

**Testimony of Center for Children's Initiatives
For the Joint Legislative Public Hearing
Regarding the 2015-2016 Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Budget**

**Presented by Betty Holcomb, Policy Director
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Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the 2015-16 Executive Budget Proposal for Elementary and Secondary Education. For more than 30 years, the Center for Children's Initiatives has championed the right of all children to start life with the best possible foundation of care, health and learning to assure that they succeed in school and later life. Every year, CCI works with thousands of parents in New York City, as well as programs and professionals statewide, to expand access to quality early learning opportunities, from the prenatal period through early elementary years.

CCI has deep expertise and experience in working on the launch of the state's Pre-K program as a key component of education reform and a proven strategy for preparing children for success in school and later life. Currently, CCI helps lead the *Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign*, in partnership with the Alliance for Quality Education, Citizen Action and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. CCI also helped found and continues to help lead *Winning Beginning NY*, the state's leading coalition for early care and learning. CCI also partners with the Campaign for Educational Equity in release of "Securing Our Children's Future, a multi-year roadmap providing a specific multi-year strategy for consistent, reliable and transparent funding for Universal pre-K for three and four year olds in New York State. The plan recognizes universal prekindergarten as a core and foundational educational service.

We now urge the Legislature to take the following steps in the 2015-16 enacted state budget:

1. **Increase funding for Full-Day Pre-K by \$150 million** to support 15,000 **four-year-olds outside New York City** and **by at least \$70 million to support New York City's plan** to reach universal service in the 2015-16 school year.
2. Use a portion of the bank settlement to **reform financing for Full-Day Pre-K as a one-time fix to make funding for the new full-day Pre-K program align with other state pre-K programs and to ensure that districts receive funding in the year expenses are incurred.**
3. **Grant clear priority for Pre-K to high-need districts and children.**
4. **Support the Governor's new Pre-K proposal for high-need three-year-olds, not as a substitute for, but in addition to,** continuing the expansion of full-day Pre-K for four-year-olds.
5. **Invest at least \$3 million in QUALITYstarsNY,** the state's quality rating and improvement system, as an important strategy to support early childhood programs seeking to improve the quality of early learning services.
6. **Protect full-day kindergarten,** which is now offered by all but 19 of the state's 677 school districts, **by increasing education funding appropriately and equitably statewide.**

7. *A wise investment in the short and long term*

The state's youngest children are now more likely than ever to be living in poverty, and family budgets are squeezed, leaving too many young children and their families behind. It is urgent that state leaders keep the promise to assure that every four-year-old has access to full-day prekindergarten. The evidence for state investment in early learning is clear and compelling: The benefits of investing in quality early learning programs – for children, families, schools, communities and taxpayers are well-documented¹:

- *Children who attend high-quality early learning programs are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to succeed, be reading on grade level by third grade, graduate high school, go on to college and have higher earnings as adults.

- *Parents can be more productive workers and increase their earnings,

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

- * Communities have more economic activity, less crime, more successful schools and stable families.

- *Taxpayers see a return of \$8 on every dollar invested. Federal Reserve economists – as well as Nobel-Laureate economist James Heckman –say there is simply no better public investment to be made. The return on the typical economic development projects – from sports stadiums to convention centers – simply can't match the benefits that accrue from one that supports children's early learning and development.

No wonder that business leaders, pediatricians, law enforcement and clergy are all speaking up, along with parents, early childhood and public school educators and advocates, in favor of new state investment in quality early learning opportunities.

¹ Decades of highly-regarded research have documented the benefits that accrue from public investments in high-quality early childhood programs, including the Perry Preschool Project, the Aceberdarian Study, the Chicago Longitudinal Study and evaluations of New Jersey's Abbott prekindergarten program, an on-going year-by-year research project following the progress of the three- and four-year-olds enrolled in that program. For a summary of the key research, see “High Quality Prekindergarten Is a Wise Investment” posted at the National Women's Law Center. For more in-depth research reviews, visit the National Institute for Early Education Research at www.nieer.org, for the studies on all aspects of early childhood education, including benefits, best practices and the emerging science on implementation of state pre-k programs. Also see the Heckman Equation, www.Heckmanequation.org, for research on the return on investment in early childhood education.

Critical Additions to the 2015-16 Budget

The Center for Children's Initiatives, along with our partners at The Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign call for these strategic investments in the state's enacted 2015-16 budgets.

