

**CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS**  
**THE NEW SCHOOL**

**Big Dreams for New York's Youngest Children: The future of early care and education**

*Tuesday, June 17, 8:30-10:30am*

Theresa Lang Community and Student Center  
Arnhold Hall, 55 West 13th Street, 2nd floor

With

**Steve Barnett**, director, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University

**Maria Benejan**, associate commissioner, Division of Early Care and Education, NYC Administration for Children's Services

**Takiema Bunche-Smith**, education director, Brooklyn Kindergarten Society

**Gregory Brender**, policy analyst, United Neighborhood Houses

**Maria Contreras-Collier**, executive director, Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation

Moderator:

**Abigail Kramer**, associate editor, Center for New York City Affairs

*Presented in collaboration with the Child Care and Early Education Fund*

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**Steve Barnett** is a Board of Governors Professor and Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. He is a Fellow of the American Educational Research Association and a member of the National Academy of Education. He is co-editor of the International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy and on the Editorial Board of Early Childhood Research Quarterly. His research includes studies of the effectiveness and economics of early care and education, including the well-known benefit-cost analyses of the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian programs. He has also studied the impacts of program duration and intensity, dual language models, curriculum, alternative staffing structures, professional development, and parental engagement. Recent publications include "Effectiveness of early educational intervention" in the journal *Science* and *The pre-k debates: current controversies and issues*, edited with Edward Zigler and Walter Gilliam. He earned his Ph.D. in economics at the University of Michigan.

**Maria Benejan** currently serves as associate commissioner at the NYC Administration for Children's Services' Division of Early Care and Education. She oversees the direction, coordination, implementation and evaluation of EarlyLearn NYC, the model through which the city's contracted Child Care and Head Start programs are administered. Her responsibilities also include setting policies and administrative structures across EarlyLearn NYC. She has worked on the integration of the NYC Department of Education's Universal Pre-Kindergarten services within ACS and in the development and launch of EarlyLearn NYC. Previously, she served as assistant commissioner for Head Start and director of Education & Early Childhood Development Services at ACS. Prior to joining ACS, she was director of the Center for Early Childhood Professionals at the Bank Street College of Education. A former National Head Start Fellow, she has a BA in early childhood education from Brooklyn College, a Master's degree in bilingual education from the City College of New York (CCNY) and is a NYS certified School Administrator and Supervisor.

**Takiema Bunche Smith** is the vice president of education and outreach at Brooklyn Kindergarten Society (BKS), where she oversees educational programming and outreach initiatives at five preschools located in low-income neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. She facilitates individual and organizational understandings of the connections between high quality preschool educational experiences and larger education and social policy issues, particularly related to poverty and equity. She is involved in various advocacy efforts that relate to early childhood care and education funding and policy, and the pushback against the overemphasis on testing in public schools. She has held various jobs throughout her twenty-year career in education, including: classroom teacher, teacher educator, content director for Sesame Street, and director of curriculum and instruction. She holds a Master's in Urban Education from the CUNY Graduate Center, a Master's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from Bank Street College of Education and a Bachelor's with high honors from Mount Holyoke College. She is currently working towards her Master's in Public Administration at Wagner NYU.

**Gregory Brender** is a policy analyst at United Neighborhood Houses. He focuses on early childhood education, after-school, youth services, housing and human services for public housing residents. He works as an advocate for neighborhood based services for New York City's children and low-income communities. He serves as mobilization co-chair for Campaign for Children, a coalition of more than 150 organizations working for access to high-quality sustainable early childhood education and after-school for New York City's children. He also serves on the Steering Committee of Winning Beginning NY (New York State's Early Care and Learning Coalition, and the New York Opportunity Youth Agenda. Before UNH, he worked at the Manhattan Borough President's Office as part of the Community Affairs Team on former Borough President Scott Stringer's initiative to reform and empower Manhattan's community boards. Prior, Gregory served as Assemblymember Glick's community liaison to the neighborhoods in the Village and SoHo, working to fight mass eviction of middle to low-income tenants and helping constituents in need obtain public benefits. He studied Literature and Philosophy at Beloit College in Wisconsin and holds a M.A. in Politics with a focus on American Politics and Government from NYU.

**Maria Contreras Collier** is executive director of the Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation. Her love of children led her to the Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation in 2001 after having worked as the assistant director of the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, our parent organization, for 13 years. Since joining the CHCCC, she has dramatically improved the quality of children's services, and brought stability and vision of the organizations three divisions Family Day Care, the Head Start Family Day Care program and our Early Learn/UPK Center. Her work led to funding for Universal Pre Kindergarten (UPK), Head Start expansion, the Center's National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation, NAFCC accreditation of our Head Start Family Day Care Program sites. The CHCCC cares for and educates close to 500 of Cypress Hills' youngest residents annually.

**Abigail Kramer** (moderator) is an associate editor at the Center for New York City Affairs, where she writes about the impact of government policies on the city's children, youth and families. She worked for 10 years with low-income and homeless teens, and with HIV-positive youth. Her writing has appeared in publications including Salon.com, The San Francisco Bay Guardian and City Limits.