

# Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge

## Compilation of Written Comments

### Public Forum

September 8, 2011



Connecticut State Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Hartford, CT 06106

Compilation of Written Comments  
Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge  
Public Forum September 8, 2011

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September 12, 2011

Attn: Early Childhood Cabinet/ RTT grant team

Congratulations on successfully developing a strong collaboration for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and for identifying strong priorities for the grant. If Connecticut were to receive the grant, it will significantly improve outcomes for our young children.

I would like to submit the following comments.

#### **Support Teacher Certification for Integrated Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Education**

First, please consider supporting the education of certified early childhood and early childhood special education teachers. As the coordinator of the Early Childhood Alternate Route to Certification at Charter Oak State College, I can report that there is a continuing need for certified early childhood teachers. The program has graduated 42 individuals in four years and this graduation rate appears to be in pace with the demand as 90% of graduates currently hold certified positions. Their employers consistently report 100% satisfaction with graduates of this program and candidates indicate through pre and post self-assessment of skills a large increase in learning across all instructional content areas. Experienced teachers in the field who complete the program consistently indicate that the program made them more knowledgeable and effective teachers than they were prior to completing the program, demonstrating that even after a bachelor's degree and years of experience in the field there is still an important role for post-baccalaureate education for early childhood teachers. The program prepares candidates to hold positions in magnet schools and early intervention and early childhood special education programs. Candidates for the program must already possess a bachelor's degree in a related field and have three years of experience in the field. Candidates represent mature and advanced professionals and this opportunity is creating advanced leaders and highly training professionals in the field. This is the only alternate route to certification in early childhood in Connecticut and for the majority of students their only means of obtaining the certificate as they are working professionals who are unable to complete certification through a traditional program. We have an active alumni association and these individuals have gone on to make a positive impact in the field, many are now pursuing master's degrees in education. Please support programs like this which train professionals at advanced levels.

#### **Support On-going Technical Assistance**

Second, I spend over 100 hours in the field every year conducting observations and coaching/consulting with pre-service and in-service teachers. From this experience a number of areas consistently appear as concerns in which teachers do not feel they have received adequate training and repeatedly seek additional assistance in the field. Furthermore, there are very few quality coaches available with adequate expertise in these areas to support the problems professionals are encountering in the field:

- 1) Working with children with emotional disturbances and problem behaviors. I have been working with teachers for over 15 years and I have noticed a marked increase in the reporting of incidents of extreme behavior problems both through my own direct observations and as reported by teachers. Very few programs in CT have staff qualified to create effective problem behavior plans for children. This is the most commonly reported issue that I (and my faculty) encounter in the field both with new and experienced professionals. Teachers across types of professional settings report that their directors and educational consultants are not able to adequately support them in this area as well, either because they lack the expertise or there isn't enough time available for them to conduct observations and in-class coaching. In addition to supporting technical assistance around problem behavior supports, professionals in the field should complete a course in behavior management very early in their course of study. Currently students are not specifically required to take a course devoted to that topic alone and, if they do complete a course specific to behavior management, will complete this course later in their program of study.
- 2) Working with families who do not speak or read or write English. Many teachers in CT work in programs where children are developing English, but their parents are not. Teachers are impeded in their ability to support children's development when they cannot communicate with parents. This is currently an issue in birth through kindergarten programs. The teachers I have worked with work very hard to respectfully and creatively address the issue through the use of translators, translated materials, and learning Spanish themselves (although this is not limited to Spanish). Preparing more bilingual teachers is one way to address the problem; however, supporting parents to communicate in English through English language programs in the school districts is another strategy that could be considered and would more directly support parents in Connecticut.
- 3) Adult literacy has a direct impact on children's ability to read and succeed in school. Many of our urban communities have adult literacy rates currently over 50% (e.g., Bridgeport, Waterbury, and Hartford). This places a significant number of children at risk for poor success in school. Preschool teachers and early literacy curriculum alone will not ameliorate the risk factor of having a parent who cannot read.
- 4) Supporting children with special needs, in particular children on the autism spectrum, significant learning delays or ADHD. Many teachers have reported inadequate access to technical assistance for inclusion of children's whose special needs make it difficult for them to fully participate in the social and learning life of a classroom. In particular, early childhood teachers consistently seek information for supporting children on the autism spectrum, significant learning delays, or ADHD. These challenges cannot be taught in a single course, but are best addressed through on-site coaching and consultation that is specific to an individual child's needs. Most early childhood teachers complete only one course in special needs, that alone is not enough to prepare teachers to work with children with complex learning and emotional needs.

- 5) Working with children in poverty. Teachers report serious challenges to working with families and children existing in extreme poverty. Children they work with often have unmet physical needs, health issues, extreme emotional issues, smaller vocabularies, no literacy activities in the home, and lack general world knowledge. Their families frequently have had limited success in school and do not possess positive feelings about school. Many children in urban areas are spending time with family members who are uninvolved with their education or spending time unsupervised, are exposed to high levels of stress and instability, lack access to safe outdoor areas and high quality nutrition and consistent medical care. These are significant barriers for teachers who may be well trained and implementing well planned curricula, but only have a child for a limited portion of their day. Teachers report spending money out of their own pockets to provide families with resources that families themselves cannot afford. Early learning curriculum alone cannot fully address the issues of these at-risk children. Child poverty and community development in Connecticut must be aggressively addressed in order to reduce the achievement gap.

Please consider the need for ongoing technical assistance for teachers encountering challenges while in the workforce. Workshops for in-service teachers, while cost effective, may not be as effective as ongoing individualized technical assistance that takes place within the classroom setting where the coaching is needed. One strategy that may be implemented would be to use a QRS to link technical assistance to evidenced needs (while also collecting data in aggregate on challenges teachers are facing in the field). If you have not read this report, I would strongly recommend it:  
[http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2011\\_04\\_27\\_FR\\_CoachingEarlyCare.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2011_04_27_FR_CoachingEarlyCare.pdf)

Please support ongoing technical assistance and the training of high quality educational consultants around more challenging issues for teachers, such as those listed above. Continuing education BEYOND the bachelor's degree must be supported in order to train individuals who will take on roles as early childhood leaders and consultants. Additionally, there must be adult literacy available for parents to enable them to maximally support their children.

