



**TO:** P-12 Education Committee  
**FROM:** Ken Slentz  
**SUBJECT:** Update on Early Learning Initiatives  
**DATE:** February 4, 2013

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**   
SUMMARY

### **Issue for Discussion**

This item provides the Board with an update on Early Learning initiatives that support the Regents Reform Agenda for Early Learning Outcomes identified in Race to the Top.

### **Proposed Handling**

This update will come before the P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the February 2013 meeting.

### **Background Information**

High quality early learning programs ensure that children acquire foundational knowledge and skills necessary for success in the later grades and college- and career-readiness. The economic benefits of investing in early learning are well documented. Every dollar invested in prekindergarten produces savings to the taxpayers of approximately \$7 through reduction of remedial, special education, welfare, and criminal justice services (see <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Pre-kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten>). A cost-benefit analysis conducted for New York State demonstrates that investing in prekindergarten results in reduction of grade repetition and the need for special education services<sup>1</sup>. These reductions, along with other increased learning benefits, offset 41% to 62% of total spending on primary grade education, which translated to a savings of between 1.9% and 2.8% of total New York State education expenses. As New York has a higher rate of special education placement than the national average, the State stands to benefit even more than others by implementing and sustaining high quality early education programs.

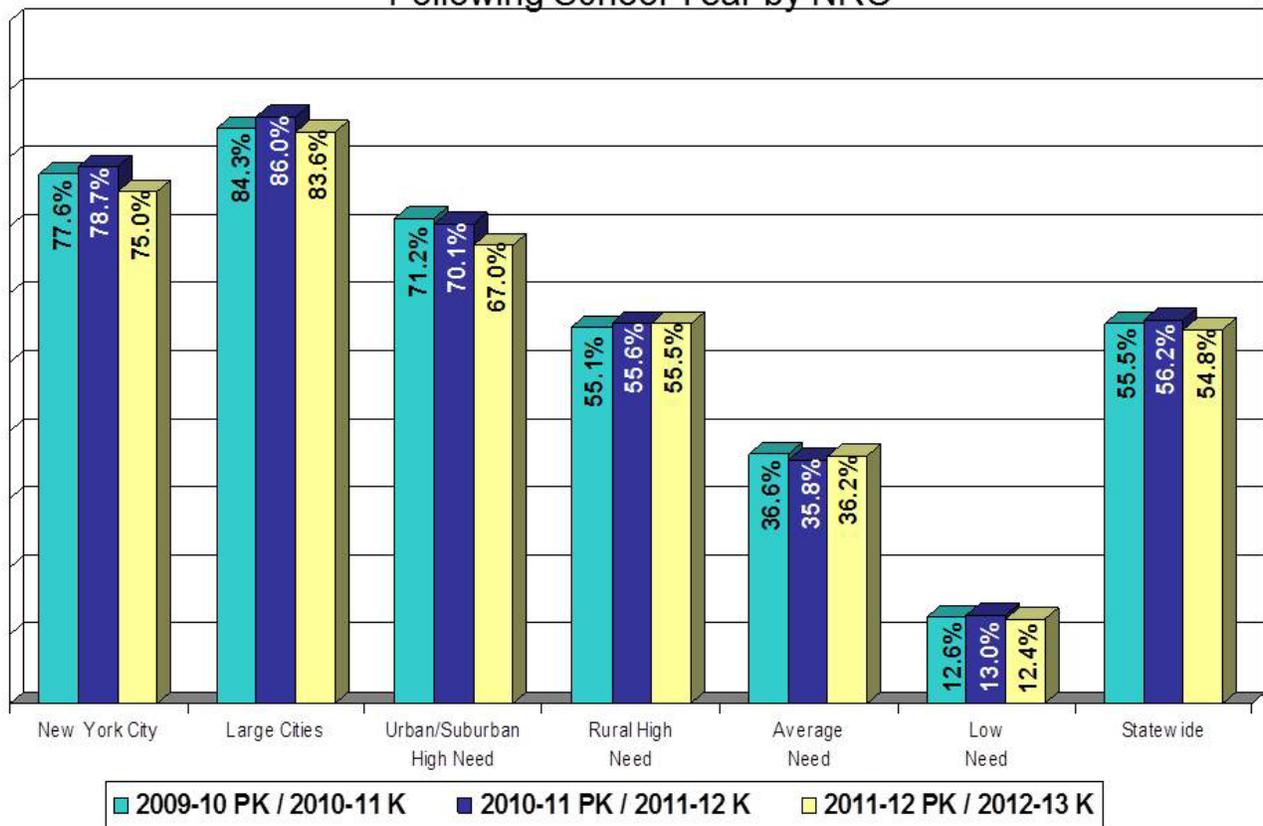
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<sup>1</sup> Belfield, Clive R. (2004) *Early Education: How Important Are the Cost Savings to the School System Research Briefing*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University

