Executive Agenda 2014

Winning Beginning NY promotes access to high quality early learning and care, from the prenatal period to school-age designed to improve outcomes for children and support the needs of working families. We support investments and policies that move the state toward a comprehensive early learning system that promotes children’s healthy social, emotional, cognitive and physical development known to promote success in school and later life.

Early Care and Learning

- Invest $225 million in full-day, high-quality Pre-K in 2014, as the first-year investment in an eight-year plan to make Pre-K truly universal in New York State. The investment should be incorporated into the state’s education finance system.

- Invest $82 million in child care funding to restore child care services for over 13,000 children across the state. (FY 2010-11 allocation).

- Implement QUALITYstarsNY, as the state’s common, tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System with a $10 million commitment in state funding.

Home Visiting

- Restore $26.8 million in funding for Healthy Families New York (HFNY), an increase of $3.5 million.

- Provide $5 million in funding to help support the sustainability of Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), an increase of $3 million from last year.

Early Intervention

- Restore the Early Intervention Program to $230 million (FY 2010-11 allocation)

- Require private health insurance companies to reimburse Early Intervention services to covered children without restricting evaluations and services to providers who belong to a child’s health insurance network and without allowing insurance companies to participate in determining a child’s EI services.

Afterschool

- Increase Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention to $30.2 million (FY 2007-08 allocation).

- Increase Advantage After-School funding to $28 million (FY 2009-10 allocation).

- Invest $1 million in an Expanded Learning Opportunities Database.
Early Care and Learning

Winning Beginning NY believes that New York State cannot continue to choose between access and quality early learning programs. Instead, we must increase access to high-quality early care and learning programs, by expanding prekindergarten, increasing child care funding and making additional investments in a state quality rating and improvement system.

Full-Day Pre-K

Invest $225 million in full-day, high-quality Pre-K in 2014, as the first-year investment in an eight-year plan to make Prekindergarten truly universal in New York State.

Winning Beginning NY endorses the detailed, eight-year roadmap, Making Prekindergarten Truly Universal in New York State, put forward by the Campaign for Educational Equity and the Center for Children’s Initiatives and supported by the statewide Ready for Kindergarten Campaign. This proposal has been broadly vetted by education and early childhood experts, advocates and educators. ¹

This plan builds on the significant current investment, experience, and expertise gained in the state’s current Universal Prekindergarten program, which now serves over 100,000 four-year-olds each year. It also expands on the state’s new competitive grant program, which adds full-day pre-K services for several thousand more children. Yet the plan recognizes the urgent need to build on this foundation. Too many children across the state still do not have access to pre-K. Nearly 40% of the state’s school districts are not eligible to apply for state pre-K funding. Nearly 30,000 high-need four-year-olds are not served. And among those enrolled, 75% are in half-day programs, which research shows to be insufficient to meet the needs of children and their families.

The eight-year phase-in will anchor Pre-K funding in the state’s k-12 finance system and make district allocations equitable, adequate, stable and transparent. The plan starts by expanding access for all four-year-olds in high need districts, making the service universal by year four. In the next four years, the state would provide voluntary access to three-year-olds, starting with the high-need, low-wealth districts first in year 6.

The investment will be made in addition to K-12 and the state will continue to fully-fund Pre-K program in high need districts until state aid for K-12 funding is brought up to constitutionally adequate levels. During the phase-in, districts will maintain their current UPK funding levels and during the initial phase-in the state will fully fund the Pre-K program for high need districts.

Funding levels must encompass all necessary costs for high-quality, comprehensive services, including qualified teachers who are appropriately compensated.

This plan assumes the continuation of the requirement that services be offered in both public schools and early childhood programs in the community, with the goal of leveraging existing public investments, capacity and resources in early education to create a full range of options to help meet the needs of working families for extended hours of service.

This plan also assumes that the state make essential investments in system supports and infrastructure, which are available to other grades funded in public education. That includes critical elements such as workforce development, transportation aid and facilities.

High Quality Child Care

*Invest $82 million in child care funding to restore child care services for more than 13,000 children across the state. (FY 2010-11 allocation)*

This investment would restore the spending level for child care assistance in New York State to 2010-11 levels of $999 million.

