

Testimony by

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My testimony is based on the conviction that deliberations about educational reform must incorporate a focus on early childhood education for one simple reason: success in school is determined by the experiences children have before they get to school. There are countless studies showing that investments in the early years have extraordinary impact on improving child outcomes and reducing school costs. There is a comparable mass of evidence proving that children who start behind, stay behind. I know my colleagues across the State have gathered the most relevant research and data to make the case and shared them in testimony already provided. The aptly-named campaign *Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College* says it all. Rather than reiterate the research, I will make reference to it as I explain why a focus on young children in our educational reform efforts is critical to families, classrooms and communities.

I offer these insights after having had the luxury of working at the national level for over 30 years, first as a federal lobbyist for the Day Care Council of America in 1974, then as a consultant to corporations as the founder of the Work and Family Information Center at The Conference Board, a national business think tank in 1983, and then as co-founder and co-president of the national research organization, the Families and Work Institute. I've had to look at early childhood from 30,000 feet high. It was my job to understand how federal policy would affect systems in New York as well as Arizona. However, it has taken me the past ten years working on and for Long Island to realize how ineffective our policies – and policy-making – for young children has been. Thankfully, New York is on the right track, which is why my support and this testimony is focused on three current initiatives in the State and one innovation we have incubated here on Long Island:

- **Support for Reassessment, Expansion and Targeting of Universal Pre-K**
- **Implementation of QualitystarsNY, a quality rating and improvement system**
- **Continuation of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC)**
- **Use of the Early Development Instrument for a Global School Readiness Assessment Tool**

I thank you for this opportunity and hope that I shed light on the systemic challenges and opportunities that exist as we integrate early childhood education into our K-12 public education system. First, allow me to provide a little background on The Early Years Institute (EYI) to explain our recommended actions.

The Early Years Institute (EYI)

EYI is a regional non-profit organization based in Plainview, NY that works with parents, teachers, pediatricians, librarians, clergy, parks, museums, government officials and business leaders to ensure all children have the opportunities and resources to learn and succeed. Our vision is that Long Island be viewed as a national leader of communities that value children. Our mission is to be a catalyst for new ideas, partnerships and resources that ensure all children have what they need to succeed in school and life.

We engage stakeholders through public education campaigns and outreach, coalition-building, demonstration projects, and published research. We invite them to help us create rich learning opportunities for young children that promote successful outcomes. In the process, we increase the number of people who care about the success and well-being of Long Island's youngest residents. We believe that our top-down, regional focus, combined with bottom-up, community strategies is beginning to result in a lasting change in resources to support our most vulnerable children.

As you know, Long Island is a very civic-minded region, with so many services that we often trip over each other while still leaving vast areas of need with limited support. There is no more apt saying than "It takes an [incorporated] village to raise a child" on Long Island. EYI works hard to break down silos among various agencies that work with children and families. Our Advisory Committee of 62 executives of intermediary organizations representing the various stakeholder groups we bring together at the community level, e.g. library association, BOCES, Docs for Tots, Catholic Charities. Our Long Island Nature Collaborative for Kids (LINCK) includes environmentalists, pediatricians, preschool educators, science teachers, landscape architects and land trusts to reconnect children and nature and create a campaign to "Leave No Child Inside." We have helped create 30 outdoor nature explore classrooms in schools, child care programs, libraries and synagogues. We developed Pick-a-Park, a searchable on-line data base of all 700 national, state, county, town and village parks organized by what parents of preschoolers said they wanted: bathrooms, playgrounds and wide pathways for strollers.

Our work is always evidence-based, with a strong focus on findings from the Foundation for Child Development substantiating that alignment of preschool and K-3 curricula allows positive gains to last longer for the child. With a Motorola Solutions grant, EYI is creating a STEM curriculum for children age 3 to grade 3 with content relevant to our LINCK nature program to be pilot tested in one school district. Though supportive of new technology, we are also the regional host of the national Screen-Free Week campaign in which parents, teachers and caregivers are encouraged to reduce children's use of electronic media. EYI offers trained Play Coaches to Long Island librarians to rearrange their children's spaces and engage parents in understanding the value of play and their role as the child's first teacher. EYI is currently partnering with three teaching hospitals on Long Island to change pediatric resident training to focus more on early literacy and social and emotional development. EYI has brought The Wakanheza Project™ to Long Island, a unique program that trains staff in public places to defuse stressful situations that parents may experience with children. It has shown to be an effective way to create a welcoming environment and show a little empathy to parents.

