



Testimony of Center for Children's Initiatives

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing
2020-2021 Executive Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Honorable Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee
Honorable Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Honorable Helene Weinstein, Chair, Assembly Ways and Means Committee
Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee**

**Submitted by
Betty Holcomb, Policy Director**

February 11, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the 2020-21 Executive Budget Proposal for Elementary and Secondary Education. I am the Policy Director for The Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI). Since the passage of the first UPK legislation in 1997, CCI has worked to support the expansion of high quality pre-K as a proven strategy for preparing children for success in school and later life. The evidence to support investment in quality early childhood education grows stronger by the year. Investments in high-quality full-day services more than pay for themselves and are proven strategies for reversing the growing income inequality in New York State, the most extreme in the nation. We do this work of course in partnership with public education and early childhood advocates.

We are committed to a the highest quality program serving threes and fours full day delivered in diverse settings including community based early childhood programs and the public schools as a foundation for an effective P-3rd strategy to prepare and support children's learning. The breadth of our partnerships are included at the end of my testimony. Our testimony today draws on that experience and the shared agenda carried by these campaigns and partnerships. We are testifying today about the Pre-K expansion, but it is clear that to meet the needs of young children and their families, the state must increase its investments in both child care and pre-K.

We come to you today with a deep concern that the State has slowed new investments so significantly that it will take more than more than five decades to meet the state's promise of a quality early learning opportunity to every four-year-old in the state.

2020 EXECUTIVE BUDGET: \$15 MILLION FOR PRE-K FALLS SHORT

The Governor's proposal to add just \$15 million for pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds falls dismally short of meeting the rising need and growing demand for pre-K around the state. Last October, 90 school districts gave formal notice of interest in adding pre-K services. However, state funding for last year's expansion left all but 26 districts behind, along with tens of thousands of preschoolers.

Last year's investment in full-day pre-K, also \$15 million to support pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds, resulted in new services for just 2197 children. That included just 752 new full-day seats for 4-year-olds.¹

Today, nearly 77,000 four-year-olds across the state still lack access to full-day pre-K despite years of pledges and unmet promises from New York's leaders. In 2014, Governor Cuomo promised to fund every school district ready with a plan for quality full-day pre-K and to make high-quality full-day pre-K an option for all the state's four-year-olds within five years. Rising numbers of young children in deep poverty and growing numbers of multi-lingual learners in small cities, suburbs and rural areas still left behind, as well as children still waiting in urban communities. These realities make a larger investment imperative for 2020.

With current pre-K funding frozen, in some cases for several decades, many districts desperately need increased resources and support to sustain current services, meet quality standards and convert part-day services to the full-day that most benefits children.

In 2014, the significant state investment of \$340 million—with \$300 million earmarked for the City's bold Pre-K for All initiative – was groundbreaking, and resulted in the successful and highly regarded program in New York City providing an early learning opportunity for every four year old and the city is now expanding that opportunity to threes. The city received well-deserved national attention for this.

The state's total investment in pre-K now totals \$857.2 million and supports part-day and full-day services for more than 121,000 3- and 4-year-olds across New York.

However, with each passing year, the promise made to provide full-day seat to every 4-year-old across the state rings more hollow, with state policymakers scaling back funding for expansion to nearly a halt.

