

**NEW YORK STATE'S PRE-K PROGRAM
WHAT'S NEW?**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
2007-2008 School Year**

How much money is there for Pre-K in this year's budget? What can it be used for?

All state-funded Pre-K—Universal and Targeted—has been rolled into a single program that will continue to be overseen by local school districts. This year \$146 million in **new** funding was added to the state budget for Pre-K, both to launch new programs in districts that have never offered Pre-K and to expand existing programs. That additional funding brings the total to \$446 million available statewide for Pre-K services. Pre-K funding is **now** available to all but nine school districts (ineligible high school and special act districts). The State Education Department (SED) will continue to have responsibility for the overall program.

Pre-K funding supports a half day program (2.5 hours) for four-year-olds for a school year (180 days). Some districts have combined Pre-K funding with other resources to support a full-day program, usually in a public school setting.

Districts with existing Targeted Pre-K programs can request a waiver to continue Targeted Pre-K at the same level of funding and under the regulations established for Targeted Pre-K. For example, with such a waiver, districts can continue to enroll three-year-olds in a continuing Targeted Pre-K program.

Have the regulations governing Pre-K changed?

There are a number of significant changes in the statute governing Pre-K. SED has drafted regulations to meet these new requirements. There will be new requirements with regard to educational standards, teacher credentials, assessments and other aspects of the program. These regulations will be posted on www.winningbeginningny.org when available.

Is there any state funding for full-day Pre-K?

Sixty-six school districts are classified as needing to develop a Contract for Excellence. These districts must submit a comprehensive plan in order to spend additional funds received as a result of the 2007-08 budget. Full-day Pre-K service is one of five strategies to improve student performance under the Contract for Excellence. The Contract guidelines indicate that Districts can fund full-day Pre-K at both community and school sites. The other four options available to Contract districts are class size reduction, increased time on task, teacher and principal quality initiatives, and middle and high school restructuring. These funds are targeted to at-risk children and low-performing schools. Districts must develop a plan for submission to SED for use of these funds by July 2007. See www.emsc.nysed.gov for copies of the guidelines and the list of eligible districts.

How do we know that Pre-K funding will be stable?

The Governor announced in his January 2007 State of the State message that he is committed to fully funding Pre-K for all four-year-olds within four years. Pre-K is identified as an integral part of a P-16 public education system. Both of these suggest permanent long-term commitment and funding.

Is there a formal planning process for districts that want to launch a new Pre-K program?

The new statute no longer requires that districts establish a broadly representative Pre-K advisory committee to develop a plan for the implementation of Pre-K in a given school district. Each newly participating district, however will need to prepare a plan to be approved by the local school board and submitted to SED.

In the past, every district was required to convene all stakeholders to map resources and recommend how to best use existing and community resources to meet children's needs. The *Winning Beginning NY* coalition strongly recommends convening an advisory/planning council that includes all local stakeholders in early childhood education, as the state required in the past. Such a council, with broad community participation, knowledge of existing resources, and expertise in early childhood education can help build on existing resources and services for preschoolers and support strategies to meet the needs of working families. Such planning can lead to Pre-K programs being established within the context of extended-day, year-round early childhood services, which greatly improves access for the most at-risk children. Currently, about 60 percent of the children enrolled in Pre-K attend classes at community sites, largely because of input from such committees, which worked to promote strong collaborations between public schools and early childhood programs in the community.

How is the funding for each district determined?

The Pre-K funding formula changed this year. The per pupil aid level is based on the amount established in the foundation formula for state education aid for that district for grades K-12. The formula utilizes a variety of factors to determine per pupil amount, with student needs, wealth of the district, and regional cost differences as the major determinants. Since Pre-K is a part-day program, districts will receive .5 FTE of the full-day level, with no district receiving less than \$2,700 per pupil. The current range is \$2,700-\$5,750.

As with other grades, the local school district must submit enrollment figures for every grade by the end of October referred to as the BEDS date. This process will be used to determine the number of aidable Pre-K students for whom the district will actually receive funding for the 2007-2008 school year.

How do I find out the number of children to be served in Pre-K in my district for the 2007-2008 school year?

Each district has received notification of the level of funding and number of children to be served. *Winning Beginning NY* has posted a chart listing the amount of funding and number of children to be served at www.winningbeginningny.org. The information is also available on SED's Web site at: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/latestinfo2007bud.htm>.

Are school districts still required to contract with early childhood programs to provide a minimum of 10% of their Pre-K services?

Yes, a minimum of 10% of instructional services must be provided in other than public school settings. Programs that provide Pre-K services must be selected through a competitive RFP process.

Districts will be required to provide professional development opportunities for teachers in all settings and to monitor both the fiscal and program components at community sites.

Districts can contract with eligible early childhood programs, including but not limited to child care centers, Head Start programs, local nursery schools, 4410 programs and family child care as well as museums and libraries.

To be eligible, these community-based organizations (CBOs) must meet the regulatory standards that apply.

- Early childhood programs across the state serving seven or more children under age 13 for more than **three hours per day per child** must meet the regulatory standards established by the NYS Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS). Separate regulatory standards apply for New York City.