*The situation is urgent: Social Service Districts across the state ran out of funding months before year-end. As a result, many eligible children in districts across the State are going un-served.*

Without assistance in paying for child care, low wage workers cannot make ends meet. The Self-Sufficiency Standard measures the wage that a working family needs to earn in order to meet basic needs, including child care.

New York State law provides that families are eligible for (but not guaranteed) child care assistance if their income is under 200% of the federal poverty level ($38,180 for a family of 3). Because of funding shortfalls, more than 1/3 of counties have reduced their eligibility levels below that amount. In fact, many are unable to approve any new families well before the end of the fiscal year.

We must provide these essential early learning services to our children, while supporting their working parents. This includes thousands of low-income working parents across the state, in all counties, as well as student parents on CUNY and SUNY campuses, and those participating in facilitated enrollment program

In addition, the restoration would support the important work of the state’s 35 child care resource and referral agencies, which provide critical family supports to currently underserved parents across New York State. These agencies lost $1.1 million in recent years, making it challenging for them to meet their mission. Each agency serves as a critical source of information for parents, policymakers and programs in local counties, providing essential information on local services, strategies for paying for child care and helping child care programs meet quality benchmarks.

This investment more than pays for itself. High-quality early care and learning programs are a critical component of New York’s economic growth. Every $1 spent in the early learning sector generates $1.86 in revenue that stays in the community. This is more than investments in manufacturing, retail, or construction.

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2 As a result of Federal Welfare Reform, from 1995 to 2011, the number of persons on Temporary Assistance plummeted by 2/3—from 1.5 million recipients to 565,224. More than 307,500 of those recipients are children. This precipitous decline is the result of low-income parents leaving the welfare rolls to work at low wage jobs instead of staying home with their children.


4 For example, Suffolk County has lowered eligibility to 100% of poverty; Niagara: 120%; Dutchess and Schenectady: 125%; Oneida, Ontario: 150%; Cayuga and Rensselaer: 160%; Monroe: 165%; Albany, Orange: 175%; Chemung is only opening new cases for mandated categories (TANF related and Transitional Child Care). New York City has not formally changed its guidelines, but as of April 2012, it was serving only very low income families: 64.1% of households receiving child care (non-TANF) were below 100% of the federal poverty line; 81.8% were under 135% of the federal poverty line; 92.2% were under 175% of the federal poverty line.
Access to high quality early education and child care programs is vital, especially when New York is investing strongly in education reform, because years of research have shown that these programs:

- improve social and self-management skills,
- lay the foundation for literacy and learning, and
- increase academic outcomes and graduation rates for many children.

Research shows that not all programs are yet of high-quality, however. Many programs lack the critical resources, supports and infrastructure to implement best practices and recruit and retain a highly-qualified workforce. That is why Winning Beginning NY also urges the state to invest additional dollars to advance and fully implement a statewide quality rating and improvement system.

➤ QUALITYstarsNY

Implement QUALITYstarsNY as the state’s common, statewide, tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System with a $10 million commitment in state funding.

New York State has applied for an Early Learning Challenge Grant from the Federal government. With priority in that grant for the refinement and expansion of a statewide quality rating and improvement system,

New York must invest $10 million to show the state's commitment, using the following strategies to support the following:

- Expand QUALITYstarsNY in areas of high-need first,
- Allow the 35 Child Care Resource and Referral’s (CCR&R) across the state to be selected to coordinate QUALITYstarsNY as regional hubs for the 10 Economic Development Regions,
- Actively communicate the benefits of participating in QUALITYstarsNY through orientation and readiness training across the state,
- Propose tax incentives for parents who choose to use a high-quality ELDP for their children and tax rebates for the Early Learning Program Development that achieve the highest levels of quality, and
- Communicate and share data amongst all systems.

Home Visiting

Restore $26.8 million in funding for Healthy Families New York (HFNY), an increase of $3.5 million From last year. This would return funding to the level provided in 2006-07 and 2007-08 budgets, prior to 2008 deficit reduction cuts, and restore services to approximately 600 at-risk families in high need communities. It also assures the Maintenance of Effort required for federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting funding.

Provide $5 million in funding to help support the sustainability of Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), an increase of $3 million from last year. This is especially critical now to offset any additional reduction in capacity and maintain programs at current levels until the global waiver is approved by CMS and NFP can be more robustly covered under Medicaid.
Early Intervention Program (EI)

Restore the EI Program to the FY 2010-11 funding level of $230 million and require private health insurance companies to reimburse for EI services to covered children without restricting evaluations and services to providers who belong to a child’s health insurance network and without allowing insurance companies to participate in determining a child’s EI services.