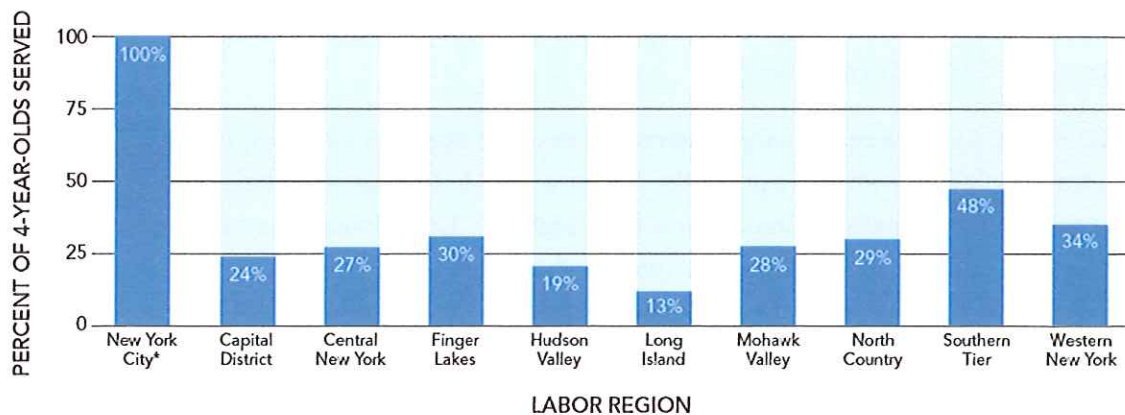
¹ Data on pre-K seats added in 2017 provided by the Office of Early Learning, New York State Education Department.

Striking Regional Inequities in Access Persist

Indeed, the strategy for pre-K investment since 2014 has done little to address the inequity between New York City and the rest of the state. The City now enrolls nearly 73,000 4-year-olds in its Pre-K for All program. The City is now adding services for 3-year-olds as well, with the goal of reaching all 3-year-olds in the next few years. Like other communities across the state, close to 60% of pre-K services are offered in early childhood programs in the community.

MORE THAN FIVE DECADES TO FULL-DAY PRE-K FOR EVERY 4-YEAR-OLD

Current Access to Full-Day Pre-K by Region



Pre-K enrollment data provided by New York State Education Department (NYSED). The number of 4-year-olds expected to enroll in full-day kindergarten is based on the following assumptions: 85 percent of children attending kindergarten, minus children enrolled in 4410 special education schools.

*NYSED estimates that New York City currently serves about 92 percent of all 4-year-olds expected to enroll. The City has adopted an official policy of universal access, however, with the promise of a full-day seat to every 4-year-old who seeks to enroll

Yet the state's strategy for pre-K expansion puts woefully inadequate investment on the table, and forces districts around the state to compete with each other for those scant funds. Families are chosen by lottery to decide who gets the very limited places. The disparities are especially stark, when considered region by region around New York State.

A total 90 districts gave the state formal notice of their interest to add new pre-K seats in the fall of 2019. Only 26 districts secured funds to expand pre-K services. (See chart on p. 13)

Many others especially smaller districts needed support and technical assistance to field a quality proposal. They simply lack the staff and expertise. What they do not lack is serious interest in offering pre-K. These issues have been consistently documented by CCI, and this fall, by the NYS Council of School Superintendents, which fielded a survey on barriers to expansion.

The results of that survey made headlines in *Times Union* on September 2. Lack of funding ranked as the biggest hurdle, prompting an editorial in the *Times Union* on September 2 to fully fund pre-K.

That fact is a source of growing frustration, even outrage, for families, educators and community leaders who recognize the power of pre-K to empower their youngest learners and put them on a path to success in school and life. Long Island is a case in point, with more than 25,000 4-year-olds still without pre-K. Need is growing among the Island's preschoolers, with a 9 percent increase in poverty among children under the age of six. Many of the region's 125 districts gave formal notice of interest in adding pre-K services. Yet only one, Freeport Union Free School District, received a grant to convert 125 part-day seats to full-day.

That is just 125 more full-day pre-K seats for the Island's 25,000 4-year-olds expected to enroll. Long Island remains the most under-served region in the state.

We cannot afford to lose generations of young children. They are only four once. They will never get a second chance. Moreover, increasingly, their needs are more acute.

RIISING POVERTY, RISING DIVERSITY ADD TO URGENT UNMET NEED – AND IMPERATIVE TO INVEST IN PRE-K OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK CITY

Changing demographics across the state, especially rising poverty and growing numbers of immigrant families with children who are dual language learners (DLL's) make the case for increased investment an imperative, if state leaders are serious about putting New York's rising generations on a path to success in school and life.

New York State now ranks third in the nation in welcoming immigrants, 43% of children birth to 8 now DLL's, that is, living in a home where they are exposed to a language other than English. Governor Cuomo and other state leaders have celebrated the state's new diversity, creating a state office for New Americans in 2013, and proclaiming New York a "state of immigrants" in 2017.

