

THE PREKINDERGARTEN ADVOCACY HANDBOOK

Building a Comprehensive
Early Care and Education System
for
New York City

Spring, 2005

Prepared by the
Early Childhood Strategic Group
and the
UPK Planning Committee, Region 2

Basic Facts about PreKindergarten

- New York State operates two prekindergarten programs. The oldest is referred to as targeted prekindergarten and the most recent is called Universal Prekindergarten.
- Both currently provide 2½ hours of care and education for four year olds in New York State at no cost to parents.
- When the UPK legislation passed in 1997, lawmakers intended to phase in the program over five years, increasing both the number of children and participating school districts each year. UPK is funded through the public education system, but children may attend programs in either public schools or in community based settings, such as child care centers, nursery schools, Head Start programs, Preschool Special Education and family child care.
- Currently, most UPK services are offered in community settings (60-65%), creating a new partnership between the public schools and early childhood programs based in the community.
- Many community-based organizations (CBOs) leverage multiple sources of public and private funds to serve children and families more effectively. Many also offer extended hours needed by working families.
- The state legislature originally voted to fund Universal Prekindergarten program at \$500 million a year. However, the governor and state senate capped funds at \$200 million, starting in 2001. No new school districts are eligible to offer UPK programs in their districts.
- New York State has enrolled about 58,000 children in UPK programs, with just over 40,000 in New York City. This means the program currently serves one fourth of all eligible four year olds in New York State.
- In addition, New York State funds a Targeted Prekindergarten program, which started in 1966. This initiative serves 14,000 children, mostly four-year-olds, in public schools in selected high-need districts across the state. Funding for this program has also been flat at \$50 million for more than five years.
- PreK advocates have fought consistently to increase the overall funding for early education, as well as to open the program to additional school districts, to promote an investment in the early childhood work force, and to win cost-of-living increases that reflect the increasing operating costs.
- Recently, advocates have pushed to include prekindergarten in the state aid funding formula so it would be treated just like any other grade in school.
- One important avenue for promoting this vision of public prekindergarten is through the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. The state court has ruled that children in New York State have a constitutional right to a “sound, basic education,” and ordered the state to invest \$5.6 billion more in New York City

schools to put them on par with the rest of the state. Governor Pataki has appealed the decision, but discussions between the governor and the legislature are ongoing. It is clear that any final resolution must take children's needs across the entire state into account.

- In New York City, the Mayor has taken a firm step in positioning early education as part of the CFE settlement. He has publicly called for using \$532 million of the CFE funds to support a full-day program for all four year olds in the city, and a part-day program for three year olds. The program would be treated as an essential part of school and offered at no cost to parents.
- The early care and education advocacy community is calling upon parents and other early childhood professionals to join with us in promoting a universal approach to preschool education in New York State.

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INTRODUCTION

New York proved itself a pioneer in 1997 when state lawmakers created the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) program, promising early education classes to every four-year-old in the state. More than 40 other states now have public preschool programs. But few match New York's ambition, which aims to serve all children, regardless of income. The bipartisan legislation envisioned a roll-out of the program in stages, over five years. By 2005, the program was to serve all four year olds. This promise has not been kept.

Parents, teachers and advocates have fought from the beginning to see the dream realized and the promise kept. They have saved the program when the governor threatened to eliminate it and have provided a strong voice in support of a quality program available to all children. This effort has ensured the program's continued survival, but the governor and state Senate have refused to increase the UPK budget since 2001. Funding is now capped at \$200 million, which means that only a fraction of the children eligible are served. The funding cap shuts out many school districts; it also makes it impossible for participating schools and community providers to keep pace with inflation.

The Targeted PreKindergarten program comprises another piece of the public preschool program in New York State. Started back in 1966, it now serves over 14,000 children in public schools in high needs areas across the state. The program is a half-day and aimed at children at risk of school failure.