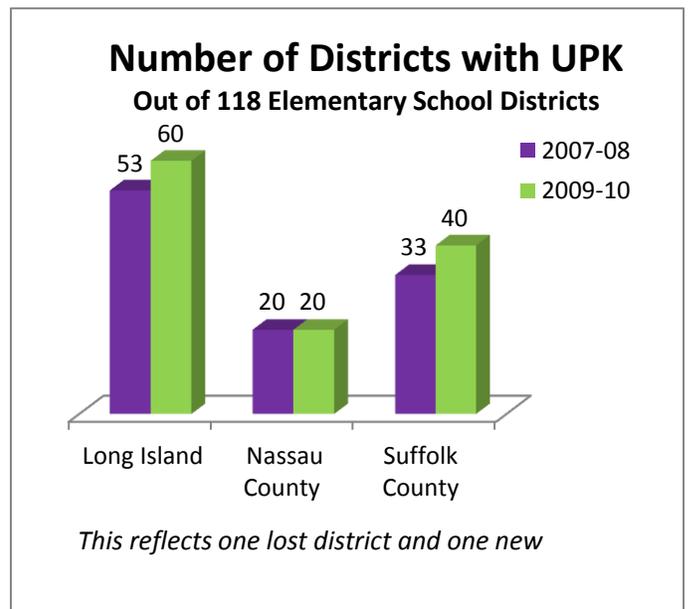
We regularly conduct polls of the Long Island public regarding early childhood education. Our work is guided by what the public does and does not understand about the investments needed to support a quality system of early childhood services.

Support for Reassessment, Expansion and Targeting of Universal Pre-K

EYI began researching pre-K after Long Island school districts returned unused more than \$11 million of the \$36.4 million allocated for pre-K in the 2007-2008 school year. In cooperation with Nassau BOCES, Western Suffolk BOCES and Eastern Suffolk BOCES, EYI embarked on the study to understand why districts declined to provide pre-K and to examine the operation of programs in those districts which did participate. We interviewed all superintendents on Long Island, surveyed district pre-K administrators and directors of community-based-organizations (CBOs) that run UPK programs; and conducted classroom observations. We learned that districts did not offer pre-K because of: 1) a concern that state allocations are insufficient to cover the true cost of an effective Pre-K program particularly the cost of transportation; 2) lack space for pre-K programs in their schools and a lack of familiarity with CBOs that could provide space; or 3) a belief that schools should not be offering pre-K or that parents are well-served by existing early childhood programs.

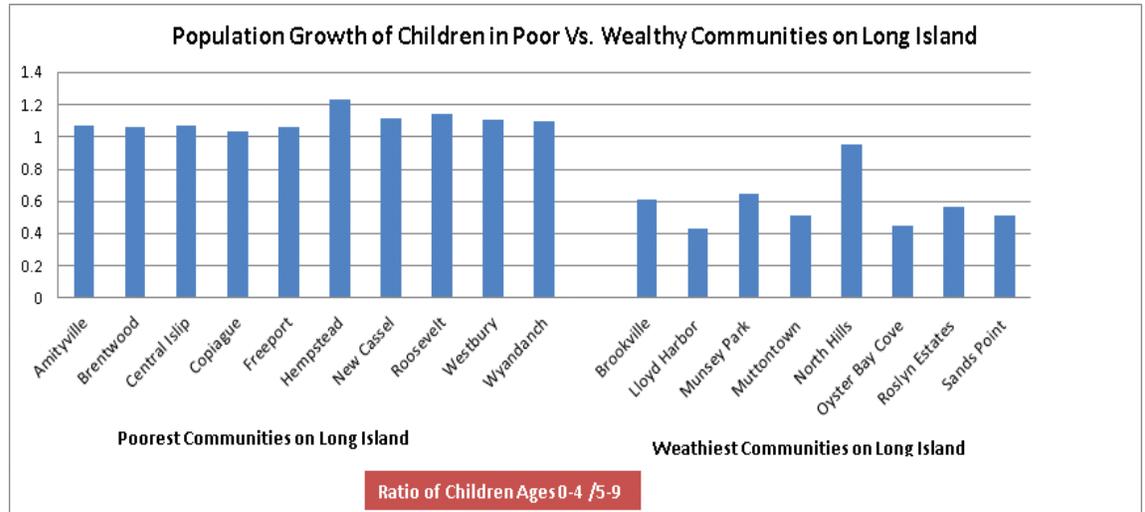
We conducted a more modest assessment again in the 2009-2010 school year. Between the two years of study:

