

Winning Beginning NY

an early care and learning coalition

Winning Beginning NY Executive Agenda 2012

www.winningbeginningny.org

Winning Beginning NY believes that in this time of fiscal crisis our State must preserve, protect, and increase access to high-quality early care and learning programs. These programs, all of equal priority, are essential for children's success and our State's economic recovery.

Early Learning:

- Invest \$20 million for Year 1 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY), to provide direct and indirect program improvement supports.
- Restore \$37 million in funding for child care subsidies and increase the total of all child care funding by 10% and explore setting consistent statewide standards for eligibility, co-pays and provider reimbursement rates.
- At a minimum, maintain the current commitment of \$384.3 million to support Pre-K services for nearly 99,000 four-year-olds across the State, and eliminate maintenance of effort penalties in the legislation. Renew the State's commitment to Pre-K in schools and community-based settings by addressing the need for systemic improvements.
- Adequately and equitably fund K-12 education aid to prevent districts from reducing access to Kindergarten for five-year-olds.

Home Visiting:

- Invest \$30.3 million to sustain evidence-based home visiting programs and for additional home visiting support services for the State's most vulnerable children and families.

Early Intervention:

- Restore the Early Intervention (EI) Program to the FY 2010-11 funding level of \$230 million.

Afterschool:

- Restore the Advantage After School Program to the FY 2010-11 funding level of \$22.5 million, as well as support the priorities of the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN).

Winning Beginning NY also supports paid family leave.

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BACKGROUND

QUALITYSTARSNY (QSNY)

QSNY is a star rating and improvement system created to drive current and future state investments toward quality improvements in early learning programs, a strategic approach to ensuring both public and private dollars are used most effectively and efficiently to promote better outcomes for children. **We urge the State to invest \$20 million for Year 1 implementation of QSNY, to provide direct and indirect program improvement supports.** Year 1 funds will invest in quality assessment, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial incentives, public awareness, system evaluation and data system development. Full implementation of QSNY across the State will require a \$100 M investment. \$20 M will begin this implementation.

■ Early Learning Challenge Grant (ELCG)

The State has applied for an ELCG, the guidelines of which stipulated that states ensure that more children enter Kindergarten ready, with the healthy cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and potential necessary for success. QSNY will provide a pathway to improve existing early learning programs, with the goal of increasing the number of low-income young children who participate in higher-quality settings.

■ Economic Development & Return on Investment (ROI)

Investments in high-quality early care and education provide an excellent return. Research on the Perry Preschool program shows that it cut crime, welfare, and other costs so much that it saved more than \$16 for every \$1 invested. And the Chicago Child-Parents Centers produced over \$10 in benefits for every dollar expended, generating savings of \$3.7 billion for the 100,000 children served. However, positive outcomes for children and the economic ROI will occur only if the programs offered are of high-quality. This is the primary focus of QSNY.

■ Accountability

QSNY provides the means to reliably measure program quality while supporting a continuous improvement process in all programs and settings serving young children and their families. For the first time in the State, investors will be able to use accurate data to assess their investment results and thus make good funding decisions.

■ Child Outcomes

The quality of early childhood programs influences child outcomes. Research suggests that low-quality programs have an adverse impact on participating children's social-emotional skills and that children in poverty attending high-quality programs make significant gains in early literacy skills and social-emotional development. Nearly 900,000 young children participate in the State's early childhood programs. School readiness data from across the State, particularly in urban areas, points to the fact that we're not doing enough to improve the quality of programs and increase their potential to prepare children for early success in school. QSNY provides us with a powerful policy tool to improve program quality and child outcomes.

■ Consumers/Constituents Awareness

Parents want and need more help in finding an early childhood program that is best suited to their children's needs. Cost and location are obvious considerations, but parents also want to know about the experience and education of the staff, what the curriculum and approach to learning is, how the program is run and its stability, and the way the program engages and involves parents. These are exactly the four areas around which points will be given to programs in QSNY. Scores will be posted on websites and in the program for parents to access. Furthermore, QSNY has a broad outreach and communications plan built into it so that parents will know to look for the star ratings.

CHILD CARE

New York State has the capacity to provide child care subsidies for 128,000 low-income children from working families and families receiving public assistance. However, cuts to New York State Child Care Block Grant (NYSCCBG) have impacted the ability of these families to work and to provide high-quality care for their children. Waiting lists are increasing, counties are being forced to lower income eligibility levels and co-pays for care are being raised. **We urge the state to restore \$37 million in funding for child care subsidies and increase the total of all child care funding by 10%.**

A greater state investment in child care could build a larger and more stable system (less dependent on diminishing federal funds), just as yearly investments in Pre-K have done. **The State should explore setting consistent statewide standards for eligibility, co-pays and provider reimbursement rates.**

New York State must make a commitment to develop a comprehensive plan to not only restore the expected loss of federal funding but also to establish a long-term funding stream for child care. Such a plan will assure low-income working families that their children will be cared for while they work.

