



early care &
Learning COUNCIL

New York's child care resource network

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2016-2017 Executive Budget Proposal:
Elementary and Secondary Education
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Submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on Governor Cuomo's proposed budget for New York State. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. The Early Care & Learning Council is also a leader within *Winning Beginning NY*, the State's early care and development coalition.

We ask that the legislature support the Executive's \$5 million investment in strengthening the quality of early learning through the investment in QUALITYstarsNY. Children deserve appropriately-funded and professionally supported child care and early learning programs that promote their optimal development and learning. Additional funding could be used for the expansion of the program into more communities, to increase the incentives that promote program quality improvement, and for continued improvement of the QUALITYstarsNY system through the CCR&R network. Without a system designed to evaluate and improve the quality of our state's early care and learning programs, we cannot guarantee that the funds invested in early education initiatives are positively improving children's academic outcomes.

Invest \$125 million to expand access to Pre-K for approximately 12,000 young learners in high quality full day services and \$25 million to support early childhood programs and schools to meet and exceed quality standards. Please do not limit expansion to three year olds and keep the promise to the State's four year olds. Furthermore, the state should establish a rate of at least \$10,000 for four year olds and \$12,000 per child for programs serving three year olds to recognize the cost of appropriate class size and highly trained professionals. Districts, who led the way 18 years ago, are now facing closure due to funds no longer covering the true cost of quality care that they have been offering. Without appropriate rates and funding, districts are finding it challenging to convert their programs to full-day to better assure children start kindergarten ready to succeed.

The Governor's proposal to create a new Empire State Prekindergarten Grants Board to award new Pre-K funding complicates rather than simplifies Pre-K funding. It creates another funding stream- number seven and complicates and extends the notification time for distribution of funds, making it challenging for districts to get seats into place in a timely way. The State Education Department has a well-developed system for managing the competitive grant strategy adopted by the Governor as well as the multiple Pre-K funded strategies established over the past 25 years. SED should continue to administer this funding.

As the New York State government plans for the future, we hope it will support the continued development of a quality early childhood system. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments to you.