



PRE-K OUR WAY

Prepared for school, ready for success.

PRE-K OUR WAY NEWS

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER **DECEMBER 2017**



As 2017 comes to a close, let's celebrate! At least one of the recent expansion communities held a winter concert, and we have pictures of those 60+ preschoolers to share...

Pre-k expansion had the **first funding in nearly a decade**. A total of 26 communities received funding to provide access to nearly 2,000 children. **Pre-k expansion became a statewide priority** and was one of the top legislative priorities in the 2016-2017 legislative sessions. Don't forget: pre-k expansion was also **part of the 2017 primary and general elections at the local, legislative and gubernatorial levels!** One more thing: together, we made pre-k expansion an integral part of New Jersey's school funding formula.

Top priorities for the governor-elect and the new administration include full funding of the school formula - and pre-k expansion. Pre-K Our Way's long-term goal remains unchanged: to secure significant funding for pre-k expansion in the first budget of a new governor in 2018. Like you, Pre-K Our Way will celebrate throughout the closing weeks of 2017 with friends and family. Like you, we'll return in January 2018 with the focus on expansion of NJ's pre-k NOW, because 50,000 NJ kids across hundreds of communities are waiting...

Thank you for all you've done throughout 2017 to make pre-k expansion a New Jersey priority. Enjoy the holidays and **watch in mid-January for a new start for our state - and for Pre-K Our Way's renewed energy and messaging.** Until then, happy and healthy 2018 to all!

SEVEN MAJOR SUCCESSES TO LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR PRE-K EXPANSION IN 2018



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EXPAND NJ'S PRE-K

50,000 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS - AND HUNDREDS OF COMMUNITIES - ARE WAITING EACH YEAR

Pre-K Our Way (www.prekourway.org) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. Created less than three years ago, it is 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 has had a single focus: expansion of New Jersey's existing high-quality, state-funded, full-day pre-k program to hundreds more communities - and to the 50,000 3- and 4-year-olds waiting each year for access to New Jersey's pre-k. Despite a law passed in 2008 and the first funding in nearly a decade (\$25 million in June 2013 for 26 communities), there are still fewer than 65 communities with New Jersey's pre-k.

Through Pre-K Our Way's **strategic messaging, targeted communication and focused engagement** efforts, pre-k expansion has become a statewide priority. Recognized as **one of the top legislative priorities** in the 2016-2017 legislative sessions, pre-k expansion was **part of the 2017 primary and general elections at the local, legislative and gubernatorial levels** in debates, candidate platforms and media interviews. Additionally, Pre-K Our Way led the discussion in late 2016 and throughout 2017 for pre-k expansion as an **integral part of New Jersey's school funding formula**. Full funding of the school formula - and pre-k expansion - are top priorities for the governor-elect and the new administration.

www.prekourway.org

NJ's pre-k expansion: linked to school funding, received first funding in nearly a decade, made a state priority for NJ AND the governor-elect. **Through Pre-K Our Way's strategic messaging, targeted communication and focused engagement efforts, there were seven major successes integral to laying the foundation for pre-k expansion in 2018.**

READ MORE: <http://bit.ly/2zU3yyy>

THE GOVERNOR-ELECT ON PRE-K EXPANSION: "NOT JUST FOR SOME, BUT FOR ALL"

ICYMI, watch one of the closing campaign interviews with now Gov-elect Murphy re: pre-k expansion <http://bit.ly/1pjl3HK>.

Murphy: "Another thing we stand for is we **want to get to universal pre-k as fast as we can...**"

Interviewer: "Can we afford it?"

Murphy: "Ye(s) we can. I think we **have to phase it in over several years**. I don't think you can do that on a moment's notice. **We stand for universal pre-k not just for some, but for all.**"

CELEBRATING PRE-K EXPANSION

We're continuing our series of features about new expansion districts. Below are recent links, stories, pictures and quotes about **Willingboro**, **Englewood**, **Bayonne** and **Somerville**, and news from **Rahway** about one of the first Back to Preschool nights in recent weeks. Thanks for sharing! In the coming weeks, we'll be adding these stories (and more) to our website and sharing them individually in social media. **Please contact info@prekourway.org to provide info to celebrate YOUR pre-k expansion experience!**

The **Willingboro School District** involved the entire community to celebrate the opening day of pre-k for the community's newest preschoolers. **"To a chorus of cheers and applause, over 25 new preschool students walked through a line of cheerleaders and school officials welcoming them on their first day,"** wrote Kelly Kultys in the *Burlington County Times*. "I'm really excited," parent Priscilla Johnson said. "It's a crucial time for (the students)." Johnson is thrilled to be able to send her daughter to preschool a year earlier than anticipated. Her daughter had been playing school for the last month with books and a pretend teacher, Johnson said. Board of Education Vice President Tonya Brown said she was "so excited" about the new program. "Preschool is where it starts," she said.

