

City School District of Albany 2021-22 Legislative Priorities Equitable Prekindergarten Funding for High Needs Urban Districts

We commend Governor Cuomo and the Legislature for the 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 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. In a typical year, our district offers approximately 1,025 pre-K seats for 3- and 4-year-old learners citywide. However, due to the COVID-19 fiscal crisis and the state’s direction in August that, in the absence of federal aid that still has not arrived, it would reduce UPK funding by at least 20%, we have reduced our available pre-K seats for 2020-21 to 850.

Apart from the COVID-19 fiscal crisis, the ongoing pre-K funding disparity for our school district remains. Our pre-K aid is based on outdated funding formulas. The UPK formula, which supports more than half of our pre-K seats, has been flat for many years and punishes districts like Albany that were early implementers of full-day pre-K. In a typical year, our 552 pre-K seats are funded at the rate of \$4,105 per pupil. In 2019-20, New York’s recent merger of all pre-K funding into one stream provided Albany with an overall per-pupil pre-K rate of \$5,177, significantly below the rate at which the state currently is investing in new pre-K programming in other districts statewide. We urge the state to end this inequity for districts like Albany, and strongly advocate raising funding for all of our pre-K seats to be equitable with more recent funding streams such as EPK (\$7,882).

We are fully committed to pre-K and believe it is critical to student success and breaking the cycle of poverty. However, the low per-pupil allocation for our district provides a significant funding challenge. This 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 2020-21 we are using \$846,400 from our general fund to subsidize pre-K, making those resources unavailable for critical programs and services for our K-12 students amid the COVID-19 crisis, 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.

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.