STATES GROWING DIVERSITY OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK CITY

Labor Region	Percentage of 4-year-olds of DLLs* in Each Region
Capital District	13%
Central New York	15%
Finger Lakes	18%
Hudson Valley	38%
Long Island	43%
Mohawk Valley	13%
North Country	10%
Souther Tier	7%
Western New York	15%

Data on Dual Language Learners by age and economic region provided by Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census pooled 2011-201 American Community Service Data.

*Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are young children, birth to school-age, who live in a home where they are exposed to a language other than English.

Suburbs adjacent to New York City – especially the Hudson Valley and Long Island – now rival the City in their diversity; with 43% of four-year-olds in the Hudson Valley are now DLL's, and 38% of those on Long Island.

Without an investment in quality, full-day pre-K, inequity rises, and grows for children right through high school.

With quality pre-K, which includes appropriate supports for emergent multilingual learners, and respect for their home language, this gap can be reduced or even erased. In fact, the latest research shows that DLL's bring special strengths to learning, and are even more creative problem-solvers, when they are supported and welcomed into high-quality early education.

New York's bedrock vision for pre-K explicitly recognizes early childhood education as foundational to success in today's global economy. Languages are most easily acquired in the early years, and research shows that waiting until kindergarten or later can be counterproductive, even harmful, to children's success, undermining their confidence and language skills later on.

In many communities, and in many programs across the state, there is now what experts call a "super-diversity" of cultures and languages. The Regents' Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Learning has proposed new supports for emergent multilingual learners and a

new pathway for teachers and leaders seeking to support these learners. We fully support those proposals, especially new protocols to identify children in need of these supports and new certification for teachers and leaders, with the goal of creating a more diverse group of teachers and leaders who represent the communities, cultures and languages in the state's increasingly diverse communities.

INCREASE REIMBURSEMENT RATES FOR PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EVALUATIONS BY AT LEAST 10%

At the same time, there is **urgent need to increase support in preschool special education for children with disabilities who require the highest level of services.**

In 2020, the state should increase reimbursement rates for Preschool Special Education and evaluations by at least 10% to ensure services to every preschooler in need of them. The state is failing to meet its legal obligation to ensure these students are served. **Today, more than 1000 children in New York City alone and hundreds more around the state are without the educational opportunities they are entitled to receive. Scores of programs outside the City have closed their doors as well and many are in a struggle to keep their doors open at all.**

Today, too many children are left at home without the support they need – and the law requires – to succeed in school and beyond. The failure to increase reimbursement rates for the services for these three and four year olds is directly related to the lack of services, and the failure of the state to build a pipeline of professionals with the appropriate skills to meet their needs.. **This is not a new problem in New York State, but the failure to address it and provide more resources has made it more urgent, even extreme – even as public support – and the scientific evidence – grows. In fact, the failure to invest results in larger costs for children, their families, the schools and communities in the long run. It is far more expensive to provide remedial services later, than to offer services in the early years.**

Increase Support for Integrated Learning Environments for Children with Special Needs

Research also shows, and state and federal laws require children with disabilities have access to early education, and be served in the “least restrictive environment,” one which allows them to learn with other children of all abilities. Without universal prekindergarten classes, such opportunities simply do not exist for most children. Special education funding is declining, limiting any option for the support that could put them on a path to success. **We fully support the Regents’ proposal to create a rate for integrated classrooms to meet this need. It is critical for the state to add resources to meet these needs, and comply with the law, for these children.**

The failure to invest in the state's universal pre-K program adds to the consequences for children with disabilities who could benefit from quality early learning opportunities in integrated settings. "The opportunity for preschool students with disabilities to be educated with their typically-developing peers diminishing by the day, according to Chris Treiber, from the InterAgency Council for Developmental Disabilities. "Keeping the promise to make pre-K truly universal with a full-day service for all preschoolers is essential, if New York State is to ensure that preschool students with disabilities have opportunity to attend high-quality inclusive early childhood programs."

