

**Testimony of Danielle Asher,
Early Childhood Education Campaign Coordinator
Public Policy and Education Fund
Governor Cuomo's Education Commission
October 11, 2012
Long Island**

Our campaign Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College recommends that the Commission adopts the following:

New York State should create a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund in FY2013-14 that targets expansion of Pre-K in high-needs school districts, including the first state funded full-day Pre-K program. The Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund should be coupled with an investment in QUALITYstarsNY to build high-quality early care and education programs across the State.

Full-Day Pre-K

The Commission should support a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation fund to provide for New York State's first full-day Pre-K program options by allowing districts to expand their quality half-day programs to full day. An investment of \$50 million in the Fund at a rate of up to \$5,000 per child would allow school districts to serve 10,000 children either by extending part-day services to full-day and/or expanding additional part-day opportunities where appropriate. An investment of between \$25 million - \$100 million would serve either less or more children, accordingly.

Districts should still be required to meet current Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements, but should have new flexibility to use state aid to support full-day options in both schools and community settings. Districts are in the best position to determine whether expanding full-day or half-day best meets the needs of their communities, but the state make changes to current policy to allow full-day.

Districts should also be required to continue with the current requirement that **at least** 10% of the funds be used in community settings. Currently, about **half** the children enrolled in Pre-K attend class in community programs, which use other funding, such as Head Start, child care or special education, to support learning and healthy development, creating a cost effective means for reaching many more children.

QUALITYstarsNY

The Commission should support \$20 million in funding to expand QUALITYstarsNY. QUALITYstarsNY is the state's early childhood education quality rating and improvement system, which has been field-tested and is currently providing assessment and supports for over 400 programs statewide. The \$20 million investment in the professional development and training and other supports that QUALITYstarsNY provides would improve services for more than 54,000 children in over 700 programs in the next year of implementation.

The funding would be allocated as follows:

- \$16.4 million investment in direct supports to programs and providers for quality improvement including professional development, technical assistance and financial rewards and incentives.
- \$3.6 million investment in program assessment and rating, communication and outreach, data collection and system evaluation.

School districts that expand Pre-Kindergarten under this initiative would be prioritized for participation in QUALITYstarsNY.

Additional Recommendations

The Commission should also:

Close the State Budget Loophole that has cut 15% of Pre-K funds

Since 2008 New York State's investment in Pre-K has been cut by \$67 million, or 15%, due to a loophole which allows the Division of Budget to divert Pre-K funds that school districts do not use into the State's general fund. Such funds become available due to factors outside a school district's control—such as unexpected changes in enrollment. The Commission should recommend that closure of this budget loophole and that any such funds should be reallocated for other school districts to use for implementing Pre-K.

Protecting Full-Day Kindergarten

The K-12 system should be adequately funded to protect full-day Kindergarten, which is now at risk in many districts. In the 2011-12 school year 199,216 five-year-olds were enrolled in Kindergarten, with all but 11,568 attending full-day programs. Prior to last year, the trend across the State has been to decrease half-day options and increase full-day seats. With the new state aid cap, as well as a cap on property tax revenues, full-day Kindergarten is now in jeopardy. Some high need districts such as Poughkeepsie, Westbury and Central Islip have already cut full-day kindergarten to half-day. The Commission should recommend that the state guarantees the resources necessary to provide full-day kindergarten.

The Commission should recommend that the state takes Pre-K out of the current cap on school aid to ensure school districts can continue to expand access to move toward reaching the State's established goal of access for all. Limits on Pre-K funding have stalled enrollment at about 102,367 children for the 2011-2012 school year – only about halfway to being available to all four-year-olds. The inclusion of Pre-K in the state aid cap last year created a new barrier to expansion by placing funding for Pre-K in direct competition with K and K-12. Pre-K aid had previously been kept separate from K-12 aid, to enable districts to keep building out the service.

