

**TO:** Early Childhood Advisory Council Membership  
**FROM:** Kate Breslin, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy  
**RE:** Advocacy Update  
**DATE:** March 1, 2013

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As you know, advocacy is a dance. It demands a set of soft skills that include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude. Outcomes are hard to measure and results are nearly always gray (as opposed to black or white). And even when we finally “win,” it can take quite a long time before we see the real results of the win. This informal memo aims to provide a very brief overview of the recent – mostly State budget-related – advocacy of *Winning Beginning NY* and just some of the substantial efforts of many individuals and organizations that engage in advocacy in support of early childhood.

Both the Governor’s State of the State message and the President’s State of the Union included significant reference to early learning. This is quite an alignment and should open real opportunities to move forward.

Before getting into more detail below about state-level advocacy, we must celebrate the inclusion of early education in the President’s priorities. The Press Release from the White House sets a framework for a plan that embraces a continuum of services. We eagerly await more details. We are reaching out to our national colleagues to align strategies in New York with national strategies to generate continued momentum to turn this framework into policy and investment.

The WBNY Coalition partners in the Ready for Kindergarten; Ready for College campaign with Citizen Action and the Alliance for Quality Education, linking WBNY’s advocacy agenda on early learning with their broader education agenda. Working with those important advocates has aligned our work with new allies, resulting in broader reach and significant access to key leaders.

The Council for A Strong America has combined the work of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and America’s Edge to bring a voice from the criminal justice community and business community to promote investments in quality early education. They have recently generated significant press attention to the value of high-quality early education and home visiting and have been valuable allies in testifying at hearings and other advocacy activities.

Advocacy strategies have included the use of e-advocacy, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, radio interviews, presenting testimony, and significant amount of local mobilization this year with increasing participation in advocacy across the state.

## **Background – Summer and Fall 2012**

During the summer and fall of each year, the Executive (Governor, State Agencies) develops proposals and plans for the coming fiscal year. Advocates often use this time to float and campaign in support of new ideas. During the summer and fall of 2012, we, advocates for young children and their families, had several unique and exciting opportunities. The Governor created an Education Reform Commission that conducted hearings across the state and we testified at all of them. We met with many members of the Commission. And, with the understanding that the Commission would be advising the Governor, we kept in contact with the Governor's staff. We also worked closely with the NYS Department of Education and the NYS Board of Regents, both of which have a strong and abiding interest in early learning. Our efforts were rewarded with the Commission's significant discussion about the value of high-quality early learning and investment in Pre-K and the Governor's proposal to create a new pool of \$25M to go toward quality full-day pre-kindergarten targeted to high-needs communities. The Governor's initiative was based on the Education Reform Commission's first recommendation – invest in high-quality Pre-K. We were also rewarded with language – during the State of the State address and in the Governor's proposal – that addresses quality in early learning.

(for recommendations to the Education Reform Commission, go here: [http://www.winningbeginningny.org/documents/Final\\_Ed\\_Commission\\_Recommendations\\_Oct2012\\_000.pdf](http://www.winningbeginningny.org/documents/Final_Ed_Commission_Recommendations_Oct2012_000.pdf)). These recommendations were focused on the Commission's preliminary report. There will be continuing work to help frame the final recommendations from the Commission coming from a number of fronts.

One of early care and learning's legislative champions, Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee, worked with us to coordinate a public hearing on QUALITYstarsNY.

Several of us also have been working with the Department of Health to convey the value of maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting. Our efforts were partially rewarded when, over the summer, the Medicaid unit of the NYS Department of Health included home visiting in its Medicaid waiver to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

### **The latest on early childhood budget issues**

The Governor's budget proposal was released on January 22 and the Legislature held budget hearings in the following weeks. Many organizations – WBNY, SCAA, Center for Children's Initiatives, Early Care and Learning Council, Council for a Strong America, and others – presented and submitted testimony focused on early childhood issues at the Human Services; Health and Medicaid; Elementary and Secondary Education; and other hearings.

The Governor has once again promised an on-time budget by April 1, 2013. The last day of legislative session before April 1 is March 21 and observers in and around the Capitol have indicated that it is likely that legislators will aim to complete their budget negotiations by March 21 and certainly before the beginning of Passover on March 25. This just leaves a brief period for significant work. We expect the one house budgets to be released during the first week in March and then the final negotiations will begin. Anything not included in these one house budgets is very unlikely to appear in the final negotiated budget.