### **Support Professional Development**

There are significant barriers to completing education among individuals in the early childhood workforce. The two which I encounter the most are financial and written language competencies. Early childhood teachers do not make enough money to support the continuing education requirements of the field. I have received multiple first hand reports of associate-level teachers planning to leave the field for more financial stability and to avoid educational requirements which they cannot afford nor will see an increase in pay for completing. If there is no financial support for continuing education, CT will not have a highly trained workforce and we will lose teachers. Additionally, many individuals are unable to succeed in the collegiate environment due to poor writing abilities and limited English. Passing candidates through programs and allowing them to graduate without successfully mastering English should not continue, because these students cannot succeed in a bachelor's-level programs. Many of

them do not possess the English language competencies necessary to successfully pass the Praxis I and become certified teachers. (25% of my applicants each year cannot complete the admissions process due to an inability to pass Praxis I reading and writing yet they have completed bachelor's degrees from regionally accredited colleges). Additionally, I have observed many teachers unable to communicate with children and co-teachers and parents. I have witnessed numerous problems occurring in the classroom when a child was not understood by a teacher and this escalated to a problem behavior. Additionally, I have observed limited English teachers unable to read a children's book and interpret the story with children because they did not fully understand the story themselves. A teacher in a public supported preschool program should be able to communicate successfully in both oral and written English. Programs must be put in place to improve the oral and written language competencies of teachers if we are to keep these individuals in the field, positively impact children's learning and reduce turnover.

### **Data Systems and the QRS**

Finally, I would encourage that in creating a data system, data be collected that can be directly linked to trends in quality over time. For example, I would strongly recommend that you collect data that will enable you to measure the turnover rate for teachers in early childhood. Research has shown (e.g., Marcy Whitebrook) that teacher turnover is significantly linked to poorer quality in programs. Teachers face numerous challenges in the field. Some of these are general to the field, while some are specific to CT. Understanding trends in turnover will be critical in creating an understanding of trends and issues in our communities. Collecting data linked to individual teachers will strengthen the state's ability to identify critical issues in the field and link that to individual's experiences and training.

Additionally, when creating a QRS, I would suggest that data be collected on quality that will allow you to measure a programs ability to support children's development using measurements that have been normed and validated and collect in the same manner across ALL settings. For example, if NAEYC accreditation is the highest level of quality and no other data is collected, then you lose critical power to collect quality data in a manner that uses rigorously tested observation tools and objective measurements in any accredited program. This data must be collected in order to measure and critically evaluate trends in quality across the state.

Finally, I would encourage you to consider how you create any type of QRS system and ensure that you do not unintentionally create a punitive system of evaluation. To prevent this, you must ensure that all programs are supported through a QRS system with technical assistance and training. Programs should be allowed to enter a QRS through a preliminary period where they are encouraged to make changes based on a rating and then then be re-reviewed in a relatively short time period before receiving an "official rating". Any QRS that is put in placed should be piloted and any scale that is developed should also be validated against known measures of quality such as the ECERS-R and CLASS.

Thank you and keep up the good work,

Sincerely

Amy Watson

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**Anna Marcucio, Chief Operating Officer, ConnCAN**  
**Testimony on Connecticut's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Application**  
**September 8, 2011**

Good morning. My name is Anna Marcucio and I am the Chief Operating Officer for ConnCAN. I'd like to thank Governor Malloy, as well as the chairs of the Education and Higher Education Committees for the opportunity to testify today on our state's efforts to put together a winning application for the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge..

Winning these federal funds can help accelerate Connecticut's efforts to close our worst-in-the-nation achievement gap. As you may know, last year, Connecticut won only about \$7.00 per pupil in competitive federal funding, while our neighboring states – Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island – won between \$300 and \$500 per student because of their bold plans for improving outcomes for all students. In these tight fiscal times, we can no longer afford to let these opportunities to demonstrate leadership and secure much-needed funds pass us by.

This application presents us with an opportunity to make Connecticut a leader and win much needed funding. To be competitive, and to ensure that Connecticut's plans are best positioned to provide excellent early childhood education for our children, we at ConnCAN believe that our application needs to be guided by three key principles: accountability, flexibility, and choice.

### **Accountability**

Given that we will likely struggle for years to appropriate sufficient funds to guarantee *every* child a high-quality early childhood education, we need to be sure that the immediate priority is on delivering the best-quality services to the kids who are starting from furthest behind. As we begin to target and expand access to early childhood education, we must also hold these programs accountable by:

- Establishing standards for the academic, social, and emotional knowledge and skills that young children should learn.
- Measuring whether preschool programs are meeting those standards and adequately preparing children for kindergarten through an age-appropriate comprehensive kindergarten readiness assessment, like Maryland's School Readiness Report, which measures seven domains of learning, including language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, physical development, and social and personal development.
- Collecting data about individual students' school readiness, as well as their health, behavioral, and emotional needs as soon as they enter preschool programs.
- Creating accessible and seamless data systems across preschool and K-12 to ensure that both preschool *and* K-12 teachers can utilize student data to inform their practice and tailor teaching to students' particular needs.

## Flexibility

Successful programs need flexibility to meet the needs of students as well as their families and communities. Our application should seek to:

- Encourage local districts to partner with innovative programs, in the mold of the Harlem Children's Zone, to provide early intervention and wrap-around services so that educational experiences are maximized for our neediest students and their families as early in a child's life as possible.
- Ensure that the state's investment in a child's quality preschool education continues to pay off by delivering high-quality, all-day kindergarten in our lowest-income, highest-need communities.
- Create new pathways to train and certify talented early childhood educators. For example, the state could create charter colleges of early childhood education that would allow alternate providers to train early childhood educators.
- Provide quality professional development opportunities to help early childhood educators effectively use assessments and data about students' strengths and weaknesses to inform and improve programs.

## Choice

Connecticut families need to have confidence that they are choosing the highest quality early childhood program that is right for their children. The proposal laid out in our state application needs to:

- Provide families with the ability to select the program that is right for their child, rather than assigning children to a program based on neighborhood or zip code.
- Ensure that parents are able to make informed choices among preschools by developing a clear, user-friendly public quality indicator system that provides ratings of preschool programs. This component is essential to winning Early Learning Challenge funding: it is worth at least 75 of the possible 300 points of the application.

I cannot emphasize enough how important is it to connect these efforts, and the principles of accountability, flexibility, and choice, to our K-12 system. Efforts to expand access to high quality preschool *must* be accompanied by aggressive efforts to improve our K-12 school system. If a student who obtains a quality preschool education enters a K-12 system that cannot teach him to read, for example, then our investment in preschool will have been squandered. This is the reality too many of our students face right now: for example, NAEP data show that in 2009, between 78 and 85 percent of Connecticut's low-income and minority fourth graders could not read at grade level.<sup>1</sup> These results are particularly dismaying in light of research that shows that if a student cannot read at grade level by the time he reaches 4th grade, his chances of future success are slim.

