Capital District Public Hearing
for New York Education Reform Commission

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July 10, 2012
My name is Marsha Basloe and I am submitting comment on behalf of the Early Care & Learning Council, where I am the Executive Director. The Early Care and Learning Council is also a co-convener of Winning Beginning NY, the state’s early care and learning coalition. The Early Care & Learning Council is a statewide, not-for-profit organization, whose mission is to promote excellence in early care and education with equal access for all families. We do this primarily through the support of, and in partnership with, a strong network of community-based organizations that provide Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services.

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity to ensure a strong, long-term educational system. I would like to focus my remarks on the Student Achievement and Family Engagement work group. I am passionate about working with New York State to provide our youngest children high quality early learning experiences and know that investing in quality efforts will impact both student achievement and family engagement.

Early care and learning is both an infrastructure support for children, for families and for communities, and an avenue for building a strong New York State future! Parents need affordable high quality services that support their ability to work productively. Children need high quality early childhood programs that provide developmentally appropriate early learning experiences with a workforce that is both educated and appropriately compensated. And, communities need high quality services to attract and support businesses, vital to our economic vitality.

Research tells us that the foundation for success in school and in life is developed well before a child enters kindergarten. In fact, a child’s earliest experiences are responsible for wiring the brain for future use. Yet, investments in child care have been focused on access only. It is essential that we invest in access to quality. Long term educational achievement is uniformly linked to participation in high quality early care and education.

With lackluster test scores, a high dropout rate, and low GED pass rates, we must invest earlier in our students. In fact, it is essential that New York invest in the early years before the children ever set foot in a school!

A commitment to building a quality early childhood helps to build a better economic future. We know that 75% of brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality and social skills develop before age five. And research from institutions such as Harvard University, the National Economic and Law Center, and Committee for Economic Development all agree that quality early care and learning is a proven strategy that closes the preparation gap for academic achievement and is the foundation to long-term success by way of higher graduation rates and post-secondary education, better paying jobs and more productive adults.

With brain architecture research so compelling, developing our future workforce begins early. Yet, significant public investment doesn’t begin until a child is in school - after important social and emotional skills have already formed. The foundational skills required to grow a team-capable, job-ready workforce are built in the earliest years of life - between birth and age 5.
They are the skills that allow children to succeed and flourish in our public education system. Without these skills, children are left behind, never catching up.

New York State is slowly implementing its quality rating and improvement system, QUALITYstarsNY with $4 million dollars over three years from Race to the Top funding. This is a very important investment, but it will not reach the number of children we as a State must reach to ensure future educational success. The quality rating and improvement system is designed to acknowledge programs that demonstrate quality above and beyond meeting New York State's strong regulatory standards and develop a plan for improvement for all participating programs to reach the highest standards. This comprehensive project will provide important support for the 1.5 million New Yorkers under age six to have the opportunity to experience a high-quality early learning experience. All parents want the best for their children. QUALITYstarsNY will be a road map for parents as they choose early learning programs for their children.

Thirty other states currently have a quality rating and improvement system. Last year, as our state applied for an Early Learning Challenge Grant from the federal government’s Race to the Top program, we found ourselves at a competitive disadvantage due to our lack of a fully implemented quality rating and improvement system. QUALITYstarsNY was piloted in 13 communities in over 200 programs, and now is slowly being expanded within those areas and to areas with Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) School Districts. A $20 million is needed to implement a five year roll out of this program statewide in order to reach the next generation of young children entering our public education system. This would be an investment in quality assessment, monitoring and administration, professional development, technical assistance, financial support, public awareness, system evaluation and data system development. Full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY will require a $100 million investment to be phased in over five years. The results of a high quality system would allow the investment in public education to be fully leveraged.

According to a recent report by the Committee for Economic Development, “investing in early learning and development is the best foundation for human capital….Savings on future expenditures, better education and earnings outcomes, and increased tax revenue are part of the future returns on investment in early learning and development.”

**Stronger Families**- Programs and services that support and engage families as partners in their children’s early learning and development – such as home visiting for at-risk parents or Early Head Start for poor infants, toddlers and their families – can promote positive parenting and set the stage for later parent involvement in schooling.1

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There must also be support for the early childhood professionals that teach our state’s children. This includes aligning professional development services with State initiatives designed to improve knowledge, competencies and dispositions; ensuring professionals have adequate supports including scholarships and wage supplements. A quality system is one that includes incentives that will result in a highly educated workforce. Ensuring that there are qualified professionals teaching the children of New York State from their youngest years will increase student achievement throughout their academic careers.

Putting a priority on young children means putting a priority on where children spend their time, which is a child care setting for 1.2 million young children every day. Quality child care builds a strong foundation for children’s healthy development. I hope you will recommend that New York State invest in QUALITYstarsNY and other early childhood programs aimed at birth to five years of age that provide support for the early learning years. It will make a difference.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit this testimony. The Early Care & Learning Council looks forward to working with you to address these challenges.