

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Proposal to Align Prekindergarten Programs in New York State
January 2017

Overview

Currently, the New York State Education Department (Department) administers seven separate and distinct Prekindergarten programs in the State of New York. The purpose of this document is two-fold: 1) to recommend to the Legislature and Governor's Office the necessary actions the State should immediately take to align the seven Prekindergarten programs and 2) to inform the Legislature and Governor's Office of the negative implications associated with competitively-bidding Prekindergarten programs, especially at the time the grant contracts expire.

Implications of Administering Seven Separate Prekindergarten Programs

Actions to competitively bid Prekindergarten programs over the most recent three State budget cycles have not only complicated the system as a whole, but have created a fragmented Prekindergarten program throughout the State. The competitive process inhibits school districts, community-based organizations, and the Department from seamlessly providing high-quality Prekindergarten programs to our youngest learners.

The most illustrative and timely example of inhibiting the ability to seamlessly provide high-quality Prekindergarten programs is the \$25 million Priority Prekindergarten Program (PPK) that was enacted in the 2012-13 State Fiscal Year—the first of the four competitive programs—and is set to expire June 30, 2018. Given that it is a competitive grant with an expiration date, in accordance with State Office of the Comptroller rules, the funds would need to be re-bid requiring currently-funded school districts to competitively re-apply for PPK funding with no guarantee of continued funding. This would likely result in some new districts being awarded and some currently-funded districts losing funding which would force currently-funded districts to close their Prekindergarten program. This would leave a disruption in services and uncertainty for families who have counted on the school district to provide Prekindergarten programs, not to mention the media attention that would occur announcing districts that lost Pre-K seats.

Each of these **seven** separate Prekindergarten programs (see Table 1) has a unique funding stream with varying requirements for quality standards and different mechanisms for data collection and reporting. For school districts and community-based organizations that receive funding for multiple Prekindergarten programs, these varying requirements become an administrative burden at the local level. Another concern is the fact that the 2016-17 Enacted Budget, the seventh separate and distinct Prekindergarten program, is exclusively for three-year olds. New York has not yet made Prekindergarten universal for four-year olds, despite in his 2013 State of the State Address, Governor Cuomo promised to make Prekindergarten universal in five years. In fact, with all of the increased funding for Prekindergarten over the past three State Fiscal Years, only 62% of New York State's eligible four-year olds are being served.

Recommendations

To align all of the current Prekindergarten programs to eliminate the fragmentation of the system, the Department recommends the following:

1. Utilize the allocational process, which has been used for the original Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) since 1997, to fund school districts for Prekindergarten programs. The creation of a single, allocational program will allow school districts and the Department to focus efforts on increasing the quality of Prekindergarten by providing technical assistance and professional development to schools, rather than spending staff time on the administrative requirements necessary to implement a competitive procurement process which is very time consuming and cumbersome in nature. *For example, once the budget passes in April, selected districts would receive PreKindergarten funds through the allocational process and, in May, begin hiring teachers, determining space, selecting curriculum, and delivering professional development and training prior to the beginning of the school year in September, allowing more time to focus on quality education;*
2. Amend the appropriation language to state that once the competitive grants expire (i.e., the PPK will expire on June 30, 2018), the total amount of funds should be absorbed into the school district's UPK allocation formula in order to maintain the greater number of children served each year. This would show the State's commitment to maintaining and sustaining Prekindergarten seats following the conclusion of the grant, and would align each of the Prekindergarten programs over time, as each grant expires. The appropriation language should state that the funds for the \$25 million Priority PreK Program should be added to the respective districts' UPK allocation. For example, if a school district received a \$1 million PPK grant to serve 100 students and also had \$2 million to serve 200 students in the 2016-17 school year, the appropriation language would be changed for the 2017-18 school year to state that the district would receive an allocation of \$3 million to serve 300 students¹. *Similarly, the \$340 million Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program is set to expire on June 30, 2019. To ensure continuity for the 53 school districts that receive funds for this program, the enacted budget should fold this grant program into the State's 2018-19 school year UPK allocation, and continue this process until all grant-funded Prekindergarten programs expire;* and
3. The Department would also amend Commissioner's regulations 151-1 to include necessary language regarding:
 - *Three-year olds*
 - *Quality standards*
 - *Health and safety*
 - *Monitoring and oversight of physical plant and quality standards*
 - *Data collection*
 - *English Language Learners*
 - *Suspension and Expulsion*

It is also important to note that the Department fully supports universal Prekindergarten for four-year olds and recommends that before creating additional funding for three-year olds the State should finish providing Prekindergarten services to four-year olds.

Should the State take these actions, the following efficiencies will occur:

¹ The actual number of students would not be in the appropriation language. This is just an example to show that the grant funds would change to an increased allocation once the grant expired.

- The Prekindergarten program would become aligned over time, eliminating a fragmented Prekindergarten system;
- School districts and families would benefit from the assurance of ongoing, coordinated, and dependable funding for early childhood educational programs in their communities; and
- There would be additional time to focus on quality and prepare for the start-up of Prekindergarten programs in a planned and thoughtful manner in their respective districts.

New York State Prekindergarten Programs 2016-2017

	Targeted Pre-K (TPK) (1966) ² \$1,303,000	Universal Pre-K (UPK) (1997) \$385,034,734	Priority Pre-K (PPK) 2013-2018 \$25,000,000	Statewide Full-Day Pre-K (SUFDPK) 2014-2019 \$340,000,000	Federal Preschool Development Expansion Grant (PDG) 2015-2018 \$25,000,000	High Need Three and Four-Year-Olds (EPK) 2015-2020 \$30,000,000	3Prekindergarten Program (3PK) 2016-2021 \$10,361,410
Number of Participating Districts	3 BOCES	444 School Districts	25 School Districts	53 School Districts + 17 CBOs	5 School Districts	34 School Districts	25 School Districts
Rates per child	Folded into UPK in 2007-2008, follow same rates	Formula based on state school aid, usually half the aid per child – with minimum set at \$2700 per child	Formula based on UPK, with rate doubled for full-day services	\$10,000, with certified teacher \$7000, with teacher in study plan to obtain certification	\$10,000 per child	Formula based on UPK, with rate doubled for full-day	Formula based on UPK, with rate doubled for full-day
Length of Day	Half-day or Full-Day (no rate differential)	Half-day or Full-Day (no rate differential)	Half-day or Full-Day	Full-day	Full-day	Half-day or full-day	Half-day or full-day
Child Eligibility	High need 3's and 4's	All 4's	High-need 4's	All 4's	4's at or below 200% poverty	High-need 3's and 4's	High-need 3's
Governance	BOCES In public schools	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs	School Districts, with new option for individual entities (Charters added)	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs
Funding Strategy	Recurring grant, now part of Universal Pre-K program	Recurring formula-based, non-competitive grant	Competitive grant in year 1, renewed based on meeting performance targets	Competitive grant, with regional funding targets; Renewed based on meeting performance targets	Federal grant to NY, in national competition Non-competitive grant based on formula driven district allocation	Competitive grant, based on Priority Pre-K framework	School Districts, with mandate for collaboration with CBOs

² Started as Experimental Pre-K, largely folded into Universal Pre-K in 1997, except for three BOCES-operated programs