



**NEW YORK  
STATE**

**BOARD OF  
REGENTS**

—

**FEDERAL**

**LEGISLATIVE**

*and*

**FUNDING**

**PRIORITIES**

**2009**



## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Participation in a high-quality early education program builds the foundation for a child's success in school — and in life.

Research increasingly demonstrates that the first years of children's lives have a much greater and more lasting impact on their future learning than was previously understood. New research shows that early childhood

experiences influence the very architecture and chemistry of a developing brain.

Teachers consistently report that children who participate in high-quality preschool are more ready to learn when they enter kindergarten and perform better during their elementary school years. Children in quality programs are found to have better language and math skills and fewer disciplinary problems.

### State Investments

Many states recognize the importance of providing early childhood education. States increased their investments in preschool by \$2 billion in the three years preceding the current economic downturn. In 2006, 38 states served nearly 950,000 children nationwide.

However, in spite of the investment, the demand for preschool continues to far exceed the supply. Only 20 percent of all 4-year-olds and fewer than five percent of all 3-year-olds are served nationwide.

Enrollment numbers also are climbing, but often without a corresponding increase in funding. This means that more children are being served with fewer dollars, decreasing the quality of their early education experience. While high-quality programs make a positive difference in children's lives, low-quality, poorly funded programs do not.

And even as quality falls, the high cost of pre-school is prohibitive for poor families and is a significant financial strain for many working- and middle-class families.

### New York State

In 1997, New York State became one of the first states to pass legislation to provide universal access to prekindergarten classes for four-year-olds. Access was to be phased in over five years and be completed by 2002.

However, more than 10 years later, less than two thirds of the State's local school districts, 447 of 677, have Pre-K programs. Last year, fewer than 91,000 children attended state-financed prekindergarten classes — just 38 percent of the State's four-year-olds.

In comparison, though it is not required, every school district in New York offers kindergarten classes, with a majority providing full-day programs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ▶ **Ensure that every child has access to a preschool program that meets nationally recognized quality benchmarks by enacting the:**
  - **Providing Resources Early for Kids (PRE-K) Act or similar proposal**
  - **Prepare All Kids Act or similar proposal**

**The PRE-K Act** (HR 3289) was sponsored in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress by Representative Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and approved by the House Education and Labor Committee. The bill creates a formula grant program for states that meet certain standards to assist local pre-school providers in improving the quality of their programs.

**The Prepare All Kids Act** (HR 2859) was sponsored in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress by Representative Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY). The bill establishes a Prekindergarten Incentive Fund to assist states in making voluntary high quality full-day prekindergarten programs available and affordable for families of all children for at least one year preceding kindergarten.

#### **The Providing Resources Early for Kids (PRE-K) Act would:**

- Create a formula grant for states that: (1) have curricula aligned with state early learning standards; (2) follow nationally-established best practices for class size and teacher-to-student ratios; (3) require each teacher to hold a least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field; and (4) have a plan for meeting the requirement that each teacher hold at least a baccalaureate degree within five years
- Create a competitive grant program for states that demonstrative that they will meet the four quality-based requirements within two years
- Permit funds to be used to: (1) increase the qualifications of and benefits provided to teachers, teacher aides, and program directors; (2) decrease class size and improve teacher-to-student ratios; (3) provide comprehensive services to support healthy child development; (4) extend program hours per day and weeks per year; and (5) improve program monitoring

#### **The Prepare All Kids Act would:**

- Establish a Prekindergarten Incentive Fund to provide matching grants to states to assist local providers in establishing, expanding, or enhancing voluntary high-quality full-day prekindergarten programs for children ages three through five



## ***Early Childhood Education (con't)***

### **Prepare All Kids Act (con't):**

- Require prekindergarten providers to target children from families with incomes at or below 200 percent of poverty and provide services for such families free of charge
- Direct states to set aside at least 10 percent of funding for high-quality early childhood development programs for children ages zero through three and/or professional development for teachers and teacher aides of children ages zero-three
- Direct states to set aside at least 10 percent of its funding for creating extended day and extended year early childhood education programs

### ***For additional information:***

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