



New York State Education Department

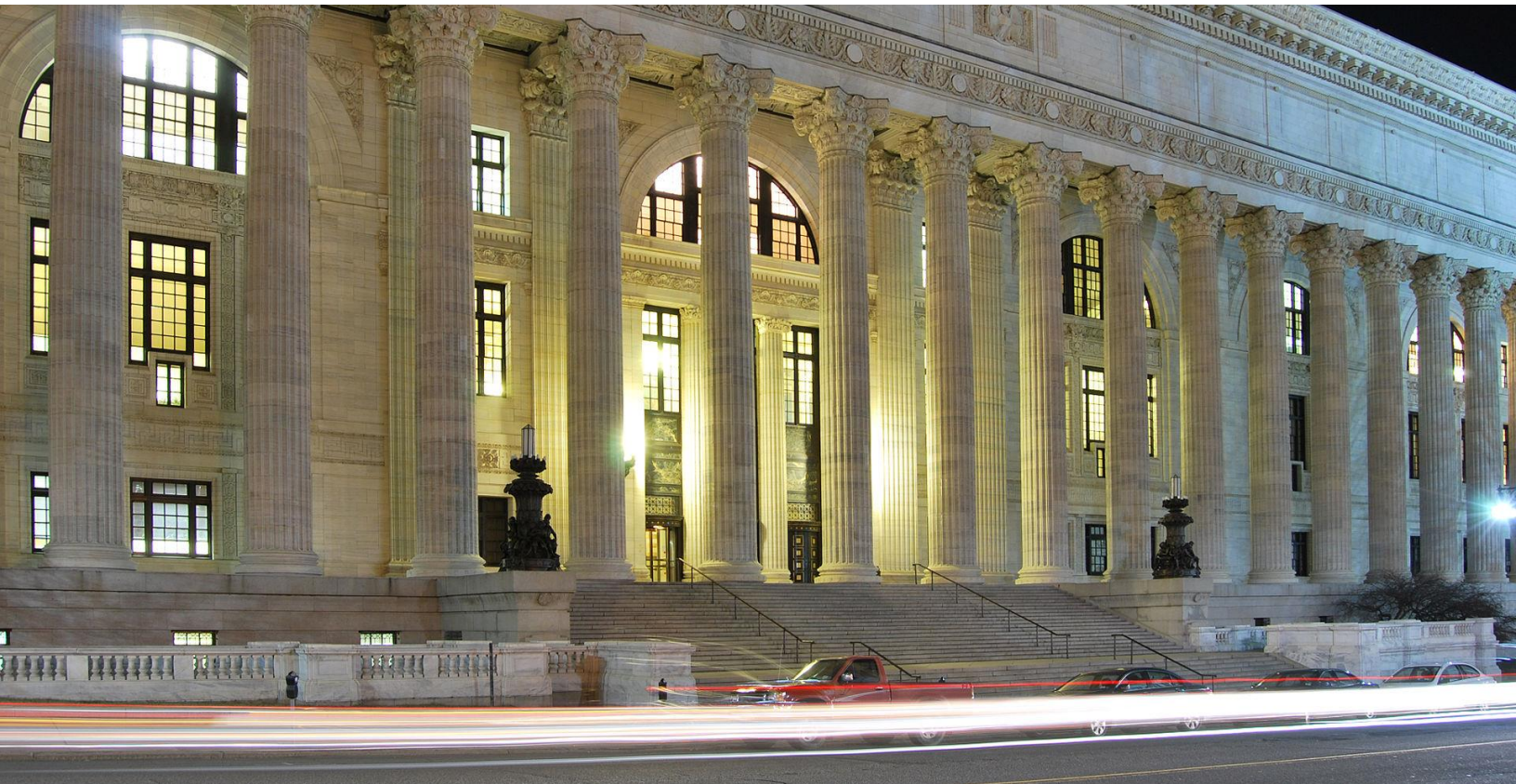
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NYS Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup's Blue Ribbon Committee

Final Budget Recommendations

December 2017



New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

NYS Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup's Blue Ribbon Committee

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Background

In New York, like many states, a student's academic path is significantly impacted by his or her third-grade academic performance. Without the strong start that high-quality early childhood education provides, students who are not proficient in reading by the third grade may never catch up, creating an achievement disparity that increases as they move through the K-12 school system. This finding is most evident for children who are socio-economically in need; children with special needs; children whose first language is other than English; and children who are black, Hispanic or recent immigrants. What is needed is a clear, coherent, and comprehensive strategy to ensure that all of New York State's children have the fairness of an even start.

