



**TO:** P-12 Education Committee  
**FROM:** Ken Slentz  
**SUBJECT:** Updates on Early Learning Initiatives  
**DATE:** October 1, 2012  
**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

*John B. Slentz*  
**SUMMARY**

**Issues for Discussion**

Does the Board wish to increase access to UPK programs by seeking legislative authority to increase UPK funding, allow more flexible use of these funds, and use transportation aid for UPK transportation? Does the Board wish to re-affirm its commitment to seek universal access to full-day kindergarten?

**Reason(s) for Consideration**

For Information

**Proposed Handling**

These issues will come before the P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the October 2012 Regents meeting.

**Background Information**

There is broad research support (see Appendix A) for expanding and improving early learning opportunities for all children. 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. Children's reading skills in first grade, for example, are a reliable predictor of how they will read by the end of third grade.

The economic benefits of investing in early learning are equally 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.

### *Improving Program Quality and School Readiness through QUALITYstarsNY*

Ensuring that each of our students and their families has strong early learning opportunities and experiences provides a staircase to 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 these 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 selecting early learning programs for their children. It is important to note that the focus of QUALITYstarsNY is on program evaluation and not on teacher or administrator evaluation, although the two are not mutually exclusive.

The State Education Department (SED) has allocated \$4 million of its federal Race to the Top grant to support implementation of QUALITYstarsNY during 2012-2014. These funds are being administered through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between SED and the City University of New York (CUNY) Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI). This initiative will support QUALITYstarsNY participation by UPK and other early learning providers in communities that have one or more schools designated as Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA).

A pilot program was completed in 2010. Substantial interest was generated among a wide variety of programs and providers; 433 programs, providers and public schools applied for 250 slots. QUALITYstarsNY gained valuable information from pilot program participants, which was used to revise program standards and procedures now in place for full implementation.

Currently, PDI has completed the recruitment and selection of approximately 325 early learning centers and family providers to participate in QUALITYstarsNY during the 2012-2013 school year. They have begun outreach to public schools with the intent to recruit 60-80 public school-operated UPK classrooms to participate in QUALITYstarsNY. Public schools that wish to participate must apply by October 31, 2012; selections will be made in early November.

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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

## *Increasing Access to Universal Prekindergarten Programs*

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) was launched in New York State in 1998 with a statutory funding phase designed to achieve statewide implementation within four years. Implementation efforts to date have resulted in 454 districts implementing the program, providing services to approximately 47% of the State's four-year-old children. A primary goal of the program is to give all children – including those with disabilities – the opportunity to participate. However, UPK funding has been frozen at the 2008-09 level, and those districts not already offering a UPK program in 2008-09 are not currently eligible to apply. Beginning in 2010-11, individual district UPK allocations were capped at an amount no greater than what the district spent in 2009-10.

The chart below looks at enrollment of four-year-olds in New York's UPK programs based upon the 2011-12 BEDS data:

New York State Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)  
Percent Not Enrolled disaggregated by Need/Resource Capacity  
(Based on 2011-12 BEDS Data)

	<b>Total K*</b>	<b>Total UPK</b>	<b>Not Enrolled in UPK**</b>	<b>Percent Not Enrolled in UPK</b>
Statewide	191,250	102,367	88,883	46%
Large City	8,779	7,470	1,309	15%
New York City	74,174	56,863	17,311	23%
Urban/Suburban High Needs	17,060	11,393	5,667	33%
Rural High Needs	11,941	6,181	5,760	48%
Average Needs	55,354	18,005	37,349	67%
Low Needs	23,942	2,456	21,486	90%

\* Public school kindergarten enrollment is used as a proxy for the number of four-year-olds residing in a district. This number does not include kindergarteners enrolled in charter schools and/or private schools. For a district with significant numbers of kindergarteners enrolled in private and/or charter schools, this may result in an under-estimation of the number of four-year-olds residing in the district.

\*\* Four-year-olds not enrolled in UPK may be receiving early education services from other sources such as Head Start, preschool special education, non-public nursery schools and day care centers.

## *Increasing Funding Options for UPK*

In order to maximize the use of available UPK funds, New York State teachers, superintendents, and other early childhood stakeholders have recommended giving districts increased flexibility in using these resources to implement full-day programming and to support the cost of transporting UPK children.

When the UPK funds were established, the intent was to fund half-day programming. Half-day programming can present scheduling difficulties for parents, however, and results in additional transitions for children. Districts, particularly in large cities, often have more difficulty filling half- vs. full-day UPK slots because of the challenges in securing childcare for the remainder of the day and moving children between UPK and before-care or aftercare.

While districts have the legal authority to transport UPK children, and transportation costs are an allowable grant expense, transportation of UPK students is not eligible for Transportation Aid. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for districts – particularly rural districts – to afford the cost of transporting UPK students, thereby decreasing the number of students who will attend.

### *Increasing Access to Full-Day Kindergarten*

In January 2006, the Board adopted a comprehensive policy on “Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community.” Universal prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten were among the 11 components identified by the Board as necessary for implementation of this policy. In June 2007, the Board included support for a transition to universal full-day kindergarten in its 2008-09 state aid proposal. Data from the 2011-12 school year indicate that approximately 94% of kindergarten students statewide were reported as enrolled in full-day programs. Data for the 2012-13 school year will be shared as soon as they are available.

### **Recommendation**

A comprehensive approach to early childhood education includes access to high quality early learning programs, such as those identified through the QUALITYstarsNY program, as well as access to prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten. Therefore, Department staff recommends that the Board of Regents consider adopting a legislative priority to request additional UPK funding, provide funding flexibility to support full-day UPK programs, and allow Transportation Aid to be used for UPK transportation. In addition, staff recommends that the Board re-affirm its commitment to the transition to universal full-day kindergarten.

## Appendix A

Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J.H. (2011). *The State of Preschool 2011: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/2011yearbook.pdf>

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