

# Winning Beginning NY

*an early care and education coalition*

## Testimony at the Budget Issues Hearing on Education

December 13, 2007

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Mr. Rivera, thank you for the opportunity to address you and members of the Division of the Budget. I am Jenn O'Connor, Senior Policy Associate with the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA), and I am here today on behalf of *Winning Beginning NY*, a statewide early care and education coalition of more than 60 organizations and individuals committed to quality early learning opportunities for all children.

*Winning Beginning NY* is convened by SCAA, the NYS Child Care Coordinating Council; the NYS Association for the Education of Young Children; and Child Care, Inc.

We support a zero to five agenda that promotes high-quality early care and education in a variety of settings. Our agenda stresses the quality and accountability necessary for a comprehensive and effective early childhood system. It promotes cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth and the active engagement and support of parents and families in early learning opportunities. In addition, our agenda is sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity, addressing the needs of all young children in New York State, regardless of income, background or ability.

This year, we are requesting the following:

- \$100 million for Pre-K implementation;
- \$140 million to restore and expand child care subsidies;
- \$2.4 million to expand funding to Infant/Toddler Resource Centers;
- \$15 million to invest in the early care and education workforce; and
- \$35 million for universal prenatal/postpartum home visiting.

*Winning Beginning NY* supports the Governor's initiatives on behalf of young children, in particular his commitment to universal Pre-K. However, we understand that Pre-K cannot truly be effective if the other elements of early care and education are not strengthened in tandem. Therefore, we request that the state take the following steps this year— steps that will build on the actions already taken and work to repair what is currently a fragmented approach to early care and education.

### **Contract for Excellence in Early Care and Education**

The state should establish a Contract for Excellence in Early Care and Education, launch an Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, and implement the recommendations set forth by the *Home is Where the Start Is* workgroup on home visiting.

The Contract for Excellence in Early Care and Education would be similar to the Contract for Excellence introduced last year. The Contract would set guidelines and standards, with corresponding outcomes and benchmarks, to assess how well programs, districts, and counties are meeting the goal of moving toward a well-integrated, high-quality system of early care and education. It would drive strategic investments in early childhood settings to help every child succeed in the new global economy, and would adjust funding levels to support core components of quality, including compensation for the workforce and a healthy learning environment.

The Contract would create a comprehensive plan to launch, expand, and sustain Pre-K statewide. This would mean allocating \$100 million for the successful implementation of universal Pre-K. Implementation will entail appropriate funding and infrastructure supports that draw on existing resources and community collaboration, as well as expansion of programs to full-day and access for three-year-olds within two years.

The Contract would further invest in early care and education by making a commitment to child care. Recognizing that 54% of New York's children under six have both parents in the labor force, this part of the Contract would ensure that all families have access to high-quality early care and education programs that produce good outcomes for children and that guarantee parents can go to work knowing that their children are safe and learning. The state should allocate \$140 million to restore child care subsidies to 14,000 children who have lost care since 2004, as well as expand capacity to an additional 14,000 children. The state should also eliminate barriers such as mandatory child support enforcement requirements, high co-payments, part-day services, and unreasonable eligibility requirements in schools, community programs, and family child care.

In addition, the Contract would improve the quality of infant/toddler care. The state should allocate \$2.4 million to expand funding for Infant/Toddler Resource Centers, strengthen the capacity for coordination between Centers, and assess the impact of Center interventions on improving quality.

### **Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative**

Second, the state should adopt the Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative. This Initiative would support the early care and education professionals who invest so heavily each day in nurturing and educating our youngest children while often earning less than the retail workforce. An allocation of \$15 million would serve as a sizeable down payment in workforce development as the state works to create the longer-term policy directions to support and expand the qualified workforce. We must make a commitment to support these professionals, who lay much of the groundwork for our children's success in life.

### ***Home is Where the Start Is* Initiative**

Lastly, *Winning Beginning NY* supports the *Home is Where the Start Is* Initiative—a proposal that promotes universal prenatal/postpartum care and home visitation. That workgroup, also convened by SCAA, is requesting \$35 million—\$14 million to build the infrastructure of a

comprehensive system and \$21 million for evidence-based services to new families, particularly those at the highest risk for problems such as child abuse and neglect, poverty, and homelessness. We know that learning begins long before a child enters school and we strongly advocate supporting families from day one.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to the release of the budget and hope to see early care and education issues included in the State of the State address.