

Free Pre-K



Anita Stevenson teaches kids in Freeport's acclaimed program.

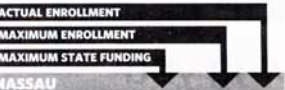
PHOTO BY PATRICK E. MCCARTHY

Money's there — why your district may not be using it **A8-9**



Schools skip chance for free Pre-K

DISTRICT BY DISTRICT
2008-09 NUMBERS



DISTRICT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM STATE FUNDING
NASSAU			
Baldwin	\$186,300	69	0
Bellmore	\$129,600	48	42
Bellmore-Merrick	\$0	0	0
Bethpage	\$91,800	34	0
Carle Place	\$54,000	20	0
East Meadow	\$191,700	71	0
East Rockaway	\$24,300	9	0
East Williston	\$54,000	20	0
Elmont	\$802,982	297	233
Farmingdale	\$440,100	163	163
Floral Park	\$206,556	76	42
Franklin Square	\$132,300	49	0
Freeport	\$1,294,721	362	273
Garden City	\$202,500	75	0
Glen Cove	\$420,109	136	64
Great Neck	\$654,324	193	219
Hempstead	\$2,168,347	346	348
Herricks	\$148,500	55	55
Hewlett-Woodmere	\$332,286	114	114
Hicksville	\$243,000	90	0
Island Park	\$59,400	22	0
Island Trees	\$75,600	28	0
Jericho	\$108,000	40	0
Lawrence	\$654,100	171	147
Levittown	\$380,700	135	135
Locust Valley	\$97,200	36	0
Long Beach	\$583,478	202	205
Lynbrook	\$99,900	37	0
Malverne	\$121,500	45	0
Manhasset	\$140,400	52	0
Massapequa	\$294,300	109	0
Merrick	\$124,200	46	0
Mineola	\$159,300	59	54
New Hyde Park	\$148,500	55	55
North Bellmore	\$178,200	66	66
North Merrick	\$137,700	51	0
North Shore	\$116,100	43	0
Oceanside	\$197,100	73	0
Oyster Bay	\$168,515	62	45
Plainfield	\$175,500	65	0
Plainview	\$218,700	81	0
Port Washington	\$601,723	174	174
Rockville Centre	\$180,900	67	0
Roosevelt	\$1,023,481	161	161
Roslyn	\$178,895	77	19
Seaford	\$99,900	37	0

- State provides money for programs, but some districts say no
- Districts fear they'll get stuck paying or say there's no demand
- Now money's being cut and opportunity may be lost for kids

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
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Thousands of additional 4- and 5-year-olds on Long Island could be getting free preschool classes if the school districts where they live had chosen to take state money earmarked for the service, according to a new report that recommends expanding future access through greater cooperation between the public and private sectors.

State funds intended to prepare 3,600 children islandwide for kindergarten went unused this year and will be eliminated at least temporarily next year — a loss to the region of more than \$9 million annually.

Funds are allotted under the state's Universal Prekindergarten program, which provides a pre-kindergarten year of tuition-free classes, five days a week. About 8,100 children get services locally, state figures show.

Districts that declined to participate in the program this year will be shut out

next year as well, because state lawmakers have cut back funding in response to the economic downturn.

Many of the 60 Long Island districts that don't have pre-kindergarten classes say that's part of the problem — they fear that state cutbacks will place the financial burden more on local taxpayers to pick up the cost to keep programs. Some affluent districts also say parents there are satisfied with private preschool programs they pay for on their own.

"I think we're always skeptical about the amount of money we're going to receive back from the state," said Henry Grishman, superintendent of Jericho schools and president of the State Council of School Superintendents. He added, however, that his colleagues supported the public-preschool concept.

Currently, the Island's school systems are split down the middle, with 61 participating in the state program and 60 not participating. Eight districts, including Eastport-South Manor, Herricks and Sa-

chem, have added services this year, according to state records.

"Why should children be denied this service, just because schools don't want to do this?" said Dana Friedman, executive director of the Early Years Institute of Plainville, a nonprofit research advocacy group that encourages development of quality child-care programs.

Widespread lack of access

This week, the Early Years Institute is releasing an 83-page report, "Windows of Opportunity," that looks comprehensively at the Island's pre-kindergarten services, including widespread lack of access. The report also highlights programs it considers exemplary in Freeport, Middle Country and a dozen other local districts.

The report draws on nearly two years of research, using last year's enrollment and funding figures. Newsday obtained current year figures from the state Education Department.

More than \$400 million in statewide pre-K funds, including \$28 million for the Island, is funneled through school districts with elementary schools. The money pays for pre-K classes both in district schools themselves and at other sites including day care centers and private nursery schools.

The report suggests that any money

unused in the future be given to districts that do participate, or to private nonprofits that could act on behalf of districts to expand or improve pre-K programs.

Parents such as Dorothy Santana, a North Babylon mother of four, agree that public preschools need to be expanded. Santana, who has urged her own district to establish a program, currently enrolls her 5-year-old in a private nursery school.

"I had to pay \$170 a month, which put quite a dent in my pocket," she said.

Funding cut increased fears

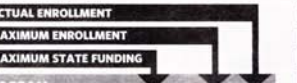
Districts' fears that they might get stuck with the tab were heightened in April, when state lawmakers reduced next year's funding. As a result, many districts with preschool programs that didn't spend all their funds this year will get less next year, and districts without programs will lose funding altogether.

