

**City Council Hearing on EarlyLearn NYC**  
**Testimony by Commissioner John B. Mattingly**  
**NYC Administration for Children's Services**  
**April 28, 2010**

Good morning Chair Palma, Chair Ferreras and members of the General Welfare and Women's Issues committees. I am John Mattingly, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (Children's Services). Joining me today is Melanie Hartzog, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care and Head Start at Children's Services. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Children's Services' vision for the early care and education system in New York City.

**Why EarlyLearn NYC?**

At the Preliminary Budget Hearing in March, I testified about the City's efforts to build upon the quality in our early childhood education system. On April 2, Children's Services released a concept paper that describes a new direction for the City's publicly-funded early childhood system designed to raise educational standards, increase family supports and strengthen professional development for teachers. With this new direction, the City will invest in an enriched system of center and home-based programs,

called *EarlyLearn NYC*, designed to best prepare children for success in elementary school and beyond.

I know that the Council is well aware of the challenges that we face in the early care and education system. Together, we have worked tirelessly to sustain the system at a time when we have experienced severe financial instability. I know that we all share the same goal – to provide the best early care and education possible to every child in New York City. In the midst of the current fiscal challenges we must not lose sight of this goal. *EarlyLearn NYC* provides us with a critical opportunity for our system and I believe that we will look back five years from now and see this as a turning point.

This is a long-term investment in our communities by investing in our children. With improvements in the quality of our system through *EarlyLearn NYC*, we will find that:

- Our communities with the greatest need for subsidized child care will have the highest quality centers available to them;
- Our parents will be able to obtain information on subsidized child care and on the centers in our system more easily;
- Our families will receive the same quality of service throughout our system regardless of their neighborhood or income level;

- Our children will receive services and supports that are centered around their individual needs;
- Our parents will play a more active role in the success of their early care program and their children's education;
- Our children will transition into kindergarten better prepared for success;
- Our centers will have more qualified teachers and the necessary administrative supports to ensure quality teaching and learning environments Citywide;
- Our centers will be better equipped to recruit children and maintain full enrollment.

Ultimately, every parent accessing one of our centers will know that their child is receiving stable and high quality care and education.

Throughout our work over the past several years, we have had many conversations with child care providers about what they need to provide the highest quality of care. We have also consulted with local and national experts and researched nationally acclaimed models demonstrating the long-term developmental gains resulting from high quality early childhood programs. *EarlyLearn NYC* is the direct result of our research and discussions to date and we have developed program

models that will leverage the best quality and services made available through existing programs in New York City.

Research clearly demonstrates that high quality early childhood education programs produce significant, positive results for young children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Children who participate in early childhood education programs show significant growth in vocabulary and oral-learning abilities, letter-word recognition, spelling, color identification, letter naming and math skills at the end of their preschool years. Therefore, with *EarlyLearn NYC* there are higher program standards to ensure high-quality services leading to better child outcomes. Fostering children's healthy development will be our primary goal through *EarlyLearn NYC*.

## **Overview of EarlyLearn NYC**

.We believe that there are four main components of *EarlyLearn NYC*:

- 1) Expansion of Infant & Toddler Care to Meet the Needs of Underserved Population
- 2) Increased Child & Family Supports to Build a Holistic Approach to Early Childhood Development and Better Support the Entire Family

- 3) Uniform Program and Child Assessments for Higher Quality Services and More Positive Outcomes for Children
- 4) Integrated Early Care Settings for a More Accessible and Sustainable System

I would like to explain these components one at a time.

### Expansion of Infant & Toddler Care

Children's Services highlighted the need for additional infant and toddler placements in New York City in our 2005 strategic plan, called "Rethinking Child Care." At that time, we stated that a 4-year-old was almost 10 times more likely to receive services than a 1-year-old. We also noted that many of these toddlers would benefit from high quality care to ensure they reach developmental benchmarks and to set them on a path to become ready for kindergarten.

Since this time, we have also heard from many programs about the challenges of competing with private programs to serve eligible three and four year old children in their contracted capacity.

Children's Services has worked with programs throughout the City to convert capacity wherever possible to serve infants and toddlers and to date we have been successful in aging down our system by more than 700 seats. However, we know we must do more in order

to maximize services for this underserved population, particularly because Child Care Block Grant funding is the only funding available to this population. For these reasons, Children's Services will seek to expand capacity to serve infants and toddlers through *EarlyLearn NYC*.

### Increased Child & Family Supports

In our existing system, children and families may or may not receive a variety of supports depending on the type of program that they are enrolled in. Head Start requires that every program provide social and nutrition services to every child. These services are provided in some universal pre-K programs, as well, depending on the program model. Up until now, however, these were not requirements of contracted child care centers or family child care networks. Through *EarlyLearn NYC*, every child will be assessed to determine their nutritional, social and mental health needs, and family supports will be provided in all programs.

