

TOWARD A 21ST CENTURY CITY FOR ALL

PROGRESSIVE POLICIES FOR
NEW YORK CITY IN 2013
AND BEYOND

Creating a Department of Early Childhood Development

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The next Mayor should create a new, independent Department of Early Childhood Development (DECD) to coordinate and enhance all the City's various programs serving children from birth to age 5 in New York City, with the aim of ensuring that every child enters kindergarten ready to learn. Currently, these programs are spread through four agencies which report to two different Deputy Mayors: the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Department of Education (DOE), and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). By consolidating these programs into one agency, we can make them more efficient and effective.

This paper consists of four sections. We first briefly lay out why the next Mayor should make ECD policy a priority. The second section delineates which programs should be a part of this new ECD department and provides some basic information about each. Third, we lay out the advantages of locating these various programs in one department. Finally, we identify a few challenges to implementation.

1. Early Childhood Development Should Be a Priority

The next Mayor should focus on early childhood development (ECD) for three important, related reasons.

ECD is a critical part of human capital development as a component of the City's economic development strategy.

As technology plays a greater role in more industries, and as our city and national economies face greater competition from around the world, it is critical to increase the skill-level of our workforce, as both Aaron Pallas and Laura Wolf-Powers have argued in their chapters (Business Roundtable, 2003; Knudsen, 2006).¹ Research indicates that early childhood education has a significant positive effect in beginning this process of skill acquisition, which launches a life-long virtuous circle of reinforcement, motivation, and skill-building. (Cunha, 2005) Many parents already grasp this without argument, which is why parents in the city's affluent neighborhoods compete so intensely to place their children in expensive

¹ It is important to point out that "skills" include social skills such as the ability to work well within teams of people with different abilities and backgrounds as well as technical skills.

pre-school slots.² Making early childhood education available to more children is an effective economic development investment in our future workforce. The Bloomberg administration was lauded for its effort to bring top-level engineers to New York City through its Applied Science NYC program because it would bring new talent to spur innovation in the City's economy. Early childhood education will help us grow our own next generations of talent.

Making early childhood education available to those who cannot afford it now will increase the equality of opportunity in the city.

Research indicates that achievement gaps in between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds often begin to open up early in life, and that these early gaps have lasting effects on subsequent school performance (Heckman, 2008; Klein and Knitzer, 2007). Since poor school performance is strongly correlated with lower incomes later in life, as well as adverse health outcomes and increases in criminal behavior, reducing these early gaps can have a significant impact on the trajectories of lives and communities. Research shows the best way to do this is through sustained, high-quality, early childhood education that focuses on cognitive and social/emotional development.³ Ensuring that each child enters kindergarten ready to learn is the only way to give them an equal chance to succeed. Furthermore, ECD is an effective strategy for ameliorating the poor social outcomes associated with economic disadvantage. The Nobel-Prize winning economist James Heckman has argued persuasively that paying for interventions early in life has a higher benefit-cost ratio than interventions made later in life (Heckman, 2008:4). He notes that "such investment will reduce the need for costly remediation and social spending while increasing the value, productivity and earning potential of individuals. In fact, every dollar invested in quality early childhood development for disadvantaged children produces a 7 percent to 10 percent return, per child, per year." (Heckman, 2013)

High-quality ECD is critical to New York City's efforts to support working parents.

This is especially true for those who are low-income so they can succeed in the workplace, as argued in the chapter by Bakst, Liewant, and Gornick. Obviously, it is not possible for parents to work outside the home unless their children have safe, reliable care, and we have argued above that that care should be high-quality ECD. This is also the case for parents attempting to make the transition from public assistance to a career, either through work, additional school or training, or some combination of those. Independent of its positive effects on the children, some evidence suggests that quality child care increases the chances of the success of the welfare-to-work strategy.⁴

These reasons should motivate the next Mayor to focus on maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of early childhood development programs. One way to do that is to reorganize the now-fragmented bureaucracy into a single agency that can be held accountable for working with service providers to run services effectively and efficiently, and to pioneer new approaches that will have even greater positive impacts on more children.

² One of the most famous example is described in Noah (2002).

³ See, for example, the discussion of the evaluation of the Perry Preschool Project in the Introduction of Tough (2012).

