

## ***Winning Beginning NY*** **Advancing High-Quality Early Care and Education**

Every child must have the same opportunity for high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent early care and education and parents must have access to programs that fit their schedules. In order to keep families in New York and to promote current and future workforce growth, the state must provide the supports they need to work and to raise healthy, well-adjusted children. Therefore, even in tight fiscal times, we must restore the child care subsidies that allow low-income families to access high-quality care and education for their children to the 2004 level, before budget cuts, and include a 3% cost of living increase for each of the four years in question.

In addition, New York State should take the following steps to ensure positive outcomes for all children.

### **New York State's Families Need:**

- High-quality early care and education programs (child care, Pre-K, and Head Start) that provide children with the foundation and skills they need to be successful in school and in life, and that allow parents to work knowing that their children are safe and learning

### **To Meet These Needs New York State Should:**

- Provide the state match for a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)—a system that focuses on quality improvement and that provides incentives to programs that move toward higher quality. This accountability strategy is supported by:
  - The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps)<sup>®</sup> scholarship program, which would increase the qualifications of early care and education (ECE) professionals
  - A loan forgiveness program for ECE professionals who pursue higher education and remain in the child care field
- Allow school districts to use Pre-K funds on full-day programs and other supports, including to support teacher credentialing
- Allow transportation aid reimbursement for Pre-K programs, as recommended by the Board of Regents
- Increase the investment in Infant Toddler Resource Centers so that they can provide training and technical assistance
- Increase parent access to child care by eliminating child support requirements and making co-payments consistent across counties

*Winning Beginning NY also supports home visiting and after-school initiatives.*

## **Background:**

### **Child Care Subsidy Funding**

Funding for child care subsidies has decreased from a high of \$929 million in FY2004-05 to this year's \$906 million. Although a report by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies cited the cost of child care in New York as among the highest in the nation, the state does not provide sufficient financial support to low-income parents, which impacts their ability to access high-quality child care.

The decline in funding for child care, combined with increasing market rates, means many fewer subsidies are available for families than there were four years ago. This puts both low-income working families and their children at-risk. Although the Social Services Law provides that those with incomes under 200% of the poverty level are eligible for child care subsidies, many social services districts use reduced eligibility levels because of inadequate funding. At least one county has determined that it cannot afford to open any new cases as a result of recent cuts to the subsidy program. Working families without subsidy assistance will have no choice but to put their children in unregulated programs. The market rate cost of a full-time slot in a day care center for a two year old is over \$200 per week in most counties. This means that the lack of a subsidy effectively forecloses access to regulated child care for low-income families since the gross weekly income of a family earning \$26,550 (150% of poverty for a family of three) is \$510 per week.

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

The state must create a QRIS—a strategy for a systemic approach to enhancing the quality of services in every early care and education setting, including Pre-K. We urge the state to invest a match that would support the first phase of field testing and help leverage private sector investments, and to pass legislation that would codify the program.

A QRIS establishes standards of program excellence by providing a research-based tool for assessing the quality of early childhood programs. It creates a comprehensive strategy for aligning the quality of programs with the investment of public resources. A QRIS provides a roadmap for provider improvement and an accountability measure for progress and funding. It simultaneously supports parents in becoming better educated consumers of early childhood services by providing them with new tools and information. The essential elements to a QRIS are technical assistance and funding targeted to both specific quality improvement and to incentive grants to support programs in meeting higher quality standards.

The state must provide supports to the early care and education workforce and make certain that they are qualified and able to care for, nurture, and teach our youngest learners. We are calling for a two part effort.

### **T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) ®**

New York State should become one of over 20 states offering the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program. T.E.A.C.H. links investments in education to staff retention and improved outcomes for children. It provides early care and education professionals seeking to

complete licensing and credentialing requirements an avenue to do so through a partnership between the early childhood program and the staff. By promoting higher education, the program is helping to establish a well-qualified, fairly-compensated and stable workforce.

New York State previously piloted a privately-funded T.E.A.C.H. initiative and the results document the value of this program, including a substantial increase in credit hours of training, increased compensation, and reduced turnover.

### **Loan Forgiveness**

Establish a loan forgiveness program to broaden the reach of support for staff seeking higher education. This program like many others New York provides to other professionals, would link higher education with a commitment to remain in the field providing the incentive of loan forgiveness.

### **Universal Pre-K**

Pre-K will not be truly universal in New York State until it is available to all children. Research shows that many school districts did not use their entire funding appropriation for FY2007-08 because of restrictions on how that funding could be used. The state should allow districts to use funding on full-day programs, which are proven to result in better outcomes for children; transportation to and from those programs; and other supports that would increase access to working parents.

A universal Pre-K program is not beneficial to the children it serves if it is not a high-quality program. The state should also allow districts to use Pre-K funding to support the credentialing of teachers.

### **Infant/Toddler Resource Centers**

The seven Infant Toddler Resource Centers established through Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies provide the technical assistance and professional development opportunities for programs and providers serving children under age three. These Centers have leveraged local resources and significantly expanded access to technical assistance with documented improvement in quality of services. However, the Centers have not had an increase in funding in five years and have never had access to the full appropriation allotted by the state. A modest investment of \$1 million will allow each of the seven centers to expand the capacity of their professional staff to offer training and technical assistance.

### **Parent Access**

#### **Child Support**

Custodial parents should be encouraged to seek support orders from non-contributing parents, and it is appropriate that local districts educate single parents about the benefits of establishing paternity and obtaining child support. However, there are often reasons that vulnerable, low-income families do not seek child support.

The current requirement that all applicants and recipients of child care subsidies seek a child support order or lose eligibility for child care assistance should be reconsidered. While we believe that custodial parents should be encouraged to seek support orders from non-contributing parents, there are often reasons why vulnerable, low-income families do not seek such support. Sometimes a fragile relationship exists with the non-custodial parent that will quickly be severed when a court order is sought. In other instances, not seeking a court order has been important for the safety of the custodial parent, as in cases where abuse has occurred in the past, but not recently enough to establish “good cause” for non-compliance.

In addition, low-income parents often have jobs that they cannot easily leave and the amount of time required to seek a court order is substantial for them – three to four days. Further, in instances when it is already known that the non-custodial parent is unable to pay because (s)he is incarcerated, disabled or on Supplemental Security Income, seeking such an order not only threatens the custodial parent’s job security but wastes valuable family court time.

### **Co-payments**

New York is one of only five states that allow each county to determine its own parent fee scale, with the result that similarly situated families pay dramatically different fees for child care, depending solely upon the county in which they reside. Some families may only pay 10% of their marginal income for child care, while other families have to pay 35% of their marginal income. Neither the statute nor the regulations provide any uniform criteria to guide the establishment of a co-payment multiplier. New York State should eliminate this inequity for low-income families by imposing a uniform, reasonable co-payment percentage of marginal income over poverty, while also capping parental co-payments for child care across the state at 10% of annual gross family income. Further, no family under the poverty level should be required make any payments.