



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

**Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council
Committee on Finance
Re: Fiscal Year 2014 Executive Budget**

**Advocates for Children of New York
June 5, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am an attorney and Project Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Given this mission, we are mystified by Mayor Bloomberg's proposal to cut 47,000 children from early childhood education and after-school programs.

At a time when the city and state are implementing the rigorous Common Core Standards and emphasizing college and career readiness, early childhood education is not negotiable. Under the Common Core Standards, by the end of kindergarten, students are expected to read common words by sight, identify similarities and differences between two texts, and solve addition and subtraction word problems. How can the city expect low-income kindergarten students to master these skills if it shuts down their preschool programs? Long-term research shows that low-income children who are left out of high-quality early childhood education programs not only start kindergarten behind but are more likely to be retained a grade, be placed in

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special education classes, and drop out of high school. Citing this research, President Obama and Governor Cuomo recently touted the importance of early childhood education and proposed expanding these programs. Yet, here in New York City, the budget proposes taking away thousands of low-income children's opportunity to go to preschool, thwarting their ability to meet the new, higher standards.

After-school programs help improve children's development, safety, and academic performance. Such programs allow children and youth to engage in academic and developmental enrichment activities in a safe environment after the school bell rings. Slashing the after-school system in New York City would move our schools and communities in the wrong direction.

Depriving 47,000 children of early childhood and after-school programs will be far more expensive in the long run. Leading economists have found that high-quality early childhood education and after-school programs are cost-effective, providing taxpayers with a strong return on our investment by reducing spending on remedial instruction, special education, public assistance, and the criminal justice system.

Approximately \$130 million is needed to ensure that we can continue to serve the same number of children in early childhood and after-school programs. To provide stability to families, this funding should be baselined. Furthermore, we continue to be



very concerned that the EarlyLearn rate is insufficient to support the high-quality standards that the program requires, as well as health insurance plans necessary to attract and retain qualified teachers. To meet the promise of EarlyLearn's vision of comprehensive, high-quality programs, it must receive adequate funding.

We are grateful that the City Council worked to restore funding for early childhood and after-school programs last year. We know children who are attending the programs that you saved and who will be on track to succeed in kindergarten this September because their early childhood programs remained open. Once again, we are urging the City Council to work with the Mayor to reject the shortsighted, irresponsible proposed cuts to early childhood and after-school programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.