

Develop a Comprehensive Plan for Implementation of Pre-K Expansion

Prekindergarten is one component of a stable and high-quality early care and education system. Attention must be paid to ensuring that the system meets the needs of children and families, including cultural and linguistic diversity. Pre-K funding is now available to virtually all of the 680 school districts in the state, but is not yet available to all four year olds. New York State relies on its schools and community partners for the delivery of these services. In fact, over 60% of the services occur in child care, Head Start, Preschool Special Education and other preschool settings. These settings help to support full-day, year-round options for working families and expanded learning opportunities for children.

To successfully launch, expand and sustain this important program, *Winning Beginning NY* urges the Governor to allocate \$100 million to do the following:

- Re-appropriate unspent funds from the 2007 – 2008 school year with attention to the following:
 - Establish a reserve fund, at local district option, from unspent funds this year. Districts unable to implement this year but who make a commitment to do so in the next year will have access to the fund. Allow spending of up to 10% for planning purposes.
 - Develop a stand-alone incentive fund to provide essential support to school districts to support start-up including planning, classroom equipment and supplies, and other expenses as identified.
 - Identify a four-year implementation plan with an appropriate increase in funding for year two—the 2008 – 2009 school year.
- Adjust funding levels to reflect actual costs based on a systematic review of the current funding framework for Pre-K, including identification of the full cost of providing core early education services based on appropriate compensation for staff
- Put essential infrastructure supports in place at the state level and locally to support all aspects of professional and program development, appropriate assessments and outcome measures, and systems of accountability. This includes planning, program start-up, professional development and quality assurance, at a minimum.

- Offer full-day Pre-K to four-year-olds with appropriate financial support, support for planning, and other infrastructure supports.
- Require that local advisory councils be established and sustained to plan for and guide implementation of Pre-K and other early education services. Establish guidelines to and requirements for these councils and provide financial support for this ongoing work.
- Make transportation available to Pre-K students, as it is for K-12 students, with attention to minimizing the transitions for children.
- Assure that social, health and mental health, and family supports are available in all Pre-K settings.
- Provide incentives for districts to work together and encourage collaboration between programs in contiguous districts, so that funding can be shared to serve the optimum number of children.
- Provide appropriate assessment, staff development and program services to meet the instructional needs of linguistically and culturally diverse children and families, including family literacy services.
- Develop a carefully designed plan to expand Pre-K services to three year olds within two years, with attention to the special needs of this age group and the need to address the potential impact on existing early childhood programs in the community.