- Nursery schools that operate for three hours or less do not need to meet the requirements of OCFS.
- Head Start Programs that operate for three hours or more must meet the licensing standards established by OCFS and must meet the Head Start program and funding standards.
- Preschool Special Education programs (4410 schools) must meet the regulatory standards of OCFS if they serve children for more than three hours per day and in addition they must meet the program and funding requirements established by SED.
- Family child care and group family child care providers who care for more than three children must meet the regulatory requirements established by New York State.

How will districts select programs to participate in Pre-K?

Each district will be required to select Pre-K providers through an RFP process. To be considered, community programs must meet all current regulatory standards. Agencies will be selected based on selection criteria identified by SED. These include both administrative and program requirements. The district must conduct at least one site visit before entering into a contract with a CBO.

Sample RFPs, contracts, program assessment tools, and enrollment forms are available at www.winningbeginninyny.org.

If I am a community-based early childhood program and I want to serve children in Pre-K, what steps do I take?

Contact your local school district to indicate your interest and request that you be sent an RFP. Consider how to make the strongest case for how your programs and others can support the local effort to promote early learning in your community. It also will be important to identify the assets that you offer, such as professionals with experience in working with four-year-olds, facilities designed to serve young children, and the capacity to expand. Some programs, such as Head Start, can offer transportation and other social supports. For more information about how Pre-K is working in your community, contact your local child care resource and referral agency. (To find your local agency, contact the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council at 518-690-4217 or visit www.nysecccnys.org.)

What are current requirements for classroom teachers?

Requirements regarding teacher certification are expected to change over the next several years. SED is expected to propose that by 2008 all Pre-K teachers outside the public schools must have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field and

a written plan to become professionally certified within five years. For the 2007 school year, a Pre-K classroom teacher does not need to meet these requirements if there is a director with certification on site. The Board of Regents will review these new proposed requirements at their May board meeting.

Will there be a required curriculum for Pre-K classrooms? How will programs be assessed?

New York State will not mandate a specific curriculum, but the regulations will set forth clear guidelines about the educational goals of the program. In particular, SED will expect the Pre-K curricula to be aligned with K-12 standards whether in the schools or in a community setting. There are a number of well-developed curricula available to early childhood programs. Some programs develop their own.

Each district will be expected to establish an assessment process to determine a developmental baseline for each child and evaluate on-going student progress. It is expected that the same process will be used in both public schools and community settings.

Is there a standard process for how children will be selected for this program across the state?

Beginning this year, each district must establish a policy to assure random selection of children for Pre-K. Some participating districts have selected children through a lottery; others have established a cut off date for enrollment. This policy may present certain challenges for districts with existing Pre-K programs that have already begun the recruitment process. It may also pose challenges for community programs that serve families for an extended day and must meet other regulatory guidelines to determine eligibility for services. It will be important for districts to work with their community partners to identify a process that meets these multiple demands.

What are the expectations regarding services for children with special needs?

The Regulations will provide guidance to each district to maximize the opportunities to serve children in integrated settings and to continue to increase that number until an appropriate target is met. The Governor has announced that he will appoint a commission to review NYS's strategy for better meeting the needs of preschool children with special needs.

Are there good models for how community-based programs can combine Pre-K with other sources of funding to offer extended day, year-round options to families?

Yes, there is substantial experience across the state with a variety of different models. With 60% of Pre-K services currently provided by early childhood programs in the community, such as child care centers, special education, and Head Start programs, there is a vast storehouse of knowledge on how to structure programs and funding. Such

strategies often make the most of existing resources and create options that meet the diverse needs of families.

Local school districts, social service districts, and Head Start grantee agencies working together can develop the most appropriate strategies for maximizing the use of resources. Some schools have out-stationed teachers in community-based programs. Others have developed coordinated professional development opportunities and focused on the transitions from CBOs to public school settings. Still others have created opportunities for intensive technical assistance supports in schools and CBOs to strengthen the quality of programs in all settings. Many have identified substantial benefits from this type of collaboration.

Some options to consider:

1. Extend a part-day Head Start program to full school or extended day to better meet the needs of low-income families.
2. Link child care funding with Pre-K to support enhanced curriculum, professional development, and teacher compensation.
3. Provide integrated early childhood services in a 4410 program utilizing the resources of special education and integrating classrooms with normally developing children.
4. Provide opportunities for children with identified special needs to enroll in a child care classroom, leveraging a combination of funding.
5. Extend a school day or part-day preschool program to better meet the needs of families and provide extended early learning opportunities to children.
6. Visit www.ecsgnyc.org and www.winningbeginningny.org for examples of how programs have braided and blended funding to create these service options in New York City.

Resource Summary

Information about Prek Implementation including sample contracts and other information: www.winningbeginningny.org

Universal Prekindergarten(UPK) Web page: www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/upk.html

UPK Grant Applications: www.emsc.nysed.gov

Information about community-based providers: Contact your local child care resource and referral agency to identify the CCRR serving your school District. Contact the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council at www.nyscccc.org.