

## **Implementing Prekindergarten in New York State Barriers to Expansion**

A report on findings from a statewide survey and in-depth interviews

October 28, 2007

*Winning Beginning NY* is an early care and education coalition that supports a birth to five agenda stressing the quality and accountability necessary for a comprehensive and effective early childhood system. The coalition is convened by NYS Child Care Coordinating Council; NYS Association for the Education of Young Children; Child Care, Inc.; and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. From August 2007 to October 2007, *Winning Beginning NY* surveyed school superintendents via an online survey to better understand the barriers to Pre-K expansion and implementation. The first part of this report details the responses of the 17 people who responded to the survey.

The second part of this report contains the results of interviews conducted by Todd Boressoff of Early Childhood Consultancies, on behalf of *Winning Beginning NY* and with funding provided by the New York State Council on Children and Families (the Council). Mr. Boressoff interviewed a total of 18 people—a combination of school district representatives from across the state and experts with broad experience in implementation.

This report describes the barriers districts face, and the insight interviewees offered into what has worked well for them and what they feel is necessary in terms of expanding and implementing Pre-K programs. While the number of respondents and interviewees is too low to provide true scientific validity, the report provides very useful information about the barriers being experienced and potential remedies for successful implementation.

The online survey and interviews identified common themes and concerns from the field. Some are relatively easy to address, such as increasing access to implementation information, enhanced technical assistance, and mentoring supports for new districts working to implement and or expand substantially. Some of this could be provided through existing support networks such as BOCES and other professional organizations. Additional systemic concerns raised by respondents include the level of funding per pupil, the lack of funding for start up and transportation, and more flexibility for a mix of part- and full-day programs. Respondents also identified the need for on-going collaboration efforts to anchor the role of Pre-K in schools and community-based settings most effectively. In addition, respondents identified workforce concerns including recruiting and retaining certified teachers, compensation issues, and in-service training.

## **Pre-K Implementation Online Survey: Process and Results**

*Winning Beginning NY* designed a survey using the online *Survey Monkey* tool. In August 2007, the coalition sent a letter to all school districts that could receive funding to implement a new Pre-K program. The letter contained a link to the survey and asked them to help determine why some school districts are not using the funding allocated to them this year. A reminder letter followed later that month. There were 17 total respondents, although not all respondents answered each question. While this is a small cohort, it should be noted that a number of superintendents followed up their survey response with a call to *Winning Beginning NY* staff for technical assistance, and that their answers to the survey questions were insightful.

Results included the following findings. 85.7% (14 responses) were from rural districts; 86.7% (15 responses) had not offered TPK in the past, and 57.1% (14 responses) are planning to offer Pre-K in the 07-08 school year.

Districts that said they were not planning to offer Pre-K had a variety of reasons for not offering programs, including not enough time to plan (4 responses), uncertainty about long-term funding (2 responses), insufficient funding (2 responses), lack of space (2 responses), and cost of transportation (1 response).

Districts stated that they had the following expertise and/or resources available to help plan and launch a new program, including no resources (5 responses), prior TPK experience (4 responses), other community resources (4 responses), an Early Childhood Education coordinator (3 responses), a CCR&R (2 responses), higher ed expertise (2 responses), and a local planning council (1 response).

Districts stated that the following assistance would help them plan and launch a new program, including examples of model programs from other districts (8 responses), technical assistance from SED (7 responses), a start-up grant to equip, supply, and perform minor renovations on classrooms (6 responses), a planning grant (4 responses), examples of arrangements with non-public school programs (3 responses), and the creation of a planning council (3 responses).

100% said they are not planning to partner with a neighboring district to offer Pre-K (15 responses). 60% said they were able to identify community partners for the provision of Pre-K (9 out of 15 responses). Those partners were identified as the following (9 responses with more than one response possible): Head Start (6 responses), child care centers (6 responses), other preschool programs (3 responses), a museum or library (2 responses), and Preschool Special Ed (1 response). Those unable to identify community partners responded with the following reasons—no current child care providers or other CBOs meet established criteria, no interest among child care providers or CBOs, space constraints, and a general lack of early child care providers in the area.

71.4% (5 out of 7 responses) stated that they are considering or planning to provide Pre-K in the 08-09 school year. Those districts stated that the following resources would be

helpful in planning (5 responses with more than one response possible): examples of approaches taken by other districts (5 responses), resources for planning (4 responses), technical assistance (2 responses), and a listing of potential community partners (2 responses). Districts stated that they would prefer receiving technical assistance from the following (6 responses with more than one response possible): State ED (4 responses), BOCES (1 response), Superintendents association (1 response), a child care organization (1 response), a county agency (1 response), and other districts in which programs have been implemented successfully.