Protect Pre-K standards with the goal of a B-2 certified teacher in every classroom. The Pre-K program was established with high standards for classroom practice and teacher qualifications. The recently approved *Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* set an appropriate set of expectations and are aligned with the program goals for QUALITYstarsNY. Without adequate resources to support teacher training, professional development, and teacher compensation in non-school settings, it is extremely difficult to meet those program goals and child outcomes. The State needs to focus more attention on developing teachers who can support English Language Learners. To date, teacher

preparation and professional development focus on monolingual training, curricula instruction and programming, leaves too many children behind.

Why Quality Early Care and Education Matters

There are volumes of research documenting that high quality early care and learning has enormous benefits for children, particularly at-risk children. When one considers that 75% of the brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality, and social development happens by the time a child reaches his/her fifth year of life¹, one sees the necessity to do more for our young children. These benefits manifest themselves throughout a person's life, starting with his/her academic achievement:

At-risk children are:

- 25% more likely to drop out of school
- 40% more likely to become a teen parent
- 50% more likely to be placed in special education
- 60% more likely to never attend college
- 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime²

Waiting until children reach kindergarten to provide them the quality learning experiences necessary to be successful will inevitably lead to missed opportunities with generations of children struggling to catch up. Children growing up in poverty depend on these quality learning experiences as child care and education settings are often the only way of equalizing the playing field.

Research shows that high quality full day prekindergarten prepares children for kindergarten much better than half day options. A recent study comparing the effects of half day and full day prekindergarten on students' readiness and achievement states unequivocally that full day prek yields better results.³ In addition, the National Institute on Early Education found that full day programs are substantially more effective in closing the achievement gap in urban settings. The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy also found that full day programs have a greater effect on achievement, grade retention, special education referrals, and social end behavioral issues. Parents were also more satisfied with full day programs than with half day. For parents, decreased childcare expenses, more convenient arrangements, and a great opportunity to foster the academic, social, and emotional growth of the children are cited as major advantages.⁴

In our state, the foundation to raise the quality of our programs has already been laid. QUALITYstarsNY is the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The ultimate purpose of a QRIS is to improve the learning and development outcomes of children by improving the quality of early learning

¹ iii Shonkoff & Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Academy Press (2000).

² Ounce of Prevention Fund, <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/about/why-early-childhood-investments-work.php>

³ Robin, K.B.; Frede, E.C., and Barnett, W.S. (2006). Is More Better? The Effects of Full-Day vs. Half-Day Preschool on Early School Achievement. Accessed at www.nieer.org on September 5th 2012.

⁴ Same as footnote 3.

Plucker, J.A.; Eaton, J.J.; Rapp, K.E.; Woong, L; Nowak, J; Hansen, J.A. and Bartleson, A. (2004). The Effects of Full Day Versus Half Day Kindergarten: Review and Analysis of National and Indiana Data. Prepared for the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents by The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. Accessed on September 5th 2012.

and development programs by providing pathways and resources for continuous improvement, accountability for funders, and information for consumers.

The same type of program was implemented in our neighboring state of Pennsylvania, the Keystone STARS program where significant gains were made in programs in the following areas:

- Protecting the health and safety
- Providing opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience
- Building relationships with children, parents, extended family and community.

The Keystone STARS program increased significantly the quality of early care and learning programs. Specifically, on the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) which measures whether a program provides opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience, for building relationships with children, parents, and extended family and community, and protects children's health and safety, early childhood programs participating were found to get increase the quality of their programs by 13%.

- Child care centers participating in Keystone STARS in 2006 have higher quality than the Pennsylvania average for child care centers and are showing higher quality now than at the inception of the STARS program. Overall ERS (Environmental Rating Scales) scores range from 4.11 for child care centers at Start with STARS to 5.42 for STAR 4 programs.
- Child care centers at the STAR 3 and STAR 4 levels have significantly higher overall ECERS (Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale) scores than centers not enrolled in the Keystone STARS system or at the Start with STARS level.
- Child care centers at the STAR 4 level have consistently higher scores on all subscales of the ECERS than all other child care centers

Having high quality early care and education programs produces better results that are sustainable throughout a student's academic life.⁵ Investing in quality early care and learning in the form of QUALITYstarsNY and expanding prekindergarten to full day in high needs school districts, will give our young children the opportunity to learn and succeed in school and in their lives.

