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Testimony on 2-K oversight in New York City

The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, or PDI, works to strengthen the early childhood workforce and improve the quality of early care and education across New York. Our work includes career and academic advising, professional and leadership development, quality improvement through QUALITYstarsNY, and the Aspire Registry, New York State's workforce registry for early childhood professionals. We also coordinate the NYC Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program with funding from the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development, a promising pathway for new early childhood educators.

We welcome New York City's commitment to expanding access to early care and education for younger children. As 2-K begins and the City considers what successful implementation and future growth should look like, our experience points to a central principle: **expansion and quality must be built together.**

The success of 2-K should not be measured only by the number of seats that are created. It should also be reflected in whether programs have the workforce, leadership, and ongoing support they need to provide developmentally appropriate, responsive care and education to two-year-olds.

A prepared and supported workforce is essential to 2-K

Working effectively with two-year-olds requires knowledgeable educators who understand early childhood development and can build strong, responsive relationships with young children and their families. Children in this age group have distinct developmental needs that require specialized knowledge and skills, but many early education degree and credential programs provide limited opportunities for students to study infant-toddler development and gain practical experience working with children from birth to age 3.

As 2-K expands, ensuring that educators have access to preparation, professional learning, and strengths-based coaching focused on infants and toddlers will be essential to providing high-quality experiences for two-year-olds.

Compensation must be part of the workforce strategy

Preparation alone, however, cannot ensure a stable 2-K workforce. Educators also need compensation that makes it possible to remain in the profession, build their expertise, and advance over time. Career pathways are most meaningful when professional growth leads to economic growth.

Compensation has long been a significant challenge across early childhood education, and infant-toddler educators have historically been among the lowest-paid members of the early childhood workforce. As the City expands public investment in care and education for two-year-olds, this longstanding compensation challenge has direct implications for the stability of the workforce on which 2-K depends.

A career ladder and salary scale developed by the Early Care and Education Workforce Collaborative, convened by PDI, proposes one approach to addressing this issue. The model connects increased compensation to educators' credentials and degrees, while also recognizing experience in the field. The Collaborative designed the framework to establish clearer pathways for professional advancement and to illustrate what parity compensation could look like across the early childhood workforce.

As the City evaluates the first phase of 2-K and considers future expansion, we encourage policymakers to consider compensation, credentialing, professional development, and career advancement together, rather than as separate workforce issues. A sustainable 2-K system depends on educators having opportunities both to grow professionally and to build sustainable careers in early childhood education.

Quality should be part of the system's infrastructure

Quality early childhood programs require an environment in which educators and program leaders can continually strengthen their practice. That means thinking about quality improvement not as an intervention for a program that is struggling, but as part of the infrastructure that supports every program's ongoing development.

QUALITYstarsNY offers one model for doing this. Through QUALITYstarsNY, participating programs receive support that can include individualized technical assistance, resources for quality improvement, and access to professional development opportunities.

Continuous quality improvement can be particularly valuable during an expansion. New classrooms are opening, educators and leaders are taking on new responsibilities, and programs are responding to the developmental needs of a younger age group. Quality supports can help translate standards and expectations into day-to-day practice.

The important question should therefore not simply be whether a new 2-K program meets requirements at the point when it opens. We should also be asking: What structures are in place to help that program, its educators, and its leaders continue to learn and improve?

Successful implementation requires accurate information

As the City examines the initial implementation of 2-K, reliable workforce information will be essential. Earlier this year, City testimony acknowledged that New York City does not have a single authoritative source describing how many people currently work in early care and education, in what settings, or under what conditions.

PDI operates the Aspire Registry, which collects and verifies education, employment, and training information about the early childhood workforce across licensed program types. As 2-K develops, incentivizing Aspire Registry participation for programs offering 2-K will provide data to help the City better understand the workforce supporting the program, including educators' qualifications and professional learning needs, and identify where additional workforce supports may be needed.

Better information can help policymakers move beyond identifying problems after they occur and toward recognizing emerging needs and responding to them.

Building on what already exists

The encouraging news is that New York City does not need to build all this infrastructure from scratch.

Across CUNY, PDI, City and State agencies, early childhood programs, higher education, and other partners, significant expertise and infrastructure already exist. 2-K creates an opportunity to connect these resources more intentionally around a shared goal: ensuring that expanded public access to care and education for two-year-olds is accompanied by the conditions that support high-quality experiences for children and sustainable careers for the educators who work with them.