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E R N M E N T  
Leading Large Scale Change

December 5, 2007

## The Challenge of City/State Collaboration: Implementing Universal Pre-Kindergarten

### Panelists:

Evelyn Castro      Executive Director, Office of Early Childhood  
Education, Department of Education

Alan Gartner      Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Mayor  
for Education and Community Development

Melanie Hartzog      Deputy Commissioner, Child Care and  
HeadStart, Administration for Children's  
Services

Jennifer Jones-Austin      Family Services Coordinator, Office of  
the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

Kristin Proud      Deputy Director for State Operations, New York  
State Executive Chamber

### Moderator:

Christine McWayne      Assistant Professor, Steinhardt School  
of Culture, Education, and Human Development/NYU

### Remarks:

Linda Gibbs      Deputy Mayor, Health and Human Services

Dennis Walcott      Deputy Mayor, Education and Community  
Development

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**Supporting High Performance Government: Leading Large Scale Change  
“The Challenge of City/State Collaboration: Implementing Universal Pre-  
Kindergarten”**

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**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

Accenture and the Research Center for Leadership in Action of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University are co-hosting an Executive Briefing series for public sector managers to discuss the multiple managerial and leadership challenges of implementing large scale change. The series strives to:

- Encourage the exchange of ideas between senior managers of complex change programs and those emerging leaders charged with undertaking similar efforts.
- Support a cadre of new leaders interested in undertaking such challenges, providing them with the insights, learning and the collegial support that will help sustain their work over time.
- Promote further learning about how successful complex change initiatives are designed and managed, and capture this information in written reports.

Each session is organized around a central strategic and managerial question of particular relevance to large-scale change. The session held on December 5, 2007 entitled “The Challenge of City/State Collaboration: Implementing Universal Pre-Kindergarten” focused on the strategies for putting this complex program into practice while working across agency silos to achieve this effort.

**Background and Context**

The broad topic is City/State collaboration – a vital component in the successful implementation of many City policies and programs. We’ve selected Universal Pre-Kindergarten as an example. One of the few well established facts in education is that early childhood is critical to later learning. Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Spitzer have each made Universal Pre-Kindergarten a high priority. Since the City is home to such a large portion of the Pre-K population, State success depends on successful implementation of the program in the City.

Pre-school children are the special concern of the City’s education and human services agencies and provider non-profit agencies. The City in turn depends on the State Legislature, the State Education Department, community based agencies, and the support of the City Council to carry out its mission. The focus of this Executive Briefing will be the management challenges faced in harnessing all these diverse forces to produce successful educational outcomes.

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Moderator:

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### **The Collaboration Imperative in Universal Pre-Kindergarten Policy Implementation**

New York State and City’s implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) provides an exemplary case study of policy implementation at work—one which calls attention to the importance of effective collaboration in this process. Policy studies, focused as they tend to be on the processes by which policies are formulated or enacted, too often overlook the fact that public policy is only made real by its implementation and the fact that the implementation process shapes the actual policy as much as the policy formation or legislative process (O’Toole, 2003). It is perhaps for this reason that inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration has not received it due attention as perhaps one of the most important ingredients for successful policy implementation processes.

The panelists at the December 5<sup>th</sup> briefing elucidate during their discussion that the decision by New York State and City governments to collaborate around Universal Pre-Kindergarten is not merely a stylistic concern or preference, but rather essential to the implementation of the policy itself. As Kristin Proud notes, “[I]t’s not as simple as decreeing from the Governor’s office that we want to make a change.”

Indeed, all members of the panel agree that the Governor’s commitment to universalize Pre-Kindergarten education would go unrealized, and his unprecedented investment of over \$60 million would go unspent, without the participation and the collaboration of local jurisdictions. This is made clear by the fact that in many jurisdictions in New York State, besides New York City, because of a lack of interest or means to collaborate, UPK remains a far-off goal despite the Governor’s commitment. The implementation of UPK in New York City, as one important jurisdiction possessing both the interest and means to collaborate with the State, thus becomes all the more useful as a case of policy success, and as an illustration of the collaboration imperative in policy implementation. Likewise, the panel’s discussion on New York State and City’s collaboration around UPK provides some critical

insights into how policy success can be achieved through effective collaboration, what such collaboration requires, and what challenges lie therein. As Deputy Mayor Walcott rightly states, “There is no greater collaboration to work on besides Universal Pre-Kindergarten.”