The EI Program provides evaluations and services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. Recognizing the substantial brain development and plasticity during a child’s first three years of life, the purpose of EI is to detect and address developmental delays as early as possible. EI services help young children who are behind catch up and prepare for kindergarten, reducing later special education and rehabilitation costs and maximizing the potential for individuals with disabilities to live independently and be productive citizens.

Despite the cost-effectiveness of this program, state funding for EI decreased by one-third from FY 2010-2011 ($230M) to FY 2013-2014 ($151M). This cut included a significant reduction in the reimbursement rate for EI services. Additional legislative changes to the reimbursement system have resulted in providers going months without receiving payment this year as they wait for insurance companies to make decisions about whether or not to issue payment. As a result, EI provider agencies have shut their doors and experienced service providers have stopped taking EI referrals. This loss of providers is making it increasingly difficult for young children with delays or disabilities to access the services they need in a timely manner, especially in certain rural and low-income neighborhoods that already had shortages of providers.

A restoration of $79 million to return to the FY 2010-2011 funding level would allow EI to restore service reimbursement rates so that the program can retain experienced professionals, recruit and train new professionals, and make other quality improvements.

One strategy for helping to fund EI is to maximize reimbursement from health insurance. While EI has been successful in obtaining reimbursement for EI services from the Medicaid program, private insurance companies have refused to pay their fair share, rejecting claims for EI services for a variety of reasons, such as claiming that they are not “medical necessities.”

Last year’s Executive Budget proposed a significant restructuring of the EI program that would have restricted a child’s access to EI evaluators and providers based on the child’s health insurance coverage. While we applaud the goal of having health insurance companies contribute to the cost of EI services, the role of health insurance companies must be limited to paying for services available through health insurance. Health insurance companies should not be allowed to play a role in determining a child’s services or in restricting access to evaluators and providers. Indeed, if health insurance coverage were sufficient to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities, we would not need EI. The state has recently implemented a central fiscal agent to collect health insurance reimbursement. The state should give the fiscal agent time to collect insurance reimbursement and analyze results. Therefore, this year is not the time to make further structural changes that could restrict children’s access to effective EI services.
Afterschool

Increase Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention to $30.2 million (FY 2007-08 allocation).
Increase Advantage After-School funding to $28 million (FY 2009-10 allocation).
Invest $1 million in an Expanded Learning Opportunities Database.

As New York seeks to strengthen its economy, afterschool and summer programs are part of the solution. These programs help parents keep working by providing safe, affordable opportunities for their children to continue learning through the end of the work day. They provide fulfilling jobs for local community members, including teens getting their first employment experiences. And they help develop New York’s future workforce, as participation in high quality programs builds academic and social skills, and increases the chances that students will graduate from high school.

Invest $1 million in an Expanded Learning Opportunities Database. Such a data system would demonstrate the impact of afterschool and summer programs on the social-emotional and academic growth of New York’s children, simplify programs’ data collection efforts, help parents locate programs, and promote improvements in program quality.

In addition to the specific budget items mentioned above, Winning Beginning NY supports the New York After-School Network’s overall budget and policy agenda for 2014, including:

Continue the Community Schools and Expanded Learning Time Initiatives. Additional funding should be allocated to give more communities the opportunity to develop high-quality school-community partnerships that offer innovative approaches to engaging students with school and providing additional time and/or supports for learning. Priority should be given to applicants with community partners, and technical assistance funds should be made available.

Increase Summer Youth Employment to $35 million. SYEP dollars are a double investment in youth by the state—many SYEP participants serve as aides to summer programs for younger children, allowing programs to serve more children while supporting older youth in their transition to the workforce. Funding for SYEP needs to increase to reflect the rising minimum wage.

Eliminate the SCR Clearance Fee. In the FY 2010-11 Budget, a $25 fee was added for each employee check conducted through the Statewide Central Registry for records of child abuse and maltreatment. While this fee may seem small, it adds up quickly for providers, as afterschool programs maintain low staff to student ratios and frequently hire new staff to provide specific enrichment activities.