



**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees  
on the SFY 2015–16 Executive Budget  
Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Hearing  
February 3, 2015**

**Submitted by  
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Schuyler Center would like to thank the chairs and members of the respective human services committees for the opportunity to submit our testimony on the 2015-16 New York State Executive Budget. Schuyler Center is a 143-year-old statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing policy analysis and advocacy in support of public systems that meet the needs of people in poverty. Schuyler Center often works on areas that fall between multiple systems of care including health, welfare, human services and more recently early care and learning.

Schuyler Center has a long history of advocacy in child welfare and human services. We are a founding member of *Winning Beginning NY*, a statewide coalition of about 200 organizations and individuals representing early care and learning programs, parents, and advocates from a range of venues. Schuyler Center convenes a statewide workgroup on maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting, which brings together State agencies, providers and advocates to strengthen coordination between and access to important dual-generation interventions. Schuyler Center participates in the Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign which works to advance high-quality early learning including Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) as an essential component of the cradle to career pathway for success in life. I am also a member of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). The ECAC is charged with developing policy and programs for young children.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

**Support Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program**

Governor Cuomo's proposed budget includes \$365 million for pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds in New York State. This represents flat state funding compared to the 2014-15 enacted budget of \$340 million, plus \$25 million from a federal grant to support quality early care and learning. As part of an education package, the Governor also proposed an additional \$25 million to expand high-quality half-day and full-day Pre-K for 3-year-olds in high-need school districts for two years.

The benefits of Pre-K are well known. Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs, including pre-kindergarten, are more likely to find success in school, graduate from high school and earn more over their lifetimes. High-quality pre-kindergarten can improve educational outcomes, reduce disparities and save money. Investing in high-quality early education provides children with opportunities that are the foundation for success in school and in life. Research shows that the early years in a child's life when the brain is developing is a critical period to develop a child's full potential and shape vital academic, social, and cognitive skills that determine a child's success in school and in life. The achievement gap can begin especially early for the nearly one in four (24.4%) New York

State children under age 5 who live in poverty. The school-readiness gap becomes an achievement gap when children enter school, and this gap can persist over children's school careers. One out of three children in New York State starts Kindergarten behind in basic skills.<sup>1</sup>

Eliminating these disparities is critical—for the children whose futures are at stake and for a labor market and society whose goals demand that children be prepared to begin school, achieve academic success, and ultimately sustain economic independence.

We appreciate the investments the Governor has made toward a promise of making pre- truly universal. However, the existing funding is not enough to expand access to Pre-K statewide. Last year's budget allocation for districts outside New York City of \$40 million was spread among 62 school districts and community-based organizations. In addition, last year's budget created a funding methodology that requires school districts to spend the money upfront and seek reimbursement later.

*Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to build upon the potential of Pre-K as an essential strategy for boosting student achievement with:*

- *\$150 million to support access for an additional 15,000 four-year-olds in full-day Pre-K outside New York City and at least \$70 million to support New York City's plan to reach universal service in the 2015-16 school year.*
- *Use a portion of the bank settlement to reform the financing for full-day Pre-K to ensure districts receive funding upfront.*
- *Grant clear priority to high-need districts and children.*
- *Support the Governor's new Pre-K proposal for high-need three-year-olds in addition to, not a substitute for, continued expansion of full-day for four-year-olds.*

### **Investment in Quality Rating and Improvement is Essential**

Governor Cuomo's proposed budget includes a \$3 million investment in the implementation of New York's quality rating and improvement system, QUALITYstarsNY. This amount will be split evenly for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years.

Last year's final budget did not invest in assessing or improving child care quality through QUALITYstarsNY or any other mechanism. This year we are pleased to see the Governor commit to funding QUALITYstarsNY in a meaningful and ongoing way. His proposed investment embodies a commitment to quality assurance that includes certified teachers, quality learning environments and effective teaching in early care and learning settings. QUALITYstarsNY is a system that lays out expectations, helps create a blueprint for improvement, improves accountability, ensures that early childhood program staff understand their achievable goals in the context of the plan and gives parents information about the early learning programs available for their children.

*Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to support the Governor's proposal to invest in QUALITYstarsNY.*

### **Invest in quality infrastructure for after school programs in 2014-15**

The Executive Budget reduced funding for Advantage After School by \$500,000 to \$17.26 million. This was a surprise given the bold promise from the Governor in his State of the State address in 2014 that After School was going to get an infusion of funds in the 2015-16 budget.

After school programs are an important part of the continuum to build a comprehensive high-quality system that supports children's learning and development and meets the needs of families. Lack of access to high-quality after school and summer learning opportunities contributes to the achievement gap that children face through their school years. Research has found that high-quality programs can significantly narrow the gap at each stage of a child's life, and that children need consistent access to such programs to continue making these gains. Creating a system that takes children from birth through high school, ensuring access to high-quality programs that support children's development while keeping them safe, will put all our children on a path toward success in college, career and life.

After-school is one component of our education continuum. It is critical that New York also ensure adequate funding for a strong P-12 school infrastructure.

*Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to make a significant investment in after school programs to ensure that the estimated 1.1 million children who need an after school program can have access.*

### **Conclusion**

We urge the Legislature to support increased investments in full-day pre-kindergarten over the amount within the Executive Budget for high-needs communities and to develop a plan to realize the long-standing promise of universal Pre-K for all. To make the most of this investment in early learning, it is imperative that there be thoughtful investment to ensure high-quality in Pre-K programs. We also urge that the Legislature invest more in supporting after school programs in this year's budget to assure the after school system is of high-quality and well positioned to take advantage of the Governor's commitment to expand access to after school programs in the next five years. Targeted investment in access to high-quality early learning, including Pre-K, and after-school has the potential to generate school success, improve accountability, and save public dollars in New York's most at-risk communities.

Thank you. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to continuing to work with you to build a strong New York.

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<sup>i</sup> QUALITYstarsNY brochure, Early Childhood Advisory Council, New York State Council on Children and Families, [http://ccf.ny.gov/ECAC/WG/Quality/Resources/ECAC\\_BrochureLowRes.pdf](http://ccf.ny.gov/ECAC/WG/Quality/Resources/ECAC_BrochureLowRes.pdf)

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