The key insights regarding inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration discussed by the panel are presented below. Of these insights, two have to do with contingencies for collaboration, that is, the conditions necessary for collaboration to take place. The remaining three insights regard challenges faced by public leaders within and during collaboration.

#### Collaboration Contingency: Alignment of State and Local Interests

The panel discussion focuses on the specific challenges and achievements of New York State and New York City in launching their Universal Pre-Kindergarten program. However, in contrasting New York City’s experience from that of other jurisdictions, the panel also brings to light some possible reasons why collaboration between the State and City was possible in the first place. The first of these reasons is the alignment of New York City’s interests with that of the Spitzer Administration around implementing Universal Pre-Kindergarten. As Jennifer Jones-Austin explains, Governor Spitzer’s investment of “\$60 million presented a good opportunity. Our Mayor had campaigned on the promise of expanding pre-Kindergarten education. When the \$60 million came down, we were very excited about it.” No small part of the City’s interest in universalizing Pre-Kindergarten education has to do with the groundswell of demand on the part of the community and advocates. Jones-Austin remarks, “The \$60 million was very public. Everywhere you went, advocates, community-based organizations all knew that there were \$60 million...Advocates were excited about the money, and quick to tell us how to spend it.”

In contrast to New York City’s unbridled enthusiasm for universalizing Pre-K and collaborating with the State, many other jurisdictions have little interest in the policy. Proud notes, “We have a lot of districts who don’t have programs, and those tend to be low-need districts. Those districts feel they are fine.” She further explains that this misalignment between the interests of these jurisdictions and the State results in a failure to collaborate: “It says to us that they don’t want to put in the efforts to make things mesh together.” Moreover, Proud believes that an alignment of State and local interests is a necessary prerequisite to collaboration: “We are trying to instill those districts with the sense that Universal Pre-Kindergarten is important and persuade them to come it...We’re working with a whole host of different organizations and different parties, and trying to build some momentum from the grass-roots perspective.”

#### Collaboration Contingency: Alignment of State Funding and Local Capacity

Even when a jurisdiction’s interests are aligned with that of the State’s, inter-governmental collaboration may still not be possible if the jurisdiction lacks the capacity to take advantage of the funding opportunity. Hence, another contingency to inter-governmental collaboration may be an alignment between the State’s funding availability and the local jurisdictions’ capacity to take advantage of these funds. In the case of New York’s

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implementation of universal pre-Kindergarten, such capacity has to do with the City's possession of its own resources to match those offered by the State, as well as the existing base of community-based organizations (CBOs) that could help provide those services. As one panelist explains, "A lot of the resources [used in conjunction with State funds] are City tax levy dollars." This availability of local resources, she then adds, allows the City to achieve a financial collaboration as well as an inter-governmental one: "Here we have two agencies, and yet on the ground, we're blending this funding and we're walking into early Pre-K classes, and you can't tell what is funded by what." Thus, as Proud recalls, "there were proposals to the City, and in other localities that don't have the same resources that New York City does. Other districts who wanted to participate couldn't do it due to local resources." For example, in some districts, "transportation is a barrier. The districts can use some allocation [of State funds] for this, but most feel that the money is not enough." In general, with regard to the State's effort to increase participation from districts, "A lot of the issues are about money, and this impacts the number of kids that [the State] can extend services to."

Beyond financial capacity, the panel notes that local jurisdictions also need adequate capacity in terms of their organizational infrastructure, that is, the network of community-based organizations that can ultimately utilize the State and local resources to provide early education services. Thus, Proud observes that jurisdictions like Syracuse who are attempting to collaborate with the State to implement universal pre-Kindergarten education "have good relationships with community-based organizations and have good programs, but are struggling to increase their capacity." This is particularly true for rural districts where "[t]here is not a strong network of non-profits. There are some not-for-profits and child care providers, but they don't have the ability without technical assistance and an infusion of resources to take on implementation." By contrast, "The City has a higher percentage of CBO utilization than other districts." In fact, in New York City, the organizational capacity was so developed that one of the challenges became that of meeting CBOs' overwhelming demand for an expansion of early education services. As another panelist explains, "We had conversations with CBOs about supporting four-day classes, when the law and regulation provides funding for 2.5 hours. It was a challenge trying to be responsive to parents." These remarks make clear that a local jurisdiction's capacity is an important pre-requisite for entering into inter-governmental collaboration with the state.