- **More districts offered UPK.** The percent of school districts offering UPK moved from 45 to 50 percent (from 53 districts to 60 districts [out of 118 elementary school districts] including nine new districts and two districts that discontinued its programs).
- **More eligible children were served.** Between the two years of study, the percent of eligible children served moved from 61 percent to 78 percent and the number of districts serving all eligible children increased from 9 districts to 25 districts. We were surprised that about a quarter of the children not served in the 2007-2008 school year were from districts with pre-K. According to pre-K administrators, the causes were poor recruitment strategies, lack of transportation and the hours of the program which typically does not cover a parent's work day. While hours and transportation did not change, we believe that EYI helped with a recruitment protocol send to districts emphasizing the need to circulate flyers throughout the community in churches, nail salons, beauty shops and Laundromats in order to reach the neediest families. Too many of these families have not been included in the pool from which the class of UPK will be randomly selected.



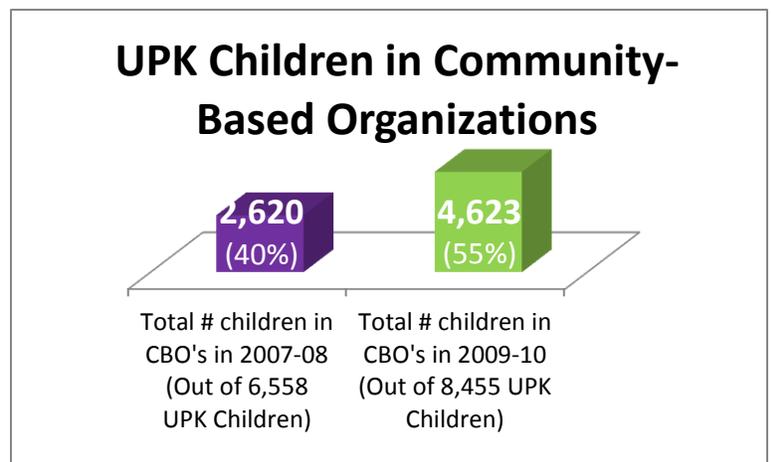
- **High number of children on waiting lists**, particularly in high-needs districts. The overall child population on Long Island is falling, with 5 percent fewer Nassau children and 3.2 percent fewer Suffolk children enrolled in school. These averages, however, mask serious disparities among Long Island's population and create new challenges for Long Island. Shown below is the ratio of children 0-4 years old to children 5-9 years old in ten of the poorest communities and eight of the wealthiest communities

on Long Island, based on U.S. Census data 2000 and 2010. A ratio over 1.0 means the number of children is growing, while a ratio below 1.0 means the number of



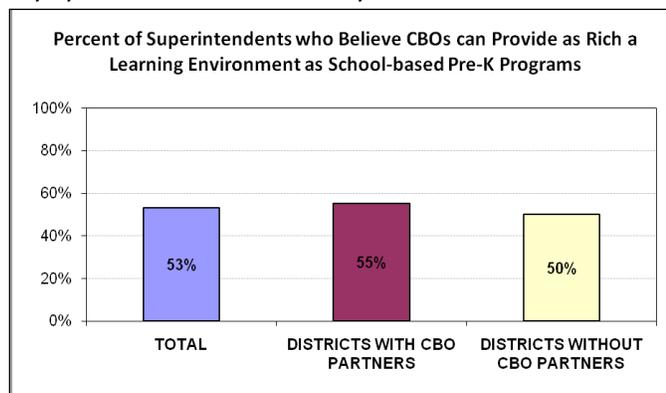
children is shrinking. As you can see, the child population is growing in all of the high-needs communities, and shrinking in all of the wealthy communities, which already have a much smaller populations of children.

