

Legislative Agenda 2013

Winning Beginning NY believes that as New York State sees signs of economic recovery, it is essential that we preserve, protect, and increase access to high-quality early care and learning. These programs support families' work force participation and provide an effective foundation for children's school and life success.

EARLY LEARNING:

- ▶ **Invest \$5M for QUALITYstarsNY**, to provide professional development and program improvement supports for early learning programs.
- ▶ **Support the \$25M Full-Day Pre-K initiative**, proposed by the Governor, as a significant next step in expanding access to high-quality early education.
- ▶ **Maintain and protect the \$385M invested in Universal Pre-kindergarten.**
- ▶ **Adequately and equitably fund K-12 education aid** to prevent districts from reducing access to Kindergarten for 5-year-olds.
- ▶ **Restore child care funding to 2010-11 levels by adding \$92M to the Executive Budget.** This will help to ensure that low-income children will be in safe care while their parents go to work or school.

HOME VISITING:

- ▶ **Maintain \$23.3M for Healthy Families New York as proposed in the Executive Budget.**
- ▶ **Restore \$2.5M in funding for the Nurse-Family Partnership program.**

EARLY INTERVENTION:

- ▶ **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.

AFTERSCHOOL:

- ▶ **Increase Advantage Afterschool Program funding to \$28M to expand access to an approximately 10,000 additional students** and support the priorities of the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN).

BACKGROUND

Early Care and Learning

► QUALITYstarsNY:

Invest \$5M for QUALITYstarsNY.

A strategic investment in professional development, training and other supports that QUALITYstarsNY incorporates will have a positive impact in the following areas:

■ **Economic Development & Return on Investment (ROI)**

Investments in high-quality early care and education provide an excellent return on investment. Research on the Perry Preschool program shows that it cuts 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 \$1 expended, generating savings of \$3.7B 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. Measuring and improving quality is the primary focus of QUALITYstarsNY.

■ **Accountability**

QUALITYstarsNY 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 statewide 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. QUALITYstarsNY 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 QUALITYstarsNY.

► **Pre-kindergarten:**

Support the \$25M Full-day Pre-K initiative, proposed by the Governor, as a significant next step in expanding access to high-quality early education. The Governor’s plan for a new and “robust” full-day pre-kindergarten program, starting with our state’s highest needs students, represents a critical breakthrough in State education policy, which recognizes the power of early childhood education to close the achievement gap and improve school success. Specifically, our coalition wants to highlight:

- **Full-day is more educationally effective**, preparing children to succeed in school and reading on grade level by third grade.
- **Full-day service will also expand access to quality early education**, since many families need more than a part-day service.
- **The focus on quality is critical to the success of the new initiative**, with commitment to qualified teachers, effective teaching and quality learning environment.
- **The new investment is particularly strategic, since the Pre-K investment creates a singular link between K-12 and early childhood services**, to build an effective, quality “education pipeline” envisioned by the Education Reform Commission.

We also support several recommendations to strengthen the new initiative, including:

- (1) 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;
- (2) Making sure the new full-day Pre-K aid includes the same mandate for investment in community programs as the existing UPK aid does; and
- (3) 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.

WBNY supports designating \$2M for those strategies, such as technical assistance and professional development, to support all service providers participating in the new full-day Pre-K program.

Maintain and protect the \$385M Invested in Universal Pre-kindergarten. As a voluntary, non-mandated educational service, UPK is losing ground, dropping from \$452M just four years ago to \$385M this year – a \$67M loss in funding for early childhood education. 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. The situation has persisted even though some districts have waiting lists and some provide UPK services without the benefit of Pre-K aid. The State should protect UPK funding by re-allocating unused funding to districts that can add Pre-K services and expand enrollment and work toward addressing the long-term issues in Pre-K financing to fulfill the promise of universal service, with priority to high-need districts first.

Adequately and equitably fund K-12 education aid to prevent districts from reducing access to Kindergarten for five-year-olds. The current fiscal climate is creating severe threats to these critically important components of the State's P-12 education system. A growing number of districts around the state are putting cuts to Kindergarten on the table – cutting back full-day to half-day or eliminating Kindergarten altogether.

► **Child Care:**

Restore child care funding to 2010-11 levels by adding \$92M to the Executive Budget. New York State faces a crisis in child care funding for low-income working families. Since 2010-2011, spending on child care funding in New York has declined from \$999,328,543 to \$907,245,924, a loss of over \$92M. This restoration of \$92M will buy nearly 13,000 new child care slots for working families. Early care and learning programs are a critical component of New York's economic growth. If all New York children had access to quality early care and learning, the State would generate \$6.7B in total new spending in New York businesses, creating 80,000 new jobs at a cost of \$3.6B.ⁱ

As a result of 1996 Federal Welfare Reform, with its emphasis on “work first,” public assistance rolls plummeted as families left welfare for low wage jobs. In 1995, there were 1.5 million recipients of cash public assistance in New York State – 803,000 of these recipients were children. As of 2011, the number of persons on Temporary Assistance had plummeted by two-thirds to 565,224 and 307,544 of those recipients were children.

