

**Testimony before the Elementary and
Secondary Education Committee
on the SFY 2012-13 *Executive Budget*
Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing
January 23, 2012**

**Submitted by
*Winning Beginning NY***



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This testimony is submitted on behalf of *Winning Beginning NY (WBNY)*, the State's 200-member strong early care and development coalition. *WBNY* is co-convened by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA), the Early Care and Learning Council (ECLC), the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC), and the Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI).

WBNY's agenda includes early education issues that impact children from the prenatal period to age eight. They include: Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten, *QUALITYstarsNY*, child care, home visiting, Early Intervention, and afterschool programs.

Pre-K

WBNY applauds the great strides the State has made with regard to Pre-K, with nearly 99,000 children enrolled in programs across New York. The State still falls far short, however, of keeping the promise of Universal Pre-K—a promise that all children have access to this valuable education program. 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.

The Governor's budget proposes flat funding Pre-K. This will limit the program to the currently participating districts and not allow for any growth in those districts. *WBNY* makes the following recommendations to ensure more children benefit from high-quality Pre-K programs:

- Invest \$53 million in Pre-K, as recommended by the Board of Regents, to expand and improve services for four-year-olds across the State and eliminate the Maintenance of Effort penalties in the legislation.

- Recognize Pre-K as a foundational core educational service. Any increases in education funding, such as those proposed by the Governor in the *Executive Budget* for K-12, should include Pre-K.
- Renew the State's commitment to Pre-K in schools and community-based settings by addressing the need for system improvements using expanded investments:
 - Allow funding for full-day Pre-K in schools and early childhood programs.
 - 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.
 - Invest in teacher preparation and professional development and other quality improvements.
 - Support transportation aid for Pre-K particularly in rural areas.

QUALITYstarsNY

WBNY believes that all education should be of the highest quality. Therefore, we support implementation of QUALITYstarsNY, a rating and improvement system developed by New York State's Early Childhood Advisory Council, which would improve program quality for all early learning programs (including Pre-K). QUALITYstarsNY would simultaneously provide parents with the information they need to make wise choices about their child's early education.

The program was piloted in 13 communities and over 200 programs around the State, but funding is needed to move the initiative forward. WBNY requests \$20 million to provide direct and indirect program supports. Full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY will require a \$100 million investment, but a down payment of \$20 million would be an investment in quality assessment, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial incentives, public awareness, system evaluation and data system development.

Kindergarten

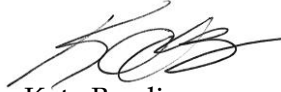
WBNY asks the State to increase school aid funding by more than the 4% proposed in the 2012-13 *Executive Budget*. This increase is necessary to restore the funding lost due to \$2.7B in cuts over the last two years. Unfortunately, because of recent cuts in education funding, some schools have eliminated their Kindergarten programs. When we know that 85% of a child's brain development occurs in the first five years, denying any child access to Kindergarten is unconscionable.

Conclusion

Attached please find [WBNY's 2012 Executive Agenda](#), which outlines the coalition's budget requests in greater detail.

We thank you for your time and welcome any questions. WBNY's Coordinator, Jenn O'Connor, can be reached at 518/463-1896, ext. 131, or at joconnor@scaany.org.

Respectfully submitted,



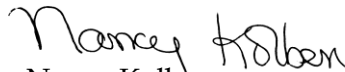
Kate Breslin
President and CEO
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy



Marsha Basloe
Executive Director
Early Care and Learning Council



Kristen Kerr
Executive Director
NYS Association for the Education
of Young Children



Nancy Kolben
Executive Director
Center for Children's Initiatives