

# Appendix C: Universal Prekindergarten Program

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## Introduction

Chapter 436 of the Laws of 1997 provides for New York State's Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Program. The program was designed to be phased in over a four-year period, with the first districts implementing programs in the 1998–99 school year and an increasing number of districts becoming eligible each year until the program was fully implemented in the 2001–02 school year. The statute specifies a formula to be used to calculate a district's grant award. When fully implemented, the UPK Program is intended to provide all districts with the opportunity to offer a State-funded prekindergarten experience to all four-year-olds, regardless of income.

By statute, districts are required to set aside at least 10 percent of their UPK grant to collaborate with existing early childhood agencies for the provision of the instructional program. UPK classes may be located at public school sites or at early childhood agency sites. This set-aside requirement may be waived when a district can document that it has made diligent efforts to identify an agency with which to collaborate and is unable to do so due to the lack of available agencies within its district boundaries.

UPK classrooms, regardless of setting, provide child-centered and interactive learning experiences. The instructional program must be designed for children as active learners and be based on a professional body of knowledge about how social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development takes place in young children. Classroom activities are planned around learning centers, and each day includes a balance of active and quiet play, individual and group activities, and teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. The goals of the program are to develop children's language and communication skills, to promote early literacy skills, to develop large and fine motor skills, and to foster children's social-emotional development. The prekindergarten content is connected with the kindergarten and early elementary curricula and the New York State Learning Standards.

## Program Highlights

**Status of Implementation.** Full implementation as set forth in Section 3602–3 of Education Law has not been realized due to three years of static appropriations. Since 2001–02, the only districts eligible to receive a UPK grant were those that were eligible in the previous year. As a result, approximately 35 percent of the school districts in New York State have not had the opportunity to offer a State-funded prekindergarten program to four-year-olds in their boundaries.

Despite funding obstacles, approximately 81,000 students statewide currently participate in a State-funded early education program. State-funded early education programs include UPK, the Targeted Prekindergarten Program (formerly known as the NYS Experimental Prekindergarten Program), and full-time approved preschool special education programs (four or more hours per day). In the 2002–03 school year, districts also used other funding sources, such as Title I, magnet school grants, and local tax levy, to provide prekindergarten services to approximately 5,800 children. In addition, the federally funded Head Start program served 26,000 four-year-olds. In the 2002–03 school year, 44 percent of New York State's four-year-olds received a State-funded, federally funded, or other school district funded prekindergarten program (Figure C.1).

Interest in the UPK Program remains high. As boards of education across the State engaged the public in the development of their local budgets, they have been urged to retain their commitment to early education. These boards of education have made important decisions to maintain UPK. As a result, the UPK program has experienced slight, incremental growth over the last three years (Table C.1).

During the 2002–03 school year, 189 of the 224 eligible districts (84 percent) participated in the UPK program, serving approximately 58,300 children. Figure C.2 illustrates the distribution of en-

rolled children between the Big 5 City school districts and the rest of the State.

***Collaboration with Early Childhood Agencies.*** New York State's UPK Program requires districts to set aside a minimum of 10 percent of their UPK grant funds to collaborate with existing early childhood agencies. This collaboration requirement has fostered the development of a prekindergarten system that builds upon and complements the pre-existing early care and education system within communities. Districts and early childhood agencies continue to be engaged in meaningful collaborations that benefit districts, early childhood agencies, children, and their families. While all collaborations involve the provision of the instructional program by the early childhood agency, the nature of collaborations varies widely and is subject to the terms of the contract between the district and the community-based organization. Professional development, curricula and assessments, kindergarten transition activities, support services, and parent involvement are among the shared and coordinated activities resulting from UPK collaborations.

The early childhood agencies collaborating with school districts include the full gamut of early care and education providers: day care centers, nursery schools, Head Start programs, group family or family day care providers, preschool special education providers, BOCES, and nonpublic schools (Figure C.3).

Since the inception of the UPK Program, the grant funds used to support collaborations with early childhood agencies have consistently exceeded the statutorily mandated minimum of 10 percent. In the 2002–03 school year, early childhood agencies provided the instructional program for approximately 63 percent of the UPK students statewide; 68 percent of the enrolled children in New York City, and 52 percent of the UPK students in the rest of the State. The distribution of grant funds between public schools and early childhood agencies approximates the distribution of students (Figure C.4).

***Teacher Qualifications.*** Qualified and well-prepared staff is one predictor of a high quality early childhood program. The UPK Program requires that all teachers possess New York State certification to teach in the early grades. The program regulations provide a transition period for early childhood agencies to meet this requirement. During the transition period, early childhood agencies may employ class-

room teachers who are not certified, provided there is an on-site education director, responsible for program implementation, who has New York State teaching certification for services in the early grades. While this transition period was originally scheduled to end in September 2001, it has been extended until September 2004. During the 2002–03 school year, 81 percent of the teachers in UPK classrooms were certified. While 94 percent of the UPK teachers outside of New York City were certified, only 74 percent of the UPK teachers in New York City were certified (Figure C.5).

***Program Effectiveness.*** UPK has created an earlier entry point to education, assisted in the coordination between day care settings and public education, and helped young children be better prepared to learn.