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<sup>1</sup> ConnCAN 2009 NAEP score analysis, based on percent of students at the "proficient level" in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers NAEP, "proficient" means solid grade level performance.

The ideas I presented this morning are just a starting point. Thank you again for the opportunity to share some ideas on the application; ConnCAN would welcome the chance to provide additional thoughts and support for this effort.



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The Connecticut Association for Human Services would like to thank the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet for the opportunity to comment on Connecticut's grant application for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Funds. Founded in 1910, CAHS promotes family economic security strategies that empower low-income working families to achieve financial independence.

CAHS takes a deliberate role in advocacy for the development and implementation of a cohesive early care and education system. We take a lead role in building the public will for an early care system by convening the Providers' Caucus. The Caucus serves as a forum for providers-- center-based and family childcare, publicly and privately funded-- to develop a well-informed voice and become equip to participate in early care and education policy dialogue.

From that perspective, I would like to speak to criteria D of the Race to the Top Application, A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce. This is one of Connecticut's greatest areas of need in terms of investment and supports. Connecticut has an extremely talented and dedicated early childhood and education workforce, but unfortunately, the predominantly female workforce is extremely underpaid.

In order to retain and build out talented workforce, Connecticut must:

- Incentivize and reward highly qualified programs and teachers. We set high standards for state funded programs and teachers, but provide little remuneration for these costly efforts;
- Develop and implement strategies to inform and network with Family Child Care and Family, Friend and Neighbor care about child development, quality care and community and state resources; and
- Increase the Care4Kids reimbursement rate. Although the Department of Social Services is mandated to undertake a market rate survey every two years to determine the fees charged locally by child care centers, there is no requirement to increase the reimbursement rate to

reflect the results of the survey. Presently, the subsidy rates for licensed child care providers are based on the 2001 market survey. Care4Kids is used by licensed and unlicensed child care providers and has the potential to be used as an incentive to promote professional improvement and career advancement.

Connecticut has a long history of commitment to our children. Our state programs often reach above and beyond the federal programs and local communities have actively worked for over a decade to intensively coordinate services and uncover needs at the local level. We have innovative programming, like that of All Our Kin, which engage and strengthen Family, Friend and Neighbor childcare and we have long established programming, like our Family Resource Centers, conceptualized by Dr. Edward Zigler and charged with providing support and training to Family Day-Care Providers.

In 2011, Connecticut passed landmark legislation that creates a comprehensive system for early childhood services, birth-8. This law will result in a system that consolidates and streamlines programs while coordinating services for children, including health, childcare, education and family support. We have the leaders in government, business, and philanthropy, not to mention a passionate workforce. We have the commitment in Connecticut, now we need the investment! Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Connecticut's Race to the Top Application and best of luck on the process.



# CONNECTICUT CHARTS-A-COURSE

Supporting Careers and Program Improvement in Early Care and Education

**September 8, 2011**

**To: The Honorable Dannel P. Malloy, Governor**  
**The Honorable Andy Fleischmann, Co Chair, Education Committee**  
**The Honorable Andrea Stillman, Co Chair, Education Committee**  
**The Honorable Beth Bye, Co-Chair Higher Education and Employment Advancement**  
**George A. Coleman, Acting Commissioner of Education**  
**Members of Governor's Early Childhood Cabinet**

**From: Darlene Ragozzine, Connecticut Charts-A-Course, Executive Director**

**Re: Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant**

***Comments on D: A Great Early Childhood Workforce***

**Current profile of Connecticut's early childhood workforce:**

- More than half of the directors (67%) and teachers (57%) have an associate's or bachelor's degree with early childhood training.
- Only (17%) of assistant teachers have an associate's or bachelor's degree with early childhood training,
- The majority of assistant teachers (47%) have less than a CDA.
- The overwhelming majority of teachers (81%) and assistant teachers (95%) earn less than \$30,000 a year.

**Strategies to move the credentials of the workforce in order to create a high quality plan:**

- Increase the financial support for the professional development for teachers, especially those working with our highest need children and families. Make this system of support as universal and seamless as possible for the individual within the state's higher education system.
- Expand professional development and workplace practices that support professional development activities. Build in release time and other supports that allow for paid time to take course work, visits to other programs, mentoring and coaching.
- Create greater access to higher education by offering programs that are creative , flexible, articulate and build among one another (with shared competencies) and take into account the work schedules and culture of adult learning.
- Identify current and new ways to increase compensation and provide teachers with commensurate pay parity with their education level.

### ***Comments on B: High Quality, Accountable Programs***

#### **Program Quality:**

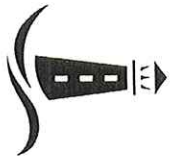
- There is evidence that program accreditation positively impacts the work environment and lower levels of turnover, which is a key ingredient in providing high-quality care and education.
- Program turnover rate in CT programs is 21% combined for teachers and assistant teachers. This is lower than the national average.
- NAEYC places CT third in the country (407), only behind MA and CA in numbers of accredited programs.

#### **Strategies to assure program improvement and accountability in order to create a high quality plan:**

- Link program accreditation and/or accountability (QRIS) to an overall plan for supporting the creation of a highly qualified, stable early childhood professional workforce.
- Staff in programs should be expected to have individual professional development plans that are linked to accreditation standards and accountability, financially supported and earn college degrees and credentials that are tied to tiered reimbursement.
- A system to track and maintain longitudinal data of the workforce demographics and education characteristics, which is tied to program improvement efforts, accreditation standards, accountability and tiered reimbursement measures.

#### **References:**

1. Connecticut's Early Care and Education Workforce Report. CT Charts-A-Course. February 2011.
2. Research Notes. *Degrees in Context: Asking the Right Questions about Preparing Skilled and Effective Teachers of Young Children*. McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University. Summer 2011.
3. NAEYC Position Statement on Developing and Implementing Effective Public Policies to Promote Early Childhood and School-Age Accreditation. April 1999.



