

Winning Beginning NY

an early care and learning coalition

Winning Beginning NY FY 2021-2022 Legislative Agenda



New York State cannot recover from the health and economic consequences of COVID-19 without strengthening early care and education. The FY 2021-2022 Budget is the time to invest in building back New York's early care and education system better so that children can learn, parents and families can thrive and communities can rebuild.

New York State policymakers should look to developing sources of revenue to ensure that the State can make these crucial investments which keep communities strong. The burden of the pandemic has fallen most hard on struggling New Yorkers including many parents of young children. It is appropriate to ask the wealthiest New Yorkers to contribute more at this time to stabilize the State Budget and critical funding for New York's communities.



Winning Beginning NY is New York's statewide coalition working to inform policymakers and the public about the many benefits of early care and learning for children from the prenatal period through age eight. Our priorities include high-quality afterschool, child care, early intervention, home visiting, and pre-K. The coalition aims to build a broad-based constituency to make investments in quality early care and learning a top public priority.

Expand Access to Child Care for New York's Families

Winning Beginning NY and the Empire State Campaign for Child Care call for New York State to make the following investments in New York's 2021-2022 Executive Budget to provide New York's child care sector the funds necessary to stabilize and begin to rebuild the sector and to lay the foundations for a universal system that serves all New York families that need care, one animated by the emerging recognition that child care is a public good, essential to a healthy economy, and an integral part of a birth to 12 education system:

1. Raise new state revenue if necessary, to make these necessary investments to stabilize the child care industry, and expand access to more families. These are unprecedented times; it is just and appropriate to ask those New Yorkers who have prospered since the pandemic struck to contribute more to the state's recovery.
2. Make no cuts to 2020 funding levels for child care in 2021.
3. Provide counties with \$370 million to make the child care subsidy system more equitable by eliminating unfair eligibility variations across counties and communities, and prioritizing families with the greatest need by: Making child care subsidies available consistently statewide to all income-eligible families who are unemployed and seeking work, retraining, or pursuing higher education; families involved in domestic violence; families receiving preventive child welfare services; foster families; families experiencing homelessness; and children with special needs; Incrementally expand subsidy eligibility to at least 85% of the state median income (beginning with regions with a high cost of living and/or those hit hard by the impacts of the pandemic); Reduce or eliminate parent co-pays for child care subsidies to no more than 10% of income over the federal poverty level in counties that are currently above that level as a step toward ensuring that one day, no New York family pays more than 7% of income for child care; and Pay subsidy to providers for at least 12 absences/quarter per child, plus federal holidays, building toward a system in which subsidy is not paid based on a child's daily attendance, but based on enrollment.
4. Commit to eliminating expulsions and suspensions in child care and pre-K, which disproportionately impact children of color, by setting a state-wide prohibition on suspensions and expulsions (in most cases) while investing at least \$15 million to infant-toddler resource centers to provide child care and pre-K programs the supports they need to meet the developmental, mental health, social-emotional needs of all the children in their care.
5. Invest \$100 million to create a fund to increase workforce compensation to a fair wage and improve child care quality. Priority should be given to programs that serve low-income families and care for infants and toddlers. By investing \$485 million in child care in 2021-22, New York State can extend child care subsidies to an estimated 30,000 additional children each month, lower the cost of care among families receiving support, and boost child care worker wages to a level more commensurate with their importance to New York's children, families, and communities.

Fully Fund Pre-K for All New York's Children

Raise state revenues to ensure that the needs of the whole child are met

Nearly 77,000 four-year-olds still lack full-day pre-K that state leaders promised. Protect and build on the state's current \$857.2 million investment in pre-K. Include appropriate resources for culturally responsive and sustaining pre-K that supports each child, including those with developmental delays and disabilities, emergent multi-lingual learners and those who are homeless.

The state must raise the necessary revenue to ensure that the needs of children and their families are met, and, ensure that they are given the opportunity to learn and succeed, regardless of their income, zip code, race, or immigration status.

Invest \$770 million to expand access to quality full day pre-K for all children in the state. Funding for the next pre-K expansion should include enhanced rates to meet quality standards. This includes an additional 20% set aside to support highly qualified and appropriately compensated teachers in both community programs and public schools.

New York State currently invests \$857.2 million to provide a combination of half- and full-day pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. Early on, in 1997, New York's leaders promised every preschooler a seat. In 2014, Governor Cuomo doubled down on the promise, with a commitment to *full-day* pre-K for every four-year-old. In 2015, he added three-year-olds. But today, only New York City has Pre-K for All four-year-olds, and the state's investment slowed to a trickle, leaving tens of thousands of children behind. The evidence shows pre-K is not only one of the most effective educational strategies for addressing inequality, it is also one of the best ways to ensure that parents and guardians can be part of the workforce. Children who attend pre-K are more likely to be reading on grade level, graduate high school and go on to college, when pre-K is coupled with continued investment in the K-12 world. Every year that goes by, the state is forgoing \$3 to \$7 for every dollar spent in return on investment. Every year, the state spends an enormous amount of funding in special education, in remediation, and in incarceration, all of which are decreased when children have access to a quality full day pre-K program. By providing at least \$10,000 per child to all districts that need to implement pre-K, the state can begin to ensure that children are put on a path of success early on. With more than half of all pre-K services are offered in community programs, the state, in collaboration with local districts, needs to do more to promote equity in funding between public school and community-based programs.