- 1. An additional \$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 the city's plan to reach universal service in the 2015-16 school year.**

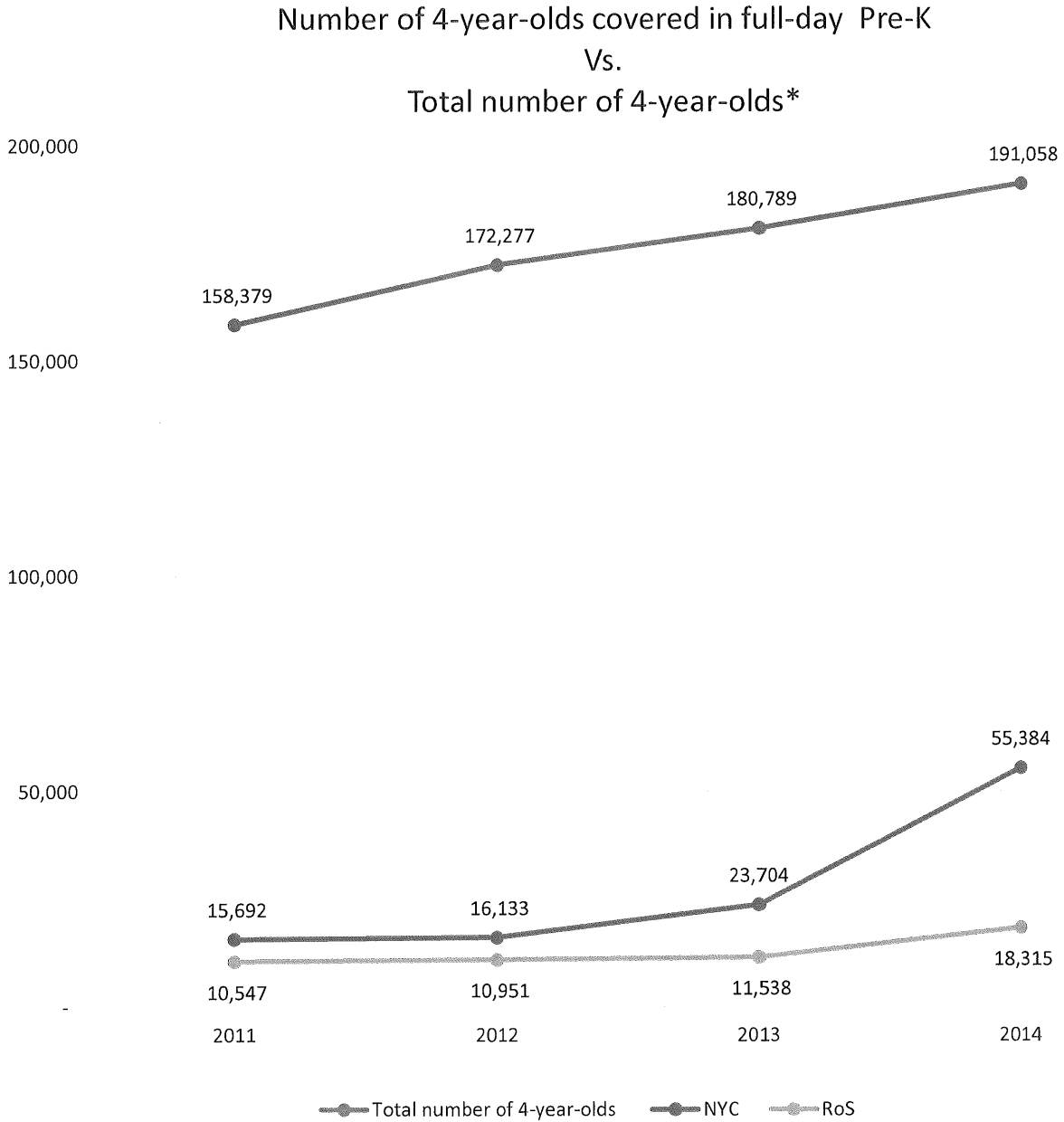
The **executive budget for 2015** is **WRONG** on early learning, with **zero new funding for expansion of full-day pre-K for four-year-olds**. The \$365 million for Universal Pre-K for four-year-olds included in the Governor's budget represents commitments already made². There is no new investment in services for four-year-olds. In addition, there is no new funding for the ***urgently-needed subsidies that make child care affordable for the state's working families***. The legislature must now work to remedy the failure to support young children and their families.

