

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Suite of New Proposals to Expand Access to Early Childhood Education and Support Working Families

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Murphy Administration Has Expanded State-Funded Preschool Programs to an Additional 229 School Districts Over the Past Seven Years

Administration Releases Phase II of the Strategic Plan for Preschool Expansion

TRENTON – During his 2025 State of the State Address, Governor Phil Murphy announced his support for two policy initiatives that will ensure more families than ever can enjoy the benefits of expanded access to early childhood education. Today – joined by Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Assemblywoman Andrea Katz, and Assemblyman Sterley Stanley – the Governor visited Maurice Hawk Elementary School in West Windsor to underscore his continued commitment to furthering access to free, high-quality preschool and kindergarten programs, enabling young learners in communities across New Jersey to start their educational careers on strong footing. Senator Shirley Turner and Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli also joined the announcement.

“One week ago, during my State of the State Address, I announced that our Administration will be taking a new step to ensure that every school district in New Jersey offers free, full-day kindergarten. Paired with a second initiative to codify preschool funding, we are paving the way for both universal pre-k and free full-day kindergarten in our state,” **said Governor Murphy**. “By working with our partners in the State Legislature, including Majority Leader Ruiz and Assembly Members Katz and Stanley, we are going to strengthen early childhood education, alleviate the burden of child care costs on parents, and ensure all children in New Jersey benefit from the same strong start when it comes to their education. We owe it to the children and families that call New Jersey ‘home’ to continue building a public education system that lifts up every single one of our state’s children – no matter their zip code or their family’s socioeconomic status.”

“The research is clear: access to early childhood education is an educational imperative, crucial for the development of our youngest learners while providing relief to our state’s working families,” **said Acting Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer**. “These legislative initiatives will provide every child access to full-day kindergarten and detail the continued expansion of preschool to all of our communities – this underscores our commitment to ensuring every student has the strong foundation they need to thrive academically and beyond. Together, we are paving the way for a brighter future for all New Jersey children.”

Since the beginning of his Administration, Governor Murphy has made it a priority to set New Jersey firmly on course for achieving universal, free preschool in all school districts. Over the past seven years, funding for public preschool has increased by over \$550 million, with New Jersey currently spending \$1.2 billion to stand up and sustain programs in communities across the state. Since year one of the Administration, 229 additional districts have been added to State-funded preschool programs; meaning now, 293 or about half of New Jersey’s elementary-serving school districts offer free, high-quality preschool, whether that is in partnership with childcare providers or in elementary schools.

The Governor’s Office is coordinating with legislative partners, including Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, Assemblywoman Andrea Katz, and Assemblyman Sterley Stanley, on legislation to advance the following initiatives:

- **Codify Preschool Funding:** Preschool Education Aid is currently distributed through budget language. By enacting separate legislation, we are making the program more reliable for the future;
- **Require access to full-day kindergarten:** All five-year-old students will be ensured access to free, full-day kindergarten;
- **Strengthen Mixed Delivery:** The Department of Education will develop a mixed delivery handbook to clarify and standardize the process of forming agreements between school districts and private providers;
- **Create the Preschool Teacher Pipeline Investment Program:** The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education would have to publish guidance on dual admission programs for Early Childhood Education studies. The Departments of Human Services and Children and Families would have to publish joint guidance for childcare centers to implement graduated salary scales for private teachers working towards preschool certification.

“Ensuring every child in New Jersey has access to free full-day kindergarten is a critical step in supporting families, strengthening our state’s future, and building on our mission to make New Jersey more affordable,” **said Speaker Craig Coughlin**. “New Jersey’s status as a national leader in public education is reinforced by our commitment to providing free kindergarten, giving every child a strong foundation for lifelong learning. By removing financial barriers, we’re also easing the burden on parents, helping them keep more money in their pockets.”

“Investing in early education is one of the most powerful ways to transform our communities. It offers dual benefits – providing students with a strong educational foundation while easing the financial burden of childcare for parents,” **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz**. “It’s long past time for full-day kindergarten to be the standard in every New Jersey school, a crucial step toward building a unified early childhood ecosystem and achieving universal pre-K.”

