

**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2014–15 Executive Budget
Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Hearing
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**Submitted by
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My name is Kate Breslin and I am President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA). The Schuyler Center is a 142-year-old statewide, nonprofit, policy analysis and advocacy organization working to shape policies that improve health, welfare and human services in New York State.

The Schuyler Center is 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. *Winning Beginning* focuses its efforts on children from the prenatal period to age 8. The Coalition is actively engaged in policy issues relating to early care and education in New York State. The Schuyler Center also 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.

Budget Recommendation: At least \$225 million in State funds, to support local districts to add new high-quality, full-day Pre-K seats. Fully support New York City's plan to rapidly expand to universal high-quality, full-day Pre-K.

The Executive Budget proposes \$100 million for 2014-15, as part of a vision, articulated by the Governor, to bring high-quality, full-day Pre-K to all four-year-olds throughout New York State within five years. However, that amount is not enough to achieve the vision. The State needs to invest \$225 million statewide for Pre-K this year and each year thereafter to truly move forward with implementation of high-quality full-day Pre-K. With this level of investment in 2014-15, New York could move forward to bring full-day Pre-K to four-year-olds in high need districts. In addition, we support Mayor de Blasio and any locality with a plan to get more young children into high-quality, full-day Pre-K faster. If Mayor de Blasio is able to implement the plan that he has presented for New York City, then the State's investment can support efforts in other parts of the State to reach more four-year-olds statewide sooner.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to allocate sufficient resources toward a down payment on New York finally fulfilling its 1997 promise of statewide, full-day, high-quality Pre-K.

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. 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.ⁱ

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 agree with the Governor that now is the time to fulfill the promise of making pre-kindergarten truly universal. However, his funding commitment for five years will not get us there. The estimate for New York City alone is \$340 million for one year to provide Pre-K for all 4-year-olds.

Pre-K funding must be predictable, sustainable, equitable, and adequate to support program stability, including districts' ability to plan and hire and retain staff. Funding should also specifically support quality improvement, for both new and existing programs. The evidence shows that children who attend high-quality Pre-K programs perform better in school and throughout life. It is essential that we invest intentionally in quality improvement to maximize the benefits for our children and our state.

In addition to urging support for additional funding, the Schuyler Center offers the following recommendations to build upon the potential of Pre-K as an essential strategy for boosting student achievement:

- Include and make permanent the new full-day Pre-K initiative as part of State Pre-K aid, with a plan to increase the program over time. Distributing Pre-K funding through a competitive grant process was cumbersome, slow, and administratively and programmatically problematic.
- Protect UPK going forward by allowing unused funds to be reallocated to districts that can use them.
- This funding must be added to funds that support the continuum of learning for children. Expanding high-quality UPK must be part of a broader initiative to support a high-quality prenatal to eight system of early care, development and learning.
- The maintenance of effort requirement should not impose a penalty on districts should districts experience fluctuations in enrollment from year to year due to demographic changes.
- This new funding should require the same investment in community-based (CBO) programs as in existing UPK aid. Currently, about \$200 million of the State's \$385 million in Pre-K is invested in community-based programs allowing for an alignment of teaching and learning across child care, Head Start and Preschool Special Education and making sure that capacity and resources are maximized. This funding for full-day pre-kindergarten should include a mandate that investment in community programs be maintained.

It is important to note that the gains anticipated from investments in pre-kindergarten will not be sustained without investment the larger education system.

Investment in Quality Rating and Improvement is Essential

The Governor's budget neglects to invest in quality rating and improvement. Two years ago, the New York State Education Department (SED) invested \$4 million in Race to the Top funds toward QUALITYstarsNY, a cogent and tested framework for ensuring quality and improving school success

in Pre-K and other early learning programs. But that funding expires in 2014. New York applied for but did not receive a \$75 million Early Learning Challenge Grant, which in part was to support our quality rating and improvement system.

New York is long overdue to make 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. The State needs to commit to funding QUALITYstarsNY in a meaningful and ongoing way.

Most states that have launched successful Pre-K programs have invested in statewide technical assistance, guidance to local districts, and solid professional development opportunities. New York State has yet to make this targeted and ongoing investment, to ensure that districts have the supports they need to operate programs that will succeed in promoting school readiness for the most at-risk children.

In addition to investing in access to full-day Pre-K, the State needs an intentional investment in quality rating and improvement.

Support After-School Programs with \$9 million in the 2014-2015 Budget in preparation to support the Governor's multi-year plan to expand access to high-quality after-school programs.

The Governor proposes an increased commitment of \$720 million over 5 years, starting in 2015-16, to expand after-school programs, but does not propose new after-school funding in this year's budget. It is exciting that the Governor recognized and articulated the importance of after-school programs but it is important to commit real State dollars this year toward the needed ramp-up in enrichment opportunities for students. We recommend the State invest \$9 million in quality infrastructure in 2014-15 budget, in preparation for 5 years of investment beginning with \$160 million in 2015-16. This investment will need to be expanded in subsequent years 2 through 5 to reach \$825 million annually, providing access to half of the estimated 1.1 million children in need of programs.

Similar to Pre-K, 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; assuring access to high-quality programs that support children's development while keeping them safe will put all our children on a path towards success in college, career and life.

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 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 proposal 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.

¹ 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

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