# CONNECTICUT CHARTS-A-COURSE

Supporting Careers and Program Improvement in Early Care and Education

| Qualifications of Teachers in Publicly Funded Centers, Comparison 2008-2011 |     |   |  |     |   |  |      |   |       |   |    |
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Percentage of teachers in publicly funded programs at or above the current state standard of level 7 increased from 76% in 2008 to 87% in 2011. Those with a Bachelor degree or higher, which is the 2015 requirement, has steadily increased each year but still falls short of representing even 50% of the currently employed teachers in publicly funded programs. This increase is a direct result of more individuals requesting and receiving scholarship funding toward bachelor degree course work.

Source: CT Early Childhood Professional Registry 6/24/11



Connecticut  
Early Childhood  
Alliance

Testimony of Maggie Adair, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance  
Before the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet  
Re: Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Funds  
September 8, 2011

The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance wishes to thank the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet for the opportunity to comment on Connecticut's grant application for Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Funds. Improving outcomes – the lives – of Connecticut's children should be central to this application and to all of our early childhood efforts. The Alliance supports the Race to the Top application, and regardless of whether Connecticut is granted the funds, our organization urges the state and its leaders to remain committed to the vision and goals set forth in the application to ensure that all Connecticut children are healthy, safe, and ready for school success.

**It is clear Connecticut should be a strong contender for these funds for a number of reasons.**

- (1) HISTORY - Connecticut has a long history of commitment to our children. Our state programs reach above and beyond federal programs, and local communities have actively worked for over a decade to intensively coordinate services and uncover needs at the local level.
- (2) LEADERSHIP - We have leaders in government, business, and philanthropy who not only understand the importance of the early years, they have supported early childhood programs and services even in the toughest of budget times. As mayor of Stamford and as governor, Governor Dannel Malloy has matched rhetoric with resources on behalf of early childhood. Community and family foundations in Connecticut partner with state and local governments to support health, child care, and education for young children. Business leaders are outspoken supporters of early childhood initiatives.
- (3) LEGISLATION - Connecticut passed landmark legislation in 2011 that calls for creating a comprehensive system for early childhood services. Public Act 11-181 is indicative of the long-term investment that Connecticut is willing to make. This act will result in a system that consolidates, streamlines, and aligning programs while coordinating services for children ages birth to eight including health, nutrition, child care, education, and family supports. Legislation was also passed in 2011 that sets a timeframe for early childhood teachers to secure a higher education degree in specified areas.

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Connecticut  
Early Childhood  
Alliance

- (4) STANDARDS & MEASUREMENT - Connecticut holds early care and education programs and teachers to high standard by employing learning standards and by measuring progress. While Connecticut does not have a QRIS technically in place, it has many quality components that exceed those of many other states
- (5) PREVENTION & INTERVENTION - Prevention and intervention services in Connecticut such as home visitation, Nurturing Families and Child FIRST are models of national significance.

The Alliance believes that this application is an opportunity to build on the strong foundation the state and communities have laid and reach further to improve developmental outcomes in the areas of learning, health, safety and economic security for all children ages birth to eight.

**The Alliance recommends that Connecticut focus future efforts - both in this application and in Connecticut's legislative and administrative efforts - to:**

- Build the system as outlined by Public Act 11-181. Connecticut must ensure that this system includes early care and education, health, nutrition, and family support for ages birth to eight. By developing the system outlined by PA 11-181, Connecticut will have more efficient and effective services and better outcomes for children.
- Maintain our traditional areas of strength in early childhood, and use PA 11-181 as a launching point for new and enhanced efforts in the following areas:
  - Coordinated, complete, and transparent data collection;
  - A quality rating and improvement system;
  - Family engagement and outreach;
  - Workforce development and improved workforce compensation, including family care providers and kith and kin.
  - Uniform reporting requirements;
  - Unified funding streams;
  - Fully-funded slots.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on this critical application. The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance looks forward to continuing working with you to improve the developmental outcomes for young children.

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**Testimony Regarding Connecticut's Application  
for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge**

Sarah Esty

Governor's Early Childhood Cabinet

September 8, 2011

Governor Malloy, Commissioner Coleman, Senators, and Representatives

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children in support of Connecticut's application for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. We believe that a comprehensive system of early care and education is a critical investment in the future of our state and laud the recent movement towards the creation of this system through the establishment of an ECE planning director in PA 11-181 and the pursuit of federal funding for ECE through the RTT-ELC.

We believe that the ideal ECE system must incorporate several specific characteristics, which we have identified through high-quality research and input from Connecticut's ECE community. This system should include each of the eight fundamental elements listed below, which also align with many of the key criteria of the RTT-ELC application:<sup>1</sup>

1. Uniform reporting requirements for providers;
2. Blended and braided state and federal funding sources to allow early care and education providers to access a single funding stream;
3. *Fully* funded services for children aged 0-8 based on evidence and research as to the real cost of high quality care;
4. A quality rating and improvement system;
5. Means to develop our early childhood workforce and improve this workforce's compensation;
6. Coordinated data collection that ensures that data is complete and transparent;
7. Uniform standards for early learning that are developmentally appropriate; and
8. Improved outreach to and access for parents.

We hope that these principles will guide both the state's application for Race to the Top and the early care system planning process, and that the creation of a coordinated and comprehensive ECE system will not be contingent upon selection for RTT-ELC, but rather a top ongoing priority regardless of federal funding.

As Connecticut prepares its RTT-ELC application, we hope it will emphasize the importance of birth-to-eight and the unique developmental needs of infants, toddlers, and young children. To this end, we are concerned that the ECE coordinated system properly support young children through the early years of public schooling, not just until their entrance into kindergarten.

We believe Connecticut is poised to become a model state for ECE. We hope the drafters of our RTT-ELC application will convey the potential of the ECE planning process and our existing

strengths in our commitment to young children and the strong partnerships we have built between government, philanthropy, and business, and that those potentials are realized as we move forward.