“This is the issue that brought me into the political arena. I wanted to ensure that every kid in New Jersey had access to a great public education. I’m proud to work towards permanent pre-k funding because it just makes sense for New Jersey families and taxpayers,” **said Assemblywoman Andrea Katz**.

“One of our most significant accomplishments, which I am proud to have been a part of, has been the incredible strides we have made expanding free pre-k for New Jersey’s families. Which is why I am incredibly proud to join with my colleague Assemblywoman Katz in putting forth this bill that will ensure that every child is provided with early childhood education so we can minimize any barrier that may stand between children and their ability to flourish into incredible individuals. I look forward to seeing this bill passed and signed into law so that we can bear witness to the extraordinary individuals the children of our State will become with this law protecting their right to education at such a critical time for their development,” **said Assemblyman Sterley Stanley**.

“As someone who has spent my career in education, and as someone who was a working mother, I can’t stress enough just how important kindergarten programs are, both to our children and to working families,” **said Senator Shirley K. Turner**. “Kindergarten offers more learning and socialization time, helps teachers identify challenges early, and relieves parents of the financial burden of paying for daycare, which is costing many families as much as their rent or mortgage. Expanding full-day kindergarten to the schools that still lack these programs is crucial to ensure no child starts their academic journey behind their peers.”

“When we look for ways to make New Jersey more affordable, offering free, full-day kindergarten and creating a pathway to universal, free preschool is a pivotal part of the conversation,” **said Assemblyman Anthony S. Verrelli**. “Every child in the state should be able to benefit from New Jersey’s nationally-recognized education system. Providing access to free early childhood education has the dual advantage of setting our children’s educational path on a solid foundation and enabling parents to save significant money on childcare costs.”

These initiatives are informed by [Phase II of the Strategic Plan for Preschool Expansion](https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/docs/NewJerseyStrategicPlanforPreschoolExpansionPhase2.pdf) (<https://www.nj.gov/education/earlychildhood/preschool/docs/NewJerseyStrategicPlanforPreschoolExpansionPhase2.pdf>), which is also being released today. This document includes feedback from an intensive stakeholder engagement process over 74 sessions across all counties, representing 36 organizations and an additional 485 staff from school districts and private providers across the state. In addition to the above four goals, the strategic plan’s recommendations include: better aligning childcare and public preschool facilities requirements; evaluating public-private partnership opportunities to provide dedicated facilities funding; and improving transportation options for preschoolers.

“The implementation of a full-day kindergarten program has provided our students with additional instructional time, purposeful playtime both structured and unstructured, the opportunities to participate in learning centers, additional special area classes such as art, music, and PE, and access to recess. We are proud of our educators who have dedicated tremendous amounts of time in curriculum writing and professional development throughout this transition and

championed the benefits of moving to a full-day Kindergarten model. As a district, we have much to be proud of, but the move to full-day K is one of the brightest accomplishments in recent years," **said West Windsor-Plainsboro School District Superintendent David Aderhold**. "Governor Murphy, we thank you for your ongoing support of public education and appreciate your continued vision of supporting New Jersey's students and school districts."

"Governor Murphy's determination to bring full-day kindergarten to every district in New Jersey and to continue making pre-K opportunities available to more students in more communities will pay dividends for decades to come," **said NJEA President Sean Spiller**. "Dollars invested today in education – especially early education – are repaid many times over in a stronger future economy. New Jersey must continue to be a national leader in all aspects of public education, from preschool through college, and getting a strong early foundation will help us achieve that."

"We commend Governor Murphy for taking steps to mandate full-day kindergarten. We know that early education provides a vital foundation for children's academic, social, and emotional growth. A structured, immersive environment will give our youngest learners the time and tools to develop the skills they will need to be lifelong learners," **said Barbara Martinez, Executive Director of the NJ Children's Foundation**.

"AFT New Jersey applauds Governor Murphy and his administration's commitment to full-day kindergarten. As we know, full-day kindergarten has a positive impact on children's academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall school readiness," **said Jennifer S. Higgins, President of AFT New Jersey**.

