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Concept Paper for EarlyLearn NYC: New York City's Early Care and Education Services

This concept paper is being offered to New York City's private provider community and the general public in order to help frame and give purpose to the Request for Proposals ("RFP") which the City of New York's ("City") Administration for Children's Services ("ACS") expects to release in 2010, for implementation of services to children and families in 2011.

I. Background information

ACS was formed in 1996 with the mission of ensuring the safety and well-being of New York City's approximately two million children, who live in the five counties/boroughs that comprise New York City's roughly 300 square miles. To fulfill this mission, ACS operates the majority of the City's publicly funded Early Care and Education ("ECE") system, including Child Care and Head Start programs, and the City's child welfare system comprised of protective, foster, and preventive services. ACS also oversees detention and alternative to detention programs for juvenile delinquents.

ACS ECE system, henceforth to be known as EarlyLearn NYC, is the largest publicly funded ECE system in the United States. It serves approximately 100,000 low-income children through center-based child care, home-based care, and legally-exempt care, using both contracts and voucher systems. ACS also serves as a Head Start grantee, overseeing one of the largest Head Start grants, which serves approximately 19,000 children.

ACS works in concert with the Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Development to create the City's comprehensive ECE system. The Department of Education provides public Kindergarten throughout the City and manages New York State's Universal Pre-Kindergarten ("UPK") program, which is provided through public schools and contracted ECE providers. The Department of Youth and Community Development offers "Out-of-School-Time" programs for kindergarten students.

ECE, as a city-wide system, has seen many changes over the past years. Now ACS seeks to advance the system, as whole, to the next level of service and positive child outcomes through the upcoming Request for Proposal ("RFP") process. The RFP will refer to the portion of EarlyLearn NYC that involves contracted care, for both center- and home-based care, as well as for UPK within ACS contracted care.

Through this RFP, ACS will invest resources devoted to classroom quality and family support, and increased quality standards set for early childhood education programs. **EarlyLearn NYC** will focus on elements of program quality proven to produce positive outcomes for children and families. Specifically,



EarlyLearn NYC will devote resources to program elements including: improved teacher-child ratios to ensure that children receive optimal levels of adult supervision to support their learning and growth; developmentally-appropriate, research-validated curricula that provide rich and varied learning experiences to support children's growth across all of the developmental domains; opportunities for high-quality, meaningful professional development that encourage teachers to consistently reflect and improve their practices; and collaborative relationships with parents, fostered through improved accessibility to both early education opportunities for their children, and comprehensive family support services. **EarlyLearn NYC** will also utilize holistic and developmentally-appropriate screening and child assessment systems that inform teachers' professional development and instructional practices to best support children's development. Finally, in recognition of the importance of leadership and management in quality services, **EarlyLearn NYC** will strengthen program administration by investing in administrative staff, and will ensure that administrators have the tools necessary to utilize programmatic and fiscal resources effectively.

II. EarlyLearn NYC's Guiding Principles and the purpose of the RFP

ACS' Division of Child Care and Head Start ("CCHS") mission is to provide a high-quality learning experience for New York City children. ACS recognizes that early childhood programs play a critical role in supporting young children's development and learning and in preparing children for both school and life success. ECE programs need to foster children's healthy and positive cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. CCHS is committed to ensuring that New York City's young children have positive early learning experiences. **EarlyLearn NYC** will set high standards that will give every child tools to succeed and meet his or her full potential.

Towards that end, ACS CCHS is committed to five guiding principles:

1. **EarlyLearn NYC** will implement and support the highest program standards and ensure programs are developmentally focused
2. **EarlyLearn NYC** will emphasize positive educational and social outcomes for children and provide families with needed and comprehensive supports
3. **EarlyLearn NYC** will align early care resources with high need communities
4. **EarlyLearn NYC** will maximize resources from all early care and education funding sources that are available for young children
5. **EarlyLearn NYC** will ensure financial accountability and sustainability of the early care system

To successfully make these principles real, **EarlyLearn NYC** will expect the following characteristics of its programs:

- **Developmentally focused:** EarlyLearn NYC programs will foster children's development, placing great emphasize on improving educational and social outcomes of children
- **Align resources:** EarlyLearn NYC programs will be located in communities based on the concentration of eligible children and need for early care services
- **Accessibility:** EarlyLearn NYC programs must provide parents and caregivers with comprehensive information on services available and pre-screen for eligibility of subsidized care
- **Accountability:** EarlyLearn NYC programmatic decisions will be made by informed and engaged management using reliable data

The upcoming RFP will seek appropriately qualified providers to support the City in its fulfillment of these important goals by providing quality early childhood educational services in centers and home-based settings. The RFP will focus on the development of three EarlyLearn NYC models, utilizing multiple funding sources to provide the highest quality of care. The EarlyLearn NYC models are explained in detail in Section VI. Program Approach.