The Board of Regents recognizes this urgent need, as well, and is calling for funding to support new models for integrated classes in as full-day pre-K expands. The Governor has also repeatedly recognized the need for more opportunities for children with disabilities to attend pre-K with their more typically developing peers. **We support the Regents recommendation for the state to add \$6.7 million in a pilot program to establish a new model for integrated classes serving both typically developing children and those with disabilities.**

PRE-K: A WISE INVESTMENT AND SOME PROGRESS

The evidence to support the investment in quality early childhood education only grows stronger by the year: Investments in high-quality full-day services more than pay for themselves.²

We applaud the steps taken in the past several years. This includes access for 3's to pre-K, funding of full-day pre-K, proposals to consolidate the now disparate funding of pre-K classroom and the reopening of access to new pre-K funds to all school districts in the 2017-2018 budget.

Bottom-Line: Increase the Pre-K Investment in the 2020 Enacted Budget to expand access to high quality for the state's 3- and 4-year-olds.

Given the dramatic needs and changing demographics of the state's youngest children, the funding should continue to be available to any district ready with a plan to meet the needs of and prioritize at-risk children in their communities. We support the Governor's new priority for homeless children. State leaders should build on his proposal by including:

² For complete references to the research case for pre-K, and other data in this report, in our attached report, "Opportunities Foreclosed, Equity Denied. New York Youngest Learners Still Left Out! Make Quality Early Learning Top Priority," released January 2018, available at ccipolicy.org, which includes both national and New York-specific data and supports the case we make here.

\$150 MILLION TO EXPAND ACCESS TO FULL-DAY, QUALITY PRE-K

- **\$125 million to expand access to pre-K full day and part day for both three- and four-year-olds.** Funding levels should be sufficient to assure quality in all settings, appropriating at least \$10,000 for four-year-olds and \$12,000 for three-year-olds to support quality standards known to produce better educational outcomes for children.
- **\$25 million to enhance quality and eliminate barriers to expansion, as districts expand pre-K.** The pre-K program has established high regulatory standards, but the State has not invested sufficiently in necessary infrastructure and quality strategies as pre-K expands.

The \$25 million investment in quality initiatives should include funding to support three critical purposes:

- (1) **Evidence-based strategies to attract retain and support qualified teachers in all settings, including improved compensation as well as professional development, coaching and mentoring.** We fully support the Regents' new proposal for a new initiative to create a research-based advanced certification for both teachers and leaders to prioritize the recruitment and quality preparation of a diverse early childhood workforce for the state's under-represented and underserved communities, to ensure the early childhood workforce is both well-prepared and reflects the communities, cultures and languages of the children they serve..
- (2) **Investment in regional technical assistance centers to support districts that need the support to meet the highest quality standards and strengthen partnerships between school districts and community programs.** The impressive track record of the Long Island Pre-K Initiative , as well as the long-running and effective support offered by the Rockland Child Care Council offer models for such centers, which engage school districts, BOCES and child care resource and referral agencies in effectively support quality pre-K.
- (3) **Funding for the other essentials of implementation, including start-up funding to equip new classrooms, and transportation costs.**

- **Increase the reimbursement rates for Preschool Special Education by at least 10% to ensure services for every preschooler in need of them.**
- **Protect and build on the state's current \$857.2 million investment in pre-K. Include appropriate resources to support each child, including those with developmental delays and disabilities, emergent multilingual learners and those who are homeless.**

Reform Pre-K Financing to Sustain Quality Pre-K in the Future

The state still lacks a financing strategy to sustain existing programs and establish appropriate funding levels for new seats added in the future.

State leaders have taken the critical first step to consolidate the state's multiple pre-K funding streams, which represents a significant step forward. The 2017 agreement for consolidation does provide a pathway toward a single pre-K program.

However, that approach effectively abolished per-pupil rates, essentially freezing districts in place with disparate funding levels, for part day and full-day services and offers only partial implementation of the promised full-day pre-K for all 4's. **Some are frozen at funding levels as low as \$2700 per child and have been shut out of the expansion of full-day pre-K,** even as parents and educators clamor for full-day pre-K.