The immediate task before the New York State Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup is to prepare a reasoned set of budget recommendations that will be presented to the full Board of Regents for consideration and inclusion in the 2018-19 Budget Request. To accomplish this task, the Workgroup relied on the informed judgment of a Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC), made up of stakeholders representing: researchers, practitioners, policy makers, elected officials, teachers, school administrators, and parents. Representation was not confined to one part of the state; in fact, special efforts were made to ensure a valid and reliable cross section of New York State. We received input from stakeholders with expertise in early care and education from New York State and the nation. Throughout our process, whether at Teachers College in Central Harlem; Nazareth College in a suburb of Rochester; or Mercy College in Westchester County, there was a clear consensus on two facts: quality and investments matter for young children.

Research substantiates that children who attend high-quality early care and education programs are better prepared for kindergarten, have stronger language skills in the first years of elementary school, and are less likely to repeat a grade or drop out of school.¹ High-quality early care and education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment—more than \$7 for every dollar spent—by reducing future expenditures on special education, public assistance, and the criminal justice system.² Based on this research, the science of brain development and learning, and the Workgroup's desire to eliminate New York State's fragmented early care, preschool, and early childhood education, the BRC set out to accomplish its task. Finally, a key priority of the Workgroup was to ensure that deliberations and recommendations were both sensitive and responsive to race, culture, ethnicity, language, citizenship status, and socio-economic status.

Context for the BRC Recommendations:

Emerging from our deliberations was the overarching vision of ***transforming the birth to age eight early care and education system in the state of New York***. We envision a New York where ALL CHILDREN thrive from birth, flourish in preschool, enter the school age program on a trajectory of success, and are academically proficient in third grade by growing up healthy and having opportunities for high-quality early learning experiences that are culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate.

¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children, Developmental Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Servicing Children from Birth through Age 8, 2009.

² Early Childhood Education. Strategy No. 5 in A Blueprint For Great Schools report from the Transition Advisory Team, California Department of Education August 9, 2011.

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Developmentally appropriate practice is informed by what we know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn. For example, all the domains of development and learning—physical, social and emotional, psychological, cognitive and linguistic—are important, and they are inextricably interrelated. A child’s development and learning in one domain are influenced by what takes place in other domains.³ In addition to domain interrelationships, development and learning requires viewing each child within the cultural context of that child’s family, language spoken, and community, as well as within the broader society. These various contexts, interacting with the domains of development, have a major influence on the developing child. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) identifies the following essential principles of child development and learning that inform practice:

- Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers;
- Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience;
- Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s individual functioning;
- Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competency;
- Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills;
- Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn, these dispositions and behaviors affect their learning and development; and
- Development and learning occur in, and are influenced by, multiple social, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

The BRC also concluded that programs and services that support the healthy development of young children cannot be the sole purview of the education system. It is incumbent that state policy makers work across sectors. This concept of shared responsibility is supported by the recent recommendations of New York State’s First 1000 Days on Medicaid, “***These are the same kids and families in different systems across time.***”⁴

Recommendations

The target of the Blue Ribbon Committee’s recommendations is to transform the birth to age eight early care and education system in the state of New York. To accomplish this task, the Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup has adopted a five-year phased-in approach for education and legislative policies. The priority is to serve children with greatest need and reflect a coordinated effort with other state agencies and initiatives.

The following budget recommendations, which total \$37 million for the 2018-19 State Fiscal Year, have been thoughtfully prepared and reflect the constraints of the current fiscal climate. The following budget proposals will begin the process of aligning and integrating our work to ensure that all New

³ Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009.

⁴ New York State’s First 1000 Days on Medicaid Presentation, New York State Department of Health, November 2017.

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York State's children experience improved outcomes through access to services that are developmentally appropriate and responsive to culture, race, ethnicity, language, citizenship status, and socioeconomic status.