III. Initiatives and Objectives for ACS' EarlyLearn NYC

Proposers should be aware of ACS' objectives and strategic initiatives to improve early care and education services in the City and, if awarded a contract, proposers will be responsible for implementing those objectives and strategic initiatives. The objectives and initiatives are designed to help exemplify the five guiding principles stated above. This set of initiatives and strategies includes the following:

- The underlying principle of **EarlyLearn NYC** is to ensure all children, regardless of income, have access to quality early care and education, fostering an environment where all children can thrive. Program standards are being elevated to ensure early care and education program goals lead to positive child outcomes. Standards relate to the learning environment, leadership and management, health and safety, and qualifications and credentials. To strengthen the quality of care and better address the needs of the community, the programs and, ultimately, every child, ACS is investing in the classroom and in program administration. EarlyLearn NYC is committed to offering children the social, emotional, and academic skills to promote success in all aspects of their future.
- A **Unified Assessment System** is being developed among ACS Child Care and Head Start division, the Department of Education, and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. This assessment system will hold all programs accountable to the same quality standards. Once implemented, ACS will use the results to direct training and technical assistance resources.
- Providers are responsible for **Community Based Enrollment and Pre-screening** for subsidized child care to facilitate enrollment and increase family access, thereby efficiently meeting the families' needs in their communities. Parents must go directly to the providers in the community and begin their child's enrollment process. Parents and programs may also use the **ACS Eligibility Wizard**, a web-based tool, to pre-screen eligibility and further facilitate a child's enrollment. Additionally, providers use the **Web-Based Enrollment and Attendance** system, designed to improve the efficiency of reporting enrollment and attendance – granting providers 'real-time' information on children determined eligible for and enrolled in care.
- The **Project Full Enrollment** initiative is targeted to ensure all early care resources are used efficiently and achieve system-wide financial stability by maintaining maximum enrollment in programs. Utilizing a rate-based system, providers will be reimbursed based on the number of children enrolled. A series of regular financial management reports will offer data and guidance for providers to financially plan and programmatically strategize.
- ACS supports **Innovative Strategies** to better serve children and ensure the economic sustainability of the system. To be reflective of the community served, providers will be encouraged to develop a mixed-financing model, including private-pay families and other government grants and foundations. Additionally, operational and business models are

encouraged which rethink management and administration and organizational staffing roles and responsibilities to promote fiscal and programmatic efficiencies.

- **ACS' Community Partnership Program** is creating easier and faster access to needed services for children and families. The basic premise of the community partnerships is that children and families experience better outcomes when service providers from the communities where the families reside, work actively together to meet families' overall needs in the neighborhoods where they live. ACS works directly with key members of the local communities such as child welfare agencies; local child care providers; community-based preventive services; and neighborhood clergy leaders to build coalitions to provide integrated services that will strengthen the community's ability to keep children safe. As part of this initiative, EarlyLearn NYC programs will be informed about and integrated into networks of local community support.

IV. Services to be Procured through this RFP

Research demonstrates that children are better served and benefit from integrated program models where providers have combined multiple ECE services focused on early learning. ACS, therefore, is procuring services to promote and establish EarlyLearn NYC to provide young children with enriched, nurturing environments and learning experiences that support children's development and creativity. These services, supported by funding from City Tax Levy, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start and Universal Pre-Kindergarten, will promote children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and help children develop competencies that will support each child's potential for success in school and in life.

Within the EarlyLearn NYC vision, children 6 weeks through 4 years old will be able to benefit from services located in center-based settings. (UPK will be required for all 4-year old children served in center-based programs.) Children, ages 6 weeks through 3 years old also may be served in home-based settings, administered through Family Child Care Networks. A significant difference in the up-coming RFP is that ACS is promoting an integrated model to provide all the services through a combination of program settings and funding streams. Within this integrated program model, ACS also encourages the maximization of collaboration at the level of the individual child slot.

