



Published in the

DNAinfo New York

## Preschool Teachers at Nonprofits Want Raises Like Bus Drivers Got

By Jeff Mays

September 29, 2014

EAST HARLEM — Preschool teachers who work with 2- and 3-year-olds are asking the city for a raise, just like their colleagues who teach 4-year-olds received from the city earlier this year.

Ahead of this fall's universal pre-K expansion, the city sought to entice more high-quality teachers by giving a roughly \$7,000 salary bump to those who taught 4-year-olds at community organizations contracted by the city.

But those who taught 2- and 3-year-olds saw their salaries remain stagnant — and now they're arguing that they should get raises too, especially after the city also recently found \$42 million to give a raise to school bus drivers employed by private contractors.

G.L. Tyler, the political director of DC 1707, the union that represents 4,000 community-based preschool teachers, called last month's raise for bus drivers an "encouraging sign" as the union prepares to sit at the bargaining table with the city in October.

"The city is in good fiscal health," Tyler said.

Mayor Bill de Blasio had pitched the bus driver raise as an issue of fairness and a way of increasing New Yorkers' income.

Preschool teachers say they have the same issue.

The city used \$17 million in state money earlier this year to increase the salaries of universal pre-K teachers at nonprofits, bringing them to about \$44,000 with a bachelor's degree to just over \$50,000 with a master's degree. At the DOE, teachers of 4-year-olds have a starting salary of \$46,445 with a bachelor's degree and top out at a little over \$85,000 with 20 years experience. The range for teachers with a master's degree is \$52,459 to just more than \$91,000.

But preschool teachers who work with 2- and 3-year-olds at community-based organizations were not included. Their salaries start at \$36,452 for those with a bachelor's degree, and rise to \$41,265 with 20 or more years of experience. Those with a master's degree start at \$39,350 and rise to \$42,350 with 20 years experience.

"I would consider the raises a good investment of the city's money," Maria Contreras-Collier, executive director of Brooklyn's Cypress Hills Child Care Corp., said about using the bus driver pay increases as a model for preschool teacher pay raises. "That would be a wonderful approach."



Published in the

DNAinfo New York

David Nocenti, executive director of Union Settlement, which runs seven early childhood education centers in East Harlem that serve more than 460 children, agreed.

"When individuals provide a core government function like teaching or providing transportation for children, the city needs to make sure they are fairly compensated," he said.

However, some advocates raised concerns about bumping up the salaries of government contract workers, warning that the proposal would open the city up to lawsuits in the future and raise expectations of similar raises for other workers.

The city uses nonprofits and other private contractors to handle everything from pre-K to preventative health care, with the idea that outside groups can operate more nimbly than the city and can perform the functions for less, saving taxpayer dollars, said Carol Kellermann, president of the nonprofit fiscal watchdog Citizens Budget Commission.

Her organization advised the de Blasio administration against the \$42 million for bus driver raises.

"The city should just say no and explain they made an exception in the bus driver case," Kellermann said.

"It's either you are contracting out with private companies or you aren't," she added. "Everyone wants to be treated with parity to a city employee."

Wiley Norvell, a spokesman for the mayor, said the bus driver pay increase "would not be an applicable model" to apply to the preschool teacher raises.

Norvell said the de Blasio administration is at the "beginning" of efforts to address teacher pay issues, but he declined to divulge specific plans.

Kellermann said she understands that many nonprofits contracted by the city to do quasi-government functions are in need of pay increases. But that's a discussion that should be had within the realm of the city's budgeting process, she said.

Maria Hernandez, 50, who works at Union Settlement's Metro North Child Care Center on East 102nd Street in East Harlem says she makes about \$40,000 per year even though she has a master's degree in early childhood education and 20 years of experience.

"For me, it means that I'm stuck," she said of her salary. "The bus drivers deserve their raise but what about the people who advocate for children in the classroom?"