



Expand Access to High Quality Early Education Programs to Improve Student Achievement

**Testimony to the Education Reform Commission
October 16, 2012**

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My name is Nancy Kolben. I am the Executive Director of the Center for Children's Initiatives and a founding partner in the *Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign (The Campaign)*. We appreciate the opportunity to testify at this second hearing in New York City. My goal today is to present to you the recommendations from *The Campaign*. Members of *The Campaign*, as well as other early childhood professionals, researchers, business leaders and representatives from the criminal justice system have presented eloquent testimony on the importance of early education. By now, you are keenly familiar with the case for how and why quality early learning opportunities improve educational outcomes and produce a significant return on investment. We have urged the Commission at each of the hearings to make early education an essential priority in your recommendations to the Governor. In recent months, we have shared information with members of the Commission to provide more background and are eager to continue to serve as a resource.

Today, I would like to focus on the recommendations proposed by *Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College Campaign*. These recommendations are formally endorsed by Winning Beginning NY, Alliance for Quality Education, Citizen Action of New York and the Public Policy and Early Education Fund. The recommendations have been vetted and reviewed by a diverse group of experts and experienced professionals across the state with hands-on experience in the public schools and early childhood community.

Innovation Fund

Create a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation fund in FY 2013 - 2014 that targets expansion of Pre-K in high-needs school districts, coupled with an investment in QUALITYstarsNY to build high-quality early care and education programs across the State.

The Campaign is recommending the establishment of the **Innovation Fund**, as a new mechanism to ensure that the state provides high-needs children with a quality early learning program. We recommend that the state not only create the new Innovation Fund, but also create a mechanism to re-allocate any unused funds to eligible school districts prepared to expand and

meet quality standards. Funds not requested by a school district could be re-allocated to other eligible districts. The fund effectively links the goal of expanding access to **Pre-K with QUALITYstars NY** as the strategy for driving investments in quality early learning in both schools and early childhood programs in the community. The fund is designed to target funds to high-needs school districts, including the Big Five.

The Campaign was guided by a set of core principles in framing its recommendations. These include:

QUALITYstarsNY is the mechanism by which early care and education system is aligned. QUALITYstarsNY sets research-based standards for early childhood programs and helps programs meet them, as the state tracks, supports and analyzes that progress.

The long-term vision for our work must be to provide high-quality early care and education for all children. Expansion of Pre-K services is one strategy for moving toward meeting that goal. Due to current budgetary restraints, the priority must be to high-needs districts, including the Big Five School Districts

Pre-K policies must be effectively and efficiently coordinated with community programs to ensure maximum options for families and effective use of all public and private resources.

Early childhood embraces a period from prenatal months to third grade should be understood as a continuum with program and policies that are integrated of high-quality and offer smooth transitions for children. ¹

QUALITYstarsNY

The Campaign is calling for an investment in the first year of \$20 million to move forward with New York's quality rating and improvement system. This level of funding will support quality improvement strategies in over 700 early childhood programs serving more than 54,000 children.

The program is designed around star-ratings (one to five stars) that indicate the effectiveness of key aspects of the educational offering including teacher qualifications, learning environment, teaching strategies, parent engagement and program management. By raising standards and holding early childhood educators accountable, QUALITYstarsNY is designed to drive investment toward better outcomes for children. It sets research-based standards for teaching and learning as well as the classroom environment and program management in all settings that serve children under five. As a result, QUALITYstarsNY provides a systematic way for educational programs, wherever they are located, to identify effective teaching, select and effectively use research-based learning materials and promotes effective leadership with the goal of creating a strong learning environment. It also supports vertical alignment between preschool and K-12. There is strong evidence that well designed quality improvement strategies result in higher performance and child outcomes. New York State has designed QUALITYstarsNY, building from a strong research base of what works - learning from other states, and from the extensive professional academic expertise in our own backyard. While similar strategies are in place in the traditional K -12 systems, we need the comparable system for the early years and QUALITYstarsNY is designed to fill that need.

We are recommending that school districts that apply to the Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund should be prioritized for participation in QUALITYstarsNY and that the program be expanded overall as outlined above.

Full Day Pre-K Options

The Fund would provide for New York State's first full day prekindergarten program and would also allow districts to expand access to current quality part-day programs. *The Campaign* is proposing a \$5,000 per pupil investment to expand services to children either by converting part day to full day or opening new quality part day slots. Today, many states including neighboring New Jersey, fund the six-hour preschool day advocated by educators and researchers in New York. Research documents that children in full day Pre-K have better language and math skills than those who attend three hours or less. Full day services are also more effective in closing the achievement gap between higher income and lower income children. The research clearly supports the value of full day early learning experiences for the most at risk children.¹ We estimate that an investment of \$50 million would serve 10,000 children while \$25 million would reach 5,000 children. The State Education Department (SED) submitted recent estimates to the Board of Regents about the unmet need for Pre-K Services. The SED estimates that there is an unmet need to serve approximately 11,400 children in Pre-K in Urban/Suburban High Needs Districts and Rural High Needs Districts and just over 1,000 children in the Big Four Schools Districts and 17,000 in New York City using current Kindergarten enrollment as a proxy...