In order to make available these services a provider will need to:

- Comply with federal, state, and City laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, contract terms, Article 47 of the City Health Code, and should the provider accept any funding from Head Start grant, the Head Start Act and Program Performance Standards
- Maintain a licensed program facility and/or registered home-based care providers
- Maintain full enrollment
- Provide a learning environment and varied experiences that will help children develop socially, intellectually, physically, and emotionally in a manner appropriate to their age and stage of development
- Ensure a healthy and safe environment for children, providing proper supervision of all children at all times and developing constructive methods for maintaining group control and handling individual behavior
- Conduct pre-determination eligibility screenings to increase parental access through community-based eligibility
- Recruit children, including a percentage of children with special needs
- Meet the UPK requirements for any 4-year-old served within a center-based setting

- Adhere to the highest standard/program requirement, if applicable or to the extent possible. ACS acknowledges that across current ECE settings (center and home based) and current ECE programs (Child Care, Head Start, and UPK), there are varying program requirements reflecting varying program standards and regulations, yet the primary goal of EarlyLearn NYC is to offer high quality care regardless of setting and program model
- Comply with ACS reporting and monitoring mandates, including, but not limited to, enrollment data systems, performance measurement system, and child developmental screenings and assessments
- Adhere to responsible fiscal and administrative practices, including allocation of all costs fairly and accurately across programs and funding streams
- Gather and maintain knowledge of the socio-economic composition and needs of the community that they serve
- Contribute to the cost of providing services. A combination of cash and in-kind contributions will be required to meet a set percentage of the cost of care. A provider contribution for cash could include but is not limited to revenue generated from fundraisings, a private-pay program, and other government grants
- Consider serving subsidized children along with children whose families pay privately for care to promote socio-economic diversity and to ensure populations served are reflective of the community
- Consider serving children across the age continuum of 6 weeks through age 4. Serving multiple ages promotes the continuity of care, serves the needs of families with children of varying ages, and leverages fiscal resources. As the most underserved population, ACS is also promoting the provision of infant and toddler care, particularly in home-based care settings

V. Procurement Information

1. Planned method of evaluating proposals

Upon receipt, all proposals will be reviewed for responsiveness. ACS will evaluate all responsive proposals based on the following criteria:

- Program Approach
- Organizational Capability; including financial feasibility of model
- Experience

2. Proposed term of the contract

It is anticipated that the term of the contracts awarded from the RFP will be for an initial period of four (4) years from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2015. The Department reserves the right, prior to contract award, to determine the length of the initial contract term and each option to renew, if any.

3. Procurement timeline

It is anticipated that the RFP will be released in the summer of 2010. A pre-proposal conference will be held approximately two weeks after the release of the RFP. Proposals will be due approximately six weeks after the pre-proposal conference. It is anticipated that the contractor(s) will be selected by late November to early December 2010.

4. Total funding available for the request for proposal

The available annual funding for the contracts awarded from this RFP is approximately five hundred fourteen million, nine hundred thousand (\$514,900,000) dollars. The amount to be allocated will be determined by the actual need as determined by ACS at the time of award.

5. Anticipated Number of Contracts

ACS anticipates funding approximately 350 contracts.

6. Sources of funding

It is anticipated that EarlyLearn NYC centers will be funded through a blending of federal, state and City dollars. The Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) and City tax levy will comprise approximately two hundred thirty five million, six hundred thousand (\$235,600,000) dollars and the federal Head Start grant is an estimated one hundred eighty five million, five hundred thousand (\$185,500,000) dollars. An additional sixty two million, nine hundred thousand (\$62,900,000) dollars in revenues will come from UPK since providers serving 4-year-olds will be participating in the UPK program. A provider contribution will also be required as noted above equating to approximately thirty million, nine hundred thousand (\$30,900,000) dollars. All EarlyLearn NYC programs will be required to participate in the Child and Adult Food Care Program (“CACFP”).

7. Anticipated capacity and funding ranges

The RFP will prescribe a range for funding based upon classroom-related (direct) and administrative (indirect) costs. The anticipated minimum will be set at 20 slots for center-based models and Family Child Care Network models serving at least 200 children. The anticipated maximum will be set at 2,000 center-based slots and 1,500 children served by a Family Child Care Network. The estimated annual funding is one hundred seventy five thousand (\$175,000) dollars to twenty million (\$20,000,000) dollars for center-based models and one million, four hundred eighty nine thousand (\$1,489,000) dollars to fourteen million, eight hundred ninety thousand (\$14,890,000) dollars for Family Child Care Networks.

8. Funding match requirements

Contractors are required to contribute to the cost of care through a combination of cash and in-kind contributions such as private pay, foundation grants, donated space, and cost allocation of other program grants (e.g. Early Intervention, Special Education) in support of the proposed program. ACS is currently finalizing the percentage of contribution which will be included in the upcoming RFP.