As professionals in the field of early care and education, we know that a system capable of preparing our children for the future requires that we put more resources into it. Early childhood education is the *foundation tier* of public education. When it is rickety, the entire education edifice is unstable. Our job is to push for the creation of an early care and education system that offers comprehensive, early learning opportunities to preschool children by fully utilizing all public and private resources in a coherent and easily accessible system for families. We want to ensure that every child has the skills and tools they need to be an effective learner. In order to accomplish this, we are calling for the public education system to embrace PreK as it did kindergarten as a non-mandated program open to all children. School districts should receive state aid reimbursement based on the number of children enrolled, not limited grant funding as we have now.

This advocacy handbook has been developed with this goal in mind. It proposes strategies to optimize resources at the program level, city level and state level. It was designed to support the work of advocates in New York City but is readily adaptable to work in other communities across New York State.

The handbook was developed as a joint effort of the Region 2 UPK Planning Committee and the Early Childhood Strategic Group. Special thanks to the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council (NYSCCCC) for information on contacting legislators.

BACKGROUND

The passage of legislation creating the Universal Prekindergarten program in 1997 helped to build a new partnership between public schools and the early childhood education community. It fostered a greater understanding of the need for a comprehensive, fully-integrated early care and education system that offers a range of opportunities for children and families. Participants include child care, Head Start, special education programs, private nursery schools and public schools. UPK built on the framework of high standards established through the Targeted Prekindergarten program.

Early Education is the Foundation Tier of Public Education

Research over the past fifteen years has consistently documented that 75 percent of brain growth occurs during the first five years of life. The same studies show that what children experience in these early years greatly influences their ability to learn in school and become successful adults. This makes the learning experiences created by families and early childhood professionals vitally important.

In the preschool years, children need to learn a set of intellectual, social and physical skills that serve as a foundation for all future learning. All too often, however, children, especially economically disadvantaged children, do not have access to the resources necessary to develop these skills. Their vocabulary may be limited, for example, which also limits their ability to reason and problem-solve. Studies show that low-income children often enter school a full two years behind more affluent peers, and never catch up. By contrast, children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to graduate high school on time, go to college and be productive adults. Researchers estimate that a dollar spent on early education eliminates the need to spend seven dollars down the road on remedial or special education services, as well as the costs of welfare and crime that the public must bear when young people fail school.

Educators, public officials and the public at large increasingly view preschool as an integral part of a child's education. Four out of five middle-class families already vote with their feet, sending their children to an early education program.

It is now time to insist that early education take its rightful place as a distinct tier in public education, similar to primary, secondary and college education. Each tier was created by legislation at specific times in history to meet the needs of American society. So, too, the early childhood foundation tier is now being created. It is crucial to enable children to gain the essential cognitive, sensory-motor and social-emotional skills they will need for life-long learning.

Over the past six years we have witnessed a sea change in thinking about early education. Early education is now recognized as a core component of a “ sound basic education”. One can point to several significant indicators of this change in support. First, The Board of Regents, who oversee the New York education system has publicly endorsed early education as the most important tool in closing the achievement gap that separates middle class and disadvantaged children. Both the Senate and the Assembly have fought for funds for UPK in years past.

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity Law suit has further solidified this support. For example, the Zarb Commission, appointed by Governor Pataki to make recommendations concerning the state’s response to the Courts mandate under the CFE lawsuit, cites the benefits of early education. In forums sponsored by the Alliance for Quality Education and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, citizens across the state have listed early education as one of their highest priorities in education reform. Recently, Mayor Bloomberg echoed this demand by announcing his intention to provide full day education programs for four year olds and a half-day program for three year olds by 2007. This support from public officials and professionals testifies to the fact that a growing number of people now understand the unique role early education programs play in ensuring that children have the learning skills they need to perform in school and in society.

In addition, there is increasing discussion about the need for New York to expand its vision for New York State’s education system to PreK-12, embracing early education like it did kindergarten more than 30 years ago.