## EARLY LEARNING

**QUALITYstarsNY.** Funding for QUALITYstarsNY was not included in the Governor's budget. Advocacy is underway to seek a legislative addition to the budget in the amount of \$5M. It is increasingly difficult this year to get additions to the budget that were not included in the Governor's budget proposal and we continue to test out more effective ways to make the case for a quality rating and improvement system as an essential investment. This year there was a letter circulated in the Assembly with 47 signatures of members of the Assembly majority calling on the leadership to make this investment. Kudos to the Early Care and Learning Council for the big push on the letter.

**\$25M Full-Day Pre-K.** This is a new initiative, proposed by the Governor, a significant step in expanding access to high-quality early education. The Governor also proposed competitive grants of \$25M for community schools and \$25M for extended learning (after school programs). Priority will go to high need school districts. Advocacy is underway to ensure that this funding is retained in the budget and to make refinements as noted below.

- Incorporate an intentional strategy and appropriate investment to achieve the quality benchmarks laid out in the budget proposal, with appropriate supports and investment in quality so that programs can reach those benchmarks. *Winning Beginning NY* supports designating \$2M for quality strategies, aligned with QUALITYstarsNY benchmarks to support organizations in meeting the quality standards outlined in the Governor's language.
- Make the new full-day Pre-K initiative a permanent part of state Pre-K aid, with a plan to increase the program over time.
- Make sure the new full-day Pre-K aid includes the same mandate for investment in community programs as the existing UPK aid does.

**Child Care.** There is a growing crisis in child care, with counties reducing eligibility and increasing co pays. The result is waiting lists, families losing subsidies and children without appropriate care. The WBNY coalition has an increasingly strong group of advocates making the case about what is happening to families and why we need to increase investment. WBNY is asking for a substantial investment of \$92M to restore child care funding to the 2010-2011 levels.

## AFTERSCHOOL

The WBNY coalition partners with the New York State After School Network to integrate WBNY's child care and early education messages with their position on increased after school funding. They also carry WBNY's agenda in their legislative agenda.

## HOME VISITING

New York serves only a small percentage of those who would benefit, and gaps in services and eligibility criteria mean that many families miss opportunities for help and support.

**Healthy Families New York.** The Executive Budget includes flat funding (\$23.3M) for the Healthy Families New York home visiting program. While this represents an effective cut, since costs continue to rise, advocacy is underway to maintain this level of funding. Healthy Families New York services 25% fewer families than it did in 2007-08, partly due to disruptions of services and temporary cessation at some sites during two years of severe budget delays and flat funding.

**Nurse-Family Partnership program.** The Executive Budget did not continue the \$2.5M that was added by the Legislature in the SFY 2012-13 enacted budget. Advocacy is underway to secure a legislative restoration of \$2.5M in funding. This is especially critical now to offset any additional reduction in capacity and maintain programs at current levels.

The need for home visiting services and programs goes beyond Healthy Families New York and Nurse-Family Partnership. Several other evidence-based models are working effectively in New York State and deserve funding as well. Home visiting programs in New York State reach only a small percentage of those who would benefit. The Home Visiting Workgroup continues to advocate for building and funding a comprehensive system.

## **EARLY INTERVENTION**

Advocacy is underway to address concerns with the proposal in the 2013 Executive Budget to protect access to high-quality Early Intervention (EI) services and ensure that EI services are driven by the child's needs, not by the child's health insurance coverage. State funding for EI decreased by 29% from FY 2010-2011 (\$230M) to FY 2012-2013 (\$164M). Specific concerns include the proposals that:

- Give the health insurance company a voice in determining a child's EI services by making a health insurance representative part of the team that develops and reviews the child's EI services plan.
- Require a child to be evaluated and served by providers within the child's health insurance network, without delineating a clear procedure and clear criteria for obtaining an exception. These provisions will be particularly problematic for children who need evaluations and services in languages other than English and for children whose disabilities require evaluators and interventionists with particular expertise.
- Place onerous billing and financing requirements on providers, leading to a further reduction in the number of EI providers able to serve children and families.

## **Moving Forward**

While much attention is focused on the New York State budget process during the first few months of the calendar year, advocates continue to work on other fronts – with coalitions, agencies, community members, etc. In the coming months there will be early childhood advocacy opportunities at the state and federal levels and across agencies and systems. Advocates are also looking forward to continued strong advocacy with the Governor's Education Reform Commission, which is expected to release its second Action Plan in the fall of 2013.