

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Dr. Larry C. Schmiegel  
Superintendent of Schools  
Watertown City School District  
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**Request For Proposal**

**Watertown City School District Invites Community Based Organizations to Partner for 2026-2027 Prekindergarten Programming**

**Watertown, New York** – Our 2026-2027 prekindergarten Request for Proposals is now available on our website. We need to receive your completed proposals by March 23, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. EST.

**What's Happening at the State Level**

Governor Hochul has committed to universal prekindergarten for all four-year-olds across New York by the 2028-2029 school year. This is a major policy shift, but frankly, we're still waiting on the details that matter most for planning purposes.

**Here's what we know so far:**

- Universal access for all four-year-olds is the goal by 2028-29
- The state is looking at full-day programming
- This will roll out over the next few years

**Here's what we don't know yet:**

- What this means specifically for districts like ours in 2026-27
- Whether we'll need to shift entirely to full-day programming (we currently offer both full and half-day)
- Final funding formulas and reimbursement rates
- How this affects our current lottery system
- When we'll get clear guidance from NYSED

We're staying in close contact with NYSED and talking regularly with other superintendents to make sense of all this as it develops.

### **Our Commitment to You**

I know this uncertainty makes planning difficult - it's challenging for us too. We're committed to sharing information with you as soon as we have it.

We'll keep you updated through:

- Our website
- Direct emails to current and prospective partners
- Meetings when needed

### **Where We Stand on State Expansion**

We support what the Governor is trying to do. Her FY 2027 budget proposal includes increases in PreK funding. The state budget won't be finalized until April 1, 2026. Once that's done, we'll have the real numbers and can give you much more concrete information about what to expect.

### **2026-2027 Program Details and What You'll Be Paid**

Here's what we're planning for next year. These are our best estimates based on current information:

- Three-year-old full-day: \$7,100 per student
- Four-year-old half-day: \$4,350 per student
- Four-year-old full-day: \$8,700 per student

*Important: These rates could change based on what actually comes through from the state. We'll confirm final rates once the state budget passes.*

**Better Payment Stability for You:** We've made a change that should help with your cash flow. After BEDS Day in October, we'll lock in your enrollment numbers. For the rest of the school year, you'll be paid based on whichever is higher - your BEDS enrollment count or your actual enrollment (as long as you're not turning away eligible students). This gives you more stable, predictable payments throughout the year. Before BEDS Day, we'll pay based on your actual monthly enrollment up to your contracted amount.

How many seats we'll have available depends on what the state ultimately allocates to us.

## **We Value Our CBO Partners**

Let me be clear - we need you. You bring expertise and dedication to early childhood education that's essential for our kids. Your work matters, and we want to continue partnering with you.

## **The Space Issue**

The School District has facility constraints. We're dealing with:

- **Special education needs** - We have to serve our students with disabilities, and that requires classroom space
- **Our \$110 million capital project** - Construction affects what spaces we have available
- **Overall district space planning** - We're juggling space needs across all our programs and grade levels

If your proposal requires space in our buildings, we need to talk early. Space is limited. Please reach out to Lynn Gaffney at [lgaffney@watertowncsd.org](mailto:lgaffney@watertowncsd.org) before you submit your RFP.

## **About Funding**

Everything depends on what NYSED allocates to us. Like most schools, we can't fund proposals beyond what the state gives us - we just don't have the budget flexibility. Please build your proposals around what we're telling you we can offer.

## **Why Quality PreK Matters**

This work is about building a caring culture that fosters lifelong learners and responsible citizens. Over the past few years, we've strengthened our connections with families and our community.

Prekindergarten isn't just the doorway to formal education - research shows it increases a child's chances for success in school and life. Quality prekindergarten respects where each child is developmentally. Good teachers create environments where both kids and parents feel welcome. They know that relationships drive learning. Our classrooms balance structure with flexibility - teaching good habits and social skills while giving children chances to make choices, explore, and learn through play.

## Moving Forward

Despite the uncertainty from Albany, we're committed to working with you to serve our families. We want your applications. Thanks for your patience as we all navigate this transition together.

## How to Apply

Get the RFP at: <https://www.watertowncsd.org/about-us/departments/pre-k>

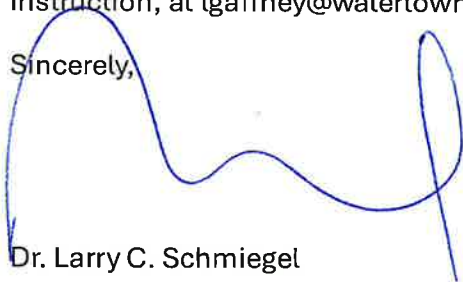
## Key Dates:

- RFP Posted: February 25, 2026
- Q&A Meeting: March 5, 2026, 9:00-10:00 a.m. (via Zoom)
- Last Day for Questions: March 12, 2026
- **Proposals Due: March 23, 2026, by 3:00 p.m. EST**
- Interviews: April 1-2, 2026
- Award Decisions: April 2026

Come to the March 5th meeting if you can. Get your questions early - if you wait until the last minute, we may not have time to respond.

Questions? Contact Lynn Gaffney, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, at [lgaffney@watertowncsd.org](mailto:lgaffney@watertowncsd.org).

Sincerely,



Dr. Larry C. Schmiegel  
Superintendent of Schools  
Watertown City School District