



## PRE-K OUR WAY

Prepared for school, ready for success.



# EXPAND NJ'S PRE-K

## CONTINUE SUBSTANTIAL PRE-K EXPANSION!

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Pre-K Our Way ([www.prekourway.org](http://www.prekourway.org)) was a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization started in early 2015 to provide a strategic effort to have pre-k expansion as a NJ priority. The organization created a statewide advocacy effort led by former governors Kean and Florio and funded by almost 10 different philanthropic organizations. From inception, Pre-K Our Way had a **single focus: expansion of New Jersey's existing high-quality, state-funded, full-day pre-k program**. Despite a law passed in 2008, the first funding in nearly a decade occurred in June 2017.

Thanks to Governor Murphy and the Legislature, the five most recent state budgets have included funding for pre-k expansion – the first in many years! There are now 150+ communities with state-funded, full-day pre-k, BUT, 110+ eligible school districts still wait. The FY2022 state budget includes \$50 million in pre-k expansion funding, and will bring pre-k expansion to more communities!

Working **strategically, tactically and together**, pre-k expansion became a NJ priority! Throughout the 2017 election cycle, pre-k expansion and funding for pre-k were supported at the gubernatorial, legislative and local levels. Beginning in 2018, there has been funding for pre-k expansion in all of the Murphy Administration's state budgets – and the legislative leadership was integral to maintaining pre-k expansion's statewide priority.

Through its targeted messaging and strategic focus, Pre-K Our Way drove significant results:

- **Made pre-k expansion a NJ priority:** it was one of the top 5 priorities in the 2017 gubernatorial election season and has been a legislative priority since 2016; Governor Murphy's first budget message in 2018 included a commitment to universal pre-k; in July 2019, the position of Assistant Commissioner, Division of Early Childhood Education was announced and put early education at an assistant commissioner level for the first time in nearly a decade. During the COVID-19 crisis – and the resulting budget constraints – the FY21 State Budget continued pre-k expansion as a NJ priority and included funding for existing 'expanding expansion' districts. The FY2022 budget included \$50 million for 'historic' pre-k expansion funding and continued the 'expanding expansion'

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- **Secured funding for pre-k expansion:** funding in July 2017 was the first funding for pre-k expansion in nearly a decade; NJ currently has 150+ school districts with state-funded, full-day pre-k PLUS additional funding for existing districts with pre-k expansion for their planned 'expanding expansion'; supported change in the eligibility criteria for school districts so that the at-risk percentage was lowered from 40% to 20% and thereby enabling a school district to be eligible to apply for pre-k expansion funding with 20% of the students considered 'at risk' – resulting in the total number of eligible districts to increase from fewer than 50 to nearly 270 for the 2020-2021 school year
- **Established a clear, focused message and purpose:** expanded NJ's existing high-quality pre-k for 3- and 4-year-olds into more communities
- **Extended advocacy beyond the usual community of support:** showcased the importance of NJ's pre-k for child health, working parents and the business community, educational achievement and long-term future success – including reduced costs for law enforcement and as an investment in New Jersey's future; motivated in-person outreach across 400+ communities/all 21 counties/every legislative district
- **Identified key legislative education opportunities:** shaped testimony of more than half of the presenters for the 2015 Senate Education Committee Hearing on Benefits of Pre-K; included pre-k expansion in the Legislative Leadership Policy Agenda Priorities beginning in October 2015 and throughout 2016 and 2017 (position papers presented by both State Senate President and Assembly Speaker); maintained focus on pre-k expansion throughout every budget cycle since and including 2016 – and counting
- **Linked pre-k expansion funding to school funding discussions in 2016 and 2017 – and now, beyond:** the Murphy Administration included *continued* and new pre-k expansion as part of a district's annual school funding formula for districts where pre-k expansion had already been awarded ('expanding expansion')
- **Conceived, organized and executed the Campaign for Pre-k Expansion:** a focused, enhanced media outreach effort and continued at critical times in the calendar to drive the message of pre-k expansion directly to the governor and legislature

**Pre-K Our Way provided strategic focus on funding for pre-k expansion – and for making pre-k expansion a statewide priority. The Governor and Legislature agreed, and have acted to fund that priority! Now, YOU must encourage your eligible local school district to apply to the NJ Department of Education for pre-k expansion funding. Continue substantial pre-k expansion!**

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**QUESTIONS?** Until December 31, 2021, you may reach Pre-K Our Way at 609-246-0034 or toll free at 844-335-PREK (844-335-7735). You can also email us at [info@prekourway.org](mailto:info@prekourway.org).