The state should establish an aid formula for pre-K, distributed via annual allocation like other education funding, with funding levels based on the true cost of meeting quality standards, including support for qualified and appropriately compensated teachers in all settings, those working in public schools and those in community-based early childhood programs. Our recommendations for the short- and long-term include investment strategies to strengthen that system and assure equity across all settings.

In 2020, state leaders should ensure the new seats outside New York City, are funded at \$10,000 per child or double the districts half-day Universal Prekindergarten allocation, whichever is greater, until an aid formula is established, based on the study of actual costs.

The precedent and promise for this funding strategy is already established through several expansions of pre-K, including the \$340 million grant in 2014 and the state's implementation of the federally funded \$25 million Preschool Development grant that same year. The state's focus on high-need school districts also offered many participating districts at least 10,000 per child.

The results of such a strategy are also well established, with universal access now established in New York City and nearly universal enrollment in Rochester, where 97% of that city's 4-year-olds now in full-day seats.

To assure the aid for pre-K is appropriate and supports equitable access to early learning long term the Board of Regents' Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Learning called for the state to conduct a cost study to establish the actual costs of quality pre-K in New York.

We support strategies to establish appropriate funding level, and we support all efforts to establish a long-term financing strategy to support high quality pre-K.

However, children cannot wait another year for the cost analysis to justify a new investment, with funding levels necessary for a quality program. They will be kindergartners. State leaders must act now to protect existing services and set a course for the future.

Investment Should Also Ensure Quality Implementation for 3-Year-Olds

There is growing interest in adding pre-K for three-year-olds, in New York City and around the state. More than half of the new seats added in recent grants are for 3's. The evidence shows these younger children are best served when class size is capped at 15. However, the state's regulations and funding levels do not distinguish between the rates and standards for 3's.

Community programs partnering in delivery of pre-K must follow regulatory standards set by their licensing agency. Child care programs, for example, must already meet this goal. New York City is already capping its class size at 15 in its roll-out of 3K for All.

In 2020, the state should cap class size for 3's and also set a separate rate for pre-K for three-year-olds of at least \$12,000 per child, to address the specific needs of 3-year-olds as set forth in the state's Early Learning Guidelines. That includes smaller class sizes as well as teacher preparation and additional social supports necessary for serving younger children. The state's current pre-K rates, based on the needs of 4-year-olds, simply do not recognize those costs.

Additional investment in 3-year-olds at appropriate rates also offers the opportunity for the state to enhance resources for the many community-based programs that partner in delivery of pre-K in New York, such as Head Start and child care programs that serve younger children as well. Pre-K funding can add new resources to add children and augment resources, especially for programs dependent on parent fees or shrinking public investments in child care.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE PRE-K SERVICES

The State has wisely chosen to deliver pre-K services through a mixed delivery system that includes child care and Head Start programs in the community. Today, more than half of all pre-K services are offered in early childhood programs outside the public

schools. This essential strategy leverages existing resources and better serves the State is working families who often need extended hours and year-round care. Some of these programs offer the expertise and capacity to create integrated settings, so children with disabilities and typically developing children can learn together and from each other. Other community-based programs have experience and expertise supporting children and families whose primary language is a language other than English.

The State should offer more support to community partners with the capacity to offer integrated classrooms, support for multi-lingual learners, and developmentally appropriate programs for three-year-olds. Many also serve infants and toddlers, creating capacity for stable, continuous care and learning experiences that experts say can most benefit young children, improve educational outcomes and support the State's goal to create a continuum of early childhood education, birth to third grade.

However, the funding levels often do not reflect the value of these settings and the disparities in funding levels between schools and community-based programs destabilizes a critical part of the delivery system.

Our 2020 agenda for prekindergarten includes several key recommendations to address these disparities, including the establishment of per-child rates for 3- and 4-year-old pre-K to support quality standards. Meeting this goal offers a strategy and pathway to enhance resources for many community partners and a starting point for equity across settings. Regional technical assistance centers can guide and strengthen collaboration between public schools and their community partners, supporting joint learning and leadership in pre-K implementation and assist school districts interested in providing pre-K services and expanding current services to benefit from best practices across the state.