***State Education Department Program Administration.*** Department staff continues to provide technical assistance to school districts and community agencies via telephone calls, e-mail, and listserve communication. In the 2002–03 school year, comprehensive monitoring visits to UPK Programs were made to 14 school districts. In addition, UPK Program oversight was provided by Department staff conducting coordinated monitoring reviews for other programs, such as Title I, Academic Intervention Service (AIS) plans, District Comprehensive Education Plan (DCEP), school improvement, and SURR/Redesign visits. Complete and current UPK Program information was made widely accessible through the New York State Education Department web site, as well as through early childhood conferences, articles in relevant publications, and policy memoranda to the field.

Technical assistance and support to school districts were also provided through the participation of Department staff in the citywide meetings of the New York City Early Childhood Directors. These meetings provide an opportunity to obtain information regarding the needs of the programs and to discuss implementation difficulties in New York City. They also provide an opportunity to reinforce the Department's strategic objectives for early education and to convey information on program policy and new initiatives. Department staff also attend meetings of the New York State Prekindergarten Administrators Association, which serve a similar purpose on a statewide basis.

## Program Challenges and Needs

**Transportation.** The inability of districts to receive transportation aid for UPK children continued to challenge districts in 2002–03. Districts are allowed to use their grant funds to transport children; however, use of funds for this purpose results in decreased resources for program requirements. In an effort to move toward structuring a district’s prekindergarten program like that of its K-12 program, it is recommended that districts be allowed to use State transportation aid for the purpose of transporting prekindergarten children.

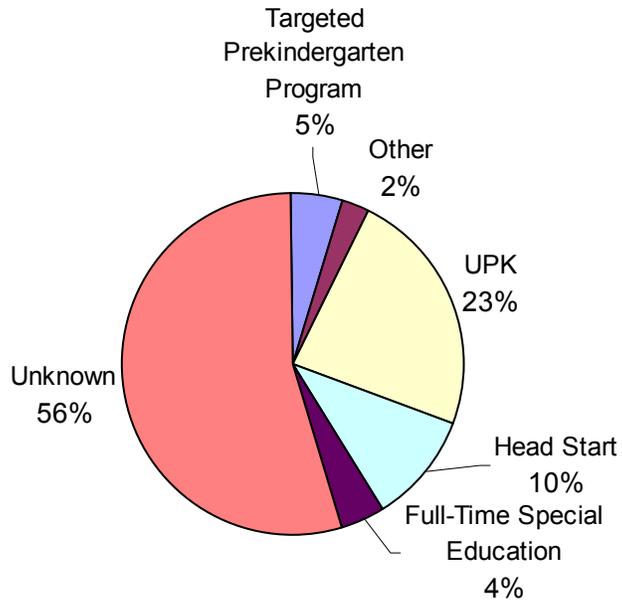
**Alignment with Other State and Federal Initiatives.** Early education and reading instruction have been at the forefront of State and national attention over the past five years. Research suggests strongly that the roots of reading difficulties lie in the early childhood years. Quality early education for all students that includes strong scientifically based reading instruction is a core strategy for raising academic performance and closing the achievement gap.

Since 1992 when the Board of Regents adopted “Supporting Young Children and Families: A Regents Policy Statement on Early Childhood,” there have been significant changes in how districts address standards, assessments, curriculum, and instructional practices in the early childhood years. The Regents have determined that the policy statement would benefit from review to ensure that it is aligned with the current research and the increased focus on literacy in the early school years. To this end, the Regents have directed the Department to conduct a series of public forums throughout the spring of 2004 with key early education stakeholders. The outcomes of the public engagement and subsequent policy discussions may have implications for the UPK Program requirements.

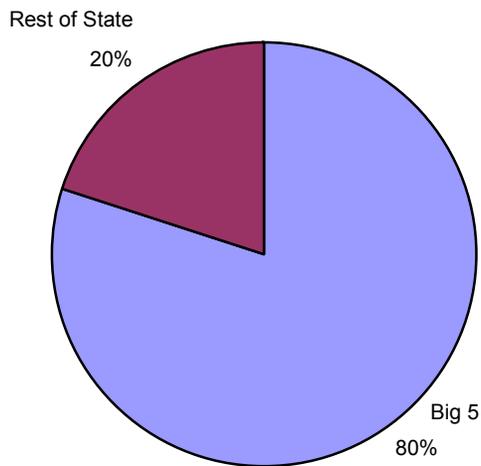
## Summary

Prekindergarten programs and quality early childhood programs are essential to assisting young children prepare for academic success. The UPK Program has been a catalyst for positive change in those districts where it has been implemented. Both districts and early childhood agencies have benefited from shared professional development activities and collaboration. Consistent goals, objectives, and curriculum are being implemented and all teachers benefit from interaction across systems. Districts are reassessing their kindergarten through grade two programs to ensure continuity between prekindergarten and the early elementary grades. These efforts benefit the children who enter kindergarten with a stronger educational foundation, as well as their parents and families who have better understanding of school expectations and how they can support their children’s learning.