⁵ Robin, K.B.; Frede, E.C., and Barnett, W.S. (2006). Is More Better? The Effects of Full-Day vs. Half-Day Preschool on Early School Achievement. Accessed at www.nieer.org on September 5th 2012.

**READY FOR KINDERGARTEN INNOVATION FUND
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EDUCATION REFORM COMMISSION
PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST**

Executive Summary

The *Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College* Campaign, a partnership of *Winning Beginning NY*, the Public Policy and Early Education Fund, the Alliance for Quality Education, and Citizen Action of New York, recommend that New York State create a *Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund* to assure that children enter Kindergarten prepared to succeed. Thoughtful investment in expanding access, together with measuring and improving early childhood program quality, are essential to ensure Kindergarten readiness and that public funds are allocated effectively to achieve measurable results for children.

There is consistent and highly regarded research that documents the strong links between high-quality early education opportunities for children and their future school success. New York State has taken several major steps to promote high-quality early education. The State is to be commended for the passage of Universal Prekindergarten legislation 15 years ago, which resulted in expanded early learning opportunities for close to 100,000 children. New York is also nationally recognized for its decision to invest in Pre-K programs in both public schools and community-based early childhood programs, leveraging existing private and public resources as well as the expertise and capacity across communities.

New York was one of the few states to include early childhood education in its successful Race to the Top (RTTT) application. The State Education Department recently invested RTTT dollars in targeted implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. QUALITYstarsNY is the State's agreed-upon mechanism for improving early care and education and aligning that system with the school years.

In addition, QUALITYstarsNY is a way to ensure accountability for public expenditures. While the State should be commended for its current investment in Pre-K, an investment in expansion *and* improvement will allow the State to measure outcomes and cost effectiveness, thereby connecting results to dollars spent.

The Campaign recommends that New York State create a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund in FY2013-14 that targets expansion of Pre-K in high-needs school districts, coupled with an investment in QUALITYstarsNY to build high-quality early care and education programs across the State.

Why Early Care and Education Matters

It is essential that education reform include quality early childhood education. Studies show that graduates of high-quality early care and education programs are far more likely to read at grade level and graduate from high school. They are twice as likely to go to college. They are also 40% less likely to need costly remedial services during their K-12 years, saving public schools an average of \$2,500 to \$9,500 per child. Conversely, children without access to high-quality early learning opportunities tend to start behind and stay behind—costing far more.

The research is also clear that the return on investment in early childhood education is linked to high-quality. Researchers have identified the key components of successful early childhood services associated with positive outcomes for children. Research shows that in order to ensure high quality

outcomes, it is essential to focus on key components, such as qualified teachers, evidence-based curricula and data-driven instruction, as well as on expanding access.

PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM

Several key principles emerged from our research to help guide further expansion of the State's early care and education work.

QUALITYstarsNY must serve as the mechanism by which the early care and education system is aligned. QUALITYstarsNY will improve program quality, increase teacher preparation, and increase family engagement, resulting in highly effective programs and children who are ready to enter school.

Pre-K must be part of a continuum of services from the prenatal months to third grade. Research shows investing early and continuously in young children is the most cost-effective and educationally-sound way to close the achievement gap. Such an approach can address developmental delays early and prevent the need for remedial services later. In addition, this continuum helps children transition successfully to elementary school and strengthens K-3 instruction.

The vision must be to provide high-quality early care and education to all children. While immediate investment should, due to budgetary constraints, be targeted to high-needs districts, we must keep our eye on the goal of universal access to high-quality Pre-K and early childhood programs for all children. Pre-K policies must be effectively and efficiently coordinated with community programs to ensure maximum options for families and effective use of all public and private resources.

Successful collaboration requires technical assistance and opportunities to learn. Most communities have only scratched the surface of collaboration, with school districts simply contracting with community-based programs. Those with true partnerships have often relied on local foundations or special grants to build the skills and relationships to foster successful Pre-K programming and to ensure local communities make the most of existing resources and capacity.