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<sup>i</sup> These eight fundamental elements were determined through collaborative research and discussion between Connecticut Voices for Children, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut Parent Power, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) and form the basis for the 2010 “I Care About Kids and I Vote” campaign led by the aforementioned organizations. *For more information, see Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010,” Connecticut Voices for Children (February 2011) on pg. 28-30 (available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ece11progressreport.pdf>).* *See also, “It’s About the Children! High Quality Early Education for All Children,” Connecticut Voices for Children, the CT Early Childhood Alliance, CT Parent Power, and CAHS (Summer/Fall 2010). See also “It’s About the Children! Ensuring Connecticut’s Kids Are Healthy, Safe and Ready to Learn,” Connecticut Voices for Children, the CT Early Childhood Alliance, CT Parent Power, and CAHS (Summer/Fall 2010) (available at <http://icareaboutkids.com/pdf/aboutchildren.pdf>).* *For more information about the “I Care About Kids and I Vote” Campaign, see <http://icareaboutkids.com/>.*



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Visit us on the internet at <http://www.danburychildrenfirst.org>

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September 8, 2011

To CT's Race to the Top Team:

Danbury Children First and Danbury's Promise for Children Partnership have been working for number of years to identify and address the most pressing issues that are affecting our the academic success of children in our city. Because Danbury is a diverse community, in many ways we are unique—but in many ways we are reflective of the state as a whole. Our achievement gap is caused by many of the same factors that cause Connecticut's achievement gap and effects too many of our children, especially those of lower economic means, those who are English language learners, and those with special needs.


The State of Connecticut has strengths to build on, including the Discovery Initiative, involving about 50 communities and is a leader in the nation with its parent leadership continuum of the Parent Leadership Training Institute, People Empowering People, and other programs supported in Connecticut by the Parent Trust.

For a successful, sustainable system of early childhood care and education, two areas are essential:

Awareness and understanding by all stakeholders--members of communities—about the importance of early learning and that learning essentially begins at birth. It's essential that parents understand the crucial role they play in providing their children with a good foundation for early learning—through interacting and playing with their children, nurturing and providing a secure environment and creating literacy rich environments for their children to grow up in. But it's equally as important that businesses and major employers, government entities, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, and public schools have a broader and deeper understanding of how the first few years of life can profoundly impact a child's ability to learn and succeed. The crucial role these play in conveying messages to parents and the community should be included in Race to the Top planning efforts.

Secondly, in order to serve the highest need children and families, parents must supported, recognized, and be involved as the children's first teachers, nurturers and role models. Parents must be partners as well as key decision makers in the services and policies that affect their children. A continuum of family support that includes: (1) home visitation for the most high risk situations to ameliorate the stressors that affect children's ability to learn, (2) information and support that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for parents, (3) early literacy programs that teach families how to support early learning at home, (4) parenting education and support that build on parent's strengths, and (5) parent engagement and leadership education that prepare parents to become partners in civic life to improve conditions for children. In quality early care and education programs in Danbury and across Connecticut, parents are partners in the development of their child's early learning. When children get to kindergarten, schools should welcome parents as parents to participate in their child's education in ways that work best for them—a key element in Danbury's approach and early childhood plans (Discovery) and in many cities across CT with support of the Discovery Initiative; the State Department of Education through the School-Family-Community Partnership and the PIRC/Parent Trust; and through early education and care programs, such as Head Start and School Readiness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,  


Linda A. Kosko

Executive Director, Danbury Children First, Inc.

Co-Chair, Danbury's Promise for Children Partnership (Discovery)

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The mission of Danbury Children First, Inc. is *to involve, empower, and support parents* to improve the lives of children.

Good morning, my name is Keisha Hardin and I am an administrator for an infant/toddler program located in Hartford. I am here today to voice my support for CT's Early Learning Challenge Grant Application and in particular, to advocate for funds that will strengthen the quality of Infant/Toddler programs serving high need children. While CT has focused significant resources to preschool programs, it has not done the same for infant/toddler programs even though early brain development research tells us that the most critical years are between birth and three years of age. Professional development opportunities framed in best practices combined with onsite coaching supports will produce long-lasting outcomes and prepare children for school success. I encourage you to maximize our sizeable investments in preschool by including these supports in our application- in order to give infant/toddler programs what they rightfully deserve to prepare children for preschool. Thank you for your time and consideration.



## Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative

Members of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet:

My name is Elena Trueworthy, and I am the Director of the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative – an initiative of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Serving over 300 members representing child care, businesses, higher education, and others, the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative seeks to improve the quality and efficiency of child care in the Greater Hartford region.

I am pleased to know that, with the leadership of Governor Malloy, there is already a commitment to quality and access to early care and education. I believe it is imperative that we come at this grant application from a position of confidence. Our current systems, our checks and balances, our high accreditation and licensing rates, and Public Act 11- 181 have successfully positioned Connecticut as a leader in providing high quality early learning programs.

The efforts have to be holistic, of quality, and needs to encompass not only the child, but also their family, and their community. Strategies can include the following:

### **1. Focus on the social and emotional needs of children and families**

Children and families are coming to early learning settings with an array of issues – including diagnosed mental health needs, homelessness and abuse. One area to focus on is supporting their social and emotional needs. For example, there should be a universal developmental and social emotional screening completed for all children at their pediatrician's office at each visit inclusive of mechanisms for medical staff and child care providers to work together to share results and plan accordingly.

### **2. Workforce Development**

One of the most consistent indicators of quality child care is having a qualified workforce of early educators. The quality of care and instruction of children is highly dependent upon the professional development, credentials, and compensation of early educators. This application needs to support the preparation and retainment of a skilled workforce through continuing professional development and non-traditional higher education opportunities.

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### **3. Supporting home based licensed and non-licensed providers**

Home based child care is the most common type of child care for children under age 5 whose parents work, and for low income families. It is through these providers that some of the hardest to reach children and families can be impacted. Intentional efforts need to be designed specifically for this population including an incentive-based system for the providers to take classes, get certifications, have in-home support and coaching, etc.

### **4. Recruiting non- traditional partners**

Communities with no play areas, dilapidated housing, crime and violence, negatively impact children. Entities such as law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and community based organizations can partner with early childhood programs to find those hardest to reach families, and reduce the risk factors in communities. We need to support parent leadership development and community action groups that are neighborhood based that can work collaboratively on community issues.

This grant application and the development of a system that values quality, true collaboration, and a commitment to shared resources, is not an easy task. However, it is very much needed to ensure that all children, especially those we are not reaching now, are given an equal chance to be successful. Thank you.

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Public Comment on the Race To The Top Early Learning Challenge  
Richard Sussman, Director, *Brighter Futures Initiative*,  
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving  
September 8, 2011

Good Morning Governor Malloy and members of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet. My name is Richard Sussman and I am the Director of the *Brighter Futures Initiative* at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge.

