



# 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 General Welfare

### Re: Implementation of UPK and 3K Expansion and the Transition of EarlyLearn NYC to DOE

June 27, 2018

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Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the implementation of Pre-K for All, the expansion of 3-K, and the transition of EarlyLearn to the DOE. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and Project Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 45 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the education system, starting from the time children are born.

We appreciate that the City is providing tens of thousands of children access to early childhood education programs, such as Pre-K, 3-K, and EarlyLearn. As the City moves forward with this work, it must ensure that these programs provide an excellent education to all children, including children who are homeless, Dual Language Learners, and children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Nearly half of the 22,000 children living in the City's homeless shelters on a given night are under the age of six, and it is estimated that 20,000 three- and four-year-old children in the City live in temporary housing. We appreciate that the City has conducted targeted Pre-K outreach to families living in shelters and, for the first time this past year, offered a Pre-K seat to every age-eligible child living in a shelter, regardless of whether the parent completed an application. Going forward, we urge the City to extend child care eligibility to *all children who are homeless*, so that no child living in a shelter is turned away from an available EarlyLearn seat because they do not meet the current eligibility criteria. The City should also expand its outreach efforts to reach families of younger children at shelters, continue training staff at shelters to assist families with enrollment, and provide busing to young children living in shelters.

To serve Dual Language Learners, we are pleased that the City plans to open 33 new Dual Language Pre-K programs and is providing phone interpretation services to allow Pre-K and 3-K staff to communicate with parents who speak a language other than English. We ask that the City continue to invest in additional Dual Language

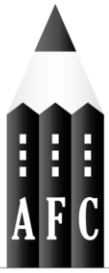


programs, as well as professional development and guidance so that all 3-K, Pre-K and EarlyLearn programs can better support Dual Language Learners. We also urge the City to eliminate the unnecessary immigration verification portion of the child care subsidy application for preschoolers enrolling in an EarlyLearn center-based program in order to ease the fear faced by immigrant families.

The City's expansion of early childhood education, allows it to identify children with disabilities at a younger age and intervene early, when services have the greatest impact. Already, more than 31,000 preschoolers in NYC have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) mandating special education services. The majority of these children can attend the same 3-K, Pre-K and EarlyLearn classrooms as their typically developing peers. However, in order to properly serve these children, the City must build the capacity to promptly evaluate students, hold timely IEP meetings, and secure service providers who can work with students in these classrooms. Despite legally mandated timelines, we have heard from families who have had to wait months for an evaluation appointment, an IEP meeting, or the start of services, causing children to miss out on needed interventions.

When preschool students with significant disabilities cannot be properly served in 3-K, Pre-K or EarlyLearn, the DOE has a legal obligation to provide them with a preschool special education class. However, we have heard from families whose children have IEPs mandating preschool special classes but remained at home this year because the DOE did not have enough seats. Many of these children are diagnosed with autism, are non-verbal, or have delays in multiple areas of development. These children stand to benefit significantly from early childhood services, and the City cannot leave these children behind. The City must ensure there is a preschool special class seat for every child who needs one for the coming school year.

We support Resolution No. 358 to eliminate the disparity in compensation paid to teachers, staff and directors at community-based EarlyLearn NYC centers, as compared to the compensation paid to DOE instructors for similar employment. We also ask that the City ensure salary parity for teachers, staff and directors of DOE-contracted preschool special education programs through an add-on to the tuition reimbursement rates set by the State. Teachers at these preschool special education programs work 12 months per year with students with significant disabilities and are paid far less than DOE instructors, leading teachers to leave preschool special education programs and contributing to the shortage of seats for preschoolers with disabilities.



Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.