⁴ For example, see Lemke, 2000.

2. The Department of Early Childhood Development

A new Department of Early Childhood Education should report directly to a Deputy Mayor and should include the following programs:

Early Childhood Development					
Program	Managing Agency	Target Population	Description	Enrollment	Cost/Child
Contracted family and center-based care	ACS	Children at or below 200% of the poverty line (as defined by the Federal government). Includes children from 6 weeks to 13 years.	Child care in centers and licensed home-based programs	26,959[1]	\$7,000-\$12,000[2]
Child care vouchers	ACS, HRA	Families on public assistance who need child care in order to meet work requirements. Includes children from 6 weeks to 13 years.	Families can use vouchers to pay for child care in a formal or informal setting of their choice.	69,020	\$8,000-\$10,000
Head Start	ACS	3 and 4 year-olds in families with incomes below 130% of the poverty line.	Comprehensive educational, health, and social services for children and their families.	18,351	\$11,271
Universal Pre-Kindergarten	DOE	Any child in NYC turning 4 before 12/31 of the year before class begins.	Focus on learning skills that are necessary for success in school. About 40% of the program slots are in public schools and the rest are in other settings such as Head Start and child care centers.	58,212 in half-day and full-day seats.[3]	Half-day: \$3,300-\$4,000 Full day: \$8,000[4]
Special Education Pre-Kindergarten.	DOE	Children with developmental delays or disabling conditions between ages 3 and 5. All income levels eligible.	The goal is to diagnose problems and formulate education plans early to increase the chances that these children can succeed. Offered in public schools and other settings.	25,000[5]	\$29,000-\$45,000[6]
Early Intervention	DOHMH	Infants and children 0-3 with developmental delays. All income levels eligible.	The goal is to reduce the likelihood of delays among at-risk infants and toddlers.	33,900	\$14,000-\$18,420[7]
Nurse Family Partnership	DOHMH	First time parents below 200% of the poverty line, targeted at high-need areas and women in shelter, foster care system, or incarcerated.	The goal is to improve the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of first-time, at-risk mothers and their infants.	2,000[8]	\$6,475[9]
Child Care Licensing	DOHMH	N/A	Responsible for regulating the care of all children up to six years of age taking place outside the home. Their permit requirements include standards for physical space and equipment, as well as teacher/child ratios, educational background of personnel, and admissions policies.	N/A	N/A

Source: All figures from Fiscal 2012 Mayor's Management Report (MMR), accessed at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/html/data/mmr.shtml> p. 94 or p. 71, unless otherwise noted.

[1] This number derived by subtracting total number of children using vouchers for child care (TANF and low-income working/other families) from total enrollment in subsidized care.

[2] Source involved with program administration.

[3] Mayoral Press Release 336-12, "Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Walcott Announce New Early Education School to Open in Brooklyn and the Addition of 4,000 Full-Day Pre-Kindergarten Seats for 2013-14 School Year," September 24, 2012. Accessed at http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.c0935b9a57bb4ef3daf2f1c701c789a0/index.jsp?pageID=mayor_press_release&catID=1194&doc_name=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nyc.gov%2Fhtml%2Fom%2Fhtml%2F2012b%2Fpr336-12.html&cc=unused1978&rc=1194&ndi=1.

[4] Source involved with program administration.

[5] "Cost of Prekindergarten Special Education is Soaring," New York Times, June 6, 2012, accessed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/06/education/prekindergarten-costs-in-new-york-city-have-doubled-in-6-years.html?pagewanted=all>

[6] Source involved with program administration.

[7] Source involved with program administration.

[8] NYC Nurse-Family Partnership E-News, March/April 2012, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, p. 7. Accessed at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pregnancy/downloads/pdf/nfp-news-march.pdf>.

[9] Source involved with program administration.

3. Benefits of Consolidation

Consolidating these programs will make them more efficient and effective for the following reasons:

Focus and accountability

Each agency responsible for managing ECD programs in New York City has another task as its primary focus: DOE on managing K-12 education, ACS on managing the child welfare system, or DOHMH managing the City's public health programs. It is simply not realistic to expect the best results from agencies whose senior management is responsible for and focused on other vast systems. The system needs a Commissioner and senior management team who wake up every morning pursuing the primary

goal of making the ECD system better, knowing that a single Deputy Mayor will hold them accountable for results.

