

# Winning Beginning NY

*an early care and education coalition*

**Winning Beginning NY  
Executive Agenda 2010**  
[www.winningbeginningny.org](http://www.winningbeginningny.org)

**Winning Beginning NY, the state's early care and learning coalition, believes that New York State should:**

- Prevent the loss of child care subsidy funding for low-income families across the state by adding \$30 million to the state Child Care and Development Block Grant.
- Restore and maintain funding for home visiting programs and ensure eligibility for millions of dollars in federal funding.
  - Restore funding for the Healthy Families New York program for a total of \$25 million.
  - Maintain \$5 million in funding for the Nurse-Family Partnership program.
  - Maintain Community Optional Preventive Services funds for home visiting programs.
- Provide \$4.5 million to prepare New York State, based on field test evaluation, for full implementation of *QUALITYstarsNY*, New York State's quality rating and improvement system, and to ensure eligibility for federal Early Learning Challenge Grant funding.
- Renew the state's commitment to Pre-K in schools and community-based settings.
  - Restore the \$38 million reduction in Pre-K funding to the FY08-09 appropriation levels.
  - Allow districts to use 25% of their funding for full-day Pre-K in schools and early childhood programs, provided they document the need for full-day services in the community. Adjust student enrollment figures accordingly.
  - Make all school districts eligible once again to provide Pre-K services and expand the number of children served in participating districts.
  - Eliminate the maintenance of effort penalties in the legislation.
  - Base per-child amounts provided to school districts/CBOs on actual cost of a high-quality program to be determined by an annual cost study conducted by SED.
  - Allow Pre-K children eligibility for transportation aid.

*Winning Beginning NY also supports improving paid family leave and expanded learning opportunities such as high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs.*

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## Talking Points

### Child Care Block Grant Funding

Child care is a critical part of the daily lives of thousands of New Yorkers with young children. Parents rely on child care in order to go to work and, most importantly, to know that their children are well cared for and safe. High-quality child care—care that is developmentally appropriate and environmentally safe—provides children with the emotional and cognitive skills they need to successfully enter school.

The market rate established by New York State to reflect the actual cost of care in the community is more than \$225 for a child under three and as high as \$338 per week in some communities. It averages \$200 plus for three to five year-olds. This puts a strain on many family budgets and forces parents to make difficult choices, including giving up quality for affordability. This is particularly problematic because there is a persuasive body of research that has found that high-quality care is beneficial to young children, but poor-quality care can be harmful. And the impact of quality early childhood experiences is pronounced for lower income children, who are more likely to start school behind higher income classmates.

It is not just the high cost of care that impacts a family's ability to ensure access to high-quality programs for their children. New York State's county-administered child care system has a number of inequities. Individual counties may choose to "prioritize" families, effectively setting different eligibility levels across the state. Counties may also set differential parental co-payments. Similarly situated families, with the same income and number of children, pay dramatically different co-payments depending on where they live. No other federally funded program allows for such inequality of access.

Families often have an especially difficult time finding high quality care for infants and toddlers. The first three years are a time of rapid brain growth and babies need child care professionals with the appropriate training to understand and respond to their developmental needs. Yet there is a scarcity of vacancies for our very youngest children and the care available is not always developmentally appropriate. Currently, funding is provided through a set-aside within the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), a small portion of which has been used to fund the regional infant toddler resource centers that focus on increasing the capacity and quality of infant toddler care. The remaining funds have been used to provide across-the-board support for state programs such as licensing. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for the CCDBG includes a set-aside for infants and toddlers. While those funds will be used to provide additional resources and training, they are time limited.

President Obama has recognized the importance of the earliest years and targeted funding to young children in the ARRA funding. But in New York State, where our share of the CCDBG continues to decrease, the ARRA funds have been used to back-fill slots rather than to create new ones.

Without a substantial influx of funding from the state to support child care subsidies for low-income children and their families, more and more parents will need to seek care that is of questionable quality and safety. **We urge the state to commit to increasing the state's share of the child care block grant by \$30 million.**

### Home Visiting

Home visiting is a model that dates back to Elizabethan England and was endorsed by Florence Nightingale in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It relies on home visitors—either nurses or other trained personnel—to provide regular home visits to educate expectant and new parents about prenatal care, infant care, child development and parenting skills.

Research shows that home visiting decreases infant mortality rates, helps prevent child abuse, and increases school readiness.

Home visiting programs work to promote the development of family self-sufficiency by enhancing financial management skills and building knowledge of employment, and quality early care and education options. These are critical points to ensure a family's participation in overall community economic development. Home visitors work with parents to ensure their continued family success throughout life, and have been proven to not only promote child well-being and development, but to lift families out of financial instability.

