

**Statement- NYS Education Reform Commission
October 15, 2012**

I am Carolyn Lee-Davis. I am here as an advocate for high quality early education for children 0-8:

- I am a policy analyst for The Children's Agenda, a local, non-profit research and advocacy organization, which uses data and evidence to advocate for what works best and is needed the most.
- I am also a co-chair for the Rochester Early Childhood Development Initiative, ECDI, and,
- The local coordinator for the Parent Leadership Training Institute, a program proven to increase parent involvement in the community.

I'm here to speak for the needs of children in Rochester and make three recommendations.

First, some information about the children who live in this region:

- The city of Rochester has the 7th highest rate of child poverty in the nation; more than half of its children live in poverty.
- One in every 4 kids in Monroe County live below the poverty line; the child poverty rate in Monroe County is the highest it's been in over 20 years.
- One quarter of 3rd graders in the Rochester City School District pass math and ELA tests.
- Less than half (48%) of students entering Rochester high schools graduate 4 years later.

1. Make a policy statement in support of quality early care and education settings for the first three years of life.

75% of brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality and social skills develop before age 5 - before a child ever steps foot in Kindergarten. The early years are critical, and are instrumental to how children succeed in life. If a child spends their first five years in a quality setting, with caring, trained adults, they will have fewer problems with school adjustment, be more prepared for school work, and be more likely to graduate from high school. Therefore, what happens to kids *before* they knock on the door of Kindergarten is your business. Efforts to improve quality in early education and efforts to improve the transition to Kindergarten, will make education reform efforts successful – ensuring quality early education opportunities *is* Education Reform. The State has done such important work in creating a quality system of pre kindergarten for 4 year olds. I stand with my colleagues at the ECDI table and at The Children's Agenda in seconding the ask that the Education Reform Commission make a policy statement in support of quality early care and education settings for the first three years of life.

2. Ensure that the NYS K-2 academic curriculum includes Developmentally Appropriate Practices.

Because children spend their first five years in a variety of places – including at home with mom, down the street with a neighbor, in a high quality child care classroom, in preschool or nursery school, or Head Start classroom – we have to ensure that what they receive when they enter Kindergarten is of the highest quality possible and follows recommended practices to ensure educational success. Children in Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade need to have access

to active learning environments, with learning centers, and movement and music. We need to ensure that the important academic content of Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade is coupled with developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). I stand with my colleagues to ask that New York State ensure that its K-2 academic curriculum includes developmentally appropriate practices and looks holistically at children, which we know is most likely to bring academic success.

3. Support professional learning in early education for elementary teachers and principals, including collegial circles and hand-on expertise in school buildings and classrooms.

Last but not least, expertise in early education is vital to bringing about improved outcomes for children, including third grade reading scores. We ask that you look for opportunities to support professional learning in early education, including collegial circles and hand-on expertise in school buildings and classrooms for teachers and principals. We are excited to be working locally on this with Rochester City School District experts, and look forward to sharing our learning from this project with you.