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit against New York State provides an important opportunity to make this important link. In this case, the plaintiffs have charged that the state of New York has failed to provide the financial resources required by city schools to provide a *sound basic education* for children required by the state constitution. This ten-year lawsuit is reaching its conclusion. The court has ruled that New York State increase funding to New York City in the amount of \$5.6 billion. Early education advocates have worked closely with the advocates and attorneys supporting the CFE settlement to make the strongest possible case that early education is an essential component of meeting the goal of “access to a sound basic education”. To this end, CFE has drafted legislation to support the requirements of the court mandate. The bill calls for prekindergarten to be funded in the same manner as grades K-12. In response, the Governor has appealed the most recent court ruling and the legislature failed to act on the court mandate in its recent budget.

We must present a coherent and unified vision for early education and insist that any steps to address education finance and education reform must include an increased investment in preschool.

Where We Stand Today As An Early Childhood Education Community

As members of the early education community, we are now at a new juncture. For six years, we’ve worked to implement Universal PreK. Our success can be measured by the fact that more than 74,000 children now attend publicly-supported prekindergarten programs. Most had no other way to attend preschool. In addition, we are winning the

battle for the hearts and minds of the public. Polls show broad support for public preschool.

Moving forward, we must now commit to a coherent and unified vision for early education and insist that any steps to address education finance and education reform must include an increased investment in preschool. The well-being of our children is at stake.

Creating A Sound Early Education Foundation?

To fulfill the original promise of preschool for all of New York's four-year-olds, we need to expand our vision beyond allocating more money for "seats" to creating the sound infrastructure that will support and sustain the growth of a system that will ensure the highest quality developmental opportunities for our young children.

In securing funding we must be sure that there are sufficient investment of resources to develop the services and the infrastructure of supports that do not currently exist. We must work to ensure common program standards and equitable compensation for teachers.

The current diverse delivery system of early education is a great benefit and a firm foundation on which to build. It fosters collaboration, improves the quality of early education and expands family options. Cross-fertilization occurs between early childhood providers and public school teachers, enhancing practice for both. Working parents' needs are better met, with some programs providing full day coverage.

The principles upon which we build our new campaign include:

- Early education should be a priority, if the state is to meet its constitutional obligations and the city is to meet its education reform goals.
- Prekindergarten should be made available full day to four year olds and part day to three year olds, as recommended in the Mayor's plan submitted to the Special Masters in the CFE lawsuit.
- Prekindergarten funding should be included in the state aid formula and the funding levels per child should parallel those for K-6. This strategy will not only allow the program to expand to meet local demand, but ensure enough funding to support salaries for certified teachers in both public schools and community-based settings.
- All classrooms, regardless of the setting, should meet comparable program standards and outcome measures that reflect high quality learning opportunities for children . New York City should provide technical assistance, professional development and monitoring appropriate to all settings, to be sure this goal is met. The city should also adopt a careful, state-of-the-art approach to setting expectations for the program and children's progress.
- All prekindergarten classrooms should have access to social work and health care services, to support stable families and healthy children.

- The Department of Education should work with the other city agencies with a stake in early education including The Administration for Children’s Services, the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Health and Mental Health as well as preschool special education within the DOE with regard to planning for service delivery, funding, workforce development and compensation, program standards and enrollment.
- Services should be coordinated locally through community advisory boards established at the regional level, with representatives from the Department of Education, other city agencies, CBOs, parents and other stakeholders. These boards will plan for a more integrated system of services at the neighborhood level.
- Site location and facility development must be addressed in a systematic fashion, using facility dollars earmarked for restructuring (\$4.55 billion) and funding for new school buildings (\$4.21 billion) to expand capacity in CBOs and public schools.

CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

Over the past few years we have worked hard to develop new allies and to align ourselves with the broader education advocacy work. We have worked very effectively with organizations such as Fight Crime Invest in Kids and with the Alliance for Quality Education, as well as with the business and labor communities. In New York City, the CBO Network was formed to provide coordinated leadership on advocacy from the early childhood community service providers.

