Winning Beginning NY

an early care and learning coalition

Winning Beginning NY
Legislative Agenda 2012
www.winningbeginningny.org

Winning Beginning NY **believes that in this time of fiscal crisis New York 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 $20M for Year 1 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY,** to provide direct and indirect program improvement supports.
- **Preserve the $93M for subsidies in the 2012 Executive Budget and make an advance on the proposed $215M in child care preservation funds for FY 2013-2014.** Explore setting consistent statewide standards for eligibility, co-pays and provider reimbursement rates.
- **Direct $53M from the competitive grants (as proposed in the Executive Budget) to Universal Prekindergarten** to expand the program to cover thousands more children, prepare qualified teachers and provide the technical support necessary to ensure sustainable quality.
- **Adequately and equitably fund K-12 education aid** to prevent districts from reducing access to Kindergarten for five-year-olds.

HOME VISITING:

- **Maintain the $23.3M for Healthy Families New York** proposed in the 2012 Executive Budget.
- **Establish a dedicated line item of $5M to help support the sustainability of Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP).**
- **Support the Medicaid Redesign Team's recommendation** to make NFP a fully covered preventive service for first-time, high-risk mothers and their children.
- **Establish a dedicated line item of $2M for evidence-based home visiting programs** to fill gaps in services for families that are not eligible for HFNY and NFP.

EARLY INTERVENTION:

- **Address certain concerns with the proposals in the 2012 Executive Budget**, 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:

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

Winning Beginning NY also supports paid family leave.

Contact: Jenn O'Connor, SCAA and Winning Beginning NY, 518/463-1896, ext. 131 or joconnor@scaany.org

BACKGROUND

QUALITYSTARSNY (QSNY)

QSNY is a star rating and improvement system—much like those for restaurants and hotels—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 $20M for Year 1 implementation of QSNY, to provide direct and indirect program improvement supports.**

Fully implemented, QSNY will provide parents with valuable tools to make good choices about early childhood programs. Equally important, it will put programs on the path of continuous quality improvement and offer assistance to those seeking to improve their rating. The 2010-11 field test built the groundwork for successful implementation. $4M in Race to the Top (RTTT) federal education funding will be invested over a three year period to expand QSNY in school districts with persistently low-achieving schools. With an investment of $20M in State funding, we can continue to build on that foundation by providing ongoing professional development support to QSNY field test participants, supporting the professional development of new programs entering QSNY with RTTT funding, and providing technical assistance for quality improvement strategies as we implement this essential statewide quality rating and improvement system.

New York's strategic investment in QSNY will help to position the State for future public and private funding opportunities, make us competitive with other states that have already committed funds to quality rating and improvement systems to improve young children's learning outcomes, and improve educational outcomes for our state's children while reducing the persistent achievement gap that has so troubled our urban and rural schools.

- **Early Learning Challenge Grant (ELCG)**
  The State applied for an ELCG, the guidelines of which stipulated that states ensure that more children enter Kindergarten ready. New York was not one of nine states awarded a first round grant, in large part due to the lack of a fully functional Quality Rating and Improvement System—QSNY. The State must invest in implementation in order for it to be poised for future opportunities.

- **Economic Development & Return on Investment (ROI)**
  Research on the Perry Preschool program shows that it cut crime, welfare, and other costs, saving 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. 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. Investors will be able to use accurate data to assess their investment results and thus make good funding decisions.

- **Child Outcomes**
  Research shows that children in low-quality early learning and development settings do not benefit from these programs. A study of Pre-K programs in 11 states found that children in low-quality classrooms did not show any gains in academic skills or reductions in behavior problems. Other studies have found that children in lower-quality care were more likely to display behavior problems. And even more troubling, recent research shows that young children can be harmed by low-quality care. Children displaying serious problem behaviors early in life have a greater likelihood of delinquency, with an increased risk of future crime as adults.

  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 are 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.

