

REACH OUT AND READ CONNECTICUT

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February 21, 2014

Testimony in Support of the State Budget and the Office of Early Childhood

My name is Christine Garber and I am the Connecticut Executive Director for Reach Out and Read. Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based, national, nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy, school readiness, and parental engagement in pediatric exam rooms by giving new books to children and educating parents about the importance of reading aloud. We serve over 4 million children nationally which includes over 40,000 children in Connecticut.

Reach Out and Read Connecticut is a member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. Reach Out and Read is both thrilled and thankful to see a budget that is so supportive of the children of our state. Today's children are our future. We believe Connecticut must invest intelligently in our children to ensure that our state has the strong leadership it will need in the future. The state's long term sustainability is directly related to how wisely we invest in our children now.

Alarming, Connecticut posts the largest achievement gap in the country. According to Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman, *"Investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age 5 helps reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs. In fact, every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education produces a 7 to 10 percent per annum return on investment"* (Heckman, J. The Economics of Inequality, the Value of Early Childhood Education, American Educator. (Spring 2011). Where the return on investment in early education is so high, we particularly support the creation of the Office of early Childhood for Connecticut.

An Office of Early Childhood will enable the state to:

- Coordinate early childhood services, leverage resources, and create efficiencies. With programs and services for young children housed in one agency, it will be easier to identify gaps in services, identify critical needs, and make informed funding and policy decisions that result in better outcomes for our young children. It will enable us to improve access, quality, transparency, and accountability so that everyone benefits: young children, parents, providers, and communities.
- Focus on the whole child. Support of the intellectual, physical, and social-emotional development of young children, starting at birth, requires integration and collaboration between areas like health, family support services, early intervention, and early care and education. An Office of early Childhood creates a single place of coordination and delivery of early childhood services that is more inclusive of all families and their unique needs.
- Collect data and measure child outcomes. Individual data systems in separate agencies do not allow for the information-sharing needed for accountability and policy decision making. This single office will allow us to unify data systems making it easier for families to enroll in services and making it possible to measure child and program outcomes.

It is critical that our children, and their families, receive the appropriate supports, programs, and interventions from birth. An Office of Early Childhood provides us with the best means of offering and delivering these resources to our young children and their families.



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In addition to funding an Office of Early Childhood, we also support the provisions in the budget to:

- Provide a 3% increase in Care4Kids rates for licensed centers and family child care providers. This increase is long overdue as it's been 13 years since these rates have been raised.
- Provide a 3% increase in School Readiness and State-Funded Center rates. Raising rates for state-funded early care and education is very important to maintaining quality in these programs. However, in order for the State Funded Centers to get the intended 3% increase and maintain rate parity with School Readiness, roughly \$500,000 must be added to the Child Care Services line item. The 3% increase was erroneously calculated on only the state half of the total allocation to the State Funded Centers, the other half coming from a federal block grant that does not appear in the state budget.
- Add 1,020 new preschool spaces at these new rates, with the possibility of spaces being allocated in suburban and rural areas. This is very important to reach the children who do not have a preschool experience prior to entering kindergarten.

At Reach Out and Read, we would also like to see the state budget include additional services that help children from birth. Pre-school slots and school readiness programs are critical to a child's long term success however children (and their families) need programs and services even before they reach pre-school, especially children growing up in low-income families.

In the 1995 Hart and Risley Study, a team of researchers recorded one full hour of every word spoken at home between parent and child in 42 families over a three year period, with children from seven months to 36 months of age. The team then spent six additional years typing, coding, and analyzing 30,000 pages of transcripts.

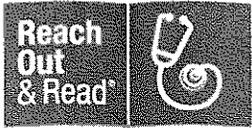
One of the many findings from this study was that the achievement gap starts early – before children enter pre-school. By age 3, the children from welfare families heard 525 words, children from working class families heard 749 words and children from professional families heard 1,116 words. So before these children were even old enough for pre-school slots, working class and welfare children were already behind their more affluent peers. Follow-up studies by Hart and Risley of those same children at age nine showed that there was a very tight link between the academic success of a child and the number of words the child's parents spoke to the child to age three (before pre-school). Other research supports this as it has been shown that 88% of children who enter school below grade level never catch up.

Other research studies have shown that by kindergarten :

- A child read to every day has the vocabulary of a 10 year-old.
- A child not read to every day has the vocabulary of a 2 year-old .
- By the time the average middle income child enters kindergarten, they have been read aloud to for 1200 to vs 25 hours for low income children.
- The typical middle-class 5 year-old is able identify 22 letters and sounds of the alphabet vs 9 for low income children.
- Low income children hear 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers by the time they enter kindergarten while living in an environment of adversity and toxic stress.

Hart and Risley's Other Key Findings:

- The variation in children's IQs and language abilities is relative to the amount parents speak to their children.



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- Children's academic successes at ages nine and ten are attributable to the amount of talk they hear from birth to age three.
- Parents of advanced children talk significantly more to their children than parents of children who are not as advanced.
- Children in professional families heard a higher ratio of encouragements to discouragements than their working class and welfare-supported counterparts.

In order for our children to develop the foundational literacy skills they need to become literate adults, and for their brains to develop normally, parents must be educated, from the time their child is born, about the enormously important role they have in shaping the lives of their child. Simply holding their child on their lap and reading aloud to them for 15-20 minutes a day will set their child on a trajectory of knowledge and success in life. Reach Out and Read provides both the parent education and the books needed in the home to prepare these high-risk children for success.

We strongly support a state budget that provides solid, comprehensive systems that reach children and families early (from birth) and provide our children and families with the tools they need to be successful.