

Building a Unified System for Universal Pre-K in New York City: The Implementation of Pre-K for All by Setting and Auspice

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Executive Summary

The National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) at Teachers College, Columbia University has conducted a study of the implementation of New York City's Pre-K for All (PKA) initiative in the 2016-17 school year to extend Universal Pre-K (UPK) to every 4-year-old in the city. The study examined the variation in PKA implementation and program quality in different settings (i.e., schools vs. New York City Early Education Centers [NYCEECs]) and different auspices (i.e., UPK funding from NYC's Department of Education [DOE], UPK and Child Care funding from NYC's Administration for Children's Services [ACS], and UPK and Head Start funding from DOE and/or ACS).

Methods: We used a mixed-methods design with the following data sources:

1. Site administrator (n=57) and teacher (n=66) survey data on PKA implementation, including child recruitment and enrollment; compliance with program requirements; pedagogy and teaching practices; curriculum and assessment use; professional development; kindergarten transitions; family and child services; administrator and teacher compensation; and teacher recruitment and turnover.
2. Interviews with a subset of administrators and teachers (n=30).
3. Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations in each sampled classroom (n=66).
4. DOE child demographic data for each site (n=57).

Overview of the Findings

From inception, the PKA initiative, like its precursors, confronted a complex and uneven structural landscape with program administration divided among city agencies. Cognizant of the obstacles and challenges presented by this extant landscape, the city tried to align program quality by providing PKA policy and standards documents to guide programs in all settings, building program capacity with differentiated PD, offering compensation incentives, assisting with teacher recruitment, and supporting site-level social work. The results of the analyses indicate that the city has much to be proud of in this regard. However, important differences in quality endure, perpetuating concerns regarding structural inequities and inefficiencies, with some favoring schools and some favoring NYCEECs. Three themes emerge from the findings:

- I. Implementing PKA has been more challenging for NYCEECs than for schools, with implications for quality, equity, and efficiency.
- II. NYCEECs possess important strengths in serving children and families, with implications for quality and equity in both school- and NYCEEC-based programs.
- III. Far fewer differences in PKA implementation were evident by neighborhood resource level than by setting and auspice, though some significant differences were found.

These differences in implementation represent multiple opportunities to promote the quality, equity, and efficiency of the city's UPK programs. We offer actionable policy recommendations and implementation options in six areas: 1) A commission to build a unified UPK system; 2) Equitable compensation; 3) Quality pedagogy; 4) Comprehensive services; 5) Program leadership; 6) Equitable enrollment.

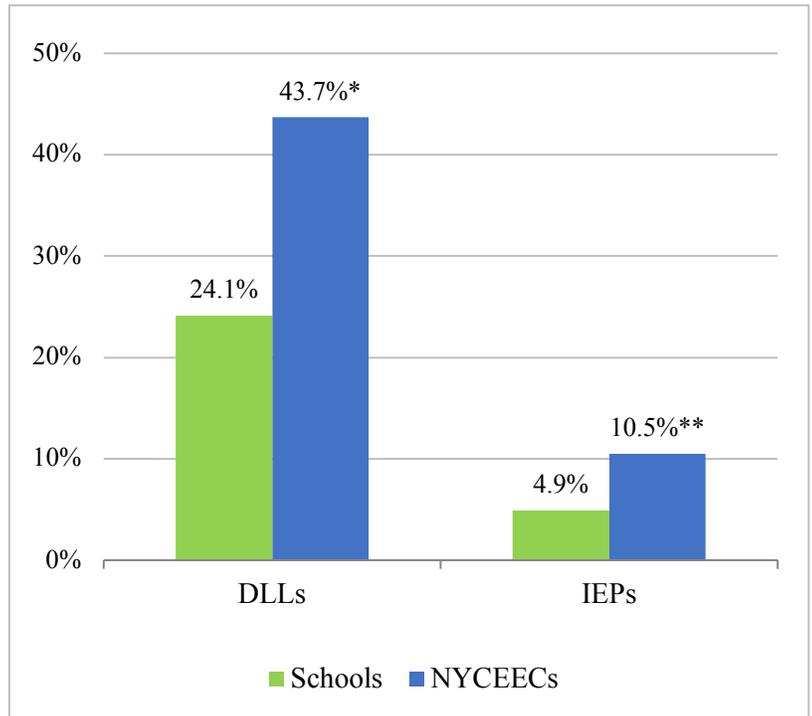
Key Results & Findings

I. The results indicate that implementing PKA has been more challenging for NYCEECs than for schools in the areas of teacher compensation; administrator compensation; program management; enrollment; instructional pedagogy, practice, and quality; and staff support and development.

