



TheChildren'sAgenda

Smart Choices. Bold Voices.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | April 9, 2026

Media contacts:

Wendell Lambert - Communications Associate, Office of Assemblywoman Sarah Clark
Lambertw@nyassembly.gov (585) 284-2164

Jessica Lewis - Communications Manager, ROC the Future Alliance
jlewis@rocthefuture.org (585) 773-1140

Seneca Hollenbeck - Communications Manager, The Children's Agenda
seneca@thechildrensagenda.org (585) 200-8642

Brendan O'Riordan - Director of Information, Rochester City School District
Brendan.O'Riordan@rcsdk12.org (585) 353-6390

Education advocates push for 3-year-old PreK funding

Rochester, New York | April 9, 2026 - Life success begins long before a child enters a classroom. From birth to age five, early experiences shape learning, well-being and long-term opportunity. [National research](#) underscores the importance of getting the early years right. [Approximately 90% of a child's brain development](#) happens before they enter the formal school system at age five. Because of this, early care and education programs are a critical support for both cognitive and social development, [particularly for children from low-income families](#).

On April 9th, local advocates hosted a press conference at the Rochester Early Childhood Education Center to highlight the importance of funding for 3-year-old PreK in Rochester and across the state.

"Research clearly shows that attending pre-kindergarten results in both immediate and long-term gains in children's academic performance and behavioral development," said Brian Lewis, ROC the Future Alliance Executive Director. RECAP, Rochester's decades-long pre-kindergarten evaluation study,

consistently found that attending pre-kindergarten increases rates of kindergarten readiness, especially for students who enroll in [both three- and four-year-old classes](#).

However, there are flaws in the funding mechanism that support early education. These are particularly harmful for the Rochester City School District, as RCSD was an early adopter of both three- and four-year-old pre-kindergarten. With each school year, the disparity between the district's flat UPK per-pupil rate and its inflation-adjusted K-12 Foundation Aid rate continues to widen, threatening the stability of the high-quality early education programs that Rochester's youngest learners deserve.

Larry Marx, CEO of The Children's Agenda, said, "[In the 2024-25 school year](#), only 34,495 (25%) of New York's 3-year-old children were enrolled in Pre-K programs, compared to 102,653 (66%) of 4-year-olds. Our youngest learners deserve access to a quality education that sets them up for long-term success, and it is critical that districts receive equitable funding for *all* of their Pre-K students. While the Governor's budget proposal increases New York City's funding for 3-K, it does not adjust the funding formula or total funding for 3-K programs in Rochester and other districts with 3-K programs. That's unfair to the nearly 1,200 3-year-olds enrolled in Pre-K each year in Rochester, which has almost one-third of all 3-year-old Pre-K slots in the state outside of New York City. We urge our State leaders to include the Assembly's proposal to raise per-pupil rates for both three- and four-year-old students, further building on Governor Hochul's transformative proposals to invest in early childhood and education."

Governor Hochul's executive budget proposal aims to correct many of the existing structural flaws by raising UPK per-pupil rates for four-year-olds to the higher of \$10,000 or a district's selected Foundation Aid amount. While this is an unprecedented investment in early education, the nearly 80 school districts that operate three-year-old (3K) programs, including high-needs Big 5 districts like Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany, will see a diminished benefit.

Assemblywoman Sarah Clark said, "High quality early childhood education has been proven time and time again to be a game changer for the future success of our children. The Rochester City School District has long been a leader building out capacity for children to have opportunities as young as three. As New York State commits to expanding pre kindergarten slots across the state, ensuring equity in every district is of utmost importance, we cannot underfund current 3K programs in the 73 districts outside of New York City. The Assembly's proposal recognizes that three and four year old students deserve the same commitment, and getting this right is critical to protecting access, sustaining quality programs, and ensuring all children enter school ready to succeed from day one. We must secure this crucial funding in the final state budget. I am proud to stand today with local advocates fighting for equity in early childhood education as we support every child on their path to success."

Without any changes, districts that enroll both three- and four-year-old students would receive less funding per pre-K student than districts without 3K, which will perpetuate funding shortfalls and may incentivize districts to only offer four-year-old classrooms.

The Assembly's one-house budget proposal builds on Governor Hochul's historic investment by also including higher per-pupil rates for districts with three-year-old (3K) programs. We strongly urge the inclusion of the Assembly's proposal in the final enacted budget.

"The Rochester City School District has long been a leader in recognizing that the journey to graduation begins with our youngest learners at age three," said Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, Superintendent of the Rochester City School District. "To continue providing high-quality, foundational experiences that Rochester families deserve, we strongly support Assemblywoman Clark's efforts to ensure state funding keeps pace with the actual costs of these essential programs."

For more information, see the UPK fact sheet (includes budget info): [Fact Sheet: Universal Pre-Kindergarten Funding in New York State - The Children's Agenda](#)

###

ROC the Future Alliance

ROC the Future Alliance is a community-wide coalition working to improve cradle-to-career outcomes. For more information about ROC the Future Alliance, visit rocthefuture.org.

The Children's Agenda is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that advocates for effective policies and drives evidence-based solutions for the health, education and success of children. We are especially committed to children who are vulnerable because of poverty, racism, health inequities and trauma. To learn more about The Children's Agenda, go to <https://thechildrensagenda.org/>

Assemblywoman Sarah Clark is a 3rd term legislator representing the 136th District. She is a member of the Committee on Education and the Committee on Children and Families and has been a champion of early education and child care throughout her time in office.

Rochester City School District

The Rochester City School District serves more than 20,000 students in the City of Rochester. Guided by a mission to cultivate a culture of academic excellence, the District's vision is activating dreams and unlocking potential. Together, We Are One RCSD.