



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 Education and Committee on Women's Issues**

Re: Resolution No. 2 – Supporting NYC Universal Pre-K and After-School Plan

**Advocates for Children of New York
February 11, 2014**

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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.

By the time children enter kindergarten, children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds lag significantly behind children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in academic skills. High-quality, full-day prekindergarten programs are proven to help fill this gap. Long-term research shows that low-income children who are left out of high-quality early childhood education programs are more likely to be retained a grade, be placed in special education classes, and drop out of high school. Leading economists have found that high-quality prekindergarten programs are cost-effective, providing taxpayers with a strong return on investment by reducing



spending on remedial instruction, special education, public assistance, and the criminal justice system.

I saw the impact of prekindergarten firsthand when I worked in Head Start centers for several years beginning in 1999. Some children entered preschool not speaking a word, not knowing the concept of colors or how to use a book. I saw the difference that a high-quality, full-day early childhood program made in preparing these children for kindergarten, academically and socially. I was surprised to learn that for every child in Head Start, there was an eligible child shut out of the program due to lack of funding. Fifteen years ago, these children were waiting for elected officials to fund universal prekindergarten. Fifteen years later, we're still waiting.

We were pleased to hear Governor Cuomo announce his support for making full-day prekindergarten programs universal in New York State. However, the New York State Executive Budget proposal does not get the job done. The \$100 million in the Executive Budget for 2014-2015 and the \$500 million for full implementation statewide in the fifth year are not sufficient to give every four-year-old child a high-quality, full-day prekindergarten program.

That's why we need New York City's plan to create a new funding stream to pay for a rapid expansion of Universal Pre-K. If we are serious about improving our schools,



we must give every four-year-old child the opportunity to attend a high-quality, full-day prekindergarten program. And we must do it now. After all, children have only one chance to go to preschool. That's why Advocates for Children of New York supports Resolution No. 2.

In implementing this plan, we look forward to working with the City Council and administration to make sure that this program serves *all* preschoolers, including preschoolers with developmental delays or disabilities, English Language Learners, and preschoolers living in temporary housing or foster care, so that the children who need this program most can benefit from it.

We thank the City Council for its support of this resolution and ask our state leaders to act quickly to allow New York City to make prekindergarten truly universal and to expand after-school programs for middle school students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.