1. Provide \$20M in year one to expand the Prekindergarten Program to approximately 2,000 four-year-old children in 40 school districts, targeting areas of highest need first, and phasing in additional funds over subsequent years until Prekindergarten is fully universal for four-year-old children in New York State. Child seats would be funded at \$10,000 per child or double the district's half-day Universal Prekindergarten allocation, whichever is greater, until an alternate funding method is developed pursuant to a study of the actual costs of quality Prekindergarten programs in New York State.

Budget Rationale: During the 2016-17 school year, approximately 120,000 four-year-old children were served in state-administered prekindergarten programs, representing 65% of the State's eligible four-year-old population. The total number of eligible four-year-old children in New York State is currently 181,500. A \$20 million increase in the 2018-19 budget would enable 2,000 more four-year old children to be served; the overall percentage of students served in New York State would increase to just under 70%. It's important to note that 30% of the State's eligible four-year-old children would still not be served. NYSED projects that it would cost a total of \$280 million to fully fund those districts that are not currently receiving state-funded prekindergarten dollars. An annual increase of funds for prekindergarten by at least \$30 million for each of the next 10 years would bring the overall percentage from its current 65% percent to an estimated 82% of the total four-year-old population in New York State.

2. Provide \$300,000 to conduct a cost study to validate the actual cost of a high-quality prekindergarten program for all four-year-old children, with appropriate weightings for areas of economic disadvantage, emergent multilingual learners, and students with disabilities, followed by a similar study for three-year-old children.

Budget Rationale: Although New York State currently has several funding structures for prekindergarten programs, a common concern among early childhood stakeholders is that the existing funding methods do not adequately cover the actual cost of operating a high-quality program that is responsive to community and student needs. A request for proposals would be issued to an entity to conduct the cost study.

3. Provide \$6M for pilot programs which will target funding to half-day and full-day 10-month and summer inclusion prekindergarten programs for three and four-year-old children. Funds would be blended and layered with existing prekindergarten and preschool special education funding to support classrooms comprised of both preschool students with and without disabilities, which will be subject to a newly developed methodology pursuant to Chapter 59 of the law of 2017.

Budget Rationale: In the 2017-18 enacted State budget, NYSED was directed to develop an alternative funding methodology for preschool Special Education Integrated Setting (SCIS) programs. SCIS programs provide specially designed instruction and related services to preschool students with disabilities alongside their peers who do not have disabilities. Due in large part to the separate and inadequate funding structure, there are not enough early childhood programs operating a SCIS model, and many existing SCIS programs do not have sufficient numbers of typically developing peers in their classrooms. The \$6M would create a pilot program to target and combine resources needed to serve both student populations in the same

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classroom. These new funds would be blended and layered with current early childhood and preschool special education dollars to add approximately 600 new preschool seats.

4. Provide \$2M to establish five Early Learning Regional Technical Assistance Centers (TAC) to provide support to early care and educational settings (i.e. in areas that include mental health consultation, training in the use of the Pyramid Model, professional development on implementing high-quality early childhood education, among others). The TACs will develop four content area trainings and a train-the-trainer course for each content area. In addition, the TACs will support school leaders by providing professional development on topics such as differentiation, universal design, and inclusion; multilingual strategies including topics such as linguistically relevant approaches, bilingual education, English as a New Language (ENL) strategies; developmentally appropriate practice including topics such as play-based learning, cultural relevance, and language acquisition; and anti-bias training and trauma-informed care.

Budget Rationale: Currently, 11 professional staff in the Office of Early Learning, located at NYSED in Albany, are responsible for providing technical assistance and monitoring oversight to prekindergarten programs in 471 school districts and thousands of prekindergarten classrooms around the State. The regional TACs are necessary to adequately meet the needs of programs, better respond to local demographics and climates, and coordinate with existing regional support centers for Special Education and Multilingual Learners. In the next budget cycle, NYSED would request an additional \$1.5 million to fund three additional TACs, bringing the total number to eight Early Learning Regional TACs around the State.