Invest \$5 million to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers

The State must provide funding to establish Regional Technical Assistance Centers to support Pre-K and early childhood education. These centers will support the improvement of existing programs and the roll-out of quality, culturally responsive and sustainable early childhood programs. They will strengthen coordination of efforts between school districts, child care providers and other early education programs, and services in the regions that focus on improving outcomes for children and families. These centers are critical in suburban and rural areas with numerous small school districts.

Increase funding for preschool special education programs

Preschool special education programs provide high-quality education services to preschool students with significant developmental delays and disabilities. Inadequate State funding over the years has forced dozens of programs to close and led to a shortage of seats in these programs, leaving preschool children with disabilities without the services they need and have a right to receive. The pandemic has only added financial challenges that have made it even harder for these programs to continue operating.

To ensure that preschool special education programs stay open and can provide high-quality services, the State must increase the reimbursement rate by at least 10%. In the five years before the pandemic, the State approved only a 2% increase in the reimbursement rates for preschool special education classes each year and provided no cost of living adjustment to these programs for the previous 6 years, so a significant investment is needed.

To maintain sufficient funding going forward, we also support the Board of Regents' proposals for the State to provide at least the same percentage increase in funding to preschool special education programs as it gives to K-12 public schools each year and to dedicate \$1.25 million to design a new rate-setting methodology, with stakeholder input, to update the way payment is calculated.

Lastly, many pre-K programs and school districts have suffered a 20% cut to their 2019-20 funding allocation. It is imperative that those funds are restored to ensure that districts can continue to offer their programs without having to choose between pre-K, K-12 programs, programs for English language learners and at risk students.

Fully Fund School Aid for K-12

Pre-K must be followed by a continuum of quality, culturally responsive and sustaining education to prepare children for college and careers. No longer should children enter kindergarten to find their schools chronically underfunded in a way that perpetuates educational racism and chronic inequities.

The Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign sees child care and pre-K as companion, not competitive, investments and fully supports the agenda for child care and home visitation developed by Empire State Child Care Campaign, the Winning Beginning NY coalition, and the Kids Can't Wait Campaign. It is important that there are simultaneous investments in birth to three care and education programs, especially those that are often less likely to be engaged with district pre-K programs, as they are an essential foundation to healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development of New York's children.

SUPPORT ESSENTIAL WORKERS, SUPPORT HOME VISITING

Please prioritize home visiting and restore and/or maintain program funding

New York State has long supported and invested in voluntary maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting programs. Home visiting is a proven and effective strategy for improving maternal and child health outcomes, reducing child abuse and neglect, and increasing school readiness. Now more than ever, New York's families need home visiting as they face this unprecedented public health crisis.

During the pandemic, home visitors have stepped up to disseminate supplies such as diapers, formula, and food. Home visitors continue to "see" families virtually, connecting them to information, resources, and (maybe most importantly) a trusted partner in a time of increased isolation. Home visitors—primarily women—are on the frontline every day, supporting families who are also often serving on the frontline as essential workers. Yet even prior to the pandemic, due to insufficient funding, programs were only able to serve 6% of babies in low-income families and a mere 3% of all children aged 0-3.

Public Private Partnership grant elimination at the Office of Children and Family Services and 20 percent withholds on state funding have placed a significant financial strain on evidence-based home visiting programs. As a result, many programs have been forced to lay off staff, reduce capacity, and in some instances, close their doors.

The populations hit hardest by the pandemic and centuries of racial injustice are the primary populations served by home visiting—low-income women and families of color. Now is not the time to decrease these essential services.

FY2022 Budget Request

We respectfully request that the Governor and Legislature restore programs to level funding in the FY 2021-2022 state budget to maintain existing programs and services to families.

Healthy Families New York (HFNY): At least \$26.2 million to support sustainability at existing sites

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) NY: \$3.8 million to support sustainability at existing sites

ParentChild+: \$2 million to support sustainability at existing sites

Parents as Teachers (PAT): \$1.3 million to support sustainability and restore services to two sites in Rochester
Home Visiting Saves Money

The return on investment of home visiting for Medicaid recipients' emergency room usage in the first year of a child's life alone is \$3 for every \$1 invested.

Stabilize Early Intervention

In early 2020, Kids Can't Wait campaign members spoke with State leaders about the fragility of the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education systems due to a provider shortage and years of inadequate funding. New York State's Early Intervention payment rates are currently lower than they were in the mid-1990s. The percentage of children receiving timely EI services fell from 74% in 2015 to 66% in 2019.