For example, the results indicate substantial differences in compensation between school and NYCEEC-based teachers, which encourage qualified NYCEEC teachers to seek higher pay for fewer hours in schools. In turn, teacher turnover absorbs resources at NYCEECs, as administrators are caught in an inefficient cycle of hiring and training new teachers, which disrupts programming and the continuity that supports children's learning. At the same time, NYCEECs serve a higher-need population of children than schools (Figure 1), with Head Start sites serving the highest-need children.

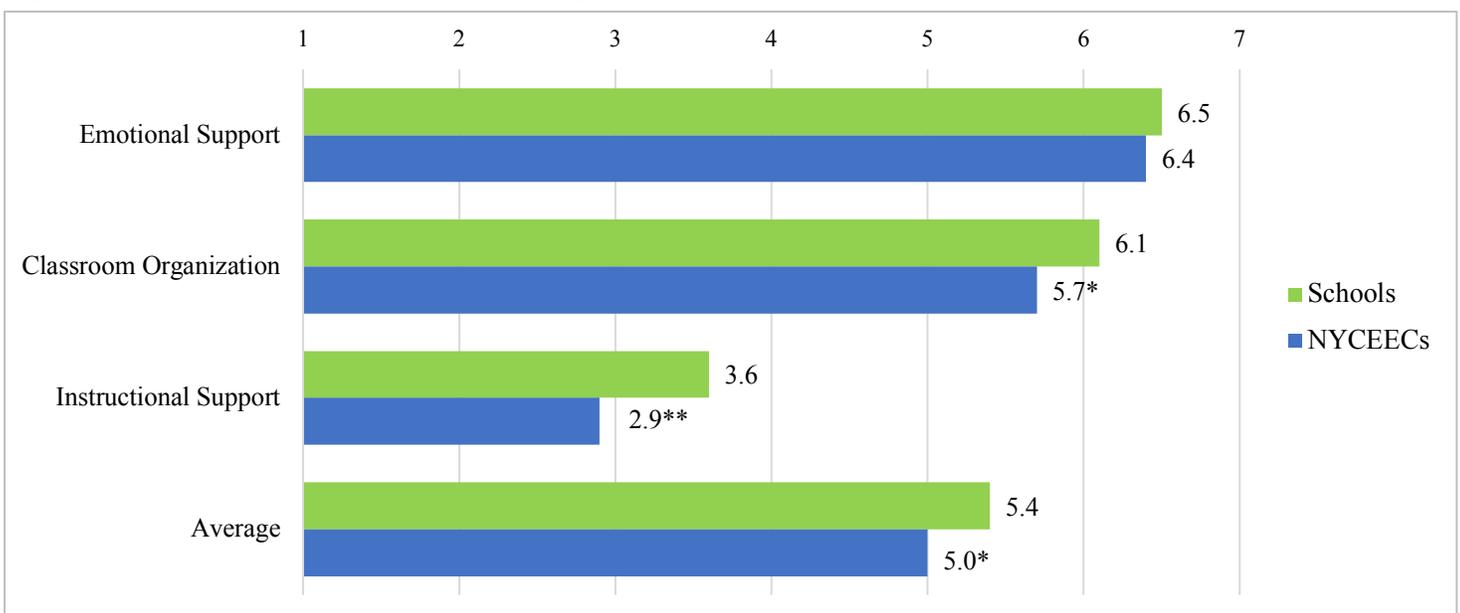
In terms of classroom quality, schools received higher overall scores on the CLASS than NYCEECs, reflecting lower average scores for NYCEEC classrooms on the domains of Classroom Organization and Instructional Support (Figure 2). Among the NYCEECs, Head Start sites had the lowest overall scores. Instructional Support scores were relatively low in both settings.

Figure 1. Percentage of Children in UPK Programs Who Are DLLs or Who Have IEPs by Setting (n=57)



Note: ~p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reference category for statistical comparisons is schools.