- **Early Childhood Professionals**
  Research demonstrates that the knowledge, skills and qualifications of early care and learning teachers, administrators and other practitioners is integral to the quality of programs. Therefore, practitioners must be equipped with, consistently demonstrate, and continuously improve, the necessary abilities, knowledge, and skills to effectively support positive development and learning outcomes for every child. A coordinated system of workforce development called New York Works for Children will provide the essential infrastructure to insure the quality of professional development and provide the necessary supports to practitioners as QSNY is implemented and grows throughout the State.

- **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

The 2012 Executive Budget contains $904M for child care, reflecting a loss of federal funds. The Governor made up this loss by including $93M in State General Funds to fill the gap. **We thank the Governor for his commitment to maintaining 19,000 child-care slots for working families.** However, even with this generous add, funding is $70M less than in SFY 2009-2010, and the cost of care has increased.

New York State must restore all lost funding for child care through the years and increase our investment to create a quality child care system across the State. 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. **We urge the State to make an advance on the proposed $215M in child care preservation funds for FY 2013-2014, to meet the needs of families struggling to work and pay for child care, to begin to serve more children, and to build a quality, stable system of care. We must also explore setting consistent statewide standards for eligibility, co-pays and provider reimbursement rates.**

The 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 the 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.

Quality child care has both short- and long-term returns.

- Short-term—it allows nearly 70% of our local workforce to go to work each day. Their productivity on the job keeps our businesses running and enables residents to buy homes and pay taxes to support our growing community.
- Long-term—it increases school readiness and lays the foundation for success in school and in life.

With lackluster test scores, a high dropout rate, and low GED pass rates, we must invest earlier in our students. We must invest, in fact, before they ever set foot in a school!

- 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 $385M, which represents a substantial reduction—$67 M less than the $452M 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 direct $53M from the competitive grants (as proposed in the Executive Budget) to Universal Prekindergarten to expand the program to cover thousands more children, prepare qualified teachers and provide the technical support necessary to ensure sustainable quality.**

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. 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. Access is particularly critical for homeless children, children with unidentified special needs, English language learners, and children living in poverty. 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.
- Support full implementation of **QUALITYstarsNY**.
- Allow Pre-K children eligibility for **transportation** aid.

Finally, the State must 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 New York's most vulnerable children and families.**

- **Maintain funding for Healthy Families New York (HFNY) at $23.3M.** 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 $5M, 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.

- **Support the Medicaid Redesign Team's recommendation** to make NFP a fully covered preventive service for first-time, high-risk mothers and their children. NFP is expected to be included in the global waiver to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

- **Establish a dedicated line item of $2M 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 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 in order to reduce later special education and rehabilitation costs and maximize the potential for individuals with disabilities to live independently and be productive citizens. The 2012 Executive Budget proposes a significant restructuring of the EI program. **We urge the State to address certain concerns with the proposals in the Budget, 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.**

State funding for EI decreased by 27% from FY 2010-2011 ($230M) to FY 2011-2012 ($167M). 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. For example, over the past several 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. Such cuts make it difficult for young children with delays or disabilities to access the services they need in a timely manner, especially in certain low-income neighborhoods that already had shortages of providers.

The 2012 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. 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.

We are particularly concerned that the Executive Budget would:

- Give the health insurance company a voice in determining the child's EI services by making a health insurance representative part of the team that develops and reviews the child's EI services plan.
- Restrict access to evaluations and services by requiring that the evaluators and service providers be part of the parent's health insurance network and by prohibiting the child's evaluator, service coordinator, and provider from being part of the same agency without delineating a clear procedure and clear criteria for obtaining an exception to either policy. These provisions will be particularly problematic for children who need evaluations and services in languages other than English or for children who require evaluators and interventionists with expertise in serving children with specific needs.
- Allow service coordinators to implement the child's service plan 30 days later than the projected date of initiation. Thirty days is a very long time in the life of an infant.
- Further reduce the number of EI providers available to serve children and families by placing onerous billing requirements on providers, failing to increase the current reimbursement rate, and requiring providers to negotiate future rates with health insurers.
- Require that an entirely restructured EI evaluation, service provision, billing, and payment system exist by 2013 without allowing adequate time for thoughtful, responsible planning and without soliciting community input.

ADVANTAGE AFTER SCHOOL

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 $22.5M, 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 $30.5M, 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 after school.

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.