

December 11, 2015

Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

On behalf of the undersigned nonprofit EarlyLearn providers, we are writing to express our grave concerns about the complete lack of meaningful progress towards addressing the unreasonably low salaries and benefits being provided to the teaching and support staff in our early childhood education centers. We therefore are asking you to direct OLR and OMB to take immediate steps to resolve this issue.

The facts are clear and compelling:

- Our early childhood education employees – who are represented by DC1707 (Locals 95 and 205) and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (Local 1) – have not had an increase in their contract salary rates since 2006, which is a period of almost 10 years.
- To our knowledge no City-funded workforce has gone as long without a pay increase.
- The salaries of these employees are 100% paid for under our City contracts, and so the City has the sole power to decide how much these employees are paid.
- Certified teachers in the public schools (who are represented by UFT) have starting salaries that are 9% to 38% higher than the starting salaries of the certified teachers in our nonprofit EarlyLearn centers.
- Certified public school teachers with 10 years of experience make 48% to 79% more than our certified teachers, and those with 20 years of experience make 82% to 115% more than our certified teachers who have the same credentials and the same experience.
- Over the course of a 20-year career, certified public school teachers will earn between \$465,000 and \$561,000 more than certified teachers in our nonprofit EarlyLearn programs.
- Our programs are open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., including on public school holidays and in July and August when the public schools are closed – which means our staff members are working longer and harder for less pay.
- Prior to 2013, the City paid for the health insurance costs of our EarlyLearn staff members through the Citywide Central Insurance Program, but in 2013 that burden was

shifted to our programs and our employees. As a result, more than 50% of employees can no longer afford health insurance, and/or have moved from family coverage to individual coverage, thereby leaving their children, spouses and partners vulnerable.

- The vast majority of the staff members in our programs are women of color, and the City has yet to articulate a non-discriminatory basis for the disparities in treatment of these employees.

Our employees are enduring tremendous hardships as a result of these unreasonable compensation levels. A recent survey indicated that:

- 61% of our employees have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level;
- 17% of our employees receive food stamps; and
- 55% of our employees or their children receive Medicaid.

The fact that so many City-funded employees have to rely on public assistance to survive is an embarrassment to us. It should be an embarrassment to anyone.

The personal stories are even more compelling – and devastating. We have staff members who walk long distances to work because they cannot afford MetroCards; who report that towards the end of each pay period they run out of money for food; and who can't keep up with their rent and end up temporarily homeless.

It is ironic – and shameful – that the City urges us to prioritize care for children in homeless shelters, and yet refuses to grant the funding necessary to keep our own employees out of those very same shelters.

Despite the clear and convincing evidence of inequitable treatment, there has been no meaningful progress in contract negotiations with the City (which are conducted through the Day Care Council of New York, the Head Start Sponsoring Board Council of New York, CSA and DC1707).

This issue has reached a crisis stage. Our certified teachers are flocking to the public schools, where they get higher pay, less expensive health care coverage, shorter teaching hours, and summers off. As a result, the most vulnerable children in the highest-need communities end up with the lowest-paid and least experienced teachers – which is exactly the opposite of the result we should be trying to achieve.

The solution is simple – provide sufficient funding to allow the EarlyLearn contractors to negotiate a fair contract with DC1707 and CSA. That contract must, at a minimum, provide the following:

1. a lump sum retroactive payment for lost wages;
2. salaries and benefits on par with those of similarly-situated public school employees, including step increases based on tenure; and
3. full funding for employee health insurance.

Your first two years in office have been highlighted by two signature initiatives – addressing income inequality and enhancing early childhood education – but the current EarlyLearn staff salaries flies in the face of both of those initiatives.

Every day, our underpaid staff members educate tens of thousands of 2, 3 and 4 year old children, the vast majority of whom are children of color living in low-income communities. Our work creates the foundation for these children to embark on a lifetime of learning, but the stark reality is that we will never have a high quality educational system if we fail to pay adequate salaries to those teaching the youngest and most vulnerable children. The low pay scale prevents us from attracting the best teachers, increases staff turnover, creates low employee morale, and as a consequence harms the children we are all dedicated to serve.

Educating young children is our highest priority. Please show us that it is yours as well.

Thank you for your leadership. We look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

Angela Ariza
Executive Director
Bellevue Day Care Center, Inc.

Jo-Ann Whitehead
Board President
Blanche CPDCC.

José Velilla
Executive Director
The Bloomingdale Family Program

Thomas Howard, Jr., Ed.D.
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East Calvary Day Care Center

Kelly Haley
Interim Administrative Director
East Harlem Block Nursery, Inc.

John A. Sanchez
Executive Director
East Side House Settlement

R. Sally Maldonado
Director
Eisman Day Nursery

Vaughan Toney
President/CEO
Friends of Crown Heights

Robert Cordero
Executive Director
Grand Street Settlement

Mark Handelman, LCSW, ACSW
Executive Director
Hamilton-Madison House

David Garza
Executive Director
Henry Street Settlement.

Ken Jockers
Executive Director
Hudson Guild

Warren Scharf
Executive Director
Marian Detalj
Director of Children and Family Services
Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

Thanh Kim Huynh
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Malcolm X Early Childhood Education Center

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Operation Director
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Director of Child Care & Nutrition
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Police Athletic League

Rev. Darren M. Morton, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Prince Hall Colonial Park Daycare

Barbara Manners
Executive Director
Sharon Baptist Head Start

Gloria Ferrer
Director
SCAN LaGuardia Nursery

Douglas O'Dell
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SCO Family of Services

Roseann Catania
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SIMHS-Head Start

Damyn Kelly
Executive Director
Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers

Sr. Margaret McDermott
Executive Director
Tolentine Zeiser Community Life Center

Melissa Johnson MS. Ed
Executive Director
Trabajamos Community Head Start

David Nocenti
Executive Director
Union Settlement Association

Ana Aguirre
Executive Director
United Community Centers

Melissa Aase
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University Settlement

Marie J Milillo
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Westchester Tremont Day Care Center, Inc.

Dr. Danielle Moss Lee
Chief Executive Officer
YWCA of the City of New York

cc: Public Advocate Leticia James
Comptroller Scott Stringer
Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito
Deputy Mayor Richard Buery
OMB Director Dean Fuleihan
ACS Commissioner Gladys Carrión
DOE Chancellor Carmen Fariña
OLR Commissioner Robert Linn