New York charted a wise course for implementing the program by being the first in the nation to mandate that Pre-K services be offered in early childhood programs in the community as well as public schools. Current legislation requires that at least 10% of the children be enrolled in community-based programs. New York utilized the existing capacity expertise and experience in early childhood programs in communities across the state and became a national leader, guiding other states on the benefits of this strategy. This policy is cost effective, improves access, promotes partnerships between the schools and other services in the community and provides opportunities to build a continuum of educational supports for families. There are positive examples of this work in many communities across the state. Of the just over 100,000 children were enrolled this past school year, over half are enrolled in early childhood programs in community settings in well over a thousand programs across the state. We need to ensure that all of our next steps improve and strengthen that partnership as key to the success of our early education initiatives in New York State. Even though much has happened since 1998 to improve the partnerships between community-based organizations and the schools, there is a much more opportunity to leverage resources, assure common standards and promote professional development. This will strengthen both the early childhood programs in the community and Pre-K in public schools.

In New Jersey, the Abbott school districts mandated by the New Jersey Courts to help close the achievement gap were succeeding with extremely positive results. In those districts, they did it right with investments, in full day intentional teaching, balanced curriculum with attention to socio-emotional as well as cognitive development, individualization with small group, and well

¹ See Barnett et.al, “*Is More Better? The Effects of Full Day v Half Day*” available at www.nieer.org; See also “*Research Briefing: The Full-Day Advantage*” available at www.winningbeginningny.org .

educated and adequately paid staff with strong supervision and monitoring. New York must meet this challenge as well.

Dr. Clive Belfield, an education economist, has conducted numerous statewide studies to determine the return on investment in high quality early education as a result of reducing current and future costs to public education. He concluded from his work in New York State that the state would save 42% to 62% of expenditures on Pre-K by reducing future expenditures on remedial education, reducing grade retention and increasing learner productivity saving an average of \$2,500 to \$9,500 per child.² Conversely, children without access to high-quality early learning opportunities tend to start behind and stay behind—costing far more.

You have heard in previous testimony by my colleagues the concern about the current cap on school aid. This is having a significant impact on both K and Pre-K and we believe that it is important to **lift Pre-K out of an education cap** to allow us to jump start expansion without penalizing the K-12 system.

We could not be discussing Pre-K without attention to **Full Day Kindergarten**. Full day Kindergarten is not at risk in many school districts as a result of the combination of a property tax cap and the education aid cap. Districts are recommending cuts in full day K to meet a budget shortfall since K is not mandated.

New York City

New York City has recently taken several big steps forward that are aligned with the recommendations presented today. The city will be making kindergarten mandatory in the 2013-2014 school year with the goal of reaching approximately 6,000 children not currently enrolled in kindergarten, with special attention to reaching the most at-risk children across the city. In addition, the Mayor recently announced an expansion of full day Pre-K seats, with the potential to add services for 4,000 additional children. The City has embraced QUALITYstarsNY in its new EarlyLearnNY strategy, which aims to leverage all funding, including state Pre-K investments, Head Start and child care, to create a comprehensive early education opportunity for at-risk children. This newly-launched effort is spearheaded by the city's Early Care and Learning Department of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

The *Ready for Kindergarten Ready for College Campaign* full recommendations have been shared with the Commission. We are eager to support the work of the Commission and will be providing a more detailed analysis of enrollment and funding data for Pre-K and cost analyses for QUALITYstarsNY. There is no wiser investment that the state can make than in strengthening the foundation for learning by providing access to high quality early education programs.

About CCI

CCI has 30 years of experience in promoting access to quality early learning opportunities for all children. Our policy work and recommendations are informed by our work with early childhood professionals and programs as well as day-to-day work with parents. CCI's team of parent

² *Early Childhood Education: How Important are the Cost-Savings to the School System?*: Clive R. Belfield, Teacher College Columbia University (2004) Available at www.winningbeginningny.org

counselors helps identify and evaluate options for early care and learning. CCI's professional development staff offers coaching, mentoring and technical assistance professionals in meeting standards of excellence. CCI's policy team develops data reports and policy briefs and works closely with policymakers and other community leaders to promote appropriate investment and effective policies to drive better educational outcomes for children. As a partner in the PEW Charitable Trusts national campaign to expand public prekindergarten as an essential component of public education in this country, CCI worked across the state and with other state leaders to promote access to high-quality early education. CCI was instrumental in the formation of Winning Beginning NY, serves on the Steering Committee and is a leader in the *Ready for Kindergarten Ready for College Campaign*. CCI is also an active participant in the planning for and implementation of QUALITYstarsNY.