

Dear Honorable Legislators,

I am a parent of two young children (ages 5 and 8) and I also work at a Child Day Care State Funded, and School Readiness Funded center in Southeastern CT. I represent a regional program, and I want to strongly encourage the funding in Early Childhood Education to be for all age groups birth through age 5 and also to be regional. A child from a town who is poor but not considered a priority district is just as much in need of high quality early education as a child who is in a priority district. We cannot have universal success in schools without universal access to education in the earliest years. A regional program such as ours is able to take children from any town in Southeastern CT, and the Child Day Care State Funded grant allows us to take them on that grant regardless of where they live and give them the grant if they qualify. Our School Readiness funded grant spaces can only be given to children from 1 specific town. We know the children in New London definitely need this grant for early education, but so do children in all the surrounding towns who are just as poor. Having a regional program with regional funding leads to much greater diversity for our children, much greater success, and we welcome you to consider this as a model for rolling out future funding.

Additionally, we want to ensure that all children birth through age 5 are funded, as they are now with the Child Day Care State Funded grant, not just 3 and 4 year olds. Just as Kindergarteners do much better when they have had a preschool experience, low income infants and toddlers do better in preschool and kindergarten if they have had a consistent, quality early care Infant/Toddler experience. Just as learning doesn't start at kindergarten, it does not start at preschool either. It starts at birth. We must continue to fund Infants and Toddlers to have successful preschoolers and elementary schoolers in the future.

Last but not least, I want to mention that this step forward to offering funding in all towns in the state, not just priority school districts and competitive school districts is a step in the right direction. Children who need these high quality programs come from all towns in the state. It is sad when I child can only look into the glass and see the high quality education their neighbor is getting, but not afford it themselves because they are poor but their town is not poor enough overall to receive it. It isn't fair. As a parent, I was very lucky both of my children were able to attend a high quality early care and education program that was state funded and school readiness funded, even though I was not eligible for that funding.

Since the funding at Riverfront comes from diverse sources so that the children are intermixed with parents paying fees, we were able to access a very multicultural educational program. You cannot tell which children are on which grants or which children are fully funded by their parents. It is a beautiful system that could and should be replicated statewide. It is the essence of diversity. My children's experience educationally was very rich and very culturally diverse and I would not have wanted it any other way.

Please, fund high quality early care and education for birth through 5, and ensure that programs can be funded directly as their own fiduciaries if possible. There are many great programs out there who could and would do high quality education for the State to meet the great demand for that service, as long as the red tape of the middlemen who handle their money were not taking a cut of that funding and micromanaging their services. The State Department of Education is a very high quality department, with great employees who should directly oversee the management of the grants and partner with agencies, centers and schools to provide the highest quality, most accountable services that we can for all of Connecticut's Children (just as the Department of Social Services did when they had the Child Day Care Grant). Partnering with municipalities is a good thing, but programs that can be their own fiduciaries should be honored.

Sincerely,

Susan Corrice

Parent and Early Care and Education provider in Groton, CT (Riverfront Children's Center)