In the current system, only child care and some Head Start programs provide ten hours of service while other types of programs provide services for as little as two to three hours. In the new system, all programs will provide services for between eight and ten hours a day. Services will also be provided 11 to 12 months a year for all

programs to better meet the needs of working parents. With this, we will ensure that every family involved with *EarlyLearn NYC* receives full day, year round service, enabling them to work.

### Uniform Program and Child Assessments

Through *EarlyLearn NYC* we will also raise expectations and set higher program quality standards across the board. That is not to say that we do not have quality programs in our system today. However, we know that there is always room to improve when it comes to providing the best care and education possible for our children.

Building off of the Head Start model, we will develop new holistic and developmentally-appropriate screening and child assessment systems designed to help teachers best support children's development. We will provide additional support in the classroom and support teachers' professional development and instructional practices. We are also working with our partners in the City and State to create the nation's first uniform performance measurement standards and tools for all early childhood development and education programs. These tools will be utilized to assess the performance of all *EarlyLearn NYC* programs so that we are ensuring that all children receive consistent quality, regardless of which program their parents chose. The performance

measurement tools will also help us to identify areas where programs need additional support to help them raise quality in their programs.

Our primary goal through *EarlyLearn NYC* is to better prepare children in our centers for success in school, both in kindergarten and beyond. We believe that by setting the bar high for quality in our programs and making sure that programs have the resources and support to meet our standards, we will achieve this goal.

### Integrated and Accessible Early Care Settings

In our new system, programs will also be encouraged to recruit a diverse group of children, reflective of their communities. Programs will serve children in economically integrated settings, meaning that there will be a mix of subsidized and private pay students. Emerging research shows that there are significant developmental benefits for children, particularly in language development, when early education settings are economically integrated. *EarlyLearn NYC* will also support the development of children with special needs in integrated settings, which is currently a requirement of Head Start programs that we will be replicating systemwide. Research shows that both children with and without special needs benefit developmentally from these inclusive settings.

Within *EarlyLearn NYC*, Children's Services will maintain its goals outlined in the 2005 Strategic Plan, including community-based eligibility and Project Full Enrollment (PFE). It's critical that parents have easy access to early childhood services by applying through their neighborhood program. We also believe that PFE is instrumental in ensuring that scarce resources are maximized and every seat paid by the City is filled with an eligible child.

In addition, we will provide resources for programs to brand as *EarlyLearn NYC* sites and will broaden demand for early care services that will be more attractive and accessible to parents regardless of family income. Through *EarlyLearn NYC*, we will integrate Head Start, UPK and Child Care funding streams on the back-end and leverage additional early care dollars. This will help us to stabilize our system, invest in higher quality standards and create economically integrated settings that both low and middle income families access.

### **EarlyLearn NYC Procurement Timeline**

Anyone interested in commenting on the concept paper can do so by May 21<sup>st</sup>, submitting comments electronically to:

[earlylearningCP@dfa.state.ny.us](mailto:earlylearningCP@dfa.state.ny.us). We are currently incorporating feedback as we develop the RFP, which is expected to be released

this summer. We expect tentative awards to be announced in the winter 2010 and new contracts will begin in July 2011, at the start of Fiscal Year 2012.

## **Conclusion**

I hope that my testimony has helped to explain the significance of *EarlyLearn NYC* and how, through this important step, we will raise the bar for early care and education in New York City that will have a profound long-term impact on our communities, families and children. While this RFP sets our system in a new direction, we know that the programs in our system are already working to provide quality care to our City's children. I would like to recognize the dedication and efforts that the staff and leadership at our centers demonstrate every day. While we acknowledge that this is a big change for all of us, overall we believe that this goal of enhancing quality is already happening in centers throughout the City. It is our expectation that through these new contracts our system will better support *EarlyLearn NYC* programs in their important work.

Before I close, I want to say that I know that the Council has many questions about this system and we will do our best to provide as much clear and helpful information as possible. It is important to know, before we take your questions, that there are many details of

*EarlyLearn NYC* that we can not provide at this hearing today. This is to comply with competitive bidding rules which, as the Council is aware, are designed to ensure that all organizations have an equal opportunity to compete for City contracts. While we may not be able to answer all of your questions today, please know that your comments will help us to strengthen our RFP which is currently in development.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our vision for the early care and education system in New York City, which we will realize through *EarlyLearn NYC*. We look forward to working with the Council in the months ahead to transform our system and strengthen early care and education services for children and families. Deputy Commissioner Melanie Hartzog and I will now take your questions. Thank you.