Today, a whopping **61% of the state's four-year-olds promised a seat in full-day pre-K are still waiting for one**, including **51,000 children in low income communities**.

As the 2015 enacted budget negotiations begin, New York State provides full-day pre-K programs to only 38% of the eligible four-year olds. We are far from reaching universal access as Governor Cuomo promised just a year ago. Yet, the Governor has added no new money for expansion of services to four-year olds.

² The 2014 enacted budget included a commitment of \$340 million for two years to support the Governor's new Full-Day Pre-K program. \$300 million was reserved for New York City, and \$40 million for the rest of the state. Those services are now in place. In addition, the Governor's budget references the federal \$25 million Preschool Development Grant, which is already committed to five districts.

As the numbers show, NYC provides the largest number of full-day seats, with the rest of state trailing behind, meeting just 16% of the need (see chart), with only 5% of those added with the 2014-15 funding.



* The total number of four-year-olds is based on Kindergarten enrollment. The NYSED assumes that 85% of the children attending Kindergarten would also enroll in pre-K if there were as many seats available. We make the same assumptions in this report. The numbers are taken from the NYS school report card database. Proxy for 4-year olds is based on 85% of the Kindergarten population, minus children enrolled in 4410 schools.

Overall, the 2014 investment in the Governor’s new Full-Day Pre-K program did not make much progress in meeting the need outside New York City. Just 5,300 seats were added outside the city, meeting just 5% of the remaining need in those communities. (See table)

| Region | Percent of four-year olds gaining access in 2014-15 | Total number of seats added in Full-Day Pre-K 2014-15 |
|----------------|---|---|
| New York City | 39% | 31,680 |
| Capital Region | 1% | 92 |
| Central NY | 9% | 697 |
| Finger Lakes | 3% | 296 |
| Hudson Valley | 7% | 1,805 |
| Long Island | 4% | 1,059 |
| Mohawk Valley | 9% | 424 |
| North Country | 1% | 45 |
| Southern Tier | 3% | 193 |
| Western NY | 6% | 689 |

The current inequities in access for four-year-olds across the state are striking. Tens of thousands of four-year-olds statewide still need a seat. About 51,000 are in low-income communities. Some are in inner-ring suburbs, where poverty is rising. Others are in rural communities, where full-day pre-K is an essential – schools and families alike report a part-day service simply doesn’t work when children must travel a distance to attend a program.

- 2. Use a portion of the bank settlement to fix the financing for Full-Day Pre-K to ensure districts receive funding in the year services are delivered, on a regular and periodic payment schedule as they do for UPK and Priority Pre-K.**

The state introduced a new approach to financing the Governor’s new Full-Day Universal Pre-K program for four-year-olds last year. For the first time in the history of prekindergarten in New York State, local districts were required to provide funding upfront and wait over a year for reimbursement when they launch the new services.

Many districts reported they are eager and ready to add the new full-day UPK services, but can’t do it without upfront funding and a predictable payment schedule for the services. They also report significant interest among families in their communities who want to enroll their children. The current strategy of asking districts to advance funding for pre-K expansion a year simply does not work In light of

districts difficult fiscal realities.³ Most do not have the resources to cover the cost of running the program for the year without assistance from the state. The 2015-16 enacted state budget should address the reimbursement structure and align it with the payment schedules for UPK and Priority Pre-K, which provide for payment in the year the services are provided and on a predictable, periodic payment schedule.

Given the infusion of one-time funding into the state budget, this is the ideal year to make the investment and fix the financing strategy going forward. This is a one-time fix to the budget language introduced last year. The earlier Pre-K programs all follow a formula for reimbursement similar to the state aid formula. Without this reform, too many four-year-old children – especially in high-need communities that can't afford to advance the funding for a full-year, will be left behind.

3. Grant clear priority for Pre-K to high-need districts and children.

There are still 51,000 four-year-olds in high need districts waiting for the promised full-day Pre-K opportunity. The research shows that these children are most at risk of school failure, and would most benefit from a pre-K opportunity. As the state continues to expand the full-day Pre-K program for four-year-olds, these districts and children should get first priority.

