

## **City Spells Out “One City Vision” for Early Care and Education** **New York Nonprofit Press (July 18, 2007) e-newsletter**

Over 300 providers and advocates turned out yesterday to hear senior New York City officials outline a new “One City Vision” for early child care and education – one likely to entail significant expansion, changes in program design and reallocation of existing funding. The gathering, which focused on “Universal Pre-K and Its Partnership with Child Care and Head Start”, was convened by the Day Care Council of New York. The City recently received an additional allocation of \$61 million for expansion of UPK programming, as part of a \$146 million statewide initiative. The new City budget also added \$5 million for the creation of additional full-day UPK program slots.

“In a nutshell, our vision is an Early Care and Education system where Child Care is provided from infancy to age three. For four-year-olds, we are seeking to provide UPK services along with Head Start and have Child Care be the wrap around service that completes the day and the full year,” said Jennifer Jones Austin, NYC’s Family Services Coordinator in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services.” At age five, children would move to kindergarten.

“This sounds very simple, but it means we have to rethink how funding flows, how our programs work and how we contract with centers and child care providers,” she continued. “This entails an expansion of child care services for infant and toddlers. We know the needs are great. We need to get as many children aged four into UPK programs as we possibly can, thus allowing us to use child care dollars to serve more and younger children.”

“This is not about taking money out of the system. We do have scarce resources and we have to use them wisely,” said Melanie Hartzog, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care and Head Start at the Administration for Children’s Services. “We want to use the child care funding to invest in expansion of infant and toddler care.

“We also want to invest in other needs you have identified,” Hartzog said to a strong round of applause. “We want to fund social workers for all child care programs.”

“Our shared history shows that we can make great strides in expanding Universal Pre-K services for children and their families,” said Eleanor Greig Ukoli, Director of the Office of Early Child Hood Education in the Department of Education. She noted that in 1997, NYC public schools were providing Pre-K for just 4,500 children. A year later, the number had grown to over 13,000 with 60% served in 125 community based organizations. Last year, the UPK population had reached 48,000 with a total of 624 CBOs still providing services for 60% of the total.

Ukoli noted that statewide standards for UPK programs were high and growing with a requirement that all UPK teachers be certified by the 2008/2009 school year. She also

outlined DOE's recent reorganization as it impacts UPK programming. Each borough now has a single Integrated Services Center with a Pre-K borough director, contract manager, instructional coordinators and contract analysts.

Representatives of the nonprofit early childhood community generally praised the "One City Vision" while highlighting a wide range of issues and concerns about how the vision can be implemented.

"I have heard nothing that I can disagree with," said Charmaine Wong, Esq., Vice President at Graham Windham Inc. "Our goals are all the same."

"We need a unified strategy, but we need to do it right," said Nancy Kolben, Executive Director of Child Care Inc. She urged the State to provide greater flexibility in the use of UPK funding, particularly with respect to allowing creation of full-day programming.

She also called for funding to support the true cost of UPK programs. "City and State officials must take into consideration what the 'it' is. What is the product? What are the specifications that we are trying to buy? While there has been this huge investment of resources, we have not addressed a systemic approach to Early Care and Education at the State level. We don't have funding for investment in work force. We don't have funding for start-up. We don't even have funding for minor facilities renovations or for equipment and supplies to open up new classrooms." To this end, Child Care Inc. recently developed a policy brief outlining a "generic" budget for UPK program which far exceeds the levels of reimbursement currently being provided.

Cynthia Cummings, Executive Director of Community Parents, Inc. cited similar concerns relating to competing standards and regulatory requirements which may limit the allocation of Head Start monies within new integrated programming.

Jennifer Jones Austin responded to questions regarding the often contradictory standards for child care, UPK and Head Start programs by noting that the City is currently working with Columbia Teachers College on a uniform set of standards which would cover all three programs. "The goal will be to make sure that we work to the highest standards," she said. "We are not going to shortchange any of the standards."

Audience members seemed most surprised when Jones Austin responded to a question about the lack of funding to create salary parity for certified teachers in CBOs and public schools – one of the longest standing issues within the child care community. "I want to be honest and candid," she said. "This is something I have heard about, but I do not know the specifics. To the extent we can look at that together, I am willing to do that."

"This is a good beginning," said Andrea Anthony, Executive Director of the Cay Care Council, who had organized the event.