Who Are Our Allies - Education Coalitions

It is vitally important to hold elected officials accountable for their actions. They must know that the early care and education field has a strong voice and that we are willing to fight for what we believe in. This is the only way that we will be able to continue to meet the needs of children and families. To do this, we must identify allies and work toward common goals. We already have many allies:

The PreK Coalition

The PreK Coalition emerged in 1999 to develop a statewide strategy to mobilize support for early education across the state. Formerly known as the *Emergency Coalition to Save Universal PreKindergarten*, its fifty member organizations lobby specifically for UPK funding each year. The name was changed in 2005 to better reflect the broader perspective on early education that the coalition now embraces.

This coalition draws organizers from across the state each year to develop a legislative agenda that advocates, parents and practitioners can use in efforts to secure essential program funding.

As an advocate, you don't have to attend its annual strategy sessions to play a vital role. The coalition works with members in a variety of ways to move the agenda. Members of the ECSG in New York City participate in the PreK Coalition teleconferences and annual meetings and then share information with the CBO Network and the CBO community regarding strategy and campaign materials.

To participate directly on the conference calls or to receive minutes of calls and other mailings, please contact the representatives of the PreK Coalition listed in Appendix A.

Winning Beginning NY /The Center for Early Care and Education (CECE)

The Center provides vital coordination and other support for the PreK Coalition. The Winning Beginning NY group was formed to coordinate media outreach and conduct research to advance the cause of early education for children from birth to five. The Center has provided leadership statewide on early education and recently published an action plan for early care and education developed by a diverse group of committed individual and organizations seeking to promote a comprehensive coordinated system of early care and education services across the state. To follow the campaign developments and to access campaign materials for yourself and parents, go to its website: www.winningbeginningny.org. Information is available on this website about the PreK Coalition.

The Child Care that Works Campaign (CCTW)

This broad based, statewide coalition of parents, employers, children's advocates, child care providers, labor unions, union child care workers, educators, researchers, and community groups work for high quality, affordable and accessible child care and early education programs. The Child Care that Works Campaign has a multi year agenda to expand funding for child care subsidies, support quality and invest in child care facilities. The CCTW supports the agenda for the PreK Coalition and many organizations and individuals are members of both coalitions. For information about the CCTW agenda you can visit the website <http://www.scaany.org/cctw.html>.

Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)

For the past couple of years, advocates for early education have also worked with the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), a statewide alliance of education advocates, parents, activists and others concerned about education reform. The AQE has adopted early education as a core tenet of its campaign. Other priorities include smaller class size, adequate school facilities and quality teachers. The PreK Coalition works with AQE on all these issues. The AQE is an active grass roots organization that has developed strong support from parents, has organized effectively in communities across the state and is becoming an ever stronger voice for education finance reform to support quality education opportunities for all children. Information about AQE is available at <http://www.allianceforqualityeducation.org/>.

Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)

The PreK Coalition and the Alliance for Quality Education also work closely with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), an organization created in 1993 to challenge the equity in state funding for New York City schools. In the summer of 2003, after 10 years of arduous work by CFE, the New York State highest court ordered the state to address

the inequity, and give more money to New York City's public school districts. The order instructed the state to 1) cost out a sound basic education for each child, 2) formulas address these needs with additional financial resources, and 3) develop an accountability system for the expenditure of the funds. Although the frame of the lawsuit focused on New York City, it is clear that we must have a statewide solution.

In the last year, the CFE conducted a study of the costs of providing each child with an adequate public education and established a position on formulas and on accountability. The CFE included prekindergarten in its calculations, arguing that preschool constitutes the foundation of public education and is an essential ingredient in meeting the constitutional mandate for a sound basic education for all children. This action created a bridge for education and early education advocates in Albany and New York City.

