

## **City School District of Albany 2020-21 Legislative Priorities Equitable Prekindergarten Funding for High Needs Urban Districts**

We commend Governor Cuomo for his commitment to early childhood education for New York. Early childhood education is a critical need in our district, and a key to success – especially for our students living in poverty. However, the current mechanism for distributing pre-K funds disadvantages children in districts that were early adopters of pre-K – predominantly high-needs urban districts like ours – by funding early pre-K seats at a lower per-pupil rate than later adopters.

The City School District of Albany has been a leader in full-day prekindergarten for more than a decade. We serve about 1,025 prekindergarten students in 68 3- and 4-year-old classrooms throughout the city. More than half of our state pre-K funding (552 seats) is still calculated based on the outdated UPK formula, which has been flat for many years and punishes districts like Albany that were early implementers of full-day pre-K.

Recently, New York merged all pre-K funding into one stream, but the funding is still calculated based on different classes of pre-K, each with a different per-pupil rate. In 2019-20, Albany \$5,177 per pupil in total pre-K funding (or approximately \$5.3 million). However, that is the average of the district's three former pre-K grants now merged into one stream. You can see the disparity in those funding streams:

- UPK – \$4,105 per pupil
- PPK – \$7,444 per pupil
- EPK – \$7,882 per pupil

We are fully committed to pre-K and believe it is critical to student success and breaking the cycle of poverty. However, the low UPK per-pupil allocation provides a significant funding challenge. Funding directly impacts program quality because it affects our ability to attract and retain high-quality, state-certified Early Childhood, Birth-Grade 2 teachers, resulting in high teacher turnover both year-to-year and within a school year. As a result we have chosen to allocate general fund resources to subsidize our pre-K funding. In 2019-20 we are using \$1.3 million from our general fund to subsidize pre-K, making those resources unavailable for critical programs and services for our K-12 students, but providing a more consistent and stable academic foundation for our youngest learners.

We urge the state to increase the UPK rate so that early adopting urban districts like ours have the resources to serve our youngest learners without compromising our ability to deliver services to our K-12 population.

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### **VISION STATEMENT**

*The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.*

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.*