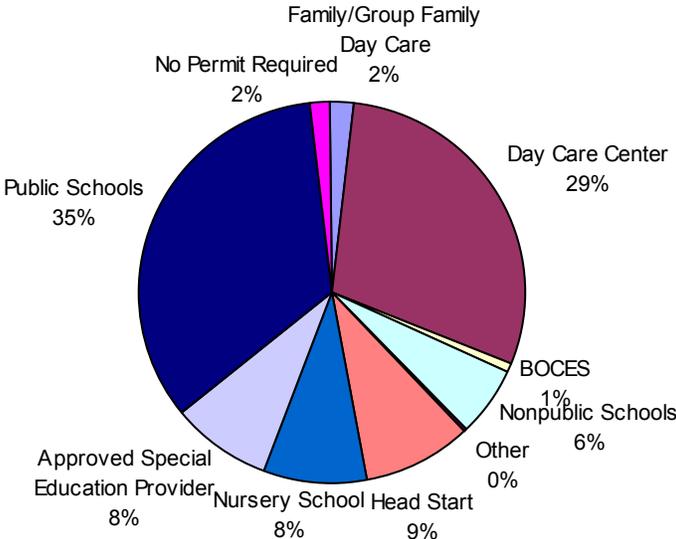
**Figure C.1**  
**Percent of New York State Prekindergarten Students Served by Various Programs**  
**2002–03**



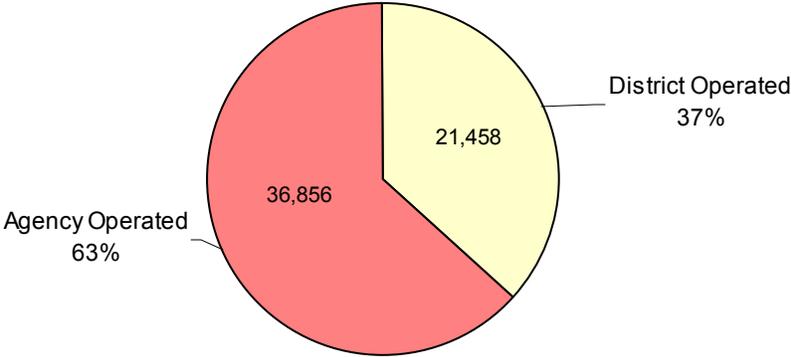
**Figure C.2**  
**Universal Prekindergarten Program Enrollment**  
**2002–03**



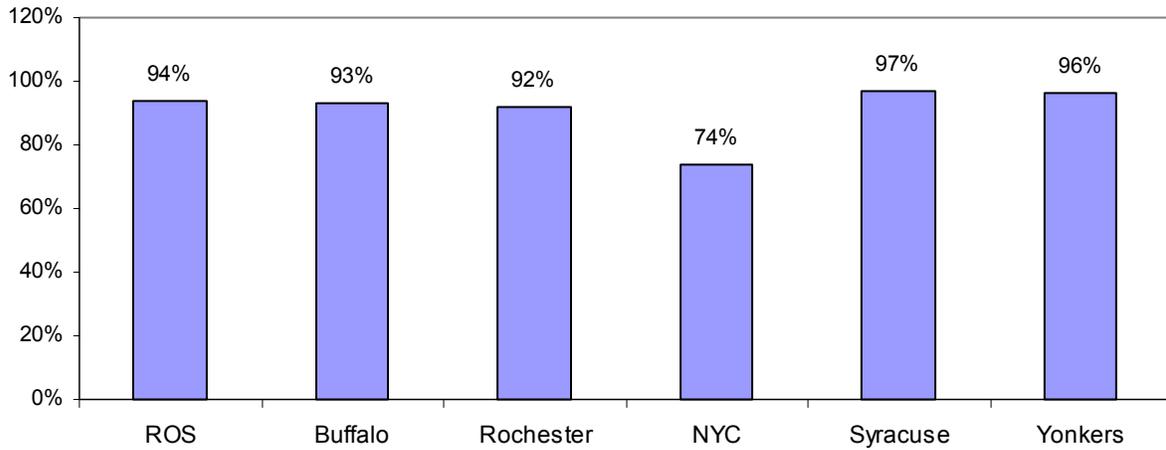
**Figure C.3**  
**Percent of UPK Classes Provided by Various Groups**  
**2002–03**



**Figure C.4**  
**Distribution of UPK Students Between District-Operated Classes and Agency-Operated Classes**  
**2002–03**



**Figure C.5**  
**Percentage of UPK Teachers Who Are Certified in the Big 5 Cities and the Rest of the State (ROS)**  
**2002–03**



**Table C.1**  
**Growth Trends in UPK**  
**1998–99 to 2002–03**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Districts Participating</b>	<b>Expenditures (in millions)</b>	<b>Number of Children Served</b>
1998–1999	62	\$56.3	18,200
1999–2000	97	\$83.6	27,400
2000–2001	162	\$158.4	48,100
2001–2002	188	\$176.8	54,800
2002–2003	189	\$195.4	58,300

Sources: 1998–2003 Final Expenditure Reports (FS-10-F) and 1998–2003 UPK Final Program Report