The state has yet to develop an appropriate funding strategy to satisfy the court. In the face of such inaction, the court appointed three Special Masters in August 2004 to review the evidence and advise the court on how the state should meet the court mandate. In January 2005, the Special Masters recommended that the state provide New York City with an additional \$5.63 billion for its schools, to be phased in over 4 years and then remain constant, as a part of the city's public education budget. The Masters also recommended that an additional \$9.179 billion be provided to address New York City's need for more space and better facilities. The court adopted this recommendation February, 2005, ruling that the State of New York could require that New York City pay a portion of the costs. Governor Pataki chose to contest this decision and the case is again on appeal. The governor has also refused to seek an increase in UPK funding which now remains stalled at the \$200 million level for the fourth year in a row. List CFE website has excellent and comprehensive information at <http://www.cfequity.org/>.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING UPK IN NEW YORK CITY

Organizing at the City Level

Advocates work, not only at the state level, but also to provide UPK services in New York City. This involves working with the Department of Education and other city agencies on issues related to every aspect of UPK, from recruitment of families and service providers, enrollment and registration of students, to development of the program, including curriculum, standards, accreditation, parent involvement, finance and evaluation. This advocacy occurs through a number of vehicles. See contact information for city advocacy groups in the Appendix.

The Early Childhood Strategic Group

The Early Childhood Strategic Group is a partnership of twenty individuals and organizations with a long-term involvement and investment in early care and education. Its mission is to assure that New York City develops a comprehensive and well-integrated early care and education system that offers quality options to all families and is respectful of the diversity of family and community needs. The ECSG is committed to working with the public and private sectors, including business and civic leaders, in

pursuit of these goals. The ECSG holds public forums, publishes reports on planning and implementation, advocates with city and state government and acts as a catalyst in other ways to bring stakeholders in the field of early education together for purposes of systems building. Child Care, Inc. coordinates the work of the ECSG. For more information visit the website at www.ecsgnyc.org.

The CBO Network

The CBO Network is composed of community-based organizations (CBOs) who contract with the Department of Education in New York City to provide Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) to the city's children. The Network's goals are to:

- Create a strong communication system for the CBO early education community, as they continue to roll out UPK implementation.
- Increase the effectiveness of CBOs in working with city officials and agencies, especially the Department of Education.
- Promote regional and citywide initiatives to share information, develop leadership and build consensus around expanded and enhanced early learning opportunities that better integrate nursery schools, child care programs, Head Start, UPK and special education.
- Advocate for funding and other needs of the UPK program.

Today over 600 CBOs contact with the Department of Education to provide Universal PreKindergarten services to over 29,000 children in New York City.

Membership in the CBO Network is open to any CBO that provides UPK in NYC. Members are called upon to help in different organizational and campaign activities that are set at the bimonthly meetings. Volunteers from each school district have formed a citywide Leadership Team that meets to address common issues, plan events and lobbying efforts.

The Leadership Team monitors developments in the Regions, serves as contacts for CBOs in their Regions, and works to strengthen the early care and education system at the regional and citywide levels. (See Appendix A for a list of Leadership Teams and contact information.) Information about the CBO Network can be found on the ECSG website at www.ecsgnyc.org.

The UPK Providers Association

The UPK Providers Association (UPKPA) works with its members to negotiate a fair and equitable UPK contract with the Department of Education. The UPKPA is a dues paying membership organization. Members receive consultation on contracts and support in negotiations.

Organizing At The DOE Regional Level

In 2004, the Department of Education closed down 32 community school districts and reorganized its administration into 10 regional offices. This required that new bridges be built between the new regional staff at the DOE and local community-based programs. Organizations like the CBO Network, UPKPA and the ECSG worked to create a better

rapport and collaboration at the regional level. In this effort, some excellent collaborations have developed.

Region 2 in the Bronx offers a good model to promote effective collaboration between CBOs and the Department of Education at the local level. The region now has a UPK Planning Committee composed of representatives from DOE and CBO directors. The committee makes plans for service expansion, and works to constantly foster the development of an early education system that successfully integrates community-based services and school-based services.

The committee promotes a vision of early childhood education as the foundation tier of public education. To this end, members of the committee engage community leaders, administrators, directors, teachers and parents in collaboration to realize this vision.

The success of this committee springs from the activism of Region 2's Early Education Director, who first conceived of the collaboration strategy. She created the planning committee after convening advocacy meetings with CBO directors and DOE staff. In the course of meetings, as relationships bloomed, discussions developed regarding collaboration in additional spheres of decision-making.

Over time, three task forces were created.