The Hartford Foundation has been in the trenches of early childhood system building for more than two decades. *Brighter Futures* is a 25-year, \$35 million commitment of the Hartford Foundation to improve the school readiness and early school success of Hartford's children age birth through eight years. This nationally recognized initiative targets four critical areas that parallel the goals of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge: child care and early childhood education, family support and parent education, health care and the early grades of school. *Brighter Futures* is not solely about early childhood education, but about early development for children from birth to eight years. In recent years, *Brighter Futures* has deepened its work to bring together community residents, providers, funders and the public sector to develop a system of early childhood support in Hartford and statewide. I believe *Brighter Futures* provides several strategies and lessons that can strengthen Connecticut's application for the Race to The Top Early Learning Challenge program:

- **Create and support a strong, neutral coordinating entity for building and sustaining an early childhood system.** *Brighter Futures* partners with the Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation to create in Hartford a vehicle for aligning diverse programs and services to provide a cohesive, coordinated, and measurable system for young children and their families. This strategy creates a local platform upon which to build a successful and accountable state system that is required by the **Selection Criteria in the Race to The Top Core Areas.**
- **Focus statewide early childhood system-building on a continuum of supports to the child, the child's family, and the child's community.** *Brighter Futures* programs and services engage, support and cultivate the capacity of every adult in a child's life. We link them to resources and systems that address their risk factors and reflect their life experiences to promote a nurturing, supportive environment for children. Specifically, *Brighter Futures* Family Centers, located in six Hartford neighborhoods, provide services in the areas of parent-child interaction, home visiting, parent education and support, parent advocacy and leadership development, quality child care and education, adult education, basic human needs and social support, and health and wellness. This strategy addresses **Priority One of the Race to the Top** program, promoting school readiness for children with high needs as well as several of the Focused Investment Areas.

(over)

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Here to help.  
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- **Align the state plan with local strengths and needs.** *Brighter Futures* exemplifies a place-based focus to grow local capacity and align local, regional, and statewide policy, practice and quality improvement standards. Our Family Centers and parent civic engagement activities weave together local and statewide efforts in the areas of early childhood care and education, health and family support. These types of efforts can promote **Race to the Top Priority One** and provide evidence of compliance with the **Selection Criteria in the Core Areas**.
- **Ensure that all types of early care and education providers share a common framework.** The Hartford Foundation, through *Brighter Futures*, and in partnership with the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative, works to ensure that professional development and standards reach all individuals presently working with children, including licensed and unlicensed home-based providers and kin and kith care providers. **Race to The Top Priority Two** seeks evidence that Connecticut includes all early learning and development programs in its QRIS and the development of a high quality early childhood workforce.
- **Create and sustain opportunities for parents and communities to be literate and civically engaged in early childhood education, family support programs, and system-building.** Civic engagement and literacy are cornerstones of the *Brighter Futures* model. Our work includes building literacy not only for children, but also for parents and community residents, as well as creating family civic engagement and leadership development opportunities such as advisory board participation, public testimony and school governance. The **Race to the Top Priority Four** signals an interest in how the State will sustain program effects in the early grades. Equipping children, parents and other caregivers with literacy and advocacy skills to act on behalf of their own children, and for all the children in their community, can increase the likelihood that children will enter school ready and experience early success.

The Hartford Foundation continues to work with other funders at the local, state and national level to strengthen the system of supports to children and families through a number of existing partnerships and informally as needs and opportunities arise. Connecticut's strong tradition of private sector support and leadership in the implementation of a statewide system of early care and education add significant value to our Race to The Top application. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the statewide efforts to build a high-quality, coordinated early childhood system of care and education at the state and local level.



Middletown School Readiness Council



Middlesex Coalition For Children

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**Testimony Presented to the Governor and the Early Childhood Education  
Cabinet  
September 8, 2011**

I am Christine Fahey, School Readiness Coordinator for the city of Middletown, and I appreciate the opportunity to provide joint testimony on Connecticut's Race to the Top application from the Middletown School Readiness Council and the Middlesex Coalition for Children, organizations of more than 200 people in Middletown and Middlesex County - parents, professionals, and advocates - who have been working on children's issues for the last fifteen years.

To begin with, we would like to thank Governor Malloy for not only recognizing the importance of building a system that will support Connecticut's youngest children and insure that each gets off to a good start in life, but for taking important steps to do so. It is a breath of fresh air to have strong direction coming right from the top, something that has been missing in the past. We appreciate a governor that is really committed to early childhood. The planning process that is being undertaken via Public Act 181 shows his strong commitment to building a comprehensive early childhood system whether or not our application is successful.

As you move forward with Connecticut's application, there are many components of the application that we would like to comment on, but we will focus on just two sections of the application today - the early childhood workforce and assessment of child outcomes:

1. Supporting a great early childhood education workforce by providing professional development, career advancement opportunities, appropriate compensation, and a common set of standards for workforce knowledge and competencies is important and yet, probably the most challenging section of the application.

Educating and caring for our youngest children is demanding work. We know that the teacher is a critical factor in both the experiences that children have in their early childhood program and the outcomes that are produced. And though we have known for a long while that we need to build this state's capacity to train early childhood teachers, we have not acted upon that in a way that has produced increasing numbers of institutions offering early childhood degree programs. This remains a serious deterrent to building the work force and meeting the requirements of the Race to the Top application.

Most important, a large part of building and maintaining a high-quality early childhood workforce is ensuring that our teachers are adequately paid for their hard work and expertise. There is an urgent need to improve the wages, benefits and working conditions for early childhood educators. We will not improve early childhood outcomes to the extent that we want to and we must until we can remove this critical barrier.

2. In the section on measuring outcomes and progress so that data can be used to inform early learning instruction and services and assess whether children are entering kindergarten ready to succeed in elementary school, please refrain from moving towards high stakes testing of young children. In addition, Connecticut's Kindergarten Inventory tool needs to be replaced with an assessment tool that has demonstrated validity and reliability. The information that is collected with the inventory is misunderstood and misused and fails to give us good information about children's readiness for kindergarten. As you develop an assessment tool that measures children's readiness for school at kindergarten entry, please insure that it uses observation in the context of children's play and daily activities in the classroom to determine the development of children's skills, rather than point-in-time assessment.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our comments, wish you well in this work, and want you to know that we appreciate all of your efforts on behalf of Connecticut's children.