Currently, the NYSCCBG is primarily funded with federal funds from the Child Care Development Fund and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. In fiscal years 2009-10 and 2010-11, the state was able to increase the NYSCCBG using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ("ARRA") funds. The 2011-12 budget reduced the total funds available for child care assistance from over \$847 million in 2010-11 to \$804.3 million, due to the loss of ARRA funds.

Child care funding for the fiscal year 2012-13 budget will be affected even further by Congress's total elimination of the federal TANF Emergency Contingency Fund. Historically, the State's budget has transferred a portion of this fund to the NYSCCBG. As a result of the elimination of this fund, the TANF transfer into child care is expected to be reduced by at least \$39 million.

- Child care is an essential component of a working family's life. This is the setting in which, starting in infancy, many children spend more than 10 hours a day.
- Without subsidy assistance, low-income working families must make choices about child care services that could put their children at risk. Some families may have no choice but to forgo employment and seek public assistance.
- Research documents the benefit to low-income children of high-quality child care programs, which provide a foundation for later success in school and in life.
- Child care is a critical component of economic development, assuring employers of a workforce that is not distracted by concerns of the well-being of their children, and creating jobs for child care providers.

UNIVERSAL PRE-K AND KINDERGARTEN SERVICES

Pre-K funding is currently frozen at \$385 million, which represents a substantial reduction—\$67 million less than the \$452 million allocated in previous years. The drop in funding is primarily due to challenges in the state aid funding formula, which have made it difficult for local districts to meet their expansion targets in the past three years. The issues have been widely documented by researchers, advocates and local districts, but remain unresolved. While some districts have been unable to participate, participating districts are reporting that they are facing waiting lists of families eager to enroll their four-year-old in Pre-K. **We urge the state to maintain funding and eliminate the maintenance of effort penalties in these challenging fiscal times, as a critical first step to protect current services and put the initiative on a more sustainable footing.**

Pre-K is now recognized as part of a P-16 education system with services provided both in community settings and in public schools to better meet the needs of children and families. New York State's mandate for an investment in community settings is both efficient and educationally-effective. The State is also to be commended for including early childhood education in its Race to the Top effort.

Yet the State still falls far short of keeping the promise of Universal Pre-K—a promise that all children have access to this valuable education program. Only 444 of the State's 677 school districts participate and the program still serves only 41% of four-year-olds. The per-child funding levels also fail to adequately support quality, including hiring certified teachers. This is a particular problem in non-public school settings, where 60% of all Pre-K children are served.

This year, these services must be protected and improved, to make them sustainable into the future. The pay-off for children, families, communities and the schools is clear—investment in early education saves money by reducing the need for remedial education, grade retention and special needs placements and by improving outcomes for all children. Children who attend high-quality Pre-K are more likely to graduate high school, go to college and have higher incomes as adults.

Along with the continued investment in Pre-K, we urge the State to pursue strategies to maximize current investments and increase the capacity that supports young children's early learning and development, including:

- Allow funding for full-day Pre-K in schools and early childhood programs.
- Eliminate maintenance of effort penalties to local school districts, which have resulted in reduced enrollment in many districts.
- Base per-child amounts provided to school districts/community-based organizations on actual cost of a high-quality program to be determined by an annual cost study conducted by the State Education Department.
- Improve teacher preparation and professional development efforts, through Race to the Top and other funding dedicated to teacher effectiveness, with particular focus on elementary school principals and early childhood program directors as key leaders in the process.
- Allow Pre-K children eligibility for transportation aid.

In addition, the state must also recognize that **Kindergarten, long a cornerstone of early education in New York State, has been put at risk by the failure of the state to adequately and equitably fund K-12 education aid.** Some of the state's largest districts upstate and on Long Island have been forced to eliminate full-day Kindergarten because of reductions in state aid. A few even considered cutting Kindergarten services altogether. **Our coalition** is deeply concerned about this shift in practice and **supports adequate and equitable education funding, as supported by AQE and other education advocates, to protect full-day Kindergarten.**

HOME VISITING

Voluntary prenatal and early childhood home visiting is a long-standing primary prevention strategy that improves the health and well-being of at-risk families. New York State's home visiting programs demonstrate documented outcomes: increasing children's safety, health and learning, as well as promoting families' economic stability. **We urge the State to invest in sustainable funding for evidence-based home visiting programs and for additional home visiting support services for the State's most vulnerable children and families.**