5. Provide \$2M that is formula-driven (non-competitive) at the statewide, regional, local, and programmatic levels that gives targeted communities the opportunity to self-identify and meet their specific family and community engagement needs. The objective of the funding would be to create program models that weave family and community influence into all levels of the educational system, while reflecting the following values including, but not limited to, cultural responsiveness; family support and engagement; common / wrap-around messaging; attention to trauma and stress; and leaders as weavers. One specific evidenced-based model that could be replicated using these funds involves assigning a family advocate to assist with care beginning at the prenatal stage and continuing with the child and family as necessary through age eight.

Budget Rationale: Allocations will be used to hire family and community engagement coordinators in identified school communities using indicators to direct the funds toward high-need districts. These funds will augment and support mandated Title I allocations for family engagement and other federal and state funds with similar goals. A phased-in approach would be used so that, in subsequent years, additional funds would be available to enhance this strategy by increasing the number of school districts and contributing to the healthy development of children.

6. Provide \$3M to expand the availability of QUALITYstarsNY⁵ throughout the state by improving assessment tools and staff support; strengthening the existing system; improving coordination by leveraging all resources available for quality improvement; and expanding the number of programs and classrooms receiving support from QUALITYstarsNY. Currently, funding can only reach a small percentage of early care and education programs, yet the data shows those programs that participate in QUALITYstarsNY have better outcomes for children.

Budget Rationale: Currently, QUALITYstarsNY receives \$5M as New York State's Quality Rating and Improvement System. As of November 2017, QUALITYstarsNY served approximately 736

⁵ <http://qualitystarsny.org/discover-landing.php>

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center-based programs, family-home providers, and public schools in targeted communities. At a cost of \$300 per child, an additional \$3M will enhance services for approximately 10,000 children and strengthen the existing system, which will improve coordination by leveraging all resources available for quality improvement to programs.

7. Provide \$2.5M to adopt and implement a competency-based approach in pre-service teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development for new and existing educators and leaders, ensuring that all teachers are prepared to teach all students, especially as the student population continues to increase in diversity. This funding would be directed at professional development that requires all teachers to be culturally competent, culturally responsive, and linguistically capable.

Budget Rationale: In the first year, these funds would be directed to five Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), replicating a model called Quality Universally Inclusive Early Responsive Education. Applicants would receive scholarships to participate in the program aimed at addressing the teacher shortage in Bilingual Special Education and preparing participants to be dually certified Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Educators. Participants in this program would be expected to teach in New York State for three years upon completion of the program. NYSED recommends a phase-in approach in which additional IHEs would be funded in subsequent years.

8. Provide \$500,000 to fund the first step toward the creation of a unified HIPAA and FERPA-compliant data system to meet the needs of children and families by tracking all screening and assessment services to capture and share relevant and useful results with parents, educators, health care organizations and other agencies. The system should include a parent portal where parents can access information about their child's learning needs and progress. Initial steps include aligning existing data systems where feasible.

Budget Rationale: In the first year, NYSED would convene the necessary State agency partners to plan and design a request for proposals to fund three communities to purchase the appropriate data system that captures screening and assessments, and enables referrals across systems. Funds would also be used for training appropriate staff in early care and education settings in the selected communities to use the data system as well information technology staff to assist with the technical components of the proposal.

9. Provide \$700,000 as a first step toward the implementation of a comprehensive developmental screening process for all children ages zero to eight that includes vision, hearing, physical and dental health, speech and language skills, fine and gross motor skills, and social, emotional and cognitive development, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures Chart. This developmental screening would help inform whether a child is on track to be ready for Kindergarten. It would also inform teachers' practice, better support each child's learning and support child readiness across the State. Every effort will be made to ensure children are screened in the language spoken in the home.

Budget Rationale: In the first year, NYSED would convene the necessary state agency partners to identify the comprehensive developmental tool and to design a protocol to be followed by early care and education settings, pediatricians, home visiting programs and parents. Two communities would be selected to participate in a pilot to test the feasibility of implementing the comprehensive developmental screening process.

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Next Steps

1. The Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup and Department staff will continue to work with representatives of the Blue Ribbon Committee to finalize a set of recommendations that specifically fall in the areas of education policy and legislative priorities.
2. A final report will be developed in the coming months to be shared with the Blue Ribbon Committee, Board of Regents, and Government Officials.