Some school authorities contend that unused pre-K money would best be applied to helping districts with half-day kindergartens expand those classes to full-day. About 60 districts statewide, including six on the Island, provide only half-day kindergartens now.

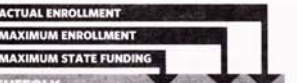
"Not that pre-K isn't important, it is," said David Albert, spokesman for the State School Boards Association. "But let's invest in full-day kindergarten first."



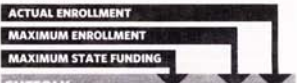
At Bicycle Path in Selden, Emma Gryzmala helps students Jesse Patterson, Nicholas Salazar, and Ryan Hughes look for numbers.



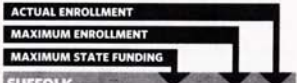
DISTRICT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM STATE FUNDING
NASSAU			
Sewanhaka	\$0	0	0
Syosset	\$278,100	103	0
Uniondale	\$337,500	125	0
Valley Stream Central	\$0	0	0
Valley Stream 13	\$140,400	52	0
Valley Stream 24	\$75,600	28	0
Valley Stream 30	\$91,800	34	0
Wantagh	\$135,000	50	0
West Hempstead	\$94,500	35	0
Westbury	\$1,576,426	313	306



DISTRICT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM STATE FUNDING
SUFFOLK			
Cold Spring Harbor	\$54,000	20	0
Commack	\$413,100	153	140
Comsewogue	\$234,900	87	87
Connetquot	\$396,900	147	147
Copiapue	\$533,079	174	114
Deer Park	\$486,266	180	201
East Hampton	\$54,000	20	53
East Islip	\$218,700	81	81
East Moriches	\$54,000	20	18
East Quogue	\$54,000	20	0
Eastport-South Manor	\$129,720	47	47
Elwood	\$78,300	29	0
Fire Island	\$24,300	9	0
Fishers Island	\$5,400	2	2
Greenport	\$54,000	20	0
Half Hollow Hills	\$624,868	220	212
Hampton Bays	\$89,100	33	33
Harborfields	\$172,800	64	64
Hauppauge	\$153,900	57	0
Huntington	\$594,000	220	156



DISTRICT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM STATE FUNDING
SUFFOLK			
Islip	\$113,400	42	0
Kings Park	\$135,000	50	0
Lindenhurst	\$245,700	91	0
Longwood	\$1,039,829	275	252
Mattituck-Cutogue	\$72,900	27	27
Middle Country	\$1,563,300	579	530
Miller Place	\$91,800	34	0
Montauk	\$59,400	22	21
Mount Sinai	\$75,600	28	0
North Babylon	\$200,688	74	0
Northport	\$383,400	129	12
Oysterponds	\$29,700	11	0
Patchogue-Medford	\$810,292	270	216
Port Jefferson	\$78,300	29	29
Quogue	\$16,200	6	0
Remsenburg-Speonk	\$54,000	20	15
Riverhead	\$691,200	256	256
Rocky Point	\$202,500	75	80
Sachem	\$599,400	222	248
Sag Harbor	\$54,000	20	0



DISTRICT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM ENROLLMENT	MAXIMUM STATE FUNDING
SUFFOLK			
Sayville	\$132,300	49	0
Shelter Island	\$45,900	17	0
Shoreham-Wading River	\$91,800	34	0
Smithtown	\$459,000	170	0
South Country	\$703,808	229	203
South Huntington	\$513,000	190	106
Southampton	\$108,000	40	38
Southold	\$62,100	23	20
Springs	\$62,100	23	40
Three Village	\$210,600	78	0
Tuckahoe	\$54,000	20	20
West Babylon	\$32,400	12	0
West Islip	\$186,300	69	0
Westhampton Beach	\$64,800	24	24
William Floyd	\$1,575,909	414	398
Wyandanch	\$503,347	108	95

LI TOTALS	\$38,745,980	11,721	8,105
STATE TOTALS	\$451,225,755	121,120	100,221

Middle Country success

Emma Gryzmala leaps high above a classroom rug, her horn-rimmed glasses put temporarily aside.

Moments earlier, the 32-year-old teacher had read her preschoolers a passage from a math story book about a figure Zero jumping from behind a tree. Now, Gryzmala illustrates the action herself — a technique used repeatedly over the last nine months to hold the attention of 18 youngsters.

The classroom acrobatics seem to have their desired effect. As the school year draws to a close, 15 of those headed for kindergarten next fall can count to 20 or beyond. Two can count to 100.

"It's amazing," Gryzmala said later, reflecting on the growth of children at Bicycle Path Kindergarten Center in Selden. "At the beginning of the year, it's 'Don't put the book in your mouth.' And now, they're thinking little beings."

Bicycle Path is part of the Middle Country school system, site of one of the oldest and largest public preschool programs on Long Island. Currently, 530 children are enrolled at four local centers. The state provides \$1.3 million in financing; the district, \$400,000.

Parent involvement is extensive here. A new report from the nonprofit Early Years Institute in Plainville cites the district's success in getting parents to work with children on learning activities, both at home and the local public library.

Jayne Short, one of Gryzmala's class mothers, finds that parents in districts nearby are surprised to hear of Middle Country's services.

"I've got a lot of friends who don't have this," Short said. "They'll say, 'You get preschool every day?'"

— JOHN HILDEBRAND