SEE THE PICTURES AND READ MORE: <http://bit.ly/2jy0Rfg>

Pre-k expansion for the **Englewood Public School District** meant expanding existing opportunity within the district. Although local sources already provided some pre-k access within the community, *The Record's* Svetlana Shkolnikova reported that "The waiting list for the city school district's preschool program varies from year to year, but the way off the list stays the same. Someone must always drop out for another 4-year-old to get in." This year, however, that changed as Englewood received a pre-k expansion grant and opened four new preschool classes. The free, full-day classes expanded Englewood's preschool to 20 total classes and increased enrollment from 186 current students to at least 217.

The article continued explaining Englewood's pre-k program. Students will spend the year **learning socialization skills, strengthening their fine motor skills and getting their first taste of academics, including literacy and math**. "It instills a love of learning very early in life," said assistant teacher Nancy Flusk. The district's pre-k program is **provided in recently renovated facilities by the Bergen Family Center**, which works with the district on after-school programs and housed the district's preschool program years ago.

READ MORE: <https://njersy.co/2B4JSaE>

More than 100 parents attended the **Rahway School District's** first **"Back to Preschool Night"** - only a few weeks after the start of pre-k expansion. The evening featured short welcomes and presentations from many district administrators and officials, and closed with a hosted sandwich, cookies and conversation gathering in the cafeteria. In between, parents and many children participated in four rotating 'school day' presentations from pre-k teachers.

Questions were welcomed, and parents gained first-hand understanding about how each day encourages learning, socialization, language development and other skills. "I was panicking about what to do for my daughter, Aurelia, in terms of school for the year, shared Rahway parent Jeanette Janvier. "(Aurelia) has been talking about going to school for the past year/year and a half.

Since attending pre-k for a little over a month, not only has her father noticed the change in her, I have noticed a change. She has become more of a person, expressing herself with full sentences and stories with the logic of a 4-year-old as opposed to having random thoughts. I am looking forward to seeing what she is able to accomplish and how she will develop over the course of the year. I am grateful also she has a great teacher, Mrs. Velez, to help encourage her and guide her in a way we are not."



Thanks to **Bayonne School District's** recent pre-k expansion grant, the city has been able to add to its existing number of pre-k classes and now provides state-funded, full-day pre-k at five schools. According to *The Jersey Journal*, a total of 65 students are currently enrolled through the expansion grant, and they are in addition to tuition-based Bayonne pre-k for nearly 20 other students. The first day of pre-k expansion in Bayonne was November 1.

"This expansion will benefit our children and our community, and I am grateful for the opportunity to play a role in such an important step for our district," said Monica Flynn, Director of Early Childhood Education for the district. "We worked around the clock," said interim Superintendent Michael Wanko, "to make pre-k expansion happen in Bayonne."

READ MORE: <http://bit.ly/2AcR94S>

More than 60 **Somerville Public Schools** preschoolers gathered on December 7 for their annual winter concert. **Less than six-weeks after the October 30 start of Somerville's pre-k expansion, all five full-day classes of 4-year-olds gathered to perform before a packed auditorium of hundreds of parents, younger siblings, teachers, administrators and community members.** Through numerous photos and videos from the audience - and animated hand waves with calls of 'hi' from the stage - the program included more than a half-dozen songs, including *Snowflake, Snowflake* followed by a poem, *Chubby Little Snowman*, then another crowd-pleaser about *5 Little Snowmen*. *Jingle Bells* was the first holiday song on the program, and the assembly ended with a rousing - and repeated - chorus of preschoolers wishing a *Happy New Year* followed by more opportunity for closer photos and waves from a safe zone 'parent paparazzi' line.

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Prior to the recent pre-k expansion, Somerville had a half-day pre-k program. When expansion funding became a possibility, the entire district and community collaborated to make full-day pre-k a reality. "There were lots of phone calls from parents about interest in pre-k and going full-day before classes began," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Timothy Teehan. **"The need and desire for pre-k is there in our community,"** continued Dr. Teehan.

The full-day program enables the students to "benefit from an expanded time to learn by doing," said Valentina (Val) Carleo, Somerville's Curriculum Supervisor. She provided examples such as the ability "to further develop fine motor skills and conversation skills." Susan Moran, Principal of Van Derveer Elementary School agreed and shared that Somerville's preschoolers benefit from interaction with students and teachers throughout the elementary school, and from the ability to use the elementary school's larger library along with "the increased level of independence offered by full-day pre-k." The Somerville preschoolers appear to be thriving in the newly expanded pre-k environment. **"They absolutely skip into school,"** agreed Principal Moran and Supervisor Carleo.

Joanne Sung, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, added that the "transition to full-day pre-k was facilitated by communication with teachers, supporting them through professional development as well as communication with parents." Full-day access to pre-k provides assistance to the large community of Somerville's working parents because the average cost of full-day pre-k in the Somerville area can range from \$425 - \$500 per week, or \$1300 - \$1600 per month, per child for multiple children in a family.



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Have questions? Contact us at info@prekourway.org

Tel. 609.246.0034 EXT. 2 Toll Free: 844.335.PREK (7735)

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