



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 General Welfare & Committee on Women's Issues

Re: Implementation of EarlyLearn NYC

Advocates for Children of New York
October 28, 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. Advocates for Children is also a proud member of the Campaign for Children.

By the time children enter kindergarten, children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds lag significantly behind children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in academic skills. High-quality early childhood education programs are proven to help fill this gap. Rigorous research found that, compared to children left out of the early childhood program, low-income children who participated in Chicago's Child-Parent Centers were 40 percent less likely to be retained a grade in school, 35 percent less likely to need special education services, 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 31 percent more likely to hold a semi-skilled or higher level job, and 41 percent less likely to be arrested for a violent crime. Studies of other high-quality early childhood programs have found similar outcomes, resulting in substantial cost savings to schools, cities, and taxpayers.

Three-and-a-half years ago, we commented on the concept paper for the ACS EarlyLearn Program. We stated that we strongly supported the vision described in the concept paper—an early childhood education system with comprehensive, high-quality, full-day programs, with children of diverse backgrounds and needs learning side by side, and expanded early childhood opportunities for infants and toddlers. We stated that, if adequately funded and carefully implemented, this vision had the potential to become a national model for early childhood education.

Unfortunately, the funding for early childhood education programs in NYC has been inadequate and unstable. For the past several years, instead of discussing how to expand and strengthen early childhood education, we have been at City Hall pleading for continued funding so that the City would not have to cut the number of children served. While we are deeply grateful that the City Council has come to the rescue

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and provided one-year funding, it is critical for the more than \$60 million in discretionary child care funding to be baselined in the next budget.

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 the compensation and 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.

The EarlyLearn rate must be adequate to serve all eligible preschoolers, including preschoolers with disabilities, English Language Learners, preschoolers in foster care, and preschoolers living in temporary housing. At Advocates for Children, we receive calls from parents whose preschoolers have been discharged illegally from EarlyLearn programs with the explanation that the programs do not have the capacity to serve students with behavioral needs or other special needs. Most recently, last week, we received a call from a parent who received a letter stating that her child's last day in the EarlyLearn program would be October 16th because the EarlyLearn center did not have the resources to manage her daughter's behavior. Yet, programs funded with Head Start dollars must meet a requirement that at least 10 percent of the students they serve be preschoolers with disabilities, and no program receiving federal funding can exclude students based on their disabilities. Discharging preschoolers throws families into crisis, placing parents at risk of losing their jobs and children at risk of experiencing school push-out before they ever enter kindergarten. Discharging students does nothing to prepare them to succeed in a kindergarten classroom. The EarlyLearn rate must be adequate not only to serve the average preschool student, but also to serve preschoolers who need additional support in order to succeed in the classroom.

Finally, we have heard from parents about the difficulty of finding an available EarlyLearn seat. Given the importance of filling every EarlyLearn seat so that as many children as possible can benefit from a high-quality early childhood education, a plan must be implemented to provide parents and professionals with an easy way of identifying open seats.

In the coming months, we look forward to discussing how to ensure that the budget includes funding so that every child can participate in a high-quality early childhood program. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today and for your commitment to early childhood education. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.