Proposal

Create a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund in FY2013-14 that targets expansion of Pre-K in high-needs school districts, coupled with an investment in QUALITYstarsNY to build high-quality early care and education programs across the State.

Fund QUALITYstarsNY at \$20 million, to enable this initial implementation.

QUALITYstarsNY

This investment in the professional development and training and other supports that QUALITYstarsNY provides would improve services for more than 54,000 children in over 700 programs in the next year of implementation.

The funding would be allocated as follows:

- \$16.4 million investment in direct supports to programs and providers for quality improvement including professional development, technical assistance and financial rewards and incentives.
- \$3.6 million investment in program assessment and rating, communication and outreach, data collection and system evaluation.

School districts that expand Pre-K under this initiative would be prioritized for participation in QUALITYstarsNY.

Full-Day Pre-K Options

The Fund would provide for New York State's first full-day pre-kindergarten program and would also allow districts to expand access to current quality part-day programs. Districts would be allowed to use state Pre-K aid to pay for either option in both community and school settings, as a strategy to make the most effective and efficient use of public and private resources. An investment of \$50 million in the Fund at a rate of \$5,000 per child would allow school districts to expand services to children either by converting part-day services to full-day and /or expanding additional part-day opportunities where appropriate. At a rate of \$5,000 per child an investment of \$25 million would expand access for 5,000 children and would serve 20,000 with an investment of \$100 million.

Districts would need to meet current MOE requirements, but would have new flexibility to use state aid to support full-day options in both schools and community settings.

Universal Pre-K legislation currently requires that at least 10% of Pre-K funding be invested in community programs to leverage investments and expertise in the community, promote quality standards, and align with K-12. Currently, almost 60% of the Pre-K funding is used in community based programs. This cross sector collaboration increases access for families and leverages child care, Head Start, preschool special education, and even private tuition payments to create a mix of part-day, full-day and extended day options for children. This cross sector collaboration is essential to support the full continuum of high quality early care and education.

Additional Recommendations

The Campaign also asks the State to:

Close the State Budget Loophole that has cut 15% of Pre-K funds

Since 2008 New York State's investment in Pre-K has been cut by \$67 million, or 15%, due to a loophole which allows the Division of Budget to divert Pre-K funds that school districts do not use into the State's general fund. Instead, any such funds should be reallocated for other school districts to use for implementing Pre-K. Such funds become available due to factors outside a school district's control—such as unexpected changes in enrollment.

Protecting Full-Day Kindergarten

The K-12 system should be adequately funded to protect full-day Kindergarten, which is now at risk in many districts. In the 2011-12 school year, 199,216 five-year-olds were enrolled in Kindergarten, with all but 11,568 attending full-day programs. Prior to last year, the trend across the State has been to decrease half-day options and increase full-day seats. With the new state aid cap, as well as a cap on property tax revenues, full-day Kindergarten is now in jeopardy.

Take Pre-K out of the current cap on school aid to ensure school districts can continue to expand access to move toward reaching the State's established goal of access for all. Limits on Pre-K funding have stalled enrollment at about 102,367 children for the 2011-2012 school year – only about halfway to being available to all four-year-olds. The inclusion of Pre-K in the state aid cap last year created a new barrier to expansion by placing funding for Pre-K in direct competition with K and K-12. Pre-K aid had previously been kept separate from K-12 aid, to enable districts to keep building out the service.

Protect Pre-K standards and ensure best practice in every classroom. The Pre-K program was established with high standards for classroom practice and teacher qualifications. The recently approved *Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* sets appropriate expectations for children that are aligned with the program goals for QUALITYstarsNY. Appropriate professional preparation and on-going professional development for both teachers and administrators are essential to meeting these program goals and supporting child outcomes. Adequate resources must be provided to help reach the goal of B-2 certified teachers in all Pre-K classrooms and equitable compensation to these teachers in both school and non-school settings. The State needs to focus more attention on developing teachers who can support English Language Learners. To date, teacher preparation and professional development focus on monolingual training, curricula instruction and programming, leaving too many children behind.