- Maintain funding for Healthy Families New York (HFNY) at \$23.3 million. HFNY serves at-risk families in 39 of the state's highest need communities. Most begin the program prenatally, others shortly after birth. Services must begin by the time the child is three months old and continue for up to three to five years. State funding for HFNY provides the Maintenance of Effort required for the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting funding.
- Establish a dedicated line item of \$5 million, in the State Department of Health's budget, to restore Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) services. NFP serves low-income, first time mothers and their families in Monroe County and Onondaga County and all five boroughs of New York City. Participants must receive their first home visit by their 28th week of pregnancy. Nurse home visits continue until the child's second birthday.
- Establish a dedicated line item of \$2 million for evidence-based home visiting programs to fill gaps in services for families that are not eligible for HFNY and NFP.

The prenatal and earliest childhood period provides a critical window of opportunity, because infants' health at birth and the care they receive, or don't receive, during the first three years has a profound impact in brain development that lasts throughout their lives. Regular visits by trained professionals during this time can shift the trajectory of families' lives and lay a strong foundation for children's future.

By reaching at-risk children and families early on, home visiting prevents problems that require expensive intervention and remediation. In fact, every \$1 spent on home visiting can generate up to \$5.70 return on investment.

It has taken us nearly 20 years to build a system of home visiting supports and services, yet we still serve only a small percentage of those who would benefit. New York State can build on what is already established, by assuring secure funding for HFNY and NFP, and beginning to develop more comprehensive statewide services that reach families and communities that those programs don't serve. Investing in evidence-based and promising home visiting programs in the State will strengthen families, improve children's well-being and development, and save taxpayers money.

EARLY INTERVENTION (EI) PROGRAM

EI provides evaluations and services to infants and toddlers with significant developmental delays or disabilities and their families. Recognizing the significant brain development that occurs during a child's first three years of life, the purpose of EI is to detect and address developmental delays as early as possible in order to reduce special education costs and maximize the potential for individuals with disabilities to live independently. **We urge the State to restore the Early Intervention (EI) Program to the FY 2010-11 funding level of \$230 million. We also ask the State to explore maximizing private insurance funding to restore EI service reimbursement rates so that the program can retain experienced professionals and recruit and train new professionals and to make other quality improvements.**

A series of State cuts have led to a rapidly decreasing reimbursement rate for EI service. State funding for EI decreased by 27% from FY 2010-2011 (\$230 million) to FY 2011-2012 (\$167 million). This cut included a significant reduction in the reimbursement rate for EI services, leading EI provider agencies to shut their doors and experienced service providers to stop taking EI cases. For example, over the past few years, New York City lost more than 20 EI contracted providers, and, in the spring of 2011, at least five additional New York City agencies ended their EI programs. In Rochester, five major agencies have stopped offering EI services and at least a dozen independent providers have withdrawn from the system. Similar loss of services is occurring across the State, including delays in receiving evaluations and services. Such cuts make it difficult for young children with delays or disabilities to get the services they need, especially in certain low-income neighborhoods that already had shortages of providers.

In addition, while EI has been successful in obtaining reimbursement for EI services from the Medicaid program, private insurance companies have refused to pay their fair share, rejecting claims for EI services as not being "medical necessities."

ADVANTAGE AFTER SCHOOL-FUNDED COMMUNITIES

Advantage After School Programs, funded and administered by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), provide quality youth development opportunities to school-age children and youth for three hours after school. **We urge the State to restore the Advantage After School Program to the FY 2010-11 funding level of \$22.5 million, as well as support the priorities of the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN), in order to ensure that OCFS can fund high-quality programs in the most high-need communities.**

While this request does not fully restore the program to its peak of \$30.5 million, it will help rebuild the youth-serving system cut in recent years, while also helping OCFS fund the highest-quality applications that target high-need communities. This partial restoration will also create jobs in youth-serving programs, provide the child care that working families need, and provide children and youth with quality learning opportunities afterschool.

Advantage After School programs are supported by school, community, public, and private partners, and offer a broad range of educational, recreational, and culturally age-appropriate activities that are integrated with – and complement – school day learning. Programs operate five days a week during the regular school year and may elect to operate during school breaks. Programs may also extend hours into the evening hours, particularly when serving older adolescents. These programs are designed to improve the social, emotional, academic, and vocational competencies of school-age children; prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock adolescent pregnancies; reduce negative behaviors such as violence and crime, tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse, disengagement from school, school suspension, truancy, and health-compromising behaviors; and provide parents with a safe after school environment for their children.