Advocacy – Advocates for funds, develops relationships with elected officials, speaks on behalf of early childhood education to the larger community, and organizes teachers and parents to advocate for the program.

Program Quality – Works on issues related to standards, evaluations, accreditation, professional development, curriculum.

Policies and Procedures – Collaborates with the regional office on administrative planning and implementation.

The Planning Committee, which includes representatives from each of the three task forces, now meets monthly. Regional DOE staff from both the program and finance sides attend. These meetings thus provide a mechanism to coordinate, collaborate and integrate the essential aspects of the program, across every setting.

The task forces also meet monthly. To make best use of members' time, the task forces currently hold their meetings as part of the DOE's scheduled meetings for CBOs, and then report to the larger body on their activities.

These meetings have led to further and deeper collaboration. A team of program and finance staff from the DOE has begun to visit CBOs to learn more about the resources, programs and financial concerns of UPK programs operating outside the walls of the public schools. These visits have led to the DOE offering special training sessions on use of computer technology and workshops on the midyear review process. Region 2 has also created additional networking and outreach activities, including

- The Planning Committee sends representatives to the CBO Network to share information and work on citywide issues.
- The Committee also works with the ECSG to share information and work on citywide and statewide issues.
- The Committee has also developed a forum and other activities as part of the Week of the Young Child that is sponsored by the DOE.
- The Advocacy Task Force worked with the ECSG to develop this UPK Resource Handbook for the CBO providers.

Organizing At The Site Level

“The setting for the children we raise, care for, or teach is influenced in the larger sense by the objectives and values we bring to that time together, as well as by the environment we create around us.” S. Wichert

The individual early education program site is the most basic unit in the UPK system. This is where the agenda for advocates emerges and grows. It is here that program directors, teachers and parents first begin to understand the issues, reach a decision about them and coordinate actions to improve and expand their program.

The 1199 Future of America early education program, a UPK program in Region 2, demonstrates how one site can significantly influence the development of early education, for children, families and the larger community.

This center, sponsored by the 1199/Employer Child Care Corporation, opened its doors with a specific, guiding philosophy - “Early Childhood Education as a Strategy for Peace and Justice.” The director views early education, not only as the foundation tier of public education, but also as a key for strengthening families and communities. The center director and staff recognize that families and communities strongly influence children’s development, so the center also actively works to empower parents and community members to speak up for children’s interests. Thus preschool becomes an important vehicle to promote social progress.