Healthy Families New York (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. **We urge the state to restore funding to HFNY—to \$25 million.**

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program is active in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga counties, serving an estimated 2,500 families. **We urge the state to maintain funding for NFP—\$5 million.**

Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) dollars partially fund both HFNY and NFP. The title alone—Community *Optional* Preventive Services—is misleading. The services provided using this funding are not optional. Approximately 1/4 of NFP funding in New York City comes from COPS; 100% of Monroe County's NFP funding and 27% of Onondaga County's NFP funding is COPS funding. **We urge the state to maintain funding for COPS.**

This year, New York State may have the opportunity to apply for federal dollars for home visiting initiatives. However, this funding is contingent on a state match. That means that the state must continue to invest in home visiting at current or greater levels. Unfortunately, HFNY funding was cut 8% in 2009. Funding must be restored, and not cut further, in order for New York State to take full advantage of the federal opportunities.

### **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)**

The state has wisely invested ARRA funding and leveraged private funding to field test *QUALITYstars NY* (QSNY). QSNY is a systemic approach to evaluating and improving the quality of services in all early care and learning settings, including those based in centers, homes, and public schools. It will also provide critical support for programs to implement targeted improvements helping to ensure best practices and positive outcomes for children in all early childhood programs. We must continue to move toward full implementation, even in these tight budget times, to ensure the most effective use of limited dollars and to leverage additional federal funding.

The field test of QSNY is being conducted in 13 communities throughout New York State and includes only those programs that are regulated by a government agency (e.g. Office of Children and Family Services, NYC Department of Health, Head Start, and/or State Education Department.)<sup>1</sup> The QSNY field test evaluation will provide us with recommendations to ensure validity of the QSNY program standards,

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<sup>1</sup> These programs include child care centers, family child care homes, registered nursery schools, prekindergarten programs (in public schools and community based organizations), Head Start and Early Head Start, and special education (4410) schools.

rating reliability, availability of program supports to assist with program improvements, and estimated cost of program improvement plans.

The programs participating in the field test will receive information about their current level of quality and a program improvement plan based on the evaluators' findings. An essential component of a quality rating and improvement system is the support provided to programs and practitioners to make targeted quality improvements. The funding provided would be allocated to increase access to comprehensive professional development and technical assistance; assist programs in making facility improvements necessary to ensure the health and safety of children; and financial incentives to help sustain and continue their quality improvement efforts.

**We urge the state to invest \$4.5 million to build on the current public and private investments, to implement the recommendations in preparation for state-wide implementation, to support participating programs in their quality improvement efforts, and to leverage federal funding.**

### **Universal Pre-K**

Four year-olds cannot wait for New York State to Keep the Promise of Pre-K. Research is clear—investment in early education saves money in the long run by reducing special needs placements and improving outcomes for all children.

Pre-K is now recognized as part of a P-16 education system. But we have fallen far short of keeping the promise of Pre-K services for every four year-old. Although we have made major strides in implementation, with 450 of the state's 677 school districts participating, the program still only serves 42% of four year-olds.

New York State is fortunate to provide Pre-K in school and non-school settings. This approach is proven to be cost-effective and educationally effective. At the same time, it supports working families. Unfortunately, the per-child funding amount does not 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 past year, Pre-K funding was frozen once again at \$414 million, a substantial reduction—\$38 million less than the \$452 allocated in the two previous years. That leaves 1/3 of the state's school districts without programs and freezes continued expansion of the program in participating districts. This action creates glaring disparities across the state, with "have" and "have not" districts. Freezing the funding also leaves fundamental barriers to expansion and quality improvement. Low per-pupil funding levels do not adequately cover the true cost of providing the service and have prevented expansion and quality assurance in many districts. Most school districts have not had any increase in the Pre-K per-child amount over the 11-year history of Pre-K implementation. During this same period, school aid for the K-12 system steadily increased.

**As part of a renewed investment in Pre-K, we urge the state to:**

### **Restore Pre-K funding in 2010-2011 from \$414 million to \$452 million.**

The state should allocate this \$38 million to support expansion of educational opportunities for four year-olds, and to invest in strategies that promote excellence in Pre-K education. These strategies also aim to maximize all current investments and increase the capacity that supports young children's early learning and development. Funding should be allocated with the caveat that it be used in the following ways:

- Allow districts to use 25% of their funding for full-day Pre-K in schools and early childhood programs, provided they document the need for full-day services in the community. Adjust student enrollment figures to reflect this.
- Make all school districts eligible once again to provide Pre-K services and expand the number of children served in participating districts.
- Eliminate the maintenance of effort penalties in the legislation.
- Base per-child amounts provided to school districts/CBOs on actual cost of a high-quality program to be determined by an annual cost study conducted by SED.

**Allow Pre-K children eligibility for transportation aid.**

Cost out and include four year-olds in the transportation aid formula, taking into consideration age-appropriate transportation and the need to minimize transitions for young children from one setting to another.