VI. Program approach and Programmatic Information

1. Program Approach:

Contractors will offer children a solid foundation for healthy development and education through a curriculum which is age-appropriate and addresses children's developmental needs. Greater consideration will be given to an integrated program approach. ACS envisions EarlyLearn NYC centers as meeting a variety of family needs and supportive services. EarlyLearn NYC services may be provided in center- and/or family-based settings. Below are program-specific parameters and requirements, including details regarding the service settings followed by EarlyLearn NYC model descriptions.

Proposers may submit proposals for more than one EarlyLearn NYC model, although individual sites may only have one model in operation.

Service Settings: The following three EarlyLearn NYC models can offer services in either center- or home-based settings.

- **Center-based Care** services are provided in a center-based setting. Centers must maintain NYC's DOHMH permits, including teacher qualifications and staff-to-student ratios. Centers

may serve children from 6 weeks through 4 years of age (up-to the age eligible for public school kindergarten). The preferred minimum classroom-equivalent capacity for center-based models will be the equivalent of three (3) classrooms. Awards will not be given for less than 20 slots in a center-based setting. Depending on EarlyLearn NYC model, center-based programs may utilize several funding sources including City Tax Levy, Child Care block grant, Head Start grant and State UPK funding). All center-based programs shall offer Universal Pre-Kindergarten services to all 4-year olds and abide by the rules and regulations of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program.

- **Family Child Care Networks** provide services in a home-based setting. Family Child Care providers are managed through Family Child Care Networks. ACS intends to contract with organizations proposing to serve as a Family Child Care Network, not individual providers. Family Child Care can be provided in either a Group Family Child Care setting or a Family Child Care setting, dependent on the number of children served as defined by City Health Code (Article 47). Family Child Care Networks offer services for children from 6 weeks through 3 years of age.

Family Child Care Networks provide effective leadership to ensure implementation of program policies and practices that support responsible planning, fiscal management, program evaluation, administration, and supervision including ongoing professional development. Family Child Care Networks utilizes funding sources including City Tax Levy and Child Care block grant. To be awarded a Home-Based Care network contract, the proposer must also be offering services in a center-based setting.

EarlyLearn NYC Model 1

This model serves subsidized and non-subsidized children in an integrated model. Proposers are encouraged to develop a program model which incorporates and offers services in all settings (center and home based) and accepts payment through a contract with ACS that blends several funding sources (including City Tax Levy, Child Care block grant, Head Start grant and State UPK funding). Families are eligible for ACS-subsidized care if they have a reason for care and meet certain income guidelines. Typically, these families are either on cash assistance, receiving child welfare preventive services or are caring for children in protective custody. Further, these programs must comply with all Head Start laws and regulations, including governance structure and family involvement. Contractors will be responsible for recruiting children that meet income guidelines and reasons for care, including a certain percentage of children who are dually eligible. It is expected that programs operate year round, Monday through Friday. Traditional hours of service are 8:00 am to 6:00 pm with services available for a minimum of 10 hours per day. Proposers may wish to propose alternative hours of service; the proposal should include the proposed hours of operation.

A proposal for EarlyLearn NYC Model 1 services can be provided in either center- or home-based settings, or a combination of both settings.

EarlyLearn NYC Model 2

EarlyLearn NYC Model 2 serves subsidized and non-subsidized children utilizing Head Start and UPK funding. Proposers seeking to provide Model 2 services shall serve families with children between the ages of 3 and 4 who meet the Head Start income eligibility criteria. These programs must comply with all Head Start laws and regulations, including governance structure and family involvement. Programs must be scheduled for full-day, 8 hours a day, Monday through Friday, and shall run for at least 11 months/48 weeks of the year. Services may be provided in a center-based model, home-based model or combination option model.

A proposal for EarlyLearn NYC Model 2 services can be provided in either center- or home-based settings, or a combination of both settings. In addition to center-based and home-based settings, EarlyLearn NYC Model 2 services can be provided in a “Combination Option”. Services are provided in a home-based setting provided that each child’s hours of service are split between home visits and time in the classroom, pursuant to the Head Start Performance Standards. Contracts will not be awarded for stand-alone home-based model. To be awarded a Combination Option model contract, the proposer must also be providing services in a center based setting.