## NETWORK OF CONNECTICUT COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

### TESTIMONY ON RACE TO THE TOP EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE

The Network of Connecticut Community Foundations, comprised of eleven community foundations, strongly endorses the State of Connecticut's application for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. Over the past two years, the Network has selected Early Childhood as its priority action area because of the importance of high quality educational, health and social services in the development of children from birth to eight, especially for those from low income families. The eleven foundations in the Network collectively granted more than \$13 million from 2008-2010 to nonprofits and school systems throughout Connecticut for early childhood development programs

The Network has identified three major areas of need for early learning and development:

1. Establishment of a coordinated system of service delivery, accountability and assessment for early childhood programs. The current fragmented system does not provide the opportunity for significant improvement of early childhood programs and is difficult for parents and service providers to navigate. Individual community foundations in the Network were instrumental in advocating for the passage of PA11-181 to develop a statewide coordinated system of early care and education services for children from birth to eight. The Network is also one of the philanthropic partners with the State of Connecticut to implement PA11-81.

In addition to the statewide support for a coordinated system, many of the Network members have supported the Early School Readiness Councils that have developed comprehensive birth to eight plans for their communities. These plans will form the critical link between the State's Race to the Top system and local cities and towns.

2. Adequate funding for core programs that serve children and families including Early School Readiness, Care for Kids, Head Start and State Funded Centers. Coordination and adequate support for these programs is essential to provide education, health and social services to low income families and ensure that the children are ready for kindergarten. The Network advocated for continued funding of all these programs during 2011.
3. Understanding the Status of Children's Learning and Development at Kindergarten entry. Without effective tools that identify the services and programs children have received prior to kindergarten and the level of achievement attained by kindergarten, it is very difficult to assess both the individual and organizational deficiencies in kindergarten preparedness. Such knowledge is critical to correct these deficiencies. In 2011, the Network worked with a consultant to understand the current kindergarten intake and assessment tools and make recommendations for improvement.

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge provides the State of Connecticut with the funding to put into place the key elements noted above for a coordinated early childhood system..

## PUBLIC COMMENTS on Race To The Top grant application

September 8, 2011

My name is Galit Sharma, I am the program director and clinical supervisor of the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) at the Coordinating Council for Children in Crisis, Inc. (CCCC) in New Haven.

It is encouraging that the Federal Government recognizes the importance of early childhood. Healthy development starts at birth, long before a child enters school, or even preschool. In addition to meeting physical and medical needs in the first months and years of life, healthy growth depends greatly on forming positive attachment to a nurturing caregiver. Some families need support in providing this nurturing environment and face barriers to seeking out help and keeping appointments. This is why it is most effective to approach these high-risk families and serve them through home visiting, where the consistency of contact depends not only on the parent but also on program staff.

According to the PEW Center "Quality Home Visiting programs lay the foundation for children's healthy development and tax payers reap the benefit when many of our nation's costliest social problems ..... are prevented."

When announcing the Race To The Top application, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said: "Our goal is to transform early learning programs and

services from a patchwork of disconnected programs .... into a coordinated system.” Connecticut is, then, one step ahead: **Connecticut already has a state-wide, coordinated system of early childhood development and family support and education.**

This system is the Nurturing Families Network (NFN). The CT Children's Trust Fund launched the program in 1995 (then called “Healthy Families”) at two sites. Today, there are 42 sites that with catchment areas that cover the whole state. NFN screeners are strategically placed in every birthing hospital in CT and in prenatal clinics. They identify mothers and fathers at-risk and offer them home visiting services before they leave the hospital with their new baby, or when possible prenatally.

Families can stay in the program for five years, until the child enters kindergarten. This model offers an ongoing, long-term support to families for the first five years of the child's life.

NFN is an example of successful state-wide collaboration that brings together very different agencies and organizations and forms a tight partnership as one whole system of care. The network includes hospitals, non-profit agencies, community based clinics, local health departments and others. Regularly scheduled network meetings ensure coordination of services and collaboration

between the various sites and between the various components of the program.

NFN has been under research for 16 years and has shown positive family outcomes. It also meets all seven Federal Outcome Measures for home visiting programs, including improvement in maternal health, in child health, in child development and school readiness, in parenting skills and behaviors, prevention of child abuse and neglect, reduction in crime or domestic violence, and improved coordination of resources and community supports (*please refer to the attached fact sheet for more information*).

Presenting this successful, comprehensive and long-term home-visiting system of care may be helpful to the State in the application for Race To The Top grant. The State can use the model of this large network, build upon and expand on its existing infrastructure. The Nurturing Families program is aligned with the federal goals for families, is already in place and has a proven record of positive results.

Thank you for your time.

Galit Sharma

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## Nurturing Families Network meets all Federal Performance Measures

*"Quality home visiting programs lay the foundation for children's healthy development and tax payers reap the benefit when many of our nation's costliest social problems—school failure, child abuse and the use of welfare—are prevented."*  
- PEW Center website

This is how Nurturing Families Network meets Federal Performance Measures for Home Visiting programs\*:

### Federal performance measure #1: Improvement in Maternal Health

- A comparison study found that high-risk mothers who came into the Nurturing Families program two months or more before their babies were born resulted in fewer preterm births and fewer low birth weight babies.
- The birth outcomes for these high-risk mothers also compared favorably to those of the general population.

### Federal performance measure #2: Improvement in Child Health

- 98% of children in NFN had a pediatric care physician for ongoing care.
- The immunization rates for two year olds in NFN are 96% compared to 66% for two year olds with a similar demographic background on Medicaid.

### Federal performance measure #3: Improvement in Child Development and School Readiness

- Children enrolled in Nurturing Families are screened regularly on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), a tool that tracks child development and identifies possible physical and social-emotional delays. 95% of children enrolled in the Nurturing Families Network home visiting program demonstrate normal development. The remaining 5% are referred for further evaluation and/or early intervention services as needed.

This rate of 5% of possible developmental delays of Nurturing Families children is much lower than the 9.5% - 14.2% of demonstrated developmental delays or social and emotional problems in a similar population reported by The National Center for Children in Poverty.

### Federal performance measure #4: Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

- The rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect in the high-risk families participating in Nurturing Families is ONLY 2%, compared to 20%-25% for similar high-risk families not participating in this type of program.
- The low 2% is also lower than the rates of abuse and neglect in other evidence based home visiting programs across the country. Several studies show rates of 5% to 8% of child abuse and neglect for some programs including the Nurse Family Partnership.

**Federal performance measure #5: Improvement of Parenting Skills and Behaviors**

- Mothers participating in the Nurturing Families Home Visiting program show statistically significant positive change in parental behaviors and attitudes.
- Nurturing Families Network is an evidence-based, federally approved Parent as Teachers (PAT) program. PAT curriculum is used to support and facilitate increase of family strengths and protective factors in the areas of attachment, discipline, health, nutrition, safety, sleep and transitions/routines.

