

Testimony

New York State Senate Hearing:

Challenges Facing the Childcare Community in New York State

New York State Senate

Children and Families

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Good morning Senator Savino, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Children and Families. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the challenges facing the New York State Childcare Community in 2012. My name is Randi Herman, and I am First Vice President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). CSA is the collective bargaining unit for 357 Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Day Care Centers and 6,100 Principals, Assistant Principals, Supervisors and Education Administrators who work in the New York City public schools.

CSA 's Day Care Directors and Assistant Directors are responsible for the operation of 278 city-funded Day Care Centers, serving more than 100,000 children in the City. The NYC Administration for Children Services (ACS) oversees the city's child care program and provides eligible families with free or subsidized child care. ACS has a contractual relationship with the not for profit agencies that operate the day care centers. The employees work for the sponsoring boards of the centers and are not considered city employees. The directors and assistant directors are not employees of the New York City Department of Education, nor are they members of the teaching or support staff. The Department of Health is the licensing agent for the centers and, with ACS provides joint oversight.

Over the years, NYC ACS has struggled with funding the child care program as assistance from the federal government has decreased. Most recently upon the painful loss of funding as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act came to an end. In response to limited funding and the need to close budget deficits in the child care program, NYC ACS has implemented a number of administrative changes, many of which have resulted in collateral damage as the services that families depend upon have been reduced or eliminated. Some of those changes have been significantly detrimental to the provision of these services, reducing the neediest population's access to quality early childhood education. These included the closure of day care centers, the elimination of subsidized slots and higher copayment fees for low income families eligible for subsidized care. According to the New York City Independent Budget Office, 14,000 fewer children were served in 2010 than in 2006. The City of New York provided child care for about 102,000 children last year, down from 104,000 in 2009. This is a 12.1 percent reduction from the peak of 116,000 children in 2006.

Low-income working families depend on subsidies to offset the cost of child care. Without assistance many families forego essentials so that they can pay for quality child care - enabling them to keep their jobs – or turn to unregulated sources for child care. In 2010, the University of Washington prepared a report for the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement; *The Self Sufficiency Study for New York City in 2010 Report* found that for families with young children, housing and child care comprise 50% of the families' budget. In this report, a "self sufficiency standard" was defined as the amount of income necessary to meet the basic needs of various family types in each borough of New York City using six costs categories: housing, transportation, food, child care, health care and miscellaneous.

Their standards assumed the full costs of each need, without help from public subsidies (e.g., public housing, Medicaid, or child care assistance) or private/informal assistance (e.g., unpaid babysitting by a relative or friend, food from food banks, or shared housing). Child care expenses are among the highest

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costs for a low-income family. In a family with one adult and one preschooler, child care comprised 23% of the monthly costs, a close second to housing which was 28%. However, in a family with one adult, one preschooler and one school age child, child care alone comprises 28% of the monthly costs, exceeding housing at 22%.

This report gives us tremendous insight into the struggles confronted by low-income families, and the sacrifices they must make on a daily basis in the absence of child care subsidies. As I previously mentioned, in an effort to maintain their employment many families turn to unlicensed providers for child care. Not only are there health and safety concerns with children placed in unregulated settings, but also educational concerns that have a direct relationship to school readiness and endanger their preparedness to attend school. Research has proven again and again, that children with access to high-quality early education have major advantages over those who do not. Access to quality early childhood education also provides an opportunity for the identification of developmental delays and the opportunity to practice appropriate social interactions with peers and adults. Identification and treatment of developmental delays as early as possible helps to ensure that issues can be addressed before a child enters school. In many instances, placement in special education settings can be avoided altogether if developmental delays are identified and addressed early in a child's life. Note that early intervention is paid for by New York State and is cost effective at an early age. The older the child when remediation begins, the bigger the achievement gap and the longer it takes to close it.

State Funding

While some areas of the state did not fare well in the enacted state budget for state fiscal year 2011-2012, New York City was provided with an increase of funds through the Child Care Development Block Grant. CSA would like to thank the Legislature for their work to secure additional funding for the CCDBG and to minimize the impact of the cuts proposed by the Governor. As we look forward to the State Fiscal Year 2012-2013 budget and an impending and daunting budget deficit of \$3.5 billion, CSA urges the Legislature to work with the Governor to increase funding provided through the Child Care Development Block to afford more low-income families the opportunity to access regulated child care.

As the state's and nation's fiscal standing continue to look bleak, CSA supports an alternative approach to funding constraints provided for in S.5586. CSA would like to thank Senator Savino for introducing this bill that would temporarily exempt from work rules, public assistance recipients with children under the age of one. As an alternative to restricted funding, it is CSA's belief that by extending by 6 months the period of time that certain public assistance recipients are exempt from work rules, the need for child care for the youngest and most expensive population to care for would be reduced. The savings achieved by this extension would be available to be redistributed to low-income families. While this legislation is a temporary measure, it provides an immediate solution to the current economic crisis and those families dependent on child care to enable them to go to work.

NYS Early Learning Challenge Grant Application

CSA supported the State's application for the United States Department of Education's (USDOE) Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant. The purpose of the RTT-ELC program is to improve the quality of early learning and development programs and services and to close the achievement gap for children with high needs. We believe that the State's application provides a framework to elevate the quality of early childhood education programs, both in the services provided and for the staff who work in these settings. "QUALITYstarsNY" is a key component of New York's application to evaluate the

early learning services provided in the various child care settings, whether in centers or family based programs. Based on these new evaluations, a program can earn ratings ranging from one to five “stars.”