- **More children in CBOs.** Following the state pattern, there were 1,897 more children served in UPK programs in 2009-10 than in 2007-08, with 82 percent of the increase occurring in CBO-run UPK programs. This is important to recognize because of the importance of aligning preschools and K-3 in order to get more lasting gains for the child. This requires intentional, specialized and vigilant efforts to align curriculum, professional development, transition practices and parent engagement.



- **Fewer full-day programs.** The tide is drifting toward part-time UPK programs rather than full-day, with a 13 percent increase in part-day programs on Long Island between the two years under study. The research is clear about the advantages of full-day programs, particularly for the most vulnerable children.

- Uneven program quality.** Many programs, both school-run and CBO-run, are operating effectively. Some pre-K programs have developed innovative models in areas of professional development, mentoring and parent involvement. But a great many others have been found to offer programs of questionable quality. Of greatest importance is the selection of evidenced-based curricula. Too many districts turn to curricula designed by textbook manufacturers that are inconsistent with effective practice identified by research. Some states have given districts a list of acceptable curricula choices.
- Lack of social service support.** Research has demonstrated that child and family support services (such as parent involvement and home visits) are essential for pre-K programs to be effective. However, few districts currently provide these supports, due to a lack of both financial resources and institutional know-how. In one-fourth of school districts on Long Island, social workers and psychologists who work with kindergartners are off limits to children in pre-K. And in some cases, social services that are available to children in school-run pre-K programs are not extended to children in programs run by CBOs, even when both programs operate in the very same school buildings.
- Inadequate assessment.** Appropriate, valid and standardized assessment is essential both for diagnosing children’s needs and evaluating program effectiveness. Currently each district chooses its own assessments, many of which have not been validated by research.
- Lack of respect for community services.** After decades of trying to create a robust system of early childhood education, we know that services must be comprehensive and integrated, involving both the whole child and the entire community. Most importantly, pre-K must be recognized as one component of a larger early childhood delivery system that includes many different forms of care and education. Yet, when asked whether they think a child care program in the community can provide as rich a learning environment for children as the school-based pre-K does, almost half of superintendents believe CBOs provide pre-K services that are inferior to those provided by the district. They view these programs as “babysitting,” and not educational. Even districts that have partnered with CBOs and rank them a “9” on a 10-point scale of satisfaction are only slightly more likely to believe in CBO capabilities than those districts that do not partner with a CBO. This negative view of community-based early childhood programs has allowed pre-K programs to emerge across Long Island without benefiting from 40 years of research on early childhood curricula and practice.



- **Transition to Kindergarten.** One of the most important ways a school district can help children prepare for Kindergarten is to cooperate with community-based programs and help orient children, explain the school system to parents and familiarize both children and their families with the registration process, the school, teachers and transportation system. The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) points out that the transition involves not only how children adjust to Kindergarten, but also how families and schools interact and cooperate. Research shows that children who experience continuity as they enter the formal world of elementary school are more likely to be successful in school.¹ Early school adjustment has been shown to have a long-term impact on children’s later school success. Furthermore, the transition to kindergarten is an ideal time to increase parent engagement.

