



Strengthening business through effective investments in children and youth

Testimony

2016 Joint Legislative Hearing

Elementary and Secondary Education Committee

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Good afternoon, Members of the Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today.

I'm Mark Eagan, the CEO of the Capital Region Chamber. We represent 2,800 businesses and organizations from throughout the Capital Region that employ more than 150,000 area residents. The Chamber is a member of ReadyNation NY, an organization of more than 150 businesses from around the State. I am here today to talk about college and career readiness.

The path to college and career readiness begins long before graduation; before the selection of high school course work; before 3rd grade reading assessments. The path to college and career readiness begins *before* a child enters kindergarten.

High quality early education teaches real math and science. Prekindergarten is where the foundation for math and science is laid. Children learn the basic concepts through activities appropriate for their age. STEM education at an early age has shown positive outcomes later in school, not just in math and science, but in later reading achievement too.

That's why we are asking that you add \$150 million to expand Pre-K across the State – focusing on high needs three and four year olds – and align the State's six Pre-K programs. The Executive Budget provides \$22 million in new funding to expand Pre-K full day. However this is only for three-year-olds. Limiting expansion to a modest number of three year olds leaves many at risk four year olds, primarily those outside of New York City, without access to a quality early learning experience before they enter kindergarten.

There are currently six different funding streams and sets of requirements for Pre-K and the proposal contained in the Executive Budget creates a seventh. New York needs to align all Pre-K funding streams, eligibility and quality requirements – not create yet another one for districts to grapple with. ReadyNation NY is opposed to the Executive Budget proposal to create a new Empire State Prekindergarten Grants Board, which further complicates Pre-K funding. Furthermore, it believes SED should have responsibility for managing the distribution of all Pre-K funds.

Any investment in early learning—whether it's in Pre-K or child care—must ensure the highest quality. If it does not, we not only do our children a disservice, but we will not receive a suitable return on investment. That return is \$1.86 for every \$1 spent in the early learning sector.

In addition to early learning, I want to express business leaders' commitment to models along the education continuum that help students develop the skills needed in the private sector while also increasing student engagement, graduation rates, and enrollment in post-secondary training and education.

Seven in 10 new jobs created in New York between 2008 and 2018 will require some type of formal education beyond high school. Fourteen of the 25 fastest growing occupations in our State will require post-secondary education. We will face a deficit of 350,000 mid-level skilled workers if current education and labor market trends continue.

We believe that in order to close this skills gap, New York State should continue to invest in models that strengthen communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills and promote college- and career-readiness.

We need support student success throughout the education continuum. We know that not all students will succeed by following the traditional pathway and should be given every opportunity to pursue other avenues to graduation. That's why we have been very supportive of multiple pathways to graduation. Not only will multiple pathways help improve New York State's graduation rate, but our graduates will be better prepared for college and/or careers.

We also need to adequately support the pathways themselves. ReadyNation NY is requesting \$65 million in increased support for Career and Technical Education pathways to graduation, which is inclusive of funding for:

- Enhanced BOCES Aid for CTE Pathway programs;

- Enhance and Expanded Aid for High Quality CTE programs operated by the Big Five Cities and Non-Component School Districts;
- Support for the improving outcomes for boys and young men of color through additional rounds of the NYS P-Tech Program.

I thank you all for your time and attention today. High quality education should be a given for all students across the State. We need to provide access and funding for high quality education. This will ensure that all our students are prepared to succeed upon graduation.