The precipitous decline is the result of low-income parents leaving the welfare rolls to work at low wage jobs instead of staying home with their children. However, without assistance in paying for child care, low wage workers cannot make ends meet. The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures the wage that a family would need to earn in order to afford to meet their basic needs, including child care. The Self-Sufficiency Standard documents that, in a family of three with a pre-school child and a school-age child, the mother would need to earn \$27.38 per hour in New York City; \$32.38 per hour in Westchester County; \$22.33 per hour in Erie County; and \$37.37 per hour in Suffolk County.

State law provides that families are eligible for (but not guaranteed) child care assistance if their income is under 200% of the federal poverty level (\$38,180 for a family of 3). Because of funding shortfalls, many counties have reduced their eligibility levels below that amount.ⁱⁱ

Free up funds by giving priority to working families who need child care: New York could maximize the use of child care dollars for working families by waiving the work rule requirement for public assistance recipients with young children. This would create over 2 slots for working families for each slot not utilized by a public assistance recipient. This waiver would shift nearly \$17M to working families (one year exemption) or \$44M (two year exemption). This proposal, which was in legislation last year in both houses and was included in the Assembly's one house budget bill, permits but does not require the exemption, and the cost savings analysis assumes that 40% of all public assistance recipients would continue to use child care to work or look for work.

Home Visiting

Maintain \$23.3M for Healthy Families New York as proposed in the Executive Budget. The Executive Budget includes flat funding (\$23.3M) for the Healthy Families New York home visiting program. Maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting has emerged across the nation as a promising way to engage new and expecting parents and their children with services that support the family and lead to positive outcomes – and public cost savings – in the short, medium, and long term.

By reaching at-risk children and families early on, home visiting prevents problems that require expensive intervention and remediation. 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 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.

Restore \$2.5M in funding for the Nurse-Family Partnership program. 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.

Early Intervention Program (EI)

Address concerns with the Early Intervention proposals in the Executive Budget.

The Early Intervention (EI) Program provides evaluation and services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. Recognizing the substantial brain development and plasticity during a child's first three years of life, the purpose of EI is to detect and address developmental delays as early as possible. EI services help young children who are behind catch up and prepare for Kindergarten, reducing later special education and rehabilitation costs and maximizing the potential for individuals with disabilities to live independently and be productive citizens.

Despite the cost-effectiveness of this program, State funding for EI decreased by 29% from FY 2010-2011 (\$230M) to FY 2012-2013 (\$164M). This cut included a significant reduction in the reimbursement rate for EI services, causing many EI provider agencies to shut their doors and experienced service providers to stop taking EI referrals. This loss of providers is making it difficult for young children with delays or disabilities to access the services they need in a timely manner, especially in certain rural and low-income neighborhoods that already had shortages of providers.

The Executive Budget proposes a significant restructuring of the EI program that would give health insurance companies an unprecedented role in determining a child's EI services, making it harder for children to receive services from experienced, specialized providers. While we applaud the goal of having health insurance companies contribute their fair share to the cost of EI services, the role of health insurance companies must be limited to paying for services available through health insurance. Health insurance companies should not be in the business of deciding what constitutes appropriate EI services for a young child.

We are particularly concerned that the Executive Budget would:

- 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 available to serve children and families.

Investing in EI services now will save the state money in the long run. We urge the Legislature to protect access to high-quality EI services and ensure that EI services are driven by the child's needs, not by the child's health insurance coverage.

Afterschool

Increase Advantage After-School Program funding to \$28M to expand access to an approximately 10,000 additional students. The \$7M available for the most recent RFP was only enough to fund 45 of the 350 afterschool programs that applied. Many more of these programs were highly-qualified than could be funded. Advantage Afterschool funding has sustained a 37% cut over the last three years – three years in which need has increased due to the slow economic recovery and overall program quality has improved through statewide work by the Office of Children and Family Services and the afterschool field to establish and encourage high standards. Research has repeatedly shown that children with a safe, supervised, engaging place to be between 3 pm and 6 pm are less likely to be arrested, engage in drug use or sexual activity, or otherwise diminish the probability that they will grow into healthy, productive adults. Returning Advantage to the \$28M level at which it was funded in the 2009-10 State Fiscal Year would allow at least 10,000 additional students the opportunity to participate in engaging, enriching activities that keep developing their academic and social skills for hours after the school day ends.

ⁱ <http://cdn.americasedge.org/clips/NY-earlylearning-report.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ For example, Suffolk County has lowered eligibility to 100% of poverty; Niagara: 120%; Dutchess and Schenectady: 125%; Oneida, Ontario: 150%; Cayuga and Rensselaer: 160%; Monroe: 165%; Albany, Orange: 175%; Chemung is only opening new cases for mandated categories (TANF related and Transitional Child Care). New York City has not formally changed its guidelines, but as of April 2012, it was serving only very low income families: 64.1% of households receiving child care (non-TANF) were below 100% of the federal poverty line; 81.8% were under 135% of the federal poverty line; 92.2% were under 175% of the federal poverty line.