What we have witnessed at registration in several districts on Long Island shows a complete lack of understanding about the importance of this transition. Kindergarten expectations have not been communicated to parents or early childhood programs and several districts do not have any orientation for them. Most troublesome is that the process of registration involves considerable paperwork that can delay school entry. For parents who have limited or no education or English, the process is daunting. We found districts where over 50 percent of the students speak a language other than English, and few administrative staff available to help translate during registration. This process requires parents to make multiple trips to the school without guidance and it often results in delayed entry to Kindergarten. We have seen children in several districts who are already less prepared than their peers, not starting school until a month or more after school begins. Some of this problem is mired in the problem of limited affordable housing on Long Island. Multiple families now occupy what were once single-family homes and have difficulty substantiating their residence. In addition, we find that pediatricians are not conducting routine school screenings, which also delays the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a Ready for Kindergarten Innovation Fund to make new investments in pre-K services, with first priority for high-needs districts and the funding and flexibility to create a mix of part- and full-day options. Adequate funding should be provided so that districts can use state pre-K aid to pay for full-day options in community and school settings. Research shows that full-day options are more educationally beneficial, especially for at-risk students. In addition, studies show that many working families cannot take advantage of existing half-day programs due to challenges in parents’ work schedules and transportation barriers. It is also hoped that this fund could also be used to invest in pilot projects and replication efforts for pilots that have proved effective at the local level, e.g. transition to Kindergarten initiatives.

Take pre-K out of the current cap on school aid to ensure school districts can continue to expand access to move toward reaching the State’s established goal of access for all. Limits on pre-K funding have stalled enrollment and the inclusion of pre-K in the state aid cap in 2011 created a new barrier to expansion by placing funding for pre-K in direct competition with K and

¹ Glicksman & Hills, 1981; Lombardi, 1992; Pianta & Cox, 1999

K-12. Pre-K aid had previously been kept separate from K-12 aid, to enable districts to keep building out the service.

Re-establish community advisory groups. This involvement from the community can help ensure the mix of full- and half-day options to meet the needs of children and families. It can also identify community partners who can help provide social services and meet the needs of English Language Learners.

Protect and promote full-day Kindergarten services. With the new state aid cap, as well as a cap on property tax revenues, full-day Kindergarten is now at risk in many districts. A few districts serving many high needs children have already cut Kindergarten services to half-day. The Commission needs to create incentives to protect and promote full-day Kindergarten.

Conduct a cost-of-care analysis of pre-K. Most superintendents on Long Island do not believe the per-child allocation for pre-K is sufficient to provide a quality program. School districts typically give CBOs that operate UPK even less than the State allocates. There should be a statewide assessment of actual costs and pre-K students should be included in transportation aid formulas.

Offer technical assistance and professional development to strengthen partnerships between public schools and community programs and leverage existing resources. Most communities have only scratched the surface of collaboration, while others have relied on local foundations to build the skills and relationships to foster successful pre-K programming and to ensure local communities make the most of existing resources and capacity. A recent Task Force on Early Childhood Education of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) brought together many perspectives to advise principals on high-leverage strategies to improve and align early childhood education with K-3 and help position principals in the Administration's push for an evidence-based system of professional development. In conjunction with the New York State Department of Education, BOCES, and Alliance for Childhood, EYI is piloting a Pre-K Leadership Project in four school districts, relying on principals to guide classroom changes needed to meet Pre-K Learning Standards aligned with the Common Core Standards. We will also be hosting quarterly meetings of pre-K administrators to create a learning community through which to share best practice.

Implementation of QualitystarsNY

More than half of U.S. states have created a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and the rest of the states are in the process of developing one. It is one of the fastest growing policy initiatives in the field of early childhood and one that has the most promise in creating systemic change. New York did not receive an Early Learning Challenge grant primarily because it did not have a QRIS in place. The primary benefits of QRIS that states report are:

- **Improved school readiness by supporting quality improvements in all forms of early childhood education.** Longitudinal research on the use of early childhood education found that only when the programs were of high quality did the savings accrue from less grade repetition, special education, teenage pregnancy and juvenile crime and higher graduation rates. Studies show children who experienced quality preschool are 40 percent less likely to need costly remedial services during their K-12 years, saving public schools an average of \$2,500 to \$9,500 per child.
- **A more efficient and effective system** by facilitating collaboration among multiple state agencies, reducing duplication and costs and increasing consumer ease in accessing services and evaluating their quality.
- **A way to measure the progress** of state investments in creating a system of high quality early childhood programs.

