



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committees on General Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Women's Issues

Re: Fiscal Year 2015 Preliminary Budget

Advocates for Children of New York March 24, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Fiscal Year 2015 Preliminary Budget on early learning programs. My name is Randi Levine, and I am an attorney and Policy Coordinator 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. We are 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.

For the past several years, we have been at City Hall pleading with the City not to cut the number of children receiving early childhood education programs. We are deeply grateful that the Administration and City Council have changed the conversation to focus on how to expand and strengthen early childhood education in New York City. We strongly support New York City's plan to ensure that all four-year-old children can attend a full-day, high-quality Universal Pre-K program. As we move toward this goal, we must not lose sight of the important work that remains in order to realize the vision of EarlyLearn.

First, we want to make sure that the City's focus on expanding early childhood programs does not end when every four-year-old child gets access to Universal Pre-K. Advocates for Children often gets calls from low-income parents looking for preschool settings for their three-year-old children, and we know that the benefits of

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early childhood education increase when children participate in two-year programs. We are concerned about the reduction in capacity of the contracted child care system described in a recent IBO report. As the City works to expand Universal Pre-K for four-year-old children, we urge you to work with the Administration to expand early childhood education programs for zero-to-three-year-old children as well.

Second, while we are very pleased that funding for child care centers was baselined in this year's budget, we are concerned about the future of the centers that were funded previously through the one-year City Council discretionary funding. We want to ensure that there is a plan to allow young children attending high-quality child care centers to continue attending those centers in July as long as those centers have a plan to meet the EarlyLearn standards.

Third, we continue to be 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 for 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 are not receiving their mandated preschool special education services at EarlyLearn programs, and the programs do not seem to have the capacity to resolve the problem and get services in place. We also 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. 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. A recent U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights study found that, even as early as preschool, black students face harsher discipline than other students. We must ensure that the school-to-prison pipeline does not begin in our EarlyLearn centers. 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 and prepare for kindergarten.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.