



Main Office
2082 Lexington Avenue, Suite 204
New York, NY 10035

t: 212.206.7818
f: 212.206.7836

info@dccnyinc.org
www.dccnyinc.org

Queens Office
James C. Hall, Jr.
Family Child Care Network
York College
94-20 Guy Brewer Boulevard, Room 2F01E
Jamaica, NY 11451

t: 718.262.2247

Leave No Teacher Behind: How to Support Study Plan Teachers in Community-based Early Childhood Programs

Prepared by Mai Miksic, Senior Research Analyst

This year, certified early childhood teachers in community-based Pre-K for All programs will begin receiving substantial pay raises, led first by two [labor deals](#)¹ that were struck between the Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) and District Council (DC) 37 Local 205 and the Head Start Sponsoring Board and DC 37 Local 95. This month, it was announced that non-unionized certified teachers would also be receiving those raises. New York City will be funding these historic agreements, which provide parity for starting salaries between community-based and public school teachers. Community-based Pre-K programs will now have an easier time attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. However, approximately 50% of all pre-k teachers in community-based programs will not be receiving salary increases, namely teachers who are not certified, often referred to as “study plan” teachers.

Due to a long history of low wages and ensuing difficulties with recruitment and retention, approximately [half of teachers](#) in community-based pre-k programs are not certified. New York State law and local City regulations allow non-certified teachers in community-based programs to be employed as lead teachers, so long as they are enrolled in college courses to fulfill State certification requirements, also known as a “study plan.” Under State education law, teachers in Pre-K for All programs have a limited window of time (3 years) to get certified or move on. However, logistical problems with tracking study plan progress has made it difficult to enforce these time limitations. Thus some teachers have been on study plans for more than three years. With the salaries of certified Pre-K teachers increasing by over \$15,000, these teachers now have added motivation to become certified. But doing so will take careful planning, and a concerted effort on the part of New York State, the City, and local universities.

Returning to school to obtain state certification is easier said than done. Certification requires first obtaining a bachelor’s degree, then eventually a Master’s degree, as well as passing three State exams. Since teachers on study plans are working fulltime, they must attend school in the evenings or on weekends. This can be especially difficult as they juggle work and personal/family obligations. Some early education teacher programs, especially undergraduate programs, do not even offer evening or weekend classes.

Then there is the issue of paying for college. The average study plan teacher makes only a little more than minimum wage. While their low salaries would qualify them for some needs-based scholarships, their part-time student status often limits the amount of funding they can receive. Some teachers take out student loans to pay for their education, but this saddles them with student debt. Despite these barriers, most early childhood teachers want to be recognized as professionals by obtaining their State certification.

With half of the community-based teaching workforce on study plans, the time has come to fully support these teachers so they can become certified. This is truly the only way to stabilize the early childhood workforce.

Failure to support early childhood teachers would result in a workforce crisis. In addition to the reality that the field cannot lose 50% of its workforce, teachers on study plans who cannot obtain their certification ultimately must leave their jobs, contributing to high turnover rates. [Research has documented](#)² that high turnover rates disrupts the bond between caregivers and children and ultimately could have detrimental effects on young children.

Most importantly, many of these teachers on study plans are excellent teachers with years of valuable experience. They love their jobs and the children they care for and educate. They are committed to the community-based early childhood model and are an asset to the field.

What can be done to support teachers on study plans? [Experts agree](#)³ that that a highly trained and credentialed workforce is essential to quality early childhood education. The best way to support teachers on study plans and ensure that they are paid adequately is to support their continuing education. The following is a set of policy recommendations that has been crafted with this goal in mind.

Recommendations:

1. Provide a comprehensive scholarship program to support all early education teachers in community-based programs working toward their certification.

Current scholarships are limited in what they can cover. The New York State Education Incentive Program (EIP) for early educators is a needs-based scholarship that provides up to a maximum amount of \$2,000 each year, which barely covers the cost of one class at a CUNY school. Recently, a [new CUNY/SUNY needs-based scholarship program](#)⁴ was announced that provides part-time early childhood students with funding for up to six credits per semester. The Day Care Council of New York and DC 37 Local 205 jointly administers a [scholarship](#)⁵ for early childhood educators, however that benefit is limited to union members. Study plan teachers must navigate a complex patchwork of scholarships with differing eligibility requirements and limited funds. Given that State law only allows teachers to be on study plans for three years, these limited scholarship options fall short of helping all teachers complete their education in a timely way.

2. Acknowledge and award the years of experience that teachers on study plans have by translating those years into college credits, up to a maximum number of credits.

This is not an unprecedented concept. The [College Board's College-Level Examination Program](#) (CLEP)⁶, which is accepted at 2,900 colleges and universities across the country, including some CUNY schools, awards college credits to students who can demonstrate their work experience knowledge by taking an exam. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) could develop a similar program in partnership with local universities that allows early childhood teachers to convert their experience into credits, which would build the foundation and motivation for continuing their education.

3. Provide student loan forgiveness to early childhood education teachers, who already have student loan debt.

Student loan debt does not just affect teachers who have already completed their degrees, it affects students who are trying to finish school as well. It is quite common for part-time students to take time off school, largely due to the burden of working fulltime while attending college. However, if a student has student loan debt, he or she is obligated to make payments

during this time off from school. The low salaries of early childhood teachers on study plans makes it difficult for them to make these payments. As time goes on, student debt piles up until it ultimately prevents students from returning to complete their degree. It is a common story that has been documented [again](#)⁷ and [again](#)⁸. How can we expect students to go back to school if their student loan debt is preventing them from doing so?

The current federal student loan forgiveness program is designed for those who have completed their degree, has [yet to demonstrate success](#)⁹, and is constantly under threat of being discontinued. In order to support this workforce, a student loan forgiveness program could be created that buys out student loans for educators who commit to teaching in community-based programs for at least five years.

New York City's child care centers cannot afford to lose 50% of their childhood Pre-K teachers, who have years of valuable experience, are committed to working in their communities, and who need help in becoming certified. High quality early childhood education requires a stable workforce. The time has come to fully support all Pre-K teachers on their path to certification.

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/335-19/mayor-de-blasio-speaker-johnson-help-district-council-1707-local-205-the-day-care-council-of#/0>

² Claudia Hale-Jinks, Herman Knopf & Herman Knopf (2006) Tackling Teacher Turnover in Child Care: Understanding Causes and Consequences, Identifying Solutions, *Childhood Education*, 82:4, 219-226, DOI: 10.1080/00094056.2006.10522826

³ <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>

⁴ <https://earlychildhoodny.org/cdsc/cunyworkforcescholarship.php>

⁵ <https://www.dccnyinc.org/members/early-childhood-career-ladder/>

⁶ <https://clep.collegeboard.org/about-clep/key-exam-information>

⁷ <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/18/739451168/i-m-drowning-those-hit-hardest-by-student-loan-debt-never-finished-college>

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/09/12/whos-blame-massive-amount-student-loan-debt-america/>

⁹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-19-595>