I want to explain why this system makes so much sense at the local level. I served as the first co-chair of New York's efforts to create a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) in 2005. Over 100 experts and researchers came together to learn from other states and develop a set of principles to guide the development of a QRIS in NYS. I came to this strategy based on surveys and focus groups I conducted on LI where I learned how little information providers had about the latest research and best practice. When consulting the agencies that support providers, there had been considerable efforts to share this information with providers, but with little saturation. Moreover, the majority of programs believed that if they met licensing standards, they were offering quality. Gwen Morgan, a leading national authority on regulatory issues in child care, states that "licensing is not a definition of quality, it is a threshold defined by the state to reduce the risk of harm." If child care programs think that licensing is all that is needed to achieve quality, they will not strive to improve. A quality rating and improvement system can provide the pathway to quality.

QualitystarsNY is New York's proposed rating and improvement system. It has been in the design phase for the past seven years. It is now the centerpiece of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Committee with numerous experts from state government, community groups and higher education working together to design the most innovative QRIS in the nation. We have field tested our proposed system, unlike other states, and have learned a great deal that will assure a smooth implementation. We are waiting for a commitment from the state to begin statewide implementation. This system will mean that pre-K programs as well as child care and Head Start programs will have ongoing technical and financial support for their continuous improvement and higher quality that can yield more positive outcomes for children.

RECOMMENDATION

I urge the Education Reform Commission to promote an investment of \$20 million for Year 1 implementation of QUALITYstarsNY that will cover quality assessments, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial incentives, public awareness, system evaluation and data system development. Full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY across the State will require a \$100 M investment.

Continuation of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC)

One of the most effective ways to assure that our education system continues to benefit from the services provided by other government agencies is to recommend that the Early Childhood Advisory Committee continue. As a member of that committee, I can attest to the multi-disciplinary focus of the strategies they are pursuing. There is a role for the education system in so many of the system improvements this group is exploring and the potential for considerable leverage in addressing a range of educational challenges.

RECOMMENDATION

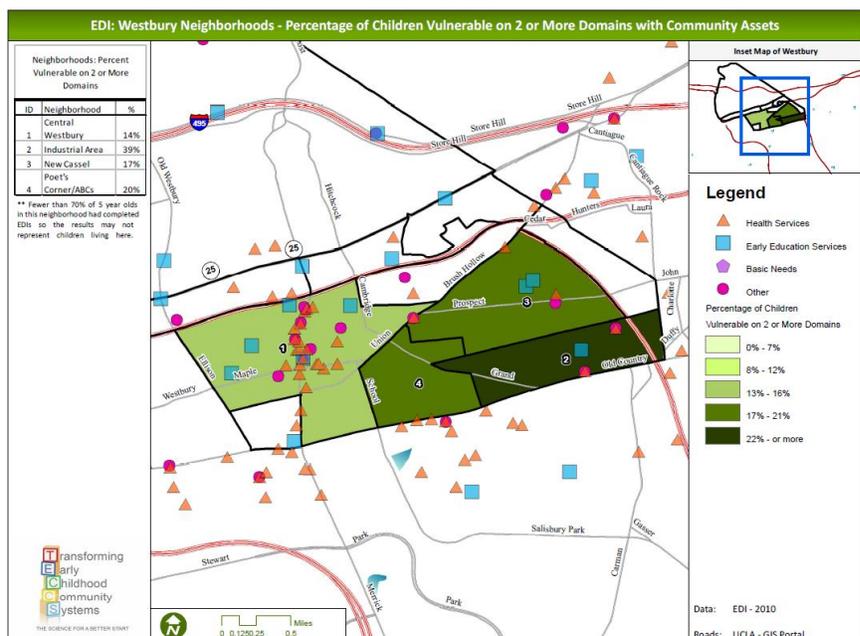
Support the continuation of the NYS Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC).

Use of the Early Development Instrument for a Global School Readiness Assessment Tool

EYI has been working in Westbury for the past three years on a project to improve school readiness. In 2010, EYI enabled Westbury to be one of 14 pilot sites in a national study of the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a school readiness tool that is currently used throughout Canada and Australia among other countries. United Way Worldwide and UCLA have brought the EDI to the U.S. and as of 2012, 30 communities across the country are using it as an effective community-building and school-readiness initiative.

