

Research Briefing: Parents and Voters Support UPK

Summary of research prepared for the Winning Beginning NY Campaign

New York's state-funded Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program gives 4-year-olds a jump-start on learning by providing two-and-a-half hours a day of classes aimed at meeting their social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, cultural, and physical needs.



Studies have found that children who attend Pre-K enter kindergarten better prepared and do better throughout their school lives. They are 50% less likely to need special education services and 25% less likely to repeat a grade by the third grade, according to New York State Department of Education studies.

Both parents and non-parents alike recognize the value of early education programs like UPK. Two recent surveys show this support: One questioned voters about funding for early education; the other surveyed parents of children in New York City's UPK program.

This briefing is one of a series of papers providing evidence that public-supported early education programs work. Covering both academic research and program implementation, the series is published by Winning Beginning NY, a statewide campaign working to inform policy-makers and the public about the many benefits of early education to children, families and society. The campaign aims to build a broad-based constituency to make investment in early care and education a top public priority in New York State.



A 2002 survey of New York voters showed that 74% of respondents — both parents and non-parents — favor state funding for high-quality prekindergarten programs.

New Yorkers Support State Funding for UPK

A 2002 survey of New York voters showed that 74% of respondents—both parents and non-parents—favor state funding for high-quality prekindergarten programs. Also, 62% think the state is not doing enough to make sure families with young children have access to affordable early education.

Reasons for Early Education

- When asked why they think it is important to have early education programs, 66% of respondents agreed, “many children who take part in programs do better when they enter elementary school.” Also, they agreed that Pre-K children “score higher in basic skills tests.”
- Further, 62% agreed that having children take part in programs strengthens families by giving parents the support they need to help their children get a good start.
- Well over half (59%) said good programs “help motivate young children to become problem-solvers” and to become more successful in school, work and in their communities.



Current Access and Obstacles

- When asked what the biggest obstacles facing parents in finding early education programs are, 42% of survey respondents said many programs are too expensive.
- Well over half (59%) said good programs “cost a lot more than most working families can afford.”
- More than half of those polled (52%) said those prekindergarten programs should be free to all children regardless of their families’ income.

Early Education Funding

- Asked if they support state funding so all parents who want to are able to send their children to high-quality programs, most New Yorkers (74%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.
- 62% of respondents said the government is doing too little to ensure that all parents have access to affordable early education programs.
- Asked for their choice among public funding preferences, 36% said they were willing to pay more taxes; 51% said they support programs but want them funded within the existing state budget.

Parent Voices

My son rushes out the door to school everyday. He loves it so much; he never wants to be late. He's thriving (in UPK). It has been an enriching environment for him. He loves his teacher and the staff, and he never wants to miss a day of school. Early education is the best gift you can give any young child.

— Yolanda Badillo

My daughter is now in UPK, and I believe that it has been a boost to her early learning years. I am convinced that this program has been a huge motivation and inspiration for her.

— Miriam King

When my oldest son turned 4, he was ready for learning beyond my qualifications to teach. I could not offer the sacred social language he received in Pre-K. Through peer contact and involvement with professional childhood educators, children gain an enthusiasm for learning. These early lessons shape future academic performance.

— Amy Cappelli

Government Involvement

- When asked what the state government's role should be, 71% of New Yorkers said it should ensure the safety of prekindergarten programs by licensing and inspection standards.
- 63% of respondents said the state should ensure the quality of programs by setting standards for learning and for teacher training and education.

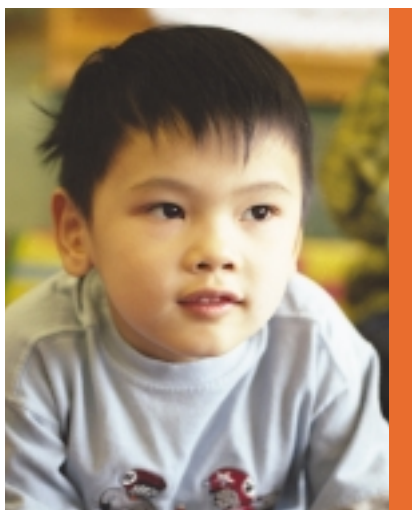
The study's key conclusion is that quality early care and education for preschool children provides significant return on investment. They close noting that their findings make the case for all children receiving a quality education in their first five years of life.



Parents Give New York City UPK High Marks

New York City's UPK program—which serves about 43,000 4-year-olds in 32 school districts—earned high marks from parents in a 2002 study.

More than 7,500 parents whose children attended a UPK program during the 2000-01 school year responded to the questionnaire. The Early Childhood Strategic Group, an assembly of more than 20 organizations supporting implementation of UPK in New York City, underwrote the study.



Among the findings cited in *A Parent Report Card: Universal Prekindergarten in New York City*:

- 99% of respondents said they felt the program would prepare their child for kindergarten.
- 99% said they would recommend the program to other parents.
- 96% felt welcomed, included and well-informed, and said program providers worked with them to keep regular, continuing communication.
- 96% described enrollment as “easy.”

Parent Voices

It has been proven that Pre-K is the foundation for school success. Full-time, early education is an investment. We depend on these full-time, good quality programs to be able to work full-time to support our families.

—Mariana Gonzalez

In Pre-K, my children began to learn to resolve conflicts and mix with other children. Pre-K programs not only lay the foundations of academic learning and socialization, but they also provide psychological support to families.

—Kirsti Kaldro

My son has gotten so much out of Pre-K this year it is unbelievable. He has learned the alphabet, learned shapes, colors, numbers, and he has made many new friends along the way.

—Rebecca Sackett

- Some 85% of parents who answered the questionnaire said they enrolled their child in the program to expose them to the educational enrichment.

A key reason for the New York City program's success is its collaboration with community-based organizations that have existing early care and education programs, such as child care centers. The enabling legislation mandated that at least 10% of UPK programs take place outside public school settings. New York City has far exceeded this mandate, with 70% of UPK students attending programs at community-based organizations.

Besides providing the space needed to serve as many eligible children as possible, such settings help some working parents with child care, since children can receive UPK and child care in the same location.



The Center for Early Care and Education, created in 1999, is a collaboration of Child Care, Inc., of New York City and the Albany-based Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. CECE sponsors Winning Beginning NY, a statewide campaign stressing the importance of quality early care and education to all New Yorkers—children, families, employers, and society at large. The campaign receives support from the Pew Charitable Trusts' initiative to advance high quality prekindergarten for the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds through objective, policy-focused research in conjunction with state public education campaigns and national outreach.



Center for Early Care and Education
c/o Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
150 State Street, 4th Floor
Albany, NY 12207

Tel: 518-463-1896 ext. 23
Fax: 518-463-3364

info@winningbeginning.org
www.winningbeginning.org