-day pre-k services for all four year olds, and high-needs three year olds – as well as half-day services for other three year olds and new pilot programs for infants and toddlers. Mayor Bloomberg has also called for universal pre-k services for three and four year olds, starting with a doubling of the number of four year olds with CFE funds.

[31] Schumacher et al., "All Together Now." See particularly, the discussion of the need to provide additional resources to community-based programs.

[32] Mitchell, *The State with Two Prekindergarten Programs: A Look at Prekindergarten in New York State (1928 - 2003)*. For more detail on impact on quality, see also: *Reengineering Reform: Adopting a New Approach to an Old Problem*, *Report of the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Part II*. Jones, Levine, and Alvarado.

[33] *Reengineering Reform: Adopting a New Approach to an Old Problem*, *Report of the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Part II*. Jones, Levine, and Alvarado.

[34] Lekies, Morrissey, and Cochran, *Raising All Boats: Community-Based Programs as Partners in Universal Prekindergarten*.

[35] Shannon Farrell, ed., *The Child Care Primer: The Key Facts About Child Care and Early Education Services in New York City* (New York: Child Care, Inc., 2004).

[36] Anonymous, Insights offered during a monthly meeting of pre-k directors from school Region 1, 2005.

[37] W. Steven Barnett et al., *Fragile Lives, Shattered Dreams: A Report on Implementation of Preschool Education in New Jersey's Abbott Districts* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2001), http://nieer.org/resources/research/FragileLives.pdf.

[38] *Reengineering Reform: Adopting a New Approach to an Old Problem Report of the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Part II*. Jones, Levine, and Alvarado.

[39] See for example: Larry Schweinhart, et al., *Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 27* (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1993).

[40] See for example: Amy Cooper, *Collaborative Leadership: A Forum on Universal Prekindergarten* (New York: UJA Federation, 2002), http://ecsgnyc.org/docs/ForumReport.pdf; Nancy Kolben and Charles Paprocki, *Next Steps in Blended Funding: A Policy Recommendation: Spring 2001* (New York: The Early Childhood Strategic Group, 2001), http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/vendor/rfppdf/blendedfunding.pdf; Anne W. Mitchell, *Implementing Universal Prekindergarten in New York: Blended Funding and Other Financial Considerations* (New York: Early Childhood Policy Research, 1998), http://ecsgnyc.org/docs/blendedfunding.pdf; Charles Paprocki and Nancy Kolben, *The Universal Prekindergarten Program in Community School District Eleven, New York City: A Study in Collaborative Leadership and Systems Building* (New York: The Early Childhood Strategic Group, 2002), http://ecsgnyc.org/docs/District11Report.pdf; Acquenetta Russell-Browne and Nancy Lederman, *A Guide to Cost Allocation Procedures: Implementing Strategies for Universal Pre-Kindergarten* (New York City: The Early Childhood Strategic Group, 1999), http://ecsgnyc.org/docs/CostAllocation.pdf.

[41] The need for increased coordination and collaboration among state agencies came up at the July 7, 2005 meeting of the state's Board of Regents.

[42] Districts with existing targeted pre-k programs already in-house had an easier time, since those districts already had early education coordinators and support services in place – many of whom became ardent supporters and advocates for the pre-k for all effort.

[43] See: Winning Beginning, *New York's Action Plan for Young Children and Families* (Winning Beginning), 36, http://www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/action_plan.pdf. This report offers a blueprint for such a statewide, comprehensive system.

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Pre-K Now at a Glance

Mission
Pre-K Now collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement for high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds.

Vision
Pre-K Now's vision is a nation in which every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

Location
Washington, DC

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Funders
The Pew Charitable Trusts
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
CityBridge Foundation
The Schumann Fund for New Jersey

Pre-K Now Key Differentiators
- Focuses exclusively on pre-k
- Provides the most up-to-date gauge of the pre-k pulse in any state
- Offers nationwide access to pre-k advocates
- Monitors and distributes daily pre-k newsclips
- Provides a national perspective on local pre-k issues
- Provides outreach, policy, and Spanish-language information targeted to the Latino community
- Leads a national movement which has gained significant momentum in the last five years

The Case for Pre-K
- Pre-k benefits all children academically, socially, and emotionally.
- High-quality pre-k for all nets a high return on investment in children and the community.
- The most important brain development occurs by age five.
- Pre-k is the first step to improving K-12 education.

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