

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMISSION ON CFE**

**TESTIMONY**

**PRESENTED ON DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>**

**BARUCH COLLEGE**

**UNIVERSAL PRE K**

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Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Kolben and I am the Executive Director of Child Care, Inc. and the Co/Director of the Center for Early Care and Education, a partnership of Child Care, Inc (CCI). and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA). We are working to ensure that early education takes its rightful place as a public responsibility in New York making prekindergarten for three and four year old children available to all families across the state. The CECE's Winning Beginning New York Campaign educates policy-makers and the public about the benefits of early education and the necessity of investment in early education as a top public priority.

We commend the City Council for forming this Commission and for focusing today on two important components essential to meeting the constitutional mandate for a "sound basic education" for New York City's children.

The report released by the Special Masters in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit provides an auspicious new opportunity for New York City's children on many fronts. With regard to early education, the Special Masters endorsed the four initiatives presented by the City in its plan. Of these initiatives, the City's second initiative focuses on "early education and grade interventions and academic enhancements" including universal pre-k programs. The plan calls for an additional expenditure of \$572 million to expand the current program to all four year olds for the full school day and all three year olds for part day by the 2008-2009 school year. Chancellor Klein in his testimony before the Special Master indicated that prekindergarten services were a priority for meeting the Court's original mandate.

Child Care, Inc. and the Schuyler Center and other organizations submitted an Amicus brief to the Special Masters on September 20th of this year that substantiates the City's position regarding the significance of early education. We refer you to that brief for a detailed presentation. It is available on [www.winningbeginningny.org](http://www.winningbeginningny.org) and on [www.cfequity.org](http://www.cfequity.org).

Since we submitted the brief to the court, several new studies added further documentation. For example, a recently released report on the Oklahoma universal preschool program conducted by noted researchers in the field documented that all children, regardless of income or race/ethnic background benefited from the program.<sup>1</sup>

We have worked closely with the New York City Department of Education, other city agencies and the early childhood community to support the planning and implementation of the Universal Prekindergarten program over the past five years. By building on this foundation, we have the opportunity today to help shape a new vision for early education in New York City. To accomplish this there are a number of challenges that must be addressed. The Commission will hear presentations today on a number of them. These include the need for a mixed delivery system of community-based and public school programs, strengthening of the partnership between the community and public schools, and building the early education infrastructure that includes facilities expansion, teacher recruitment and retention and ongoing professional development.

We are calling upon the Commission to provide a strong voice in support of a strategy to move the city toward a universal early education program. To meet that goal we present the following recommendations:

- ***Embrace PreK as an essential component of early education in New York City moving toward a PreK-12 system.***
- ***Frame an early education strategy for children from age three through grade three.***
- ***Make clear that the final CFE settlement must include resources and a plan for expanding PreK as the cornerstone of the foundation of public education.***
- ***Allocate financial resources so that funds are available to pay for the real costs of providing a quality service.***

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<sup>1</sup> William T. Gormley, Jr., Deborah Phillips and Brittany Dawson, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development, Georgetown University.

- *Support and expand the diverse settings for PreK in public schools and early childhood programs in the community.*
- *Design a neighborhood planning process that includes a neighborhood assessment of school based and community based resources for early education, their capacity to expand and address the needs and preferences of families.*
- *Ensure that professional development opportunities are equally available to staff working in programs in community based organizations as well as in the public schools;*
- *Require that teachers with comparable credentials receive comparable compensation regardless of the setting in which they work.*
- *Invest in the expansion of early education facilities in CBOs as well as public schools ; and*
- *Require that PreK be included as part of any increase in education funding in the city and statewide.*

## **EARLY EDUCATION- THE FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE LEARNING**

In the past five years, numerous research projects have documented the importance of early education in supporting good educational and social outcomes for children promoting essential cognitive, motor and social skills in children. Researchers have documented that 85% of a person’s intellect, personality, and social skills are developed by age five.<sup>2</sup> This helps to explain why the greatest return on investment in education is in those early years.

It is startling to note - that children can enter kindergarten far behind their more advantaged peers and never really catch up. Children who enter kindergarten knowing the alphabet are 20 times more likely to know how to read in the first grade according to “Children’s Reading and Mathematics Achievement in Kindergarten and First Grade” a report by the National Center for Education statistics (NCES 2002-125). Yet, one-third

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Purvis, *Body and Brain*, Harvard University Press, 1988.

of children entering kindergarten do not know the alphabet. In fact, out of every 50 first graders who have problems reading, 44 will be likely to have problems reading in the fourth grade according to this same study.<sup>3</sup> Our long term goal must be to strengthen the resources and supports to families for children from the time they are born.