Since then, the pandemic has disrupted service delivery and the programs have struggled even more. Existing disparities have widened. More children are waiting for services. Provider capacity has shrunk. In June 2020 the number of EI providers was down 15% compared to 2019 and it is very likely to have fallen more since then. The number of children enrolled in EI is at its lowest point since 2013, and the number of EI claims has dropped 29%.

As we enter 2021, we are hopeful that the new year will be one of rebuilding capacity and reducing inequities. The demands on the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education systems will be high as families seek to restore developmental skills lost during the pandemic. New York State must have sufficient revenue to respond fully, with enhanced services for children who received little or no services during the pandemic due to agency and school closures, lack of appropriate devices or internet access, and other barriers.

We urge New York State to secure additional revenue that will be needed to build back Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education systems in order to provide timely services to all eligible children and to eliminate long-standing disparities due to race, poverty or geography.

To move toward ensuring all young children with developmental delays or disabilities in New York can access the support and therapies guaranteed to them under federal law, the Kids Can't Wait campaign calls on the State to explore all possible sources of revenue to increase the rates for Early Intervention providers and preschool special education programs by at least 10%. We also recommend:

Passage of a Covered Lives assessment to bring badly needed additional revenue into Early Intervention program and to ensure that commercial insurers pay their fair share of Early Intervention services. The assessment should be at least \$40 million in SFY22.

As a step towards an increase of 10% in both Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education reimbursement rates, the state should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the methodology used to determine payment for all early intervention evaluations, services and service coordination, and should develop a new tuition rate-setting methodology for Preschool Special Education so that rates better reflect the costs of delivering services.

The state should guarantee parity in annual funding increases between public schools and preschool special education programs. We support the Board of Regents' proposal to change state law to require the State to

provide at least the same percentage increase in funding to preschool special education programs as it gives to public schools each year.

Passage of the health care workforce bill to establish regular collection and release of health workforce data, including EI providers, to inform and approve health planning and access and emergency preparedness.

New York State should act to respond to pandemic-related gaps in services. A recent report documents the impact of COVID-19 on New York's young children with developmental delays and disabilities. The number of children enrolled in EI fell by 12% statewide during the pandemic. For kids still enrolled, services delivered fell by 29%. NYS must act now to reverse these trends by taking the following steps:

- Launch an outreach campaign and develop a comprehensive plan for developmental screenings to identify young children with developmental delays and disabilities and connect them to services.
- Provide adequate technology and training to families and providers;
- Engage in targeted outreach to families to identify and address barriers to participation, including issues related to telehealth access and equity; and
- Provide make-up services to compensate for services missed during the pandemic and prepare for a potential surge in children needing EI and preschool special education evaluations and services.

Invest in Quality for After-School Programs

COVID-19 has created extraordinary circumstances for many children and families in New York. Hard hit by the pandemic, the opportunity gaps that already disadvantage communities of color and children from low-income families are likely to grow. Afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs have been crucial to helping young people and their families through this crisis: These programs provide services and support that promote resilience, provide protective factors, and elevate assets that can help overcome the effects of trauma and adversity, such as traumas of 2020 including political divisions, racial unrest, and COVID-19. As children face learning loss and isolation from the pandemic, these programs are helping to expand learning opportunities to support students who are learning remotely and parents who need a safe place for their kids while they are working. New York must ensure that afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs are able to recover from the impact of COVID-19, adequately respond to the needs of children and families, and build resilience of their programs, youth, and families served.

To fully RECOVER, New York must safeguard investments, commitments, and protections provided to afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs by:

- Baseline critical funds that support afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs at FY2020-2021 levels. This includes restoring the cuts in Advantage After School Program (\$5 million) and Youth Development Program (\$2.2 million) in the FY2021-2022 Executive Budget.
- Utilizing funds committed to expanded learning programs in the FY2021-2022 State Budget and any remaining funds from FY2020-2021. New York must streamline the current contract process for a timely execution of contracts and payments to awarded afterschool grantees.

To adequately RESPOND to the needs of children and families, expanded learning programs must be nimble to provide a continuum of care and seamlessly adapt, especially during crisis. New York must include language in the State budget that:

- Directs \$250,000 to the NYS Network for Youth Success to sustain the mobilization and coordination of high-quality expanded learning programs, especially to respond to crises such as COVID-19. None of the required 9% set-aside in CCDBG quality funds currently supports technical assistance for the 2,837 school-age child care programs in New York.
- Allows modifications to afterschool contracts and performance outcomes during a State disaster emergency.
- Directs state agencies to provide timely guidance in the case where budget modifications to afterschool contracts may be required.
- Allows summer programming as a vital component of all afterschool funding streams, especially for the Advantage After School Program.

To build RESILIENCE of expanded learning programs and the youth and families they serve, New York State must make new investments to help programs operate safely, securely, and effectively by:

- Dedicating a percentage of new revenue streams to increase access to affordable high-quality expanded learning programs.

- Increasing the per student allotment of Advantage and Empire afterschool programs to at least \$2,320.
- Fully utilizing the \$450 million in federal funds for childcare and other untapped funds to stabilize and achieve a fully-invested, high-quality, responsive continuum of care and development for children and youth in New York State.

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