



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

February 14, 2023

Dear Chancellor Banks,

I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding the ongoing crisis affecting our community-based early childhood education providers. These providers are an essential part of the preschool and early care and education landscape in The Bronx and across the city. However, they are under immense financial strain due to several interconnected factors, many of which are related to policies and procedures enacted by the Department of Education. These issues have their roots in the choices made during the previous administration, but we now have the opportunity to address these problems and make things right for our providers.

Community-based providers have been the anchor of early childhood education since before the beginning of the rollout of Universal Pre-K. In The Bronx, we are particularly dependent on these providers, and they provide an essential service in our neighborhoods that school-based programs cannot always replicate. The community-based providers often have opportunities for extended evening and night hours as well as summer hours. They are also the only programs available for children under three years old. These options are critical to families whose work schedules may not cooperate with the standard school options.

Many of these early childhood education providers are led by women and people of color, with a deep rooted and long history of serving our most vulnerable children in The Bronx. They should not feel ignored nor undervalued when they are needed the most. They provide local jobs, hire from within our communities and have the unique ability to understand the needs of our children.

These providers have been under increased stress for years, and this difficulty has only increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The slow rate of reimbursement from the DOE to these providers has made their continued operation more difficult, and in some cases non-viable. A three-week turnaround time is viewed as the norm, and invoices can be outstanding for months. Some of the providers that I have spoken with have outstanding invoices from Fiscal Year 2022,

which ended more than six months ago. This is an unacceptable delay in getting these providers the money they need to stay in operation.

These reimbursement delays have led to difficult choices for the people who run these programs. I have heard from providers who have had to miss payroll, leaving their hardworking teachers out in the cold, unable to support their families despite providing an essential service to our city's children. Additionally, these providers have often had to miss payments to their vendors or on their rent, imperiling their ability to retain these services in the future. These providers said that they often feel like they are in competition with DOE instead of working as your partners. They feel like the DOE has not been sufficiently communicative, and I agree that improvements must be made. This reimbursement situation is an unacceptable reality that imperils the early childhood education landscape in The Bronx.

Many of the providers that I spoke to believe that the DOE is deprioritizing the community-based providers in favor of the school-based programs. While the school-based programs are essential to achieve universal preschool, the community-based providers remain under enrolled. The demand for these programs exists in the community, so we must find a way to better connect families to these providers.

Additionally, there are important issues that DOE must address around enrollment practices, invoicing and other billing practices, teacher hiring, and persistent problems stemming from the closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Should this crisis go unaddressed, I fear that many of these providers will have to shut their doors, leaving many children without a place to get early education and leaving families in the lurch.

There are many possible solutions that we can explore together to improve this difficult situation. In collaboration with the Day Care Council of New York, I am calling on you to consider and act upon the following proposals:

- The DOE must immediately pay out on all outstanding claims from these providers for Fiscal Year 2022.
- The invoicing and payment processes should be moved out of the DOE PreKids system into the PASSPort system at the Mayor's Office of Contract Services, which would simplify the process for providers.

- The DOE must pay all Fiscal Year 2023 invoices promptly, move to multiple month invoicing, and ensure that the lag between invoicing and reimbursement never extends beyond one month.
- Do not penalize providers for enrollment lower than capacity so long as DOE controls enrollment.

Bronx families, particularly from Black and Hispanic communities, rely on community-based daycare and preschool providers. These providers no longer being able to serve these communities would be a serious blow to the ideal of universal high quality early childhood education in our city. The DOE simply does not have the capacity to take on all of these children should these programs go under. I hope that you will come to The Bronx to hear firsthand from these providers. Together we can ensure that our early childhood providers will be able to serve Bronx children – and children from all over the city – for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vanessa L. Gibson".

Vanessa L. Gibson

Bronx Borough President