



Testimony – Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing – January 29, 2026

Support for Universal Pre-K Expansion on Long Island & Continuing the Investment in the Long Island Regional Technical Assistance Center for Pre-K & Early Childhood Education

Jacob Dixon, Founder & CEO, Choice for All and Center Director, Long Island Regional Technical Assistance Center (LI-RTAC) for Pre-K & Early Childhood Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of continued and expanded investment in early childhood education systems that strengthen Universal Pre-K (UPK) and increase access and opportunity for families across Long Island.

The Long Island Regional Technical Assistance Center (LI-RTAC) exists to build access, opportunity, and sustainability in early childhood education, particularly through UPK expansion in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. LI-RTAC is led through a cross-sector partnership that includes Choice for All, Nassau BOCES, Western Suffolk BOCES, Eastern Suffolk BOCES, the Child Care Council of Nassau, the Child Care Council of Suffolk and the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at CUNY.

Over this past year, LI-RTAC has directly supported:

- Over **700 early childhood educators and leaders** annually through professional learning and coaching;
- Over **380 families** annually navigating UPK or early childhood opportunities through their
- Nearly **40 school districts and community-based organizations** engaged in UPK planning, quality improvement, and partnership development;
- **The creation and expansion of new UPK seats through district-CBO collaboration**, especially in historically under-resourced communities.
- **The development of our first published report, *Pathways to Progress: Exploring the UPK Landscape on Long Island***, identifying issues and opportunities to strengthen the UPK and early childhood system on Long Island

LI-RTAC provides hands-on technical assistance in areas such as:

- District and community-based organization readiness and feasibility planning;
- Cross-sector partnership development;
- Data use and enrollment strategies;
- Professional development aligned with NYS standards and developmentally appropriate practices, including but not limited to, at-large regional and statewide convening
- Workforce and leadership development through partner organizations

(next)

One day, all children will be healthy and thrive on Long Island, regardless of ZIP code.



Originally launched as the Long Island Pre-K Initiative, our region once had the lowest UPK enrollment rate in New York State - with only 10 percent of four-year-olds enrolled across 126 school districts nearly a decade ago. Through sustained public investment and growing demand from families, school districts, and community-based providers, Long Island has made meaningful progress. Today, 65 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in half- or full-day UPK across more than 90 school districts (NYSED, 2024–2025 State-Administered UPK Data). Yet more than half of our region’s census tracts remain child care deserts, and families continue to report a need for affordable, high-quality early learning options close to home. This disparity underscores the need for continued and strategic investment, as access to Pre-K still varies significantly by community. We believe sustained and targeted funding is essential to achieving true universality.

More specifically:

- **Increase UPK per-child funding** to the greater of **\$10,000 or the school district’s Foundation Aid per-pupil rate**, which will enable more districts to participate and allow more Long Island four-year-olds to access high-quality early learning.
- **Expand and support the UPK rollout timeline** by allowing for regionalized planning and district action plans that address real-world implementation challenges - including facilities, staffing, and the inclusion of multiple delivery models such as school-based, community-based, and family child care providers for both 4-K and 3-K.
- **Continue streamlining UPK funding streams**, including district-based and State-administered UPK, so that funding flows more efficiently to providers and families and reduces administrative barriers to expansion; as well as account for regional costs in determining future allocations
- **Establish the \$10,000 per-child 4-K rate as a baseline for children with disabilities**, allowing IDEA funding to be layered on top to cover the true cost of inclusive, high-quality services and ensure providers can sustainably serve students with diverse learning needs.
- **Partner with the newly established Office of Child Care and Early Education** to support statewide expansion through Regional Technical Assistance Centers, using Long Island and LI-RTAC as a model for aligning local implementation with statewide early childhood goals.

Lastly, **\$1 million investment in LI-RTAC in the FY2027 State Budget will allow the Center to:**

- Scale direct technical assistance to more districts and providers;
- Support sustainable UPK expansion across Long Island;
- Strengthen workforce development and quality improvement systems;
- Ensure that State investments translate into real access for families, not just policy goals.

LI-RTAC ensures that when New York invests in early childhood, those dollars result in high-quality classrooms, strong local partnerships, and equitable access for children - regardless of geography or income. I respectfully urge the Legislature to include a \$1 million investment for LI-RTAC in the Education Budget to advance Universal Pre-K and build a coordinated early childhood system that truly works for Long Island families.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to New York’s youngest learners.

One day, all children will be healthy and thrive on Long Island, regardless of ZIP code.