### **Pre-K Implementation In-Depth Interviews: Process and Results**

Throughout August 2007 and the first weeks of September 2007, Mr. Boressoff conducted interviews with eighteen school district representatives and experts in the field of early education. With the assistance of the Council and State Education Department (SED) prekindergarten experts,<sup>1</sup> he developed a survey tool (Appendix I) designed to assess barriers, as well as to gather insights and recommendations on how to improve implementation.

The interviewees broadly reflect New York State. (See Appendix II for chart of those interviewed.)

Interviewees identified the following as barriers to expansion and implementation of Pre-K programs:

**Insufficient Funding.** This was reported in practically every interview, with the exception of districts receiving a high per pupil rate from the state. There was broad agreement that per pupil rates need to be higher to assure certified teachers and quality. Many districts still receive the same per pupil rate that they received when UPK was implemented nine years ago.

Both district representatives and experts were concerned that in order to achieve quality districts needed to put up too much local funding. In districts with high or average wealth, there is serious concern that because of the state aid formula, their reimbursement rates could drop in the future. Districts generally perceived Pre-K as a grants program and are reluctant to support it with local funding as they do for K - 12.

**Transportation.** Not all districts need transportation, but the lack of state funding was mentioned as a barrier for every district that did. These were predominantly rural districts. That the state supports transportation for elementary children, but not for four-year-olds, was of great concern. Half-day Pre-K children require additional and shorter bus runs, and greater supervision, which exacerbates this problem.

**Timing Issues.** There are a number of different, but related, timing issues:

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<sup>1</sup> These were Robert Frawley of the NYC Council on Children and Families, Ruth Singer and Lynnette Pannucci of the NYS State Education Department, Karen Schimke and Jenn O'Connor of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and Nancy Kolben of Child Care, Inc.

- Not enough time to plan
- Late notification of the *amount* of funding
- Not enough time to respond to an RFP

Districts with the most difficulty putting everything in place quickly were those starting up for the first time and those who needed to implement a major expansion in order to spend new dollars. A number of those interviewed noted that it takes between nine months and a year to put in place a new or significantly expanded Pre-K program. This held true whether districts implemented in-house or through community partners. One superintendent noted it would be enough just to know the dollar amount in advance.

**Hiring and Retaining Certified Teachers.** Hiring and retaining certified teachers, especially for community partners, was an oft-repeated concern. All agreed on the value of, and wanted to hire, early childhood certified teachers, but almost all listed the following concerns:

- The salaries that community-based organizations (CBOs) can afford are too low to attract and retain certified teachers
- CBOs that can approach district salaries cannot match benefits
- When experienced teachers in CBOs obtain their certification, they leave for better paying jobs in the public schools

**Full-Day/Half-Day Concerns.** Concern about the lack of funding for full-day programs was voiced by districts close to meeting their need for half-day, but with serious need for full-day for working parents. A number of those interviewed cited recent research about the increased benefits of full-day Pre-K. Finally, some felt that using CBOs, especially when they had other funding sources, was sufficient to meet parent need for full-day.

**Difficulty Cultivating Community Partners.** Many districts have developed successful relationships with community early childhood programs and with CCRRs and other agencies. However, though most agreed collaboration was very important to them, some faced difficulties. These were:

- Not knowing about other early education providers in their area
- Fears that partners cannot afford to hire certified teachers
- Lack of district understanding of developmentally appropriate early education
- Concerns about partner's ability to implement a developmentally appropriate program
- Lack of available partners, in rural districts
- Lack of providers interested in collaboration
- Problems community partners must deal with caused by Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) requirements and regulations. Some of these include the child support enforcement requirement, pressures on some child care programs not to allow appropriate restraint measures, and concerns about monitoring of immunizations.

**Difficulty Recruiting Children.** Some districts noted difficulty identifying where the four-year-olds are, and a lack of data about who is caring for these children. One or two reported reluctance on the part of parents to send their children “to school” at this early age. Several non-district interviewees felt districts had not done enough marketing of Pre-K.

**Space.** Space was more likely to be of concern in districts that had not identified community partners. The problem also seemed to break down based on demographics. Overall, districts were more likely to have space concerns in schools than in CBOs.

**Uncertainty about Future Funding.** Some districts are still concerned about whether Pre-K has “legs,” but these were generally the less well-informed. They were either not aware of the Governor’s commitment to full funding in four years, or understood that funding could fluctuate.

**Random Selection.** The recent requirement to select children randomly is a logistical problem in CBOs when there is an existing three-year-old class about to age up to fours. It also prevents some districts from using their entire allocation in that they no longer can simply contract with a CBO to provide UPK to all children in existing classrooms. Some noted the greater need to serve low-income or special needs children. A number felt that since universality is a goal for every child within four years that districts and programs should make the practical enrollment decisions based on their knowledge of local needs.