### Collaboration Challenge: Attending to Regulatory (and Timing) Barriers

Once undertaken, the City-State collaboration around universal pre-Kindergarten raised several challenges for members of the panel. The first and foremost of these challenges were the various rules and regulations that surrounded policy and funding around pre-Kindergarten. For, while the interests and general goals of both City and State partners were aligned, their rules and policies were not. As a panelist recalls, "There are a lot of rules and policies that we had to adhere to... We had to figure out how to look at them, how to look back, and recreate them... One of the hardest things to do is to be true to policies and regulations." Thus the challenge arose of how the City and State and the various agencies within each government could make their respective regulations and policies align to accommodate an expansion of pre-Kindergarten services. Successfully meeting this

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challenge meant finding ways to change or modify regulations where these proved significant barriers. As Kristin Proud notes, “[W]e approached the Regents Chancellor about...changing regulations, what can we change vis-à-vis regulations around barriers to implementation.”

At the same time, agencies also explain that they could not simply ignore or completely modify regulations. Alan Gartner summarizes the dilemma well: “My flexibility might be your violation of principle.” Indeed, the true challenge is to find ways to find or create flexibility in these rules and procedures which preserved their original intent, but which allowed for UPK implementation. For instance, one panelist recalls that her first instinct, when asked by Melanie Hartzog, “Do we have to do this or that [procedure or regulation]?” was to respond “Yes, we have to do this.’ But then I would go back to my agency and talk to someone to figure out how to do it, but in a way that worked to meet all goals.” Finding flexibility while observing and respecting regulations and rules appears to be key to successful inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration.

The panel members focus on one regulatory barrier to implementation in particular, that of the State regulation that new pre-Kindergarten programs had to begin at the beginning of a school year. Proud explains: “One of the first challenges we heard about was timing. All this funding came down and our budget was finalized, and the school year was starting very quickly after that, especially when you are talking about expanding to 18,000 slots in the City alone.” On the one hand, the State’s needed to deploy its newly appropriated funding within the current budget year. On the other hand, the State regulations meant that the City had a period of only a few months to identify potential pre-Kindergarten programs, issue contracts, and disburse funds. Moreover, State regulations also require that the official number of program slots must be counted in October. Proud remarks, “We count the number of kids in October and that’s the number of beds. What’s magic about October? There seemed to be a lot of inflexibility about the way things were always done.”

In short, the City’s ability to collaborate with the State was significantly constrained by State rules and regulations. Recognizing this barrier to collaboration, the State pursued the strategy of creating flexibility in regulations. Proud notes: “We wanted to do as much as we could about these requirements especially for the City since they had the largest share of funds...We wanted to give them some flexibility to start programs after September and still get State dollars.” In the end, the State “created a change in regulations to allow districts to receive funds after September.” Proud relates, “The timing issue is one where we’ve had some success to date.”

Another example of this strategy of finding flexibility in rules and regulations is that of ACS’ decision to modify the way they would review prospective programs in the interest of expediting implementation. Whereas the process involved a fifteen page qualification, Hartzog recounts, ACS was able to bring the form down to seven pages, only four of which had to be submitted. She reflects, “It took stepping outside of our process and saying, ‘We really don’t need the Vendex forms for existing City contractors.’”

### Collaboration Challenge: Developing Unified Standards and Outcomes

A second collaboration challenge still facing the City and State, and between agencies at and across both government levels, is that of developing both unified standards and a uniform set of outcomes. A panelist describes the need for inter-agency collaboration around standards well: “[We] are definitely beginning to look at the quality of programs, and encouraging collaboration between staff members, so that they are both looking at the same program with the same eyes.” Hartzog mentions that uniformity of program standards has been achieved between ACS and the Department of Education: “We are the first in the nation where [a childcare and education agency] have developed a standard set of measurements. We will be using the same assessment tools to go out and assess quality. That again, is for a separate initiative, but now our inter-city experience enhances [our current effort].”