EarlyLearn NYC Model 3:

EarlyLearn NYC Model 3 serves subsidized and non-subsidized children utilizing City Tax Levy, Child Care block grant, and State UPK as funding sources. It is expected that proposers within this model recruit an economically integrated population reflective of the community they serve. Proposers seeking to provide Model 3 services shall serve families with children between the ages of 6 weeks to 4 years (up-to the age eligible for public school kindergarten) who are eligible for subsidized child care. It is expected that proposers will meet the UPK requirements for any 4-year-old served. It is expected that all programs operate year round, Monday through Friday. Traditional hours of service are 8:00am to 6:00pm with services available for a minimum of 10 hours per day. Proposers may wish to propose alternative hours of service; their proposal should include the proposed hours of operation.

A proposal for EarlyLearn NYC Model 3 services can be provided in either center- or home-based settings, or a combination of both settings.

Summary of Program Approach Models

Models	Funding Sources	Settings & Ages Served	Hours & Months of Operation	Notes
EarlyLearn Model 1	CTL CCBG FHSG UPK	Center-Based for 6 wks – 4 yr-olds and/or FCC Networks for 6 wks – 3 yr-olds	10 hours/day 12 months/year	Percentage of dually eligible children to be served; HS Performance standards must be met UPK expected for all 4-year-olds served
EarlyLearn Model 2	CTL FHSG UPK	Center-based or combined option for 3yr-olds - 4yr-olds FCC Network for 6 wks – 3 yr-olds	8 hours/day minimum of 11 months/year	HS Performance standards must be met for center and combined option UPK expected for all 4-year-olds served
EarlyLearn Model 3	CTL CCBG UPK	Center-Based for 6 wks – 4 yr-olds and/or FCC Networks for 6 wks – 3 yr-olds	10 hours/day 12 months/year	UPK expected for all 4-year-olds served
HS = Federally-funded Head Start program CTL = City Tax Levy CCBG = Child Care Block Grant FHSG = Federal Head Start Grant UPK = NY State Universal Pre-Kindergarten Funding (available for 4-year-olds only) FCC = Family Child Care Networks of home-based providers; must be with center-based program				

2. Licensing:

Regardless of proposed model, all proposers must have a Permit (center-based) or become licensed or registered (home-based), according to the NYC Health Code (Article 47) administered by New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ("DOHMH"), within 90 days of contract award.

3. Age of population(s) to be served

Programs within EarlyLearn NYC Model 1 or EarlyLearn NYC Model 3 may propose to serve different age categories. For purposes of the upcoming RFP age categories will be defined as:

- Infant - a child from birth through 12 months in age
- Toddler - a child from 13 to 35 months in age
- Preschooler - a child between the ages of three and four years
- Mixed ages - placing children who are at least one year apart in age into the same child care group

EarlyLearn NYC Model 2 programs may propose to serve 3- and 4-year-olds in centers and up to 3-year-olds within a Family Child Care Network.

4. Location of population(s) to be served

Proposers may propose to locate service programs (center- or family-based) at sites they own or lease, or at City leased sites, which will be designated in the RFP. The program site must be located within the neighborhood to be served.

Greater consideration will be given to proposers that target designated service areas and/or populations, to ensure that the alignment of EarlyLearn NYC services reflects community need. As such, ACS will give greater consideration to proposers who offer services in high-need communities. ACS will designate high-need communities in the RFP based on analysis of estimated eligible population, concentration of other ECE services, poverty and low-income rates, and other factors measuring neighborhood condition.

Proposers must identify the neighborhood(s) they propose to serve, indicate the number of children they have the capacity to serve, and demonstrate such capacity.

5. Participant minimums and/or maximums

Contractors will be required to comply with NYC City Health Code (Article 47), Administration for Children & Families' (ACF) Head Start law and regulations (for Models 1 and 2), including staff qualifications and staff-to-participant ratios. It is expected that contractors will also be able to meet the early learning standards outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Proposers must demonstrate experience working with the population and community in which programs sites are/will be located. In addition, proposers must demonstrate that program staff will be qualified to provide the proposed services to the identified target population.

VII. Proposed vendor performance reporting requirements

As part of the City Procurement Policy Board ("PPB") Rules, all City-contracts must be evaluated, at a minimum, on an annual basis. This evaluation takes into account aspects of program quality, regulatory compliance, and their financial systems and structure. ACS is responsible for the monitoring and

evaluating the fiscal, administrative, and programmatic operations of the program. Contractors will be required to submit needed documentation, comply with site visits, and maintain records accordingly.

Comments regarding this concept report must be received no later than May 21, 2010. Please send comments in writing via e-mail to:

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