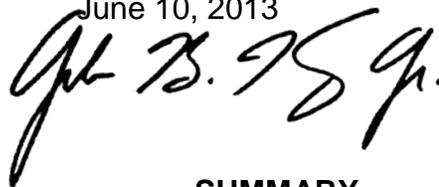




TO: P-12 Education Committee
FROM: Ken Slentz 
SUBJECT: Increasing Access and Quality of Universal Prekindergarten Grant

DATE: June 10, 2013

AUTHORIZATION(S):



SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The 2013-2014 Enacted Budget will make an additional \$25 million of the \$75 million NY Education Reform Commission Competitive Grants available to fund additional Universal Prekindergarten grants for the 2013-2014 school year. Grant funding may be used to establish new full-day placements, convert existing half-day placements to full-day or create new half-day placements. Grant funding must be used to supplement, not supplant, existing Universal Prekindergarten programs.

Background Information

An abundance of research finds that investing in high-quality prekindergarten programs has a positive long-term impact on children's life outcomes, narrows the achievement gap between poor and affluent youth, and provides benefits to children and taxpayers that outweigh their cost. High quality prekindergarten programs, especially those serving low-income or high need students, will help those students stay on track to graduate from high school and, over the long term, significantly reduce costs for remedial education, social services, health and criminal justice programs.

The New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core was approved by the Board of Regents in October of 2011. This document provides a framework for rigorous instruction within the five critical developmental domains. Carefully developed early learning expectations linked to K-12 standards contribute to a more cohesive, unified approach to young children's education. This focus has resulted in a robust, nationally recognized Universal Prekindergarten program with an investment by the State exceeding \$380 million a year.

Regents Commitment to Early Childhood Education

The Board of Regents has a history of supporting early childhood education. In December 2012, the Regents adopted a 2013-2014 State Aid Proposal that recommended dedicating \$75 million to provide high-quality full-day Universal Pre-kindergarten programming for some of New York's most at-risk students. The Regents chose to focus on early childhood education because there is overwhelming evidence that it is much more effective to give a student a high-quality early education start than it is to close achievement gaps later in the student's life through costly remediation.

Further demonstrating the Department's commitment to early childhood education, the Board of Regents has allocated \$4 million of its federal Race to the Top grant to support implementation of QUALITYstarsNY in communities that have one or more of the State's lowest performing Focus and/or Priority schools. 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.

According to an analysis from NYSED's State Aid Workgroup, Universal Prekindergarten was launched in 1998 with a statutory funding formula designed to achieve statewide implementation within four years. Universal Prekindergarten then stalled with funding frozen at the 2008-09 level and districts not already offering a Universal Prekindergarten program in 2008-09 were no longer eligible to apply. Expanding the number of slots and restructuring the program to offer full day programming, with a focus on serving low income students, is vital to implementing the Regents Reform Agenda.

There are several issues to consider in supporting a Universal Prekindergarten program aligned with the Regents Reform Agenda:

- Statewide programs are not yet universal due primarily to funding limitations;
- 20 high need school districts do not currently offer Universal Prekindergarten;
- Districts most often use the current funding to provide half-day sessions;
- The current funding levels are not adequate to support more intensive, full day educational programming;
- The current structure excludes some children who could benefit but whose parents are not available to transport them mid-day; and
- The original Universal Prekindergarten statute precluded districts from applying additional criteria for selection of children, such as giving priority to students with the greatest educational need due to poverty and other adverse life circumstances.

The State Aid Committee then did an analysis of Universal Prekindergarten programming by needs index category in November of 2012 which clearly indicates that there continue to be gaps in reaching children eligible for Universal Prekindergarten.

UPK Enrollment by Need Resource Capacity Category

Need Resource Capacity Category	Percent of All Four-year-olds Served in UPK Program	Percent of UPK Students in Half-Day Programs	Percent of UPK Students in Full-Day Programs
(1) New York City	77%	73%	27%
(2) Big 4 cities	85%	61%	39%
(3) High Need Urban/Suburban	67%	74%	26%
(4) High Need Rural	52%	80%	20%
(5) Average Need	33%	91%	9%
(6) Low Need	10%	99%	1%

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 Universal Prekindergarten programs. According to a 2004 study cited by the Regents, every dollar invested in Pre-kindergarten programs produces savings to taxpayers of approximately \$7 through the reduction of remediation, special education, welfare and criminal justice services.¹ The Regents are proposing a full-day prekindergarten grant program that would support the goals of Universal Prekindergarten 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. Districts would be required to maintain existing numbers of Universal Prekindergarten children and would access supplemental funds to increase the number of full day slots at district locations or through the use of community based organizations.

2013-2014 Enacted State Budget

The 2013-2014 enacted state budget provided \$25 million in competitive grant funding to establish new full-day and half-day pre-kindergarten placements and to convert existing half-day placements into full-day placements based, in part, on district and student need.

Budget funds will be used to expand the NYSED's Universal Preschool program to high need children in high need districts in order to increase learning opportunities and support young children's development in early childhood education. This support results in children who can enter kindergarten better prepared to learn and succeed in elementary and secondary schools.

¹ 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

Chapter 53, Section 1 of the Laws of 2013 establishes several requirements that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must meet or assure to be eligible to receive an Increasing Access and Quality of Universal Prekindergarten grant.

- The LEA must have submitted documentation that has been approved by the Commissioner by September 1, 2013 demonstrating that it has fully implemented new standards and procedures for conducting annual professional performance review of classroom teachers and building principals to determine teacher and principal effectiveness as required by Section 3012-c of Education Law.
- Programs funded with this grant must provide instruction for at least five hours per school day for full-day programs and at least two and one-half hours per school day for half-day prekindergarten programs.
- Programs must offer instruction consistent with the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core.
- To the extent that community-based organizations are part of the program, the instructional staff must meet the requirements of paragraphs d-1 and d-2 of subdivision 12 of Section 3602-e of Education Law.
- Programs funded with this grant must comply with all the same rules and requirements as Universal Prekindergarten programs funded pursuant to Section 3602-e of Education Law.
- The LEA must ensure that any measurement of student outcomes will not be used to make high-stakes, educational decisions for individual children.
- The LEA must agree to adopt approved program quality indicators within two years, including, but not limited to, valid and reliable measures of environmental quality, the quality of teacher-student interactions and student outcomes.

Eligible Children Under the New Competitive Grant Program

Education Law defines an eligible student for Universal Prekindergarten as a child who resides in the school district who is four years of age on or before December 1st of the year in which he or she will be enrolled or who will otherwise be first eligible to attend public school kindergarten the following school year. Children who are eligible for kindergarten enrollment are not eligible for Universal Prekindergarten.

While the Universal Prekindergarten program rules require the random selection of children for enrollment when there are more applicants than available slots, for purposes of this grant, LEAs must prioritize serving the highest need children and schools within the district.

Proposal Components for the New Complete Grant Program

Factors that will be considered in making awards are: measures of district need; measures of the needs of students to be served by the district; the school district's proposal to focus services on the highest need schools and students; the extent to which the district's proposal will prioritize funds to maximize the total number of eligible children in the district served in prekindergarten programs; and proposal quality.

Next Step

The Commissioner will develop and issue the Universal Prekindergarten procurement.