Because it is in the State's long-term educational and economic interests to enable the most at-risk four year old children to participate in full-day prekindergarten programs, the Regent's Proposal on State Aid to School Districts included a full-day prekindergarten grant program that would support the goals of universal prekindergarten (UPK) and expand full day programming outside of the current cap on State Aid. This approach would augment current funding and provide additional full day opportunities for prekindergarten students who are at educational risk due to poverty, English language learner status, disabilities, and/or other criteria placing children at-risk prior to entering kindergarten.

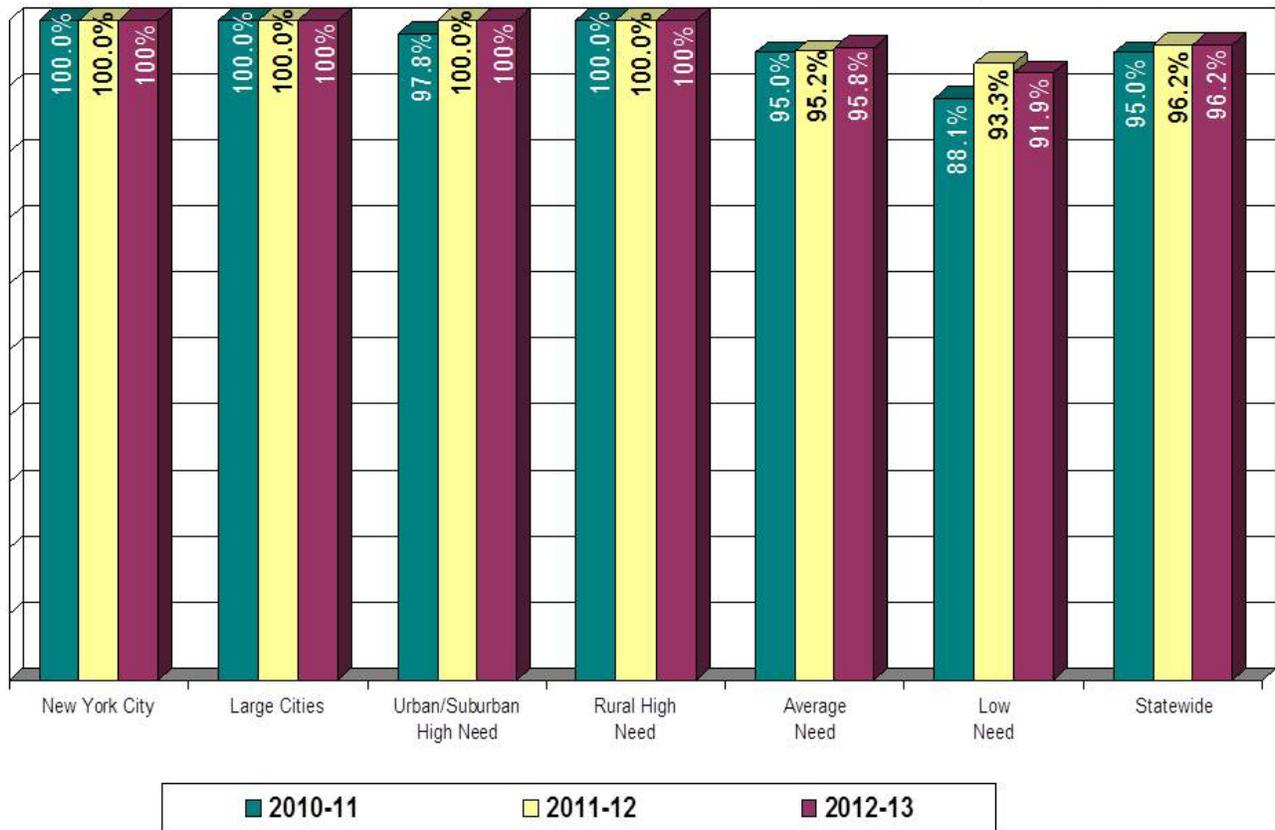
At the October 2012 meeting of P-12 Education Committee, the Board requested additional information regarding the percentage of prekindergarten (PK) children being served by school districts, as well as data pertaining to the provision of full-day kindergarten. Figure 1 displays the percentage of students enrolled in PK programs in public school districts (excluding charter schools) as a percentage of the following year's kindergarten cohort for the 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12 school years, disaggregated by Need/Resource Category (NRC). Figure 2 displays the percentage of public school districts by N/RC that offered full-day kindergarten programs for the 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13 school years. Data presented for the current (2012-13) school year are preliminary.