If awarded a grant by the USDOE, the funding is for a limited time and only covers a portion of early childhood education needs -- in particular, those in high need areas. We urge the Legislature to consider expanding these initiatives statewide and to provide funding for a parent education campaign to ensure that all parents are made aware of QUALITYstarsNY.

Oversight and Direction by State

As the union representing school leaders, CSA is concerned with closing the achievement gap and ensuring that schools have the resources needed to do so. In August, the New York State Education Department released the Math and English Language Art test scores for students in grades 3 thru 8. Unfortunately, these test results clearly demonstrate that the achievement gap among our students still exists. Statewide results for black students reveal the persistence of the achievement gap:

- 35% of black students across grades 3-8 met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard (compared with 52.8% for all students and 64.2% for white students);
- 44% met or exceeded the standard in math (compared with 63.3% for all students and 73.3% for white students).

Statewide results for Hispanic students also detail the persistence of the achievement gap:

- 37.2% of Hispanic students across grades 3-8 met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard (compared with 52.8% for all students and 64.2% for white students);
- 50.2% met or exceeded the standard in math (compared with 63.3% for all students and 73.3% for white students).

While the Board of Regents has advanced a reform agenda that seeks to close and eliminate the gap, CSA believes that New York State must do more. In order to ensure that children start on their academic journey prepared and ready, we must focus on early childhood education and the years before they enter Kindergarten and Pre-K. Research has shown that the achievement gap begins even before children enter school. Permit me just one example: In a 2005 report entitled *“School Readiness: Closing the Racial and Ethnic Gaps”*, a survey of Kindergarten teachers found that 46% reported that over half of the children in their classrooms have difficulty with following directions and working in a group.

CSA President Ernest Logan has for years called for a change in the way the State and its’ leaders view child care. It is our President’s belief that we must no longer view child care as **only** a means to allow parents to work, but also about providing quality early childhood education in and of itself. Our school leaders see firsthand the benefits of children who had access to high quality early childhood education and can easily identify those who did not have the same exposure. Children who did not have access to early childhood education struggle with mastering tasks, both physical and mental, such as holding a pencil and even sitting still. The ability to focus on a task is achieved only after extended opportunities

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to practice and acquire the essential skill attained through early childhood education. While we may take these skills for granted, they are critical to putting children on the right path for school success.

In order to successfully alter the way society and policy makers view early childhood education, we must first change the way New York State regulates and oversees these programs. Currently, there are a number of state agencies and entities responsible for various aspects of child care -sometimes even with differing philosophies:

- The New York State Education Department oversees nursery schools, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten.
- The New York State Office of Children and Family Services is charged with regulating and overseeing regulated child care centers and programs from birth to age 13.
- The New York State Department of Health oversees the Early Intervention program providing services to treat developmental delays in children from birth to age three.
- The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance administers child care subsidies for families receiving temporary assistance and low income families.

Each of these agencies has its own regulations and rules that, when viewed together may provide oversight for all of the needs of children in child care settings, but do so without a singular focus or collective purpose. CSA drafted legislation introduced by Senators Flanagan and Montgomery, S.5650, to require SED, OCFS, OTDA and DOH to conduct a study of the current early childhood education systems. The report required under this bill would also include recommendations for strengthening the day care system to provide community-based care with a focus on early childhood education; including the consolidation of day care oversight and enforcement. We thank the Senate for passing this bill at the end of session this year. CSA continues to strongly support this bill, and asks the Legislature to consider this bill as part of the upcoming budget for State Fiscal Year 2012-2013. Put more simply -- It is time for New York State to merge the various entities overseeing child care into a single entity or structure, to provide a focused, streamlined and resource-efficient system for oversight and regulation of early childhood education.

Other states have already done this. Massachusetts and Maryland have merged programs charged with overseeing early childhood education into one entity to ensure that all policies and procedures not only focus on health and safety, but as importantly, on educational preparation:

- In 2005, Massachusetts merged the two agencies responsible for overseeing child care in the State and created the *“Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care,”* overseeing early education and after-school services, as well as financial assistance to families.
- Also in 2005, Maryland merged entities to create the *“Division of Early Childhood Development”* within their State Department of Education.

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CSA believes that New York State policymakers must take a serious look at our systems and at consolidating services into a single agency with a focus on early childhood education. Doing so will go a long way in closing the achievement gap and ensuring that children enter school prepared and ready for academic success.

EarlyLearn NYC

In 2010, NYC ACS announced “*Early Learn*,” a new program to replace the existing structure of city contracted day care centers. A request-for-proposals was released in the spring of 2011; no award announcements have been made to date and no bidders listing has been released. Both day care providers and the families they serve are anxiously waiting to learn the fate of city funded day care services. Taken at face value, the new EarlyLearn program has laudable goals of providing children with quality early education and access to needed services to address special needs, such as developmental delays. However, a number of questions regarding the new program have yet to be answered. For example, what is the cost of care covered under the new program? CSA understands that only 93% of a center’s cost would be covered under this model. How will a center bridge a 7% gap in funding? We do not know how awardees will be able to provide high quality early childhood education without sufficient funding for staff and resources.

In closing, CSA believes that New York must change the way we view and regulate child care -- to one that embraces early childhood education. Only by altering the views and policies of the state can we ensure that our youngest are not only safe and healthy while their parents work, but that these children are also being prepared to enter school ready and on the track for academic success.

We stand ready to work with you on these important issues, and to do whatever we can to help move New York toward a world-class system of early childhood education. Our children deserve no less.

Respectfully submitted,

Randi Herman, First Vice President