EDI has three unique features that increase its utility: 1) The domains of child development incorporate the whole child, i.e. their health, social/emotional development, cognitive development, approaches to learning and communications; 2) Kindergarten teachers complete the EDI on-line for each child in their class based on observations during the first four to six months of Kindergarten, which avoids testing of young children; and 3) EDI data are not reported back by child or classroom, but rather, by neighborhood. This enables us to identify the specific part of town where children with specific vulnerabilities may live. We can target resources where they are most needed as a result.

Westbury Kindergarten teachers completed the EDI on all Kindergarten children in March 2010. We learned that: 57 percent of Kindergarten children in Westbury do not have the requisite skills for Kindergarten in the area of communications and general knowledge; 54 percent were vulnerable in the area of small and gross motor activities; and 28 percent of children have attention and impulse control



problems. As the map shows, the darker the area, the more children are vulnerable in various domains of school readiness. The geometric shapes indicate the location of family resources. The map clearly demonstrates that services are least available to the most vulnerable children. The EDI enables us to target resources most effectually. Teachers completed the second round of the EDI in March 2012 and the results will be returned from UCLA in the fall of 2012.

Working with our Westbury Leadership Team that involves over 30 community agencies, we have implemented a variety of responses to the EDI data. We have been astounded to see how effective the data are in galvanizing the community to come together to address vulnerabilities for “their children.” In addition, we use Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a strategy for providing the most dignified way to leverage the skills of residents, the power of associations and the supportive function of institutions to build on existing assets and collectively improve outcomes. ABCD uses mobilization strategies such as mapping neighborhood assets with community residents to develop and implement neighborhood action plans and create leadership within neighborhoods and communities. It is from ABCD that we identified the members of our Leadership Team. We plan to follow the lead of other communities across the country that have used ABCD to create an after-school program with over 200 volunteers and less than \$10,000 a year in administrative fees. We are assembling a volunteer corps to read to preschoolers, to create bags of school supplies with small manipulatives in them, and to build an outdoor classroom in a neighborhood park, all in response to the EDI data.

RECOMMENDATION

I urge you to consider the Early Development Instrument as the Kindergarten assessment for New York. It is a relatively low-cost way to assess all domains of school readiness and engage the community in addressing vulnerabilities to close the achievement gap.

In Conclusion

There has been much debate about whether educational reform should consider factors outside of school, e.g. poverty, health, family engagement. If it doesn't, it relegates everything that happens in the first five years of life to be a non-school factor.

Some states have gotten it right. Hawaii has a P-20 system. The “P” does not stand for “pre-K.” It is for “pre-natal.” In Burke County, North Carolina, Superintendent David Burleson learned about brain research at a Governor's conference and developed “baby mapping.” Burleson compiled a mailing list from birth certificates in areas where children are likely to become his Kindergarten students. Letters were addressed to “The Class of 2030,” inviting them to the first meeting of the graduating class, which was a parent-child workshop at the school that continued during that first year. Burleson explained that his goal was to make sure all children came to his schools prepared to succeed and all parents prepared to engage.

The realization here is that no matter where these children are when they are four, they will be in Kindergarten the next year. Doesn't it behoove the school district to know about the existence of the

programs serving future Kindergartners? There are opportunities to raise all boats, as some districts have done by inviting CBOs running UPK to participate in professional development along with school-based UPK teachers. A handful of districts allow ALL early childhood programs to participate in the school-based training, regardless of whether or not they offer UPK. This is a budget-neutral fix to the system that will only occur if the education establishment acknowledges the integral role that early childhood plays in school success.

If the school acknowledges the role of factors that occur outside of school, it does not have to address them on their own. More than half of the UPK programs in New York are run by community-based organizations. Community schools invite pediatricians and dentists into the school to offer health support. Churches are providing family literacy during preschool parenting classes. That is why The Early Years is developing a suburban model of school readiness where the schools partner with the community to address non-school factors affecting school readiness from the time they are born.

Educational reform must embrace the notion that when children come to school prepared, everyone in the classroom benefits, which ultimately leads to a higher quality of life for all of us. And when our children have high quality early education, research shows they have higher reading and math scores, better school attendance rates, and higher graduation rates. If we think of school readiness as starting at birth, then educational reform must incorporate early childhood education and it must be open to the contributions of organizations outside the school.