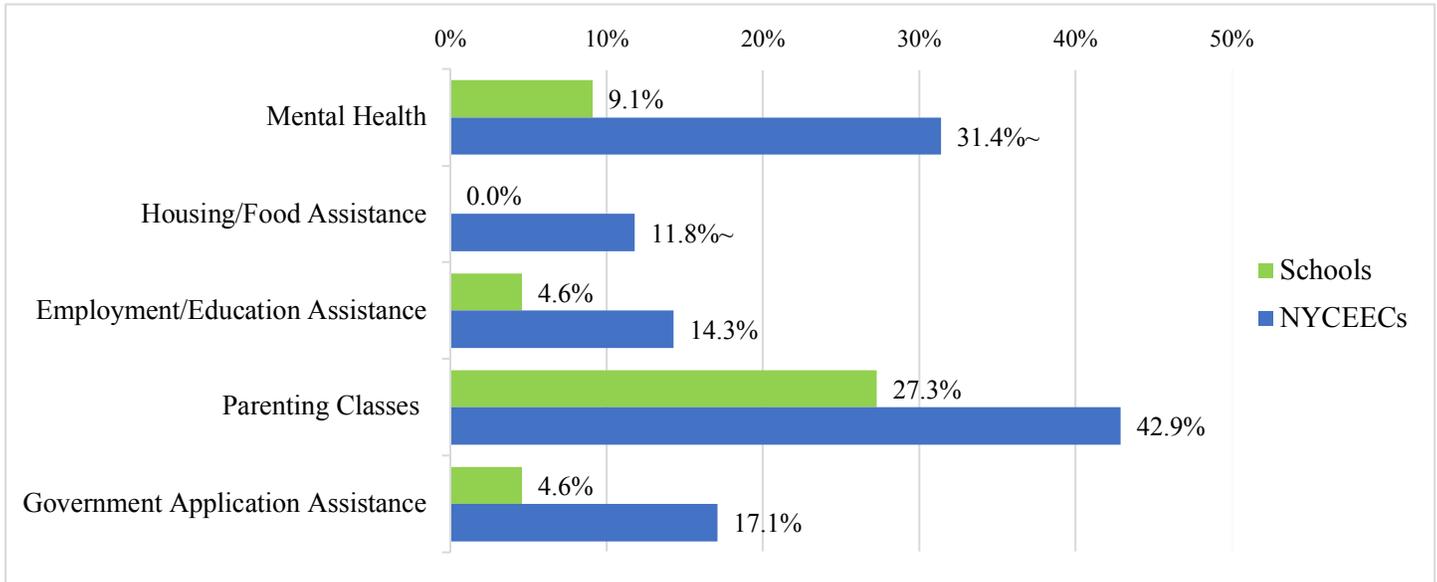
Figure 2. Differences in CLASS Scores by Setting (n=66)



Note: ~p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reference category for statistical comparisons is schools.

II. The results indicate that NYCEECs possess important strengths in their provision of UPK. For example, NYCEECs offer (or refer families to) a wider array of family services and provide more of them on-site than schools (*Figure 3*). These services include mental health, food and housing, employment and education, parenting classes, and assistance with government applications. Among the NYCEECs, Head Start sites offer the most family services and provide the most of them on site. Such services are critical to achieving equitable outcomes.

Figure 3. Types of Family Services at UPK Sites by Setting (n=57)



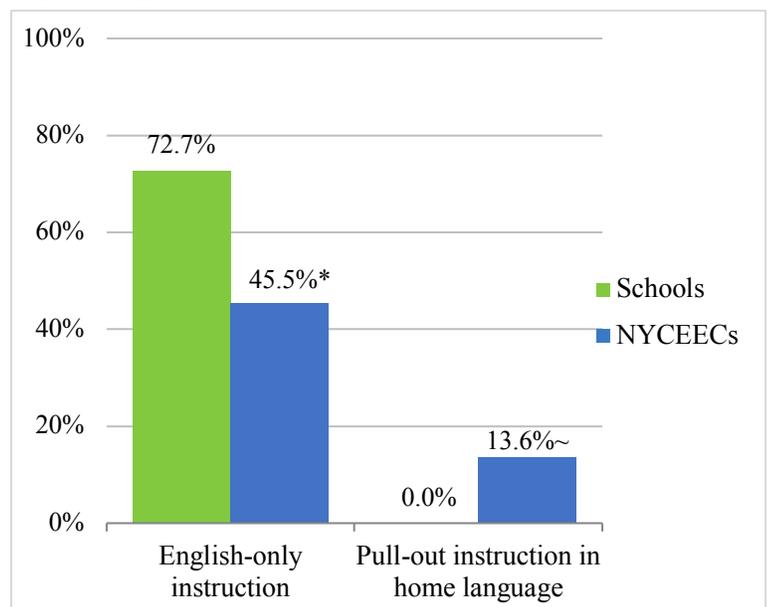
Note: ~p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reference category for statistical comparisons is schools.

In addition, school and NYCEEC teachers are equally likely to be bilingual in English and Spanish (36.4% and 43.2% respectively), and many teachers in both settings speak any second language in addition to English (54.6% in schools and 63.6% in NYCEECs). Yet, NYCEEC teachers appear to be more likely to use these skills in the classroom (*Figure 4*). NYCEEC teachers are less likely than school teachers to speak only English in the classroom and more likely than school teachers to conduct pullout instruction in a child’s home language.

III. The results indicate far fewer differences in PKA implementation by neighborhood resource level than by setting and auspice, though some significant differences were found.