In addition to inter-agency coordination around standards at the City level, Proud adds that such coordination is also needed inter-governmentally: “At the State level, we are required...to develop early learning standards. At the same time OCFS is beginning to develop quality ratings and improvement ratings.” Inter-governmental collaboration, she notes, is needed “so that we don’t end up with two different learning standards. Whether school-based or learning-based UPK standards, we have to make sure they are not contradictory or duplicative, but complementary.”

Hartzog suggests that one strategy for developing consistent and complementary standards across State and City government is to work with officials who have had experience working in both: “Our counterpart at OCFS, Deputy Commissioner Janice Molnar, met with us this Friday. It is invaluable that Janice had been a consultant to ACS around program standards. Her past work helped us determine what those assessment tools can be.”

### Collaboration Challenge: Working Across Systems and Silos

Beyond specific barriers, the panel members also touch upon a more persistent and perhaps fundamental challenge to collaboration—the challenge of working across systems and traditional boundaries of government. Referring to the divergent practices, cultures, and perspectives of governments and agencies, Proud claims that this working across systems is one of the major challenges to collaboration: “There had always been some degree of collaboration between DOE and ACS, but this was monumental in a short period of time.” Hartzog adds, “Systems are a big issue. Our systems don’t talk to one another. How can we push systems that we need, and integrate our systems?” Gartner suggests that the challenge of cross-systems work has much to do with the fact that agencies have “different languages and different vocabulary.” Moreover, they tend to use different ways of perceiving and differentiating the policy world: “We started to map where early childhood education programs overlapped, and realized that DOE and Early Childhood Education had two different sets of maps, and one of the challenges was to translate across those maps.” In other words, collaboration between the State and City, and between agencies, is often frustrated by the inevitable conflict and controversy that arise from the different ways of

seeing, understanding, and talking about problems, policies, and solutions across institutional lines.

Interestingly, however, panel members emphasize that overcoming these institutional conflicts and divisions above and beyond advancing policy and programs is an accomplishment to be celebrated. One panelist summarizes this well, “Increasing the number of program slots in such a short time period was a monumental accomplishment, but on top of that, was [the accomplishment of] bringing two agencies together, to learn about one another, and learn new ways of doing things.” Inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration, as critical as it is to successful policy implementation, may be just as important for achieving effective government practices and leadership.

## **Conclusion**

The case of New York City’s and New York State’s effort to universalize pre-Kindergarten illustrates how both inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration can be an essential element for successful policy implementation. The Briefing panel offers several specific insights regarding the factors needed for and the challenges inherent in inter-governmental and inter-agency collaboration.

First, such collaboration requires an alignment of interests between the collaborating parties, in this case, a local and State government. Whereas New York City’s interests with regard to universalizing pre-Kindergarten education are closely aligned with those of the State’s, many other jurisdictions are less interested in expanding these services, thus frustrating inter-governmental collaboration. Second, since many State funding programs require either a local funding match or a set of organizations who can adequately utilize resources, inter-governmental collaboration also requires an alignment of State and local capacity and resources. Jurisdictions that lack the resources and organizational capacity that New York City possesses are struggling to achieve collaboration, even when their interests are aligned with the State’s policy.

Once launched, collaboration presents a number of challenges. As the panel emphasizes, regulations and rules often present the most important set of challenges, frequently standing in the way of effective policy implementation. Such rules may either be due to the fragmentation of government systems or the fact that obsolete rules and regulations remain in place long after their original intent. In order to achieve collaboration, agencies and governments must find or create ways to achieve flexibility with respect to these rules, regulations, and traditions. A second challenge is that of achieving consensus or alignment around programmatic goals, standards, and outcome measures. Achieving such alignment may be as important to sustaining collaboration as it is to initiating it, serving as a concrete manifestation of the common ground achieved by collaborating parties. Finally, panelists raise the importance of developing a general competence around cross-systems collaboration—a competence that entails learning to understand the other systems’ language and perspectives. Such competence seems to grow with each successful collaboration and cross-systems effort. In this way, State and City governments can achieve the kind of

“double-loop learning” that Argyris and Schön (1990) have described, learning not only how to collaborate around a particular policy, but also navigating any policy contexts that arise.

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