



## PRE-K OUR WAY

Prepared for school, ready for success.



# EXPAND NJ'S PRE-K

## 175 DISTRICTS IN 2021-2022...AND COMMITMENT FOR UNIVERSAL PRE-K

Pre-K Our Way 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 175 communities with state-funded, full-day pre-k for the 2021-2022 school year. During a September 16, 2021 press conference on pre-k expansion, Governor Murphy announced New Jersey's path to “commit to providing universal pre-k to all families across the state over the next several years.”

Working **strategically, tactically and together**, pre-k expansion became a NJ priority! Throughout the 2017 and 2021 election cycles, 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, and on September 16, 2021 he announced that pre-k expansion has reached 175 school districts, recommitted to providing universal pre-k to all families across the state over the next several years and tasked the New Jersey Department of Education to create a Governor's Universal Pre-K Strategic Plan; 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 175 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! The NJ Department of Education has been tasked to create a Governor's Universal Pre-K Strategic Plan to focus on prioritizing districts and setting a timeline for expansion. The plan will ensure students have appropriate facilities and quality programming; involve providers and Head Start in planning to avoid displacing existing high-quality early learning centers; optimize funding streams, including federal funds; and utilize best practices from other states that offer expanded/universal pre-k programs. With 175 districts having NJ's Pre-K and Governor Murphy's commitment for the path to universal pre-k, Pre-K Our Way will sunset as planned on December 31, 2021.**



**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).