For example, administrators in low/moderate-resource neighborhoods are less likely than those in high-resource neighborhoods to report attending PD institutes for administrators and to have seen an increase in administrator PD since the advent of PKA. Such differences suggest that city efforts to develop program leadership may be misaligned with administrator needs. Together, the findings suggest that the higher demands on NYCEEC administrative and teacher capacity, relative to those at schools, are compounded by the challenges of operating in a lower resourced neighborhood, and that NYCEECs in those neighborhoods should be primary targets of policy supports and resources.

Figure 4. Approaches to Instruction with DLLs by Setting (n=66)



Note: ~p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Reference category for statistical comparisons is schools.

Policy Recommendations

Concrete policy recommendations are presented in the following six areas. In the full report, we explicate these and other recommendations and offer implementation strategies for the city's consideration.

1 **A Commission to Build a Unified UPK System: *Create a commission to align program quality across UPK settings by identifying strategies to ameliorate the structural differences that persist between school and NYCEEC programs for young children.***

The city should create a commission with a circumscribed charge to address *structural* issues that hinder the quality, equity, and efficiency of the city's UPK programs. A *Commission on the Structure of Early Childhood Education in New York City* should:

- Be composed of agency leaders, administrators, teachers, parents, and scholars;
- Be adequately funded and staffed to perform its work within 3-5 years; and
- Serve an advisory role and report to the mayor.

2 **Equitable Compensation: *Establish equitable hourly wages for UPK teachers and administrators that apply to all settings and eliminate pay disparities for equal work.***

The city recognizes the serious equity issues raised by pay disparities and is considering ways to close compensation gaps. To further these efforts, we propose the creation of equitable hourly wages that:

- Apply to all UPK teachers and administrators, regardless of setting;
- Vary by teachers' and administrators' education, qualifications, years of experience, responsibilities (such as the number of children served), and continuing education units; and
- Could be phased in over time with steady wage increases each year.

3 **Quality Pedagogy: *Build workforce capacity for high-quality pedagogy in all settings.***

The city's effort to develop its UPK workforce requires a more intensive and customized approach to assure the efficient use of resources and foster quality pedagogy across all settings. We suggest six priorities:

- Engage teachers and administrators in determining the type, content, and frequency of their PD.
- Devote more resources to increase PD participation and intensity.
- Meet the pedagogical needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children in all settings.
- Promote successful transitions to kindergarten across all settings.
- Develop a career ladder that applies in all settings.
- Guarantee that all teachers have five out-of-classroom preparation periods each week.

4 **Comprehensive Services: *Build program capacity in all settings to serve the multiple needs of all children and families.***

The findings suggest that many administrators in both settings have inadequate capacity and staffing to attend to the myriad needs of their children and families. Sites that serve the highest number of high-need children should receive the most intensive support in this regard. We recommend the following:

- Reconfigure the UPK social worker's job to be more effective and efficient.
- Support all sites, and especially schools, in identifying a list of partners within their communities to whom they can refer parents or who can provide services that their children and families require.

5

Program Leadership: *Provide additional administrative support, particularly to NYCEEC administrators, to assure that they have adequate time and resources to exercise effective program leadership.*

The findings indicate that many administrators in both settings are highly stressed, particularly those in NYCEECs. In addition to the policy recommendations offered above, the DOE and ACS should:

- Simplify the UPK and Early Learn contracting process so as to reduce its complexities. Moving Early Learn contracts to the DOE offers a rare opportunity to do so.
- Provide additional budgeting support for NYCEEC administrators to reduce the number of hours they devote each week to budgeting and cost allocation.
- Conduct a needs assessment of the location of programs across the city, how well they meet the needs of families in their area, and where to open new programs to reflect an efficient use of scarce resources.

6

Equitable Enrollment Distribution: *Create opportunities to reduce the concentration of high-need children, particularly in NYCEECs.*

When higher-need children are concentrated in programs, as they are in NYCEECs, promoting and sustaining quality becomes more difficult. To promote more economically diverse sites, we recommend that the city:

- Strengthen the UPK enrollment system to facilitate parent choices that promote diverse programs.
- Encourage NYCEECs to recruit more UPK-only children and ensure that they are funded to do so.
- Encourage Head Start sites to enroll children living above the poverty line, as federal policy allows.
- Expand the city's pilot program to promote diversity in UPK programs.
- Expand kindergarten in schools where inadequate space prevents UPK children from staying after UPK.

New York City has much to show for its ambitious launch and implementation of the PKA initiative. Having noted the inherent difficulties in overcoming a deeply entrenched structural divide, this study points out distinctions between UPK settings, with very positive findings and serious challenges in both schools and NYCEECs, which should be fully understood as the UPK expansion continues. It is to that understanding, and to the cause of improving the quality of services to young children, that this work is dedicated.