While much attention has appropriately been given to the long-term benefits of early education for the individual and society, Clive Belfield, who will testify today, has documented the advantage solely to the education systems for investing in early education. He conservatively estimates that Pre-K benefits offset 41% to 62% of the total education spending on early childhood education.<sup>4</sup>

We fully recognize that an investment in class size reduction, staff development and academic achievement are also critically important but made more effective when built on the right quality foundation of PreK.

### **PRE-K to Grade 3**

Currently educators refer to kindergarten through third grade as early education. We must transition to a public education system of PreK – 12. Several important steps set the framework for this transformation. The teacher certification requirements now include the option of a birth to third grade certificate acknowledging that early education is a separate component of the education system. New York State enacted Universal Prekindergarten legislation in 1997 following close to 30 years of support for an Experimental Prekindergarten program now called Targeted PreK. New York City in the 1980's launched Project Giant Step. The Super Start program in the public schools emerged from these early efforts. We have a well-established preschool special education program managed through the education system. New York City's child care program and Head Start also require a strong curriculum and certified teachers.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Kindergarten Year*, Report by the National Center for Education Statistics-NCES 2001-023.

<sup>4</sup> Clive R. Belfield, "Early Childhood Education: How Important are the Cost-Savings to the School system? Center for Early Care and Education, 2004.

Over 20 years ago, New York City, under the leadership of Chancellor Anthony Alvarado, mandated that full-day kindergarten should be available but not mandated for every child in New York City. There are now close to 70,000 children enrolled in public schools in a full day kindergarten program. In the past five years, we made another bold step forward in expanding services for four year olds. Currently there are close to 42,000 children enrolled in Universal Prekindergarten (UPK), and another 5,000 in Super Start and Super Start plus, New York City's Targeted Prekindergarten program. Three and four year old children are enrolled in child care and Head Start as well. Nearly 600 early childhood programs, both private and parochial schools, are partnering with the DOE to offer UPK services to four year old children. The 29,000 children in community settings are enrolled as public school students when they enter UPK. The DOE contracts with the CBOs and works with the teachers and directors. Services are offered to children who speak more than 66 languages and many organizations have reported that UPK provides important new opportunities to immigrant families to help young children learn English.

Unlike public school kindergarten that is provided exclusively in school buildings, PreK is offered in diverse settings. This provides a cost effective opportunity to expand services and provide important options to families. Historically, public schools have not made early education a program priority. As a result, an array of services were started in the community. These include child care centers, nursery schools, Head Start, Pre-school Special Education programs and family child care. Many of these programs receive other public funding and the leveraging of multiple funds makes it possible to serve children and families more effectively and to meet the extended hours required by working families.

In addition, unlike many public schools, these facilities were designed to specifically serve children from birth to five and are an important and vital resource in the community. The physical environment is one critical element in a program. It includes appropriate access to indoor facilities, meals and outdoor play facilities. As was

demonstrated with the launch of UPK, many early childhood programs in the community can add additional classroom space and have the experience as well to build new facilities.

In addition to facilities, we must focus on the work force. Clearly we need to prepare more teachers to work with children in the early years and we will need to open more classrooms across the city. We have, however, hit a major barrier in moving forward. Community based organizations are having an increasingly difficult time in recruiting and retaining certified teachers. As soon as teachers are certified they leave these programs and take public school positions because of the huge salary and benefits differential. This problem gets worse even though the city needs these organizations to serve close to 70% of the children in UPK. Other states have addressed this disparity. For example, in New Jersey, which instituted the Abbott Districts program based on a court order, now provides the funding necessary to pay certified teachers in community based organizations the same salary as teachers in the public schools. The City indicated that their estimates in the plan are based on paying New York teacher salaries across the board. Currently, we have allowed a huge disparity in salary for similarly certified teachers being funded with public dollars. A starting certified teacher in the public school system will earn over \$43,000. That same teacher in publicly funded child care center will be paid \$35,000 with more hours and fewer benefits. And the differential grows with time.

The ruling by the Special Masters provides the framework for New York City to make the most effective use of important new resources. The data is clear that early education is the most cost effective education investment and must be part of the new finance package.

We look forward to working with the Commission and its staff in any way possible to support your important work and to share our information and experience.

