

Winning Beginning NY **Legislative Agenda 2009**

It's about priorities. Prevention is not optional.

In this fiscal climate, New York State must spend existing resources wisely while continuing to support our most vulnerable citizens, who are disproportionately impacted by the economy. This does not mean cutting or reducing investments to support our youngest children; it means maintaining current funding levels and investing money in programs that work—programs that will positively impact New York's State's families in the short-term, during this crisis, while setting them up to succeed in the long-term, when the crisis has passed.

Children are helped most and the economy is made strongest when scarce resources are allocated on the basis of the best evidence of what will lead to positive child outcomes. Economists have clearly documented the high return on investment in early education. With an estimated return on investment of \$4-\$17 per dollar spent, early childhood education is one of the best investments we can make right now.

Every child must have the same opportunity for high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent early care and learning and parents must have access to programs that fit their schedules. In order to keep families in New York and to promote current and future workforce growth, the state must take the following steps.

The Legislature Should:

- Transfer \$356 million in funding from the Flexible Fund for Family Services to the child care block grant to prevent further erosion in child care funding and ensure that low-income working families have access to child care subsidies.
- Restore \$30 million in lost child care funding to increase the number of available subsidy slots to children in low-income working families. 46,000 fewer children had access to child care subsidies in 2007 than in 2003-04¹, with an additional 10,000 fewer anticipated to receive subsidies this year due to a reduction in federal block grant funds and the impact of market rate increases. Restoring subsidies is essential to our economy, allowing parents to work while preparing our future workforce and allowing children to thrive.
- Provide \$600,000 for *Qualitystars NY*, the proposed Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), to draw down funding committed by private sector investors.
- Maintain funding for Pre-K at FY08-09 levels for two years (09-10 and 10-11) as proposed in the Executive Budget, providing early learning to more than 106,000 children.
- Restore cuts to funding for Healthy Families New York, as well as child welfare preventive spending for home visiting programs like Nurse-Family Partnership, thereby preventing child abuse and foster care placements.

Winning Beginning NY also supports improving parent access, infant-toddler initiatives, paid family leave, and after-school initiatives.

¹ Child Care Development Block Grant April 2005 state plan (2005-07)

Talking Points

Child Care Subsidy Funding

In this difficult economic time, New York State is committed to strengthening the safety net by providing food stamps and other supports such as heating and housing to our most vulnerable residents. Child care is another piece of the safety net—one that is being ignored. A report by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies cited the cost of child care in New York as among the highest in the nation. The market rate cost of a full-time slot in a child care center for a two-year old is over \$200 per week and between \$130 - \$250 per week in a family child care home. This means that the lack of a subsidy effectively forecloses access to regulated child care for low-income families since the gross weekly income of a family earning \$26,400 (150% of poverty for a family of three) is \$507.69 per week. Yet, while the cost of care has increased, funding for child care has decreased from a high of \$929 million in FY2004-05 to this year's \$906 million.

As a result, 46,000 fewer children received subsidies in 2007 than just four years ago, declining from 259,386 in FFY 2003-2004 to 213,171 this past year. We anticipate another 10,000 children will be denied access to a child care subsidy in 2008 due to a reduction in federal block grant funding and the impact of market rate increases, for a total of 56,000 fewer children receiving subsidized child care.

Without subsidy assistance, many working families scramble to find affordable child care and wind up using makeshift solutions that leave them stressed and concerned about the well-being of their children. Employers are impacted as well when lack of reliable child care results in higher absenteeism and declining work performance. In these incredibly hard economic times, families need help with child care costs in order to be able to stay in their jobs and keep their children in high-quality care that will help prepare them for school and for life.