Vision for the Future: Quality Pre-K for All

CCI has worked with the Campaign for Educational Equity to offer a roadmap to financing strategies and implementation to make high quality full day pre-K available to three and four year olds. We have also put forward an in-depth analysis of the research and legal arguments, as well as the national policy landscape, to support the establishment of pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds as part of the state's definition of a sound, basic education, guaranteed by the state constitution. We have developed a vision and next steps the state should take to establish a single, stable, transparent and appropriately funded pre-K system, developed in consultation with early childhood and

public education experts across New York State. We have partnered with the Ready for Kindergarten Campaign and the Winning Beginning NY coalition in advocating for a quality, appropriate pre-K program, and developed an agenda to meet that goal in each of the last six years.

We offer testimony and our responses to the Executive budget, as well as recommendations for this year's enacted budget in the context of this ongoing work and our continuing partnerships which seeks to support state efforts to fulfill the promise for making quality full-day pre-K available to New York's children. That will require significant investment to increase access, a sustainable financing strategy and the infrastructure to support a quality program.

CCI also recognizes the need for appropriate investment in K-12 education aid, to ensure Pre-K is followed by a continuum of quality educational services that prepare children for college and careers, the K-12 public school system needs to have adequate and appropriate investment.

In addition, CCI supports proposals to strengthen and expand investment in Community Schools, a strategy that enhances support for New York's children and families, providing essential health, mental health, social services, family support and food programs to assure no child comes to school unable to focus on learning and their own development because these essential needs have not been met.

Taking these actions in the 2020-21 enacted budget will strengthen the state's Prekindergarten program. CCI stands ready to serve as a resource in moving a longer-term agenda forward to create a sustainable approach to financing these critical services, and at rates that support a quality educational service.

CCI co-founded and continues to lead the Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign, in partnership with the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the Alliance for Quality Education and Citizen Action. CCI also helped found and continues to serve on the steering committee of Winning Beginning, NY, the state's leading coalition for early care and learning and supports the agenda of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care and the Kids Can't Wait Campaign. In addition, CCI partners with the Center for Educational Equity at Teacher's College in promoting universal access to pre-K as a constitutional right, a core educational service and foundation tier for the state's guarantee of a "sound, basic education." The CCI-CEE work includes careful analysis of financing strategies to support quality standards and assure a quality implementation for pre-K, as the state moves toward a single pre-K program.

CCI also serves on the Board of Regents' blue-ribbon committee on early learning, as part of the workgroup on financing strategies. We applaud the broad engagement of that

group in seeking to assure New York State continues to build a full continuum of early learning and care, from birth to school age. We also work closely with organizations addressing the needs of emergent multilingual language learners and children with disabilities. For more information, visit www.ccipolicy.org or contact Betty Holcomb, CCI policy director at bholcomb@ccinyc.org.

26 DISTRICTS THAT WON GRANTS FOR PRE-K IN 2019

District	Grant
AMSTERDAM CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$167,587
BATAVIA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$303,467
BOLIVAR-RICHBURG CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$222,970
BROCTON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$158,008
CHITTENANGO CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$365,040
DANSVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$104,802
EAST RAMAPO CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT (SPRING VALLEY)	\$409,648
FREEPORT UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$747,171
GENEVA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$77,355
GORHAM-MIDDLESEX CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT (MARCUS WHITMAN)	\$221,824
GREENWICH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$124,800
HONEOYE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$97,200
HORNELL CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$445,806
LYNCOURT UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$156,274
LYNDONVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$540,392
NIAGARA FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$1,082,851
NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS	\$5,995,536
PERU CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$341,847
PHELPS-CLIFTON SPRINGS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$375,251
RENSSELAER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$127,547
ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$1,365,239
SCHENECTADY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$477,604
WAVERLY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$349,697
WHEATLAND-CHILI CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$81,000
WHITNEY POINT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$512,926
WINDSOR CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	\$148,158

