

**Submission to the New York State Division of the Budget
Public Hearings regarding the 2008-2009 Budget
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Thank you for holding these public hearings and for allowing me to speak to you today about a budget issue that I care deeply about—funding for universal pre-kindergarten (Pre-K).

Why is Pre-K important? In the short-term, it helps prepare children for school and for life by building their cognitive, developmental, and social-emotional skills. In addition, research shows that society benefits from the long-term effects of Pre-K through increased income tax revenues, lower welfare dependence, and a reduction in delinquency and crime.¹

I am here as a member of *Generations United*, the country's only membership organization that promotes intergenerational public policies and programs. I have joined with other age 50-plus adults for Generations United's Seniors for Kids campaign, a statewide initiative that raises the visibility of older adults in support of high-quality early care and education. Generations United is a partner organization of *Winning Beginning NY*, a statewide early care and education coalition that advocates for Pre-K and child care programs.

A common misconception is that older Americans are only concerned about property taxes and prescription drugs. The reality is far different. We have the strong desire to give back to our communities and understand that children are the messengers we send to a future we will not see.

Providing high-quality Pre-K is an issue that affects all New Yorkers. Traditional family structures are changing and many older New Yorkers are caring for their grandchildren. In New York, 121,670 grandparents were living with grandchildren under age 18 according to statistics from the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau. They are directly impacted by the availability and quality of Pre-K.

First of all, working parents and caregivers require full-day options. A 2 ½ hour program leaves parents (and grandparents!) searching for alternative programs for the remainder of the day. In addition, research shows that, from an educational and developmental standpoint, part-day programs are good but full-day programs are better.

Second, families need programs that are accessible. Those that are able to provide transportation allow working parents and caregivers to do just that—work, without the added stress of arranging transportation to and from programs.

Third, Pre-K programs need wrap-around supports. Even a full-day program is only five hours, at least three hours short of a normal work day. You may think that Pre-K and child care are separate entities, but they are not. Families need child care services both before and after Pre-K classes, to fill the gap before the workday is done.

Finally, quantity without quality is a no-win situation for New York State's children. This leads us to the cornerstone of high-quality care—qualified early care and education professionals. The majority of child care workers earn less than retail sales clerks. Pre-K teachers who teach in child care settings earn significantly less than their public school counterparts. Since they allow us to earn a living by teaching and caring for our children while we work, shouldn't they earn a decent living themselves?

I believe that the state's 2007-08 investment in Pre-K is a downpayment on a comprehensive system of early care and education and hope that New York's commitment to high-quality programs for our youngest learners will continue in 2008-09.

As an older adult, I know that seniors want to leave a legacy for the next generation. What better legacy is there than top-notch education for children, the leaders of tomorrow? But, more importantly, research shows that children enrolled in pre-K achieve a brighter future. When they become adults, they are more likely to graduate high school, have higher earning potential, and evade criminal trouble. As a result, we strengthen the entire community and promote intergenerational cooperation.

ⁱ Belfield, Clive; *Early Childhood Education: How Important are the Cost-Savings to the School System?*; February 2004.