Despite this, the Executive Budget proposes to leave child care in the Flexible Fund for Family Services, once again placing child care dollars at risk. Child care is too critical, both for working families that use subsidies and for all the families that rely on the state to ensure that regulated child care is of good quality, to be placed in competition with mandatory child welfare programs and youth related work initiatives. **We urge the Legislature to transfer \$356 million from the Flexible Fund to the child care block grant – as it did last year -- to prevent further erosion in child care funding and ensure that low-income working families have access to child care subsidies. In addition, we urge that \$30 million be added to restore lost subsidy slots for children from low income working families and to ensure that these children spend their days in safe and developmentally appropriate settings.**

Further, New York State must undertake a federal strategy to increase funding in this next federal fiscal year. The state's share of the Child Care and Development Fund block grant - a primary source of both child care subsidy and quality dollars - has decreased significantly. Without a substantial influx of child care block grant funds from the federal government, the number of children receiving subsidies in New York State will continue to decrease in the years ahead.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

The state must invest in *Qualitystars NY*—a strategy for a systemic approach to enhancing the quality of services in every early care and learning setting, including Pre-K. *Qualitystars NY* provides a coherent, systematic way to support program improvement and ensure the best use of public dollars in all early childhood programs. We must move forward now, even in these tight budget times, to ensure the best use of limited dollars. **We urge the state to invest \$600,000 to leverage private sector investments to support the first phase of field testing and to pass legislation that would codify the *Qualitystars NY* program.**

Qualitystars NY establishes standards of program excellence by providing a research-based tool for assessing the quality of early childhood programs. It creates a comprehensive strategy for aligning the quality of programs with the investment of public resources. A QRIS provides a roadmap for program improvement and an accountability measure for progress and funding. It simultaneously supports parents in becoming better educated consumers of early childhood services by providing them with new tools and information. The essential elements to a QRIS are technical assistance and funding targeted to both specific quality improvement and to incentive grants to support programs in meeting higher quality standards.

Universal Pre-K

New York State has made impressive strides in implementing Pre-K for all four-year olds. Currently, 106,000 four-year olds are enrolled in Pre-K. Nearly 450 of 677 school districts now provide Pre-K, including 53 that are new this year. The SED goal for next year is to increase that number to 500 school districts. **Funding for Pre-K should be maintained at the FY08-09 level for two years (09-10 and 10-11) as proposed in the Executive Budget.**

Pre-K will not be truly universal in New York State until it is available to all children. Pre-K helps ensure that all of the state's four-year olds enter school ready to succeed. Therefore, the state must continue its expansion of high-quality programs that address the needs of young children and their parents.

Some districts have found it difficult to participate; others have been unable to utilize their full allocation. There are a number of impediments that must be addressed to strengthen and improve the success of the program. Research documents that full-day Pre-K promotes better outcomes, particularly for the most at-risk children. It provides an important avenue for closing the achievement gap and preventing much more costly remediation in the future. Many districts are asking to fund full-day options. Transportation to Pre-K programs is a critical need across the state and many children are denied access because of the lack of transportation supports in certain districts. New York State appropriately requires certified teachers in every Pre-K classroom, yet there are no supports for individuals working in the field to meet these higher credentialing requirements.

Home Visiting

The Executive Budget proposes cutting the Healthy Families New York (HFNY) program by 25% and eliminating child welfare preventive spending dollars that partially fund the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and other home visiting programs. These proposed cuts will result in increased cases of child abuse. **We urge the state to restore child welfare preventive spending for home visiting and funding for HFNY.**

Home visiting programs such as HFNY and NFP provide savings for the state in reduced child protection and foster care costs. HFNY serves more than 5,000 families a year in some of New York's highest need communities, with a proven track record of better outcomes for children in high-risk families. The state's stringent randomized trial evaluation of HFNY demonstrated improved health and development, and decreased abuse and neglect. The program employs nearly 500 people in 39 communities across the state. Those jobs keep dollars circulating in local economies.

NFP is active in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga counties. Approximately 1/3 of NFP funding in New York City comes from child welfare preventive spending. Sixty-five percent of Monroe County's NFP funding and 27% of Onondaga County's NFP funding is child welfare preventive spending. The elimination of these dollars means that entire programs will cease serving an estimated 1,200 families.