

**Testimony before the New York Education Reform Commission  
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Retired CEO of Rochester Childfirst Network – an early education and care organization serving children ages birth to 12 years, with programs including center based child care, Universal Pre-Kindergarten, early intervention, preschool special education, family child care satellites, and a Work Experience Program (WEP) teaching young mothers child development and job skills related to infant and toddler child care.

The following are suggestions that come from 18 years of experience working with the State Education Department from the perspective of a Non-Public Private School and Preschool Special Education administrator.

**Suggestions for improvements to the Structure of New York’s education system:**

**Shared services:** Support Community Planning Committees, to bring in Community Based Organizations (CBO’s) as shared stakeholders to promote successful outcomes in our students. CBO’s currently offer before and after school education and care programs, as well as vacation programs. Many are nationally and state wide accredited education based programs, employing evidence based curriculums, Urban 4-H character building and community service options. They provide a cost effective means of keeping young students safe and secure, combining fun, interactive learning techniques to help children start and end their day, in a positive learning environment. Invest in building these cost effective partnerships, by imbedding a structure, that supports communication of learning goals and objectives between elementary schools and partner CBO’s; support innovative after school reading programs in these CBO’s that bring in real reading teachers who employ hands-on enrichment style learning activities, including cooking, plays, music and dance, book clubs. If school districts and CBO’s combined their expertise and resources as extended day enrichment specialists, the fade out that occurs on long vacations from school, will be reduced in a cost effective model. (Mercier Literacy Program, Rochester, NY)

Besides the ongoing work that happens in ECDI our broad community collaborative, here are two examples specific to UPK: Rochester’s UPK Policy Advisory Committee – Community partners sit monthly with district administrators to problem solve shared issues, including recruitment, professional development needs, fiscal issues. By working together, and understanding each others strengths and weaknesses, we partner to build solutions.

The Early Childhood Education Quality Council is a group of 20 urban child care centers who band together to share resources and to support each other through the process of national accreditation. Most are UPK CBO sites. Strategic planning discussions result in focusing our efforts on the importance of professional development as the number one factor in quality child outcomes, teacher retention and high enrollment.

**Increase effectiveness:** The Regents Policy Statement on Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community (2005)\* sites the importance of connecting systems that support the healthy growth and development of young children starting at birth. In Rochester we work hard through our community collaborative, ECDI, to align

the supports needed for children Pre-Natal to age 8, looking to strengthen the links that lead to successful child outcomes – children employing their full potential.

Currently Rochester's Universal Prekindergarten programs rank with some of the highest on the country. We are grateful for the RCSD having the foresight from the implementation of our UPK programs in 1998-99 to collect data on outcomes every year, that are used by programs to implement quality improvements.\* We ask that the Commission support investing in fiscal stability to our UPK programs so that we can retain our high quality, experienced teachers, and maintain the high quality materials and curriculum needed to maintain our students' school readiness and success. We need to stabilize the system of funding for UPK so that cost of living increases come annually, which have a direct impact on teacher retention and higher performing outcomes for children. Take Pre-K out of the fiscal cap on school aid **and** change the formula to allow districts such as Rochester, to receive payment for all children served. Last year, the RCSD's excellent recruitment efforts resulted in 70 children over funding. The district worked hard to then find funding for these 70 additional children not paid for by PreK, so as not to turn them away. We anticipate this scenario for the current school year as well.

#### **Teacher Quality and Student Achievement:**

Support the B-2 Teacher Certification so that our new teachers will enter PreK and early elementary classrooms with a strong understanding of how to keep our youngest children engaged and how to turn them on to becoming intrinsic learners. Young children are naturally inquisitive and thrive on activities that promote this inquiry. We need to support their natural learning styles. Children with special needs succeed at a much higher level when the instruction offered is developmentally appropriate and hands on, allowing for differing learning styles to engage. Rochester is proud to have 100% certified teachers in our Pre-K classrooms, 50% of whom are in CBO's.

Fund QUALITYstarsNY so that a system of professional development is imbedded in our preschool system. Also continue to strongly support access to Title 1 funding for preschool settings, especially for the specific use of professional development as it relates to supporting children with diverse learning styles in high needs districts, parent involvement, children with special needs and English Language Learners.

ECDI supports the conditions that promote successful educational achievement for children beginning with quality prenatal care and continuing into the early elementary school years. With a strong and healthy beginning, it is much easier to keep children on track to stay in school and graduate.

#### **References:**

\*Regents Policy Statement on Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community – 2005 ;

[www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2005Meetings/July2005/0705brd5.htm](http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2005Meetings/July2005/0705brd5.htm)

\*UPK RECAP Data; Children's Institute; Available via the Early Childhood Education section of the Children's Institute Website.