**Federal performance measure #6: Reduction in Crime or Domestic Violence**

- The rate of domestic violence among mothers participating in Nurturing Families Network dropped significantly from 2.4% at program entry to 1% after one year.

**Federal performance measure #7: Improved Coordination of Resources of Community Supports**

- Nurturing Families staff refers participating parents to numerous services in the community to address an array of family needs, ranging from medical and preventive services to family recreation and school enrollment.
- Mothers participating in Nurturing Families made significant improvements on the Community Life Skills Scale (CLS), indicating increased knowledge on how to access community resources and reduction in social isolation.
- NFN mothers made statistically significant gains in life course outcomes during their participation in the program. After one and two years in NFN, participating mothers were more likely to have graduated from high school or obtain a GED, be employed and live independently from other family members. Evaluations also show statistically significant increases in budgeting, having a bank account and increased financial security.

\*Evaluations of the NFN Program are conducted by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. Full reports are available at [www.ct.gov/ctf](http://www.ct.gov/ctf) click on research.



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September 8, 2011

Good Morning.

My name is Christine Garber and I am the Connecticut Program Director for Reach Out and Read.

Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based, national, nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms by giving new books to children and educating parents about the importance of reading aloud. We serve nearly 3.9 million children nationally which includes over 47,000 children in our state.

Two of the greatest areas of need we face in Connecticut regarding early learning and development are assuring our children have the foundational literacy skills they need to start kindergarten as well as engaging and educating parents from the first day of their child's life, especially those parents in the lower socio-economic brackets, those without an education and those who speak English as a second language.

Many of these parents are unaware of the enormously important role they have in shaping the lives of their children, nor do they realize that it's their actions (or lack thereof) in those very early years (birth to three) that critically shapes their child's path to learning. Often, these parents are unaware

- that by three years of age 80% of their child's brain growth is complete
- that their infant's early experiences and relationships shape their brain development
- that by simply reading aloud to their children 10 – 15 minutes a day will set them on a trajectory of knowledge and success in life

Reaching and educating these high risk children and families is the barrier we face, however, the Reach Out and Read model breaks this barrier by its unparalleled access to children and their parents from birth.

By partnering with pediatricians, Reach Out and Read leverages the trusted relationship between doctors and parents to develop critical early reading skills in children. Reach Out and Read takes place in the exam room during the ten standard well-child visits from six months through age five reaching children and educating parents during those critical years of brain development.

Moreover, through our presence in hospitals, clinics, and health centers, we reach children who do not have access to early education programs and therefore most need our services.

14 independent studies, all published in medical journals, say Reach Out and Read works. Not only does Reach Out and Read gain access to the high risk children, those participating children enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed, with larger vocabularies, stronger language skills, and a six-month developmental edge over their peers.

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Additionally, our model is fiscally responsible as our team of pediatricians volunteer their services to deliver our program.

Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read incorporates literacy and early reading skills into the definition of child health aligning us perfectly with RTT-ELC guidelines. RTT-ELC is dually funded and supported by both the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Reach Out and Read's position at the nexus of health care and education compliments this effort.

Thank you.

Christine Garber

Connecticut Program Director

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## **Reach Out and Read's inclusion in Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund (RTT-ELC)**

Reach Out and Read serves 47,248 children from the ages of zero to five in Connecticut.

Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud.

Reach Out and Read builds on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers to develop critical early reading skills in children, beginning at 6 months of age. The more than 3.9 million families served annually by Reach Out and Read read together more often, and their children enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed, with larger vocabularies, stronger language skills, and a six-month developmental edge over their peers.

Reach Out and Read aligns perfectly with RTT-ELC guidelines. RTT-ELC is the first major federal support for young children that is dually funded and supported by both the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Reach Out and Read's position at the nexus of health care and education compliments this effort.

Reach Out and Read helps to achieve the RTT-ELC "Focused Investment Area" of "Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children." **Priority C**

*Within Priority C it states...*

*Improving early learning and development outcomes also requires that children are healthy and supported by their families. Services that address health and family supports are thus critical, and health and family engagement are key elements in high quality early learning and development programs. RTT-ELC is designed to support states that focus on increasing access to quality programs and services that promote health and engage families in the care and education of their young children.*

Reach Out and Read falls clearly within this definition. Multiple studies have shown that Reach Out and Read increases parental engagement and has the ability to scale easily through our access within the medical system.

Reach Out and Read easily provides access to Connecticut's high need children through its partnerships with pediatricians in hospitals, community health centers and clinics.

Reach Out and Read helps ensure that young children with high needs – those that are low income, English learners and children with disabilities or developmental delays enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

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Reach Out and Read brings private support from foundations, corporations and individuals to match public support.

**The application asks for specific information in Table (A)(1)-3: "Participation of Children with High Needs in different types of Early Learning and Development Programs."**

Reach Out and Read would be listed as "other" and the number of children served as:

Infants under 1: 9,445

Toddlers ages 1 through 2: 9,445

Preschoolers ages 3 until kindergarten entry: 28,358

**The application asks for specific information in Table (A)(1)-5: "Historical data on the participation of Children with High Needs in Early Learning and Development Programs."**

Reach Out and Read would be listed as "other."

Children Served:

2007 29,165

2008 33,982

2009 47,205

2010 35,044

2011 46,621

**The application asks for specific information in Table (A)(1)-8: "Elements of high-quality health promotion practices currently required within the State."**

Reach Out and Read would be listed as "other" and you would check the boxes "Developmental, behavioral and sensory screening, referral and follow up" and "Health Literacy."

**The application asks for specific information in Table (A)(1)-9: "Elements of a high-quality family engagement strategy currently required within the state."**

Reach Out and Read would be listed as "other" and described as: Reach Out and Read has evidence that proves parental engagement increases around increased frequency of reading to children and subsequently increased positive interactions. There are 10 pediatric visits in the first five years, where



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physicians offer anticipatory guidance to parents to read to children 20 minutes each day and give an age and culturally appropriate book (the tool) to take home, in order to follow this advice.

**The application asks for specific information in Table (B)(2)(c): "Increasing the number and percentage of Early Learning and Development Programs participating in the statewide tiered QRIS program."**

Reach Out and Read would be listed as "other" with 47,248 children currently served today and reaching approximately 5,000 additional children per year (based on the grant funding level) over the next four years.