To meet this goal the New York State Education Department should provide technical assistance to high-need districts to assist them in promptly launching high-quality, Pre-K services, leveraging the existing capacity, resources and expertise in early childhood programs already serving young children.

4. Support the Governor's new Pre-K proposal for high-need three-year-olds in addition to, *not as a substitute for*, continuing expansion of full-day Pre-K for four-year-olds.

Evidence shows that starting early childhood education at earlier ages can lead to larger gains for children.⁴ States can produce even better outcomes when the services start early and are aligned, from birth through school age.⁵

³ The Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign, working with the Winning BeginningNY coalition and the Campaign for Educational Equity, has polled and interviewed a range of superintendents and school board officials around the state and can share examples as needed of districts eager to add UPK, but unable to wait for reimbursement. Many cite the caps on state aid and property tax rate increases as making it increasingly challenging to fund even basic K-12 education services at an appropriate level. But they also recognize the long-term value of adding early childhood education, in terms of its long-term potential to save public schools from remedial education services and other costs associated with poor student outcomes.

⁴ See the landmark study, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, published by the National Academy of Science, at www.nas.edu. Also, see Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) at www.nieer.org for benefits of offering pre-K to three- and four-year-olds.

⁵ For the latest research, see the Foundation for Child Development's research on P-3 early learning, at www.fcd-us.org.

However, the Governor's proposal for a new Pre-K program for high-need three-year-olds cannot be a **substitute for further investment in full-day Pre-K for four-year-olds. It must be considered as an additional investment**, and one that should be aligned with pre-K for four-year olds. The modest investment – just \$25 million for the whole state – must support appropriate standards and practices, to support the learning and development of younger children, as set forth in the state's Early Learning Guidelines.

Any new educational investment in three-year-olds must also require local districts to leverage existing local capacity, expertise and investment to make the most effective and efficient use of the funding.⁶

- 5. Invest at least \$3 million in QUALITYstarsNY, the state's quality rating and improvement system, as an important strategy to support early childhood programs seeking to improve the quality of early learning services.**

New York has developed a system for assisting programs in meeting quality standards in all settings serving young children. QUALITYstarsNY is designed to help programs develop intentional quality improvement plans and support programs and professionals through professional development and technical assistance. A quality rating system can also offer parents the information they need to help them to make good choices for their children. New York can build on the capacity of both QUALITYstarsNY and the existing Child Care Resource and Referral network, with agencies in every county in the state, to provide the supports programs need.

Evidence shows that professional development and technical assistance can help the many dedicated teachers and staff eager to work with young children additional tools and supports to meet their goals. They can benefit –and so can children – from keeping up with the latest research, learning how to use the information gleaned from screenings and observation to be more effective in their work with children

- 6. Protect full-day kindergarten, which is now offered by all but 19 of the state's 677 school districts, by increasing education funding overall, assuring that education aid is appropriate and equitable to support all children's learning.**

New Yorkers – and their local school districts – clearly understand that full-day Kindergarten is essential to children's success in school and beyond. Nearly all districts now offer full-day K, and a growing number are mandating it, especially large districts with many at-risk children⁷. New York City, Syracuse and Rochester are among the districts that now mandate attendance in full-day Kindergarten as a way to assure children gain the skills they need to be reading on grade level and succeeding in school. The

⁶ The state's current Pre-K programs for four-year-olds include a mandate for at least 10% of the investment to be made in community programs, which already serve large numbers of young children. Today, more than 60% of those services are offered in early childhood programs in the community, a strategy that maximizes choices for parents, creates more opportunity for the extended-day year-round services families and children need. Building on child care, Head Start, Preschool Special education and other investments also offers opportunity for more comprehensive service.

⁷ New York State education department data on Kindergarten, half day and full-day enrollment, 2013-14.

state Board of Regents has long recommended that all districts have full-day Kindergarten. The governor's Education Reform Commission has similarly called for a "pipeline" of high-quality services, from birth through early elementary, as foundational to the state's education system.

But district budgets are strained by the caps on education aid and property taxes. Many have to consider whether they can afford to offer services that are not yet compulsory, such as kindergarten. Many school boards face a debate over continuing kindergarten services when budgets are tight. With the state's budget now showing a surplus, it is the perfect year to increase education aid and make sure it is equitable and appropriate to support high-quality, full- day kindergarten.