



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

Mannion gets funding increase for local universal Pre-K programs

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NYS Senator John W. Mannion sings a song with Jennifer Kerfien's universal pre-k class at Volney Elementary school. Photo by Mike Perkins.

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FULTON — Before spending the past three years in politics, New York State Sen. John Mannion, D-Geddes, spent a long time standing in front of children and teaching them.

Mannion was a biology teacher in the West Genesee district for nearly 30 years before running for office.

He visited Volney Elementary School in the Fulton School District Tuesday to announce that he had secured \$6.1 million in new state funding for universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) programs in the 50th Senate District, including 822 UPK spots funded at six of the nine school districts in Oswego County.

During his visit, Mannion spent close to a half an hour interacting with and entertaining about 20 children in a UPK class.

Mannion introduced himself as a former teacher to the children and had an informal Q and A with them.

The class's teacher, Jennifer Kerfien, said the children were still figuring out the difference between a question and a statement.

"You can tell me, by raising your hand, what you had for breakfast today," Mannion said to the class.

"I had eggs," said one of the kids.

"Wow, I wish I had eggs," Mannion answered.

The class of mostly 4-year-olds reminded Mannion of his time in the classroom, and he asked the kids if any of them had older siblings in high school. One boy raised his hand.

"Maybe, I'll come back to visit you guys in 10 years when you're in high school," Mannion joked.

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After meeting with the children, Mannion talked with reporters to stress how important funding education is to him.

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“When we say we want to support our students in public education, we want to support them at the UPK level too,” Mannion said. “That’s where they’re building their skills. Their ability to have a high quality education with a trained professional at an early age just sends them on the right trajectory. The work and the skills and knowledge that they build at this early age exponentially increases their chance of success.”

New York State relies on state and federal funding to provide free UPK.

In 2021, New York invested \$970 million into state-run UPK programs. In 2022, the state increased its spending by \$105 million.

“That’s one side of it for our families. Many times there’s two people working in the home, (and) it’s harder and harder to find child care,” said Mannion. “This is not just a place for child care, this is a place for learning, a place for growth and education. We need these programs.”

The additional funding Mannion secured brings the total up to \$18 million, or 3,072 spots funded in his district, in the 2023-2024 New York State budget.

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“Years ago, before I was in office, they landed on the fact that New York City was really where that UPK program was and upstate was kind of an outlier,” said Mannion. “In my three years, we have had a lot more upstate voices. People from the Thruway corridor, the Southern Tier and the Hudson Valley that said, ‘our communities can really benefit from

UPK.' We were the voices that said there's a lack of equity here. Our students and families deserve to have these opportunities if they choose to send their kids to a UPK program, and the funding simply wasn't there. We advocated for it, we got the funding, there's been an increase every year, and as a result, lots of families in our area are benefitting."

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