



BRIEFING PAPER – MEETING WITH CHANCELLOR MERRYL TISCH APRIL 23, 2009, 11AM

Meeting the Goals of the Regents Policy on Early Education

The Regents policy on early childhood education, “Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community,” issued in January of 2006 set out a vision for preparing children for success in school and beyond. This policy statement establishes clear priorities for New York State for a comprehensive approach to early education starting from birth. We agree and research confirms that these are essential steps to closing the achievement gap in New York State.

The Regents set an optimistic target of 2009 for realizing their vision. While we may be on a longer trajectory, we cannot let the current fiscal downturn stop the momentum. There is tremendous interest in and new resources for early childhood education at the federal level and we need to take full advantage of the new opportunities. We have already made substantial progress in our Universal Pre-Kindergarten effort, and the Regents strong support for early childhood education has been key to that progress.

Governor Paterson has established the Early Childhood Advisory Council as the body to design a more coherent and comprehensive strategy for early learning. **In our meeting with you, we would like to discuss opportunities for the Board of Regents to continue to provide strategic leadership to propel early childhood education in New York State**

UPK funding has already played a significant role in helping the state realize one building block of the Regents vision for high-quality early childhood education. More than 106,000 four year olds are enrolled now in Pre-K, with 500 school districts participating. Yet, many gaps remain.

- This year, state UPK funding was frozen at \$376 million, a cut of \$76 million from the \$452 allocated in the two previous years. The flat-funding creates significant barriers to expansion. As a result, 177 school districts will not be able to offer any Pre-K services
- The Big Five school districts have found both the part-day format for the funding and funding levels to be a significant barrier to expansion. The Children’s Cabinet, school districts and advocates had urged state officials to protect the allocation to create funding for infrastructure and full-day services that would keep the expansion on track to improve quality.
- The program is still limited to only serving four year olds and for 2.5 hours – school districts need more flexibility in meeting their community needs.

- In these tough financial times, more families are applying for public Pre-K, often because they can't afford tuition for private preschool. In New York City, the cost of preschool now exceeds rent or mortgage payments in many family budgets. There will be no new Pre-K seats to meet this demand.

We believe it is time to revisit and revamp UPK funding to better fulfill the intended goals of this program and to more effectively maximize other investments in early education. National surveys certainly highlight the need to take the next steps. The highly-regarded Pre-K Yearbook released by National Institute for Early Education Research ranked our state 24th in terms of overall investment and New York met only six out of 10 benchmarks for quality. New York has not invested in professional development, parent education, social work and family supports or program evaluation.

We are eager to work with you, to build from the strength of the Regents' policy statement. We urge the Regents to continue to assert the importance of a P-16 education system with continued investments in early education.

- Create a comprehensive 21st century early learning program for New York State.
- Proactively support local school districts in understanding the value of investing early and using Title I funds to build our early education capacity in each community.
- Make early education a component of all state aid formulas to support facilities development and professional development opportunities.
- Promote the research, evaluation and data systems that will ensure that we better understand what services young children are receiving.

The Regents have a critical role in driving policy to ensure that every child will have a quality early learning opportunity to prepare them for meeting the challenges of a global economy.