Figure 1: PK Students as a Percent of Kindergarten Enrollment for the Following School Year by NRC



\* These data do not include charter and private schools. 2012-13 school year data are preliminary.

Figure 2: Percent of Districts Offering Full-Day Kindergarten by NRC



\* These data do not include charter and private schools. 2012-13 school year data are preliminary.

As can be seen by the data, although larger percentages of students are served in PK programs in higher need school districts, these percentages have decreased slightly over the past two years, particularly in the urban high need districts. The percentage of students served by full-day kindergarten is high and relatively constant over the past three years.

### Update on Race to the Top Initiatives Focused on Increasing Early Childhood Program Quality in Selected School Districts

High quality early learning opportunities provide a strong foundation for school readiness. QUALITYstarsNY is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system designed to ensure that New York's pre-kindergarten-age children have the opportunity to experience high quality early learning experiences. The purpose of this voluntary system is to: 1) increase program quality in all types of early learning settings throughout the State, including schools, child care centers, and day care; and 2) give parents the information they need to make a more informed choice when electing early learning programs for their children.

The State Education Department (SED) has allocated \$4 million of its federal Race to the Top grant to support implementation of QUALITYstarsNY. These funds are being administered through a Memorandum of Agreement between SED and the City University of

New York's (CUNY) Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI). This initiative supports QUALITYstarsNY participation by early childhood education providers, including Universal Pre-Kindergartens and SED Registered Nursery Schools, in communities that have one or more of the State's lowest performing Focus and/or Priority schools. See Appendix for locations of participating programs.

In December 2012, PDI completed the recruitment and selection of 418 early education programs to participate in QUALITYstarsNY. Selected programs must submit a self-study and supporting documentation for review using program standards by March. Each participating classroom will be evaluated by an independent assessor using the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ERS)*, which evaluates programs using dimensions such as Space and Furnishings; Personal Care Routines; Language-Reasoning; Activities; Interactions; Programs and Structure; and Parents and Staff. By the end of June, each program will receive a preliminary rating of one to five stars based on information gathered from the self-study and the ERS evaluation. The star rating is determined using a point system based on Learning Environment, Family Engagement, Qualifications and Experience, and Management.

The initial star rating is intended to help program educators and administrators develop a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) focused on all areas identified as needing improvement. One of twelve Quality Improvement Specialists statewide will work with each program site to assist in identifying resources and other supports for implementation of QIPs beginning in the spring 2013 through August 2014. A significant portion of the funding for QUALITYstarsNY will be used to provide high quality professional development and incentives to help sites meet the goals identified in the QIPs.

Parents and families will be able to use program star ratings to make a more informed decision as to where they would like their child to attend preschool. In addition, online resources will be posted at <http://qualitystarsny.org> beginning in summer 2013 to help parents and families better understand child development, nutrition, family literacy, and how best to prepare their child for elementary school. For those parents who do not have access to technology, resources will be made available through their child's classroom, other community agencies, public libraries and museums.

## **Summary**

The Regents have developed a comprehensive approach to increasing access to high quality early learning opportunities for our neediest children. QUALITYstarsNY supports the Regents Reform Agenda for Early Learning Outcomes identified in Race to the Top. This initiative is intended to strengthen the quality of early childhood programs in high need school districts and provide parents with tools to identify high quality early learning environments. QUALITYstarsNY will help ensure comprehensive improvements in 418 of the State's early childhood programs, and, as a result of this investment, four-year-old students from 1,588 classrooms will be better prepared for elementary school success. This investment will achieve maximum benefit when lessons learned are applied to other early childhood programs in combination with comprehensive approaches that increase student access to PK and kindergarten programs.

Appendix:  
 QUALITYstarsNY Participant Data  
 (as of 1/25/13)

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u># of Programs</u>
Albany	39
Bronx	31
Broome	9
Chemung	8
Clinton	5
Dutchess	10
Erie	57
Franklin	3
Kings	42
Monroe	32
Nassau	44
New York	3
Onondaga	32
Queens	17
Rockland	4
Richmond	2
Schenectady	22
Suffolk	23
Westchester	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>418</b>