**Oversight Requirements.** That there was no funding for the staffing and tasks of partner oversight was cited as a challenge for a small number of districts. Districts are responsible for fiscal and program oversight and student progress, as well as ensuring staff receives professional development.

**Lack of Information.** Several of our experts reported that some districts were not up-to-date on state prekindergarten. Some did not know they were eligible. Some cited non-existent income eligibility requirements. As noted previously, a few appeared not to know that there had been new funding this year.

**Other Pressures.** Prekindergarten is not mandated. Districts and superintendents face a range of issues that have sink-or-swim ramifications, including the pressures of No Child Left Behind, pressures for accountability, and pressures from school boards and communities. Since Pre-K is not *required*, it sometimes drops down the list of priorities.

### **Pre-K Implementation In-Depth Interviews: What Works**

Interviewees reported that the following are the successful components of their implementation:

**Leadership.** There was universal agreement that leadership is essential for success. Where leadership came from was different in different districts. In some, it began with a superintendent. In others leadership came from outside—a CCRR, or a program in smaller communities. Occasionally it was just one individual and sometimes a community-wide coalition.

**Collaboration in Providing Pre-K.** All those working with provider partners reported that collaboration is important to success. Asked about their successes, they mentioned collaboration early and often. Benefits noted were overcoming district space limitations, meeting parent need for extended day, and mutual learning based on interactions between district and community programs.

**Planning.** Planning, and *time* to plan, was mentioned repeatedly. It was noted as necessary to develop consensus in the community, identify partners, establish rules and guidelines, develop systems of contracting and reporting, and to inform and recruit parents.

**Collaboration for Developing and Running the System.** Interviewees discussed the importance of a wide range of collaborations that help enable smooth implementation. These included:

- Districts and CCRR agencies working together. These collaborations range from the simple (help with recruitment) to the very involved (with one CCRR actually administering the full program for the district).
- Ongoing work of a planning or advisory council
- Superintendents joining together with one another in formal groups
- Coordination between district leaders and other municipal child care agencies
- Joint professional development groups of public school and CBO teachers
- Joint orientations on quality early childhood education for administrators, directors and teachers

**Communication.** Ongoing open communication is widely cited as important to success and as important to planning a system that meets parent needs, contract management, and monitoring and technical assistance and recruiting through CCRRs and other agencies.

### **Pre-K Implementation In-Depth Interviews: What is Necessary**

In addition to the strategies that interviewees noted previously (such as creating advisory councils), they also noted the following ideas for successful expansion and implementation:

#### **Improve Funding**

- Increase state-wide funding
- Allow programs with other funding sources, such as Head Start and child care, to use Pre-K funding to strengthen core components such as certified teachers

- Maintain the base funding level (\$2,700 or higher) for districts that would suffer from strict state aide formulas
- Allow districts to use some of their allocation on start-up expenses and planning
- Reiterate the state's long term commitment to Pre-K
- Encourage districts to increase local funding to support the full core cost of Pre-K, as they do for K - 12

### **Hire and Retain Certified Teachers**

- Increase per pupil rate to enable districts to fund appropriate salaries in schools and CBOs. New state and/or local funding could be used to increase this rate.
- Allow programs to use Pre-K funding to fund certified teachers
- Develop a systematic approach to achieving a qualified workforce
- Establish loan forgiveness and supports such as mentoring, time off for training, and financial support to programs for substitutes
- Reward teachers as they move toward certification
- Develop a fund to assure equitable compensation between equally qualified teachers in public schools and community partners

### **Improve Technical Assistance**

- Raise the awareness of Pre-K with the *NYS Council of School Superintendents*, the *School Administrators Association of New York State* and *BOCES*. Provide them with the information they need to assist their members: i.e. program models, collaboration approaches, sample materials and recruitment strategies, lists of CRRs and other early care and education experts.
- Enable SED to provide TA on prekindergarten system development, with examples of models from successful districts, collaboration approaches, appropriate curricula, and best practices. SED should be given the resources to provide TA that goes beyond application and reporting procedures.
- Develop a technical assistance team to help school districts consider their implementation options
- Make successful technical assistance strategies and materials from experienced districts and communities widely available to others
- Share multiple samples of effective key documents and approaches
- Provide joint orientations on quality early childhood education for administrators, directors, principals and teachers

### **Improve Recruitment**

- Foster data collection about where the four-year-olds are
- Develop a multifaceted marketing campaign targeting parents (The campaign needs to help parents understand the value of quality early education, inform them of program locations, and make it easy for them to apply.)