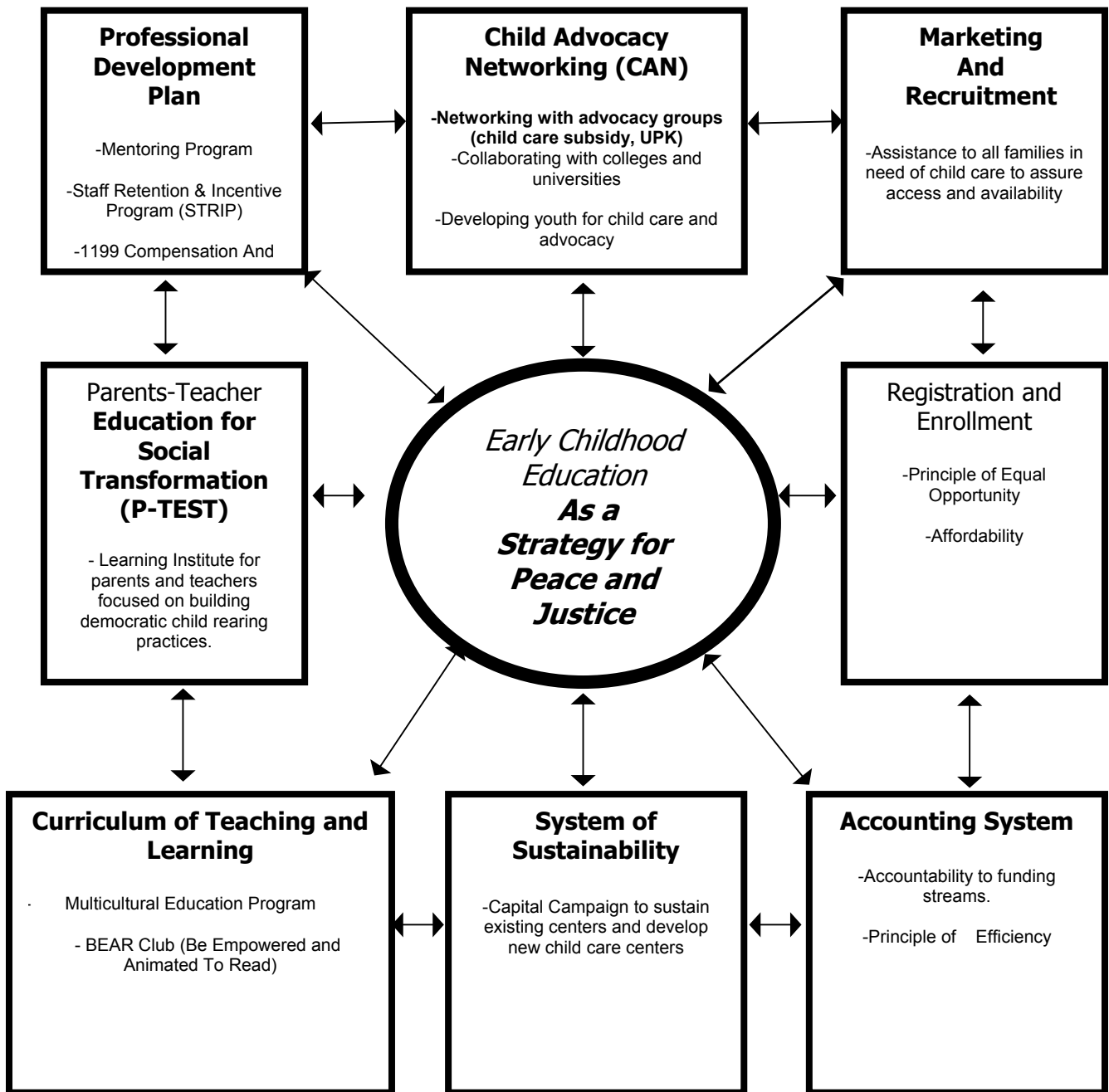
Taking a broad view of early education, and collaborating with parents, school and community members, this CBO has re-positioned early education for the community. With district officials now actively collaborating, there is broad-based understanding of the power of early education to lift the prospects of children and the community at large. The growing awareness of the true value of early education strengthens the case for comparable compensation for teachers in public schools and community based organizations. This region has made a commitment to fully support comparable programs and supports to public schools and community based organizations.

The 1199 Future of America project incorporates the core principles of Peter Senge, an expert on education systems, who developed five core disciplines in building a successful educational organization:

- Shared Vision

- Personal Mastery
- Mental Models
- Team Learning
- Systems Thinking.

These core components to systems thinking are incorporated into the 1199 program through its work with staff and parents. While too involved to describe in detail here, the chart below shows the components of the early education for peace and justice strategy.



CONCLUSION

We are at an exciting crossroads now, positioned to create a real system of early education that serves as the foundation tier for public education across the state. We have allies and supporting organizations at the state, city and neighborhood levels. All work to promote better compensation, recognition and support for early education providers. Your support and collaboration helps them be more effective with legislators and funders. In other words, these are *your* organizations and can thrive only with your support. The more that each of us joins campaigns for funding and other critical issues, the greater our chance of success. With a common agenda and course of action, we will be able to educate our neighbors, policymakers, elected officials and community leaders about the real value of early education to our children, our communities, our city and our state. We must continue to build the case for an early education system that embraces and integrates the strengths and resources of both public schools and community based organizations.

Once people understand the value of early education, as we do, we will win the resources we need for a system our children so desperately need. Please reach out to the advocacy organizations and tell them you want to participate in the effort to create a sound early education foundation for New York City's children.

Appendix A - CONTACTS

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Governor George E. Pataki
State Capitol
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Senator Charles Schumer
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NOTES