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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

**Honorable Mark Treyger, Chair**

**At the FY 2019 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**Presented by Gregory Brender, Co-Director of Policy and Advocacy**

**March 23, 2018**

Thank you Chair Levin and members of the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) of New York is New York City’s association of settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement begun over 100 years ago, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH’s membership includes 39 organizations employing 13,000 people at over 650 sites across the five boroughs of New York City to provide high quality services and activities to over 750,000 New Yorkers each year.

Typical settlement house services range from early childhood education and after-school, to youth employment and college access, to adult education and workforce development, to behavioral health services, homelessness prevention and older adult services. Essentially, our members provide “one-stop” shopping for all community members—be they children, youth, immigrants, older adults, or working families.

Settlement houses are deeply committed to high-quality early childhood education and play a role in nearly every aspect of the early childhood systems is New York City including:

* Providing over 50 EarlyLearn Center Based Child Care programs which provide year-round, full-day programs for children 0-4 years old;
* Providing six ACS contracted Family Child Care Networks which support licensed and registered home based providers;
* Providing DOE-contracted Pre-K for All programs at 21 settlement houses;
* Opening one of the first 3-K for All Programs; and
* Offering training for all unregistered home-based child care providers in the City.

**The Future of Early Childhood Education in New York City**

In the summer of 2016, UNH anticipated that Administration for Children’s Services would issue a new Concept Paper and Request for Proposals for child care programs. The system had not gone through a competitive bidding process since the EarlyLearn RFP which started on November 1, 2012. Moreover, the EarlyLearn RFP presented significant challenges for providers and families including an approximately 25% reduction in capacity. Many of these challenges were addressed only with the leadership of and investments from the New York City Council.

In preparing for a new RFP, UNH convened providers to determine what reforms were necessary to make a stronger early childhood education system. These recommendations, developed with the on-the ground experience of UNH’s early childhood providers and compiled in UNH’s 2016 report: *Starting Strong: The Settlement House Vision for New York City’s Comprehensive Early Childhood Education System,* can be divided into four categories:

1. Invest in Early Childhood Educators.
2. Better Serve Families by Improving and Simplifying Access to EarlyLearn Programs.
3. Strengthen Families through Innovative Programs.
4. Fully Fund Contracts for Quality Services for Children and Families.[[1]](#footnote-1)

As you know, ACS did not issue a new Concept Paper or RFP for the EarlyLearn system. Instead, on April 24, 2017, Mayor de Blasio announced his goal of creating a unified early childhood education system under the Department of Education. As part of this plan, two major changes were announced:

1. The transition of EarlyLearn programs operating with Administration for Children’s Services contracts to Department of Education contracts in September 2019 and subsequent reprocurement of EarlyLearn programs in 2020;
2. The launch of what is now called 3-K for All- 6.5 hour school year programs that are open to any 3-year old who resides in New York City.

Both goals are laudable. However, neither can be achieved if the City does not address the first and most important step that providers determined was necessary to ensure a strong and stable system- investing in early childhood educators. The teachers, staff and directors in community-based early childhood education programs including EarlyLearn, Pre-K for All and 3-K for All earn significantly less than their similarly qualified counterparts in public schools.

This disparity affects the stability of programs and the morale of staff. Both of those factors ultimately translate into the quality and consistency of services that are available for low-income working families. Today we are asking for the City Council’s help in addressing this disparity.

**Salary Disparities in Early Childhood Education**

For New York City’s early childhood educators, whether you work in a publicly-funded community-based organization or in a public school determines how much you earn. The salary disparities are stark and grow over time. For example, a certified head teacher in a 3-year-old classroom in a community based organization has a starting salary of $46,920 while a certified teacher in a public school starts at $61,894. After time, these disparities grow wider. With eight years of experience, a public school teachers’ annual salary will have grown to slightly over $81,042 while a teacher in a community based program will be earning just $48,920.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Unsurprisingly, due to the high cost of living in New York City, may staff feel compelled to leave community based programs for higher paying jobs with New York City Department of Education. The loss of teachers from EarlyLearn programs was an especially acute problem during the initial rollout of EarlyLearn programs. The competition with higher-paying programs led some centers to be unable to find qualified staff. Centers were forced to adjust to this reality by closing classrooms and in a few cases closing center completely.

This trend is likely to grow worse as the City moves to expand 3-K for All programs to 12 Community School Districts by 2020. The supply of qualified teachers is likely to shrink and this will lead to a further destabilized system and the possibility of more longstanding programs being forced to shut their doors.

As we mentioned before, settlement houses offer many different types of early childhood education programs and recognize that different neighborhoods and especially different families have different needs. However, the EarlyLearn system is uniquely important for many of the families it serves because it is the only system publicly funded system that provides the hours during the workday and over the summer that working families need.

Further destabilization of the EarlyLearn system means greater uncertainty for the families who are doing the often low-paying jobs that keep New York running. And it means that their children have less opportunity to access early childhood education programs. As the City seeks to expand access to early childhood education, it must ensure EarlyLearn programs can offer competitive and fair salaries for their staff- salaries that are on part with colleagues working in public schools.

**Moving Forward for Salary Parity in the FY 2019 Budget**

The City Council has long been an ally in the fight for salary parity for New York City’s early childhood educators. In its response to the Mayor’s proposed FY 2017 Budget, the City Council called on the administration to “Create Wage Parity for Child Care Providers” and cited the nearly 3,000 teachers, staff and directors in Early Learn programs who are most impacted by salary disparities. The City Council also called on the administration to invest $33.5 million in FY 2017 to move towards salary parity.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Unfortunately, the administration did not act upon the City Council’s call to action adequately. The FY 2018 Preliminary Budget projects that funding for salary increases for EarlyLearn staff will rise to $19.5 million by 2021- four years after the City Council called on the City to invest an initial $33.5 million.

In order to ensure the stability of the EarlyLearn system and ultimately the success of the Mayor’s goal of a unified early childhood education system, we ask the City Council to take two actions:

1. Call on the Mayor to take immediate action to achieve salary parity for the early childhood education workforce;
2. Hold a joint hearing of the City Council General Welfare and Education Committees on the impact of salary disparities in New York City’s early childhood education system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.

1. *Starting Strong: The Settlement House Vision for New York City’s Comprehensive Early Childhood Education System*. United Neighborhood Houses. October 2016. http://www.unhny.org/Issuu/UNH\_starting\_strong.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Salary Disparities in NYC’s Early Childhood Education Workforce.* Campaign for Children and Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York*,* 2018. https://www.cccnewyork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/salary-parity-infographic-final.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The New York City Council’s Response to the Mayor’s FY 2017 Preliminary Budget and FY 2016 Mayor’s Management Report.* New York City Council. April 4, 2016. <http://nyccouncillabs.wpengine.com/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2016/05/FY17-Preliminary-Budget-Response.pdf> page 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)