Unified goals and standards

Currently, different agencies implement ECD programs according to differing standards and with different goals in mind. The funders of these programs sometimes require this. A unified ECD Department, however, could set out a clear vision and standards for preparing children for kindergarten across the system, enabling us to monitor and motivate program providers to meet system-wide goals and compare results across and within programs. A unified ECD Department could also ensure alignment with the K-12 system, setting children up for success as they make this critical transition. Finally, it could harmonize the approach to requirements like fingerprinting and personnel screening, and quality improvement.

Greater impact

By grouping programs serving the same children and families together in one agency, the City should be able to achieve better outcomes. For example, a DECD could build a system that allows a nurse serving an infant and her family in the Nurse-Family Partnership program to make a seamless referral to family- or center-based child care, increasing the chances of making a successful early intervention that saves money down the line. A single agency would also have the best chance of finding opportunities to convert half-day pre-kindergarten slots to full-day lots by advocating for the flexibility to integrate funding streams and then managing that integration successfully. A focused ECD agency should be able to reduce the number of children referred to special education because early interventions will be more successful, and could find ways to reduce the intensity of services required by the group of children that do need special education services. Finally, such an agency may find more efficient ways of sharing training and professional development resources across the system.

Efficiency

By consolidating ECD into one agency, there should be opportunities over time to consolidate some operations and deliver services more efficiently. Furthermore, a centralized capital planning department would be more efficient than the redundant planning systems that currently exist, and could make better use of scarce capital dollars. Just as important, many providers of ECD manage centers that offer multiple services, funded and regulated with different agencies that have different standards, expectations, and processes. Creating a system in which a provider can deal with one ECD agency should allow them to become more efficient as well, devoting fewer resources to managing government relationships and more to providing quality services.

Customer service

Parents must currently navigate a complex bureaucracy to find the correct service for their children. A new ECD agency should create a one-stop system that allows parents to get reliable information from the agency and from Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and easily to enroll their children in the

best program for them. By providing quality information about those programs across a single system, an ECD agency can also foster competition, which, if managed correctly, can improve outcomes.

Expanded resources

While the ECD system in New York City is broad, it still reaches only a fraction of those children eligible for services. The Commissioner of a unified New York City Department of Early Childhood Development would have a more effective voice in debates about increasing Federal and other resources to New York City ECD programs. The Commissioner could also establish better ties with private philanthropy, business leaders, and academic institutions to maximize resources and attention.

4. Challenges

The effort to create a single ECD agency faces three major challenges:

It is far easier to describe the need for integrating services funded and regulated by different federal and state actors into a coherent, seamless system than it is to do the job. It will take sustained political effort, resources, and patience to accomplish this successfully. It will also take careful and deliberate planning to align and coordinate with the K-12 school system.

The effort to create an independent agency will almost certainly engender opposition from people invested in the current way of doing things. The success of this effort may hinge on whether the next Mayor makes the move quickly and decisively, preferably announcing it within the first 100 days, and including the organizational change as part of a legislative package accompanying the first adopted budget.

Finally, the Mayor's new ECD Commissioner will continue to face the tradeoff between expanding the reach of a system where demand far outstrips supply, and raising the quality of any given service, especially in the critical areas of staff development and support. Both are important, and we hope that the increased efficiency and impact of a coherent ECD system can increasingly make this choice a false one.

5. Conclusion

President Obama recently affirmed the importance of quality early childhood education in 2013's State of the Union address, pledging to work with states to expand programs, and to "make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind." The next Mayor should take up the President's call by working with the state and federal governments to expand services for children from birth to five to ensure that each child in New York City enters kindergarten ready to learn. The next Mayor has the best chance to succeed with a single agency focused on that worthy goal.

Funder Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful for financial support from the Brooklyn Community Foundation, the Charles S. Revson Foundation, the J. M. Kaplan Fund, the New York Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, and the Scherman Foundation. The opinions expressed in this work are solely those of the authors and do not represent those of the funders, The Graduate Center, or the City University of New York.

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