"The earliest days of learning in a child's life prepare that child for decades of education and experiences to follow, and we applaud Governor Murphy for placing such a high value on early childhood education with his targeted support of pre-K expansion and full-day kindergarten. For the districts not yet fortunate enough to have such robust offerings for their littlest learners, the Governor's leadership on this will open doors that will create opportunities for these children for years to come," **said Karen A. Bingert, Executive Director, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association**.

"As a longtime advocate for public preschool and a leader in laying the foundation for New Jersey's nationally-recognized preschool program, Advocates for Children of NJ commends Governor Murphy and the State Legislature for their continued commitment to invest in early care and education. Expansion efforts should prioritize partnerships between school districts and community child care centers and align space requirements for partnering child care centers with industry standards to ensure families have the choice to access consistent, high-quality early care and education across the setting that best suits their needs," **said Mary E. Coogan, president & CEO of ACNJ**.

"SPAN applauds the Governor's proposal for the expansion of full-day kindergarten. This initiative significantly enhances opportunities for students across New Jersey to benefit from the academic advantages of full-day programs, particularly in math and reading. We also commend the Governor's continued commitment to early childhood education, which has laid a strong foundation for future success. Expanding access to high-quality universal pre-K represents a critical next step in this progression," **said Peg Kinsell, Policy Director, SPAN Parent Advocacy Network**. "Research consistently shows that full-day pre-K improves attendance and boosts school readiness, setting children on a path toward long-term academic achievement. A recent study further underscores that full-day programs closely aligned with nearby elementary schools yield the greatest success in achieving long-term educational goals. These findings highlight the transformative potential of the Governor's vision for early childhood education. This is a pivotal moment for New Jersey's students and their families, promising enriched learning opportunities and a brighter future for all."

"NJASA fully supports the Governor's focus on expanding early childhood education, recognizing its long-term benefits. Research confirms that early intervention enhances student achievement and mitigates the need for costly remediation in later grades," **said Richard Bozza, Executive Director, NJASA**.

"NJSBA strongly supports early child education and applauds Gov. Murphy for his steadfast commitment to expanding educational opportunities for our youngest learners by making free, full-day kindergarten universal across the state and expanding pre-K. Access to high-quality education at an early age pays tremendous dividends over the long term and enhances students' chances for success over their academic journeys. As we promote the achievement of all students, we look forward to working with the governor and Legislature to make these goals a reality while ensuring all school districts have the resources and support from the state that they need to overcome any challenges they might encounter," **said Dr. Timothy Purnell, Executive Director, NJ School Boards Association**.

"The NJPTA fully supports the Governor's proposal to provide all students with access to free, full-day kindergarten and to establish a pathway toward free, universal preschool by codifying existing State preschool programs. These measures are essential to equipping our youngest learners with a strong foundation for future academic success," **said Sharon**

Roseboro, President, NJPTA.

“JerseyCAN applauds the Murphy administration’s far-reaching actions to support our youngest learners and their families. Access to high quality caregiving and education via universal preschool and full-day kindergarten reflect a laudable two-generation strategy to strengthen human flourishing in our state, particularly in our most under-resourced communities. These programs can be a game-changer for parents who want or need to participate more meaningfully in the workforce and for our young learners, the benefits will extend well beyond their formative years as they predict higher earnings and labor productivity in adulthood,” **said Paula White, Executive Director, JerseyCAN.**

“We believe strongly in early childhood education, including full-day kindergarten for all. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature on the practical details that will bring this initiative to fruition,” **said Betsy Ginsburg, Executive Director, Garden State Coalition of Schools.**

“Today’s announcement of the expansion of free, full-day kindergarten and universal preschool marks a transformative step for New Jersey’s children and working families,” **said Ebony D. Grace, Chief Executive Officer of NJSACC: New Jersey’s Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Professional Network.** “This initiative sets the stage for equitable education and increased demand for quality out-of-school time (OST) programs. These initiatives ensure children thrive both in and beyond the classroom, while supporting working parents. NJSACC thanks Governor Murphy, for prioritizing investments that strengthen education and family support systems. By providing nurturing environments for kindergarteners—school-age students transitioning into K-12, OST programs ensure continuity of care, meet developmental needs, and enable parents to remain in the workforce. Together, we can make New Jersey the best place to raise a child.”

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