- Share effective recruitment and marketing strategies from various communities Recruitment should be year round, but ramp up as September nears.
- Inform parents of the location of all Pre-K programs
- Remind parents of extended day options available in community partners

#### **Address district and superintendent reluctance**

- Educate superintendents about the value of early education
- Make Pre-K mandatory for districts, not children, within four years

#### **Research Child and Other Outcomes**

- Encourage and fund research into child outcomes
- Develop a baseline profile of all children in existing Pre-K programs
- Examine child outcomes in districts with different programs or structures

#### **Conclusion**

As one can see, the online survey and the in-depth interviews had certain commonalities. A number of issues arose as either real or perceived barriers to expansion and implementation of Pre-K across New York State. The overarching issue appears to be the need for increased support, in a variety of ways, for districts, teachers, and parents. *Winning Beginning NY* hopes that these findings inform the work being done at the state level going forward, and offers its assistance as a coalition to help improve the early care and education system, including Pre-K.

*Appendix I*

**Prekindergarten Implementation Questionnaire**

Interviewer introduces self and says, “To improve implementation of prekindergarten and help every district in the state to benefit, *Winning Beginning NY* is reaching out to explore the barriers that districts might be experiencing; and to learn more about what works well or might help improve the process.”

**Background**, interviewee’s identity and expertise, etc:

• Do I have your correct name and contact information ...?
• What is your role/job related to the implementation of prekindergarten?
• To date how much experience would you say your district has in pre-k implementation? How many programs would this include? In schools? In CBO’s?
• How would you describe your community: large urban, small urban, suburban, rural?
• Is your district[s] planning to offer pre-k in the 2007-2008 school year? (or, for groups: Do the districts in your community... etc.?)

(In each of the questions below, ask the broad question first, and wait. Then offer the other possible options.)

1. What barriers, if any, have you come across in your efforts to implement prekindergarten? Is there anything else you can think of?
2. Have any of the following interfered with or slowed down the process?
(Where appropriate, ask to explain)
a. Not enough time to plan
b. Uncertainty about long term funding
c. Transportation (cost or arranging)
d. Not enough funding
e. Lack of state full-day funding
f. Lack of space
g. Difficulty identifying community partners
h. Anything else
3. If you have already implemented, can you tell us about some of the successes you have had?
4. What expertise and/or resources did/do you have in your district to help plan and launch prekindergarten?

(Where appropriate, ask to explain)
a. An early childhood education coordinator
b. Prior Targeted Prekindergarten experience
c. Identified community resources
d. A child care resources and referral or other community agency
e. A local planning council
f. Help from college early childhood experts
g. Other
5. If you are already providing prekindergarten, what recommendations do you have for others about how to make it work?
6. If it were available, what types of assistance would help you move forward with prekindergarten implementation?
a. Examples of program models from other districts
b. Examples of collaborations between districts and their community partners
c. Start-up funding for equipment, supplies, minor classroom renovations
d. A planning grant to cover the administrative costs of start-up
e. State Education Department technical assistance
f. A local prekindergarten planning council
g. Other
7. Have you been able to identify community partners to help provide prekindergarten services?
8. If yes, which partners have you identified?
a. Child care centers
b. Head Start programs
c. Other preschool programs
d. Preschool special education programs
e. Museums or libraries
f. Social service agency
g. Other
9. If no, why not?
10. If not planning to launch prekindergarten this year, are you considering doing so in the 2008-2009 school year? Why next year rather than this year?
11. If yes, what would help you to plan for next year?

a. Technical assistance
b. Financial resources for planning
c. A specific list of potential partners in my community
d. Examples of approaches taken by other districts
e. Other
12. From whom would you like to receive assistance if it were available?
a. State Education Department
b. Superintendents association
c. Child care organization
d. Local public agency
e. Local non-profit
f. BOCES
13. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding either barriers to pre-k implementation or what might improve the implementation process?

*Appendix II*

**Charts of Those Interviewed**

**District Representatives**

This chart shows the number of district representatives interviewed, by State Education Department need categories.

<b>State Education Need Categories</b>	<b># District Representatives Interviewed</b>
1 New York City	-
2 BIG Four	1
3 Urban/Suburban, High Need	2
4 Rural, High Need	3
5 Average Need	3
6 Low Need	1
<b>Total District Representatives</b>	<b>10</b>

**Experts**

This chart shows the number of prekindergarten experts interviewed by category of expertise.

<b>Expertise Category</b>	<b># of Experts Interviewed</b>
State Education Department	1
Head Start Grantee	1
State and National Expert	1
Child Care Resource and Referral Agency	5
District Pre-k Administrators Organization	1
Big Four District Wide ECE Coordinator	1
<b>Total District Representatives</b>	<b>10</b>