

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Highlights Funding for Preschool Programs & Announces First Phase of Universal Preschool Strategic Plan

10/6/2022

WEST LONG BRANCH– To emphasize his ongoing commitment to the goal of universal preschool access throughout New Jersey, Governor Phil Murphy today joined public officials and educators at the Betty McElmon Elementary School in West Long Branch to highlight preschool funding in the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget and release phase 1 of the *New Jersey Strategic Plan for Preschool Expansion* (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zonk8h/nrddit/76inc0_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!OnqKf-g-yRROF2OeiTHNgTLZjTjM4zVQhjKVjK2ITX-YtRYYShTcSohf8LtrNRQRQUUSKav7eOuSxs_80aWqjE0ilGq3Q\$). (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zonk8h/nrddit/nzjnc0_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!OnqKf-g-yRROF2OeiTHNgTLZjTjM4zVQhjKVjK2ITX-YtRYYShTcSohf8LtrNRQRQUUSKav7eOuSxs_80aWqjEPtC6vFv\$)

West Long Branch was among 27 school districts (https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://t.e2ma.net/click/zonk8h/nrddit/3rknc0_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!OnqKf-g-yRROF2OeiTHNgTLZjTjM4zVQhjKVjK2ITX-YtRYYShTcSohf8LtrNRQRQUUSKav7eOuSxs_80aWqjEDBEWwK\$) to receive a portion of over \$26 million in the FY23 budget to establish or expand high-quality preschool programs for local children. The programs in these districts will use the funding to implement full-day preschool programs that are inclusive of children with special needs, offer small class sizes, and have both a certified teacher and an aide. With these awards, high-quality preschool seats have increased by approximately 18,000 since Governor Murphy took office, for a total of nearly 70,000 seats – including the almost 2,150 seats added through the \$26 million awarded to districts last month.

“There are countless benefits to providing a high-quality education to every preschool-aged child in our state, including making New Jersey a more affordable place to live for young, working families,” **said Governor Phil Murphy**. “We have made significant strides in our effort to offer universal preschool throughout New Jersey and must continue to seek ways to achieve this critical objective. My administration will consider all possibilities as we move towards this goal and will continue to invest in preschool education so that more New Jersey children can have opportunities to succeed.”

“Governor Murphy’s commitment to expanding access to high-quality preschool programs will benefit our students and New Jersey for years to come,” **said Dr. Angelica Allen McMillan, Acting Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education**. “The \$40 million investment is critical for all students to have the opportunity to learn, grow, and gain confidence as they continue their educational journey. The strategic plan will lead New Jersey towards providing all children access to preschool.”

The \$26 million is part of a larger appropriation of \$40 million in the FY23 budget for new school districts to operate free, full-day, high-quality preschool programs. A second application round will open in the coming weeks, with the remaining nearly \$14 million to be awarded at a later date. The Governor has increased funding for preschool expansion throughout each year of his Administration – with a total of \$990 million for new and existing preschool programs included in the most recent State budget.

In addition to existing efforts to fund the expansion of full-day, high-quality preschool programs, the Governor also announced the *New Jersey Strategic Plan for Preschool Expansion Phase 1: The Foundation*. Created in partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, this plan sets a foundation for New Jersey’s efforts to provide high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-old children in New Jersey.

The first phase of this plan outlines the benefits, options, and considerations for policy decisions in key areas such as scaling up enrollment, funding, facilities, workforce, and mixed-delivery partnerships. The Phase I plan will be used to galvanize extensive discussion with early childhood care and education stakeholders and will result in a final implementation plan (Phase II) later in 2023.

“Early childhood development and support is vital,” **Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman said**. “Under the leadership of Governor Murphy, we are dedicated to giving young children important opportunities to develop and learn, from supporting and strengthening our child care industry to supporting high-quality preschool programs. Building on the success of New Jersey’s early childhood network, opportunities to grow our mixed delivery system will give children the best possible start in life.”

“Full-day, high-quality preschool programs offer students a jump start on academic and social-emotional development, and the Governor’s proposed plan for expansion would leverage New Jersey’s network of more than four thousand licensed child care centers in partnership with our schools to create a continuum of early childhood education that benefits children and families,” **said Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families Christine Norbut Beyer**. “This funding and the overall expansion plan will help to complement other investments and initiatives across our system that are designed to support families, prevent involvement in the child welfare system through upstream supports, and offer early identification of students’ developmental needs to get them the tools and adaptations they need to excel in an academic setting.”

“With this foundational plan, Governor Murphy takes a giant step toward making New Jersey’s high-quality public preschool program available to every child and family, which will produce benefits for decades to come,” **said Dr. Steven Barnett, Founding Co-Director of the NIEER program**.

“Today we take another important step in our commitment to high quality preschool for the children of New Jersey as we continue to expand pre-K to school districts throughout the state,” **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz**. “Since the beginning of my tenure in the Senate, universal pre-k has been a cornerstone of my policy agenda. The Administration has been a valuable partner as we worked together to ensure that every child in every community has an equal opportunity to a quality education, regardless of their family’s zip code. For every dollar invested in high quality early childhood education, the state could see up to \$7.30 in return of investment. Investing in early childhood education makes sense as it underwrites the success of students in educational achievement, future employment income, lower rates of incarceration, and overall long-term health.”

"More and more emerging data show the benefits associated with high-quality preschool education. Children enrolled in preschool tend to develop better study habits, stay in school longer and set course on a clear path toward higher education," **said Senator Vin Gopal, Chair of the Senate Education Committee.** "The problem is that preschool can be expensive, so I would like to thank Governor Murphy for working with the Legislature on this year's budget to expand pre-school programs and bring these needed services to 27 school districts, including West Long Branch. This expansion represents a crucial investment in New Jersey's children and their families, as well as in the future growth of our state."

"By expanding access to high-quality preschool programs, we will ensure more students throughout New Jersey can take advantage of the social and emotional development that comes with early education," **said Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt, Chair of the Assembly Education Committee.** "The plans announced today represent an essential investment in our schools and a commitment to our children's futures. I look forward to the coming conversations and to finding new ways to uplift young learners."

"West Long Branch's Betty Mc Elmon School is very fortunate and appreciative to receive this Preschool Education Aid grant which will allow a full day preschool for all of our district families," **said West Long Branch Mayor Janet Tucci.** "This will serve to provide kindergarten readiness as well as enhance social and emotional development for our children as we prepare them for pre-academics and general life skills."

"We are grateful and thrilled beyond measure to have secured this opportunity to improve and expand access to full-day, high-quality preschool for the children of West Long Branch," **said Dr. Christina Egan, Superintendent of West Long Branch schools district.** "We look forward to growing and expanding our program until it becomes available to all of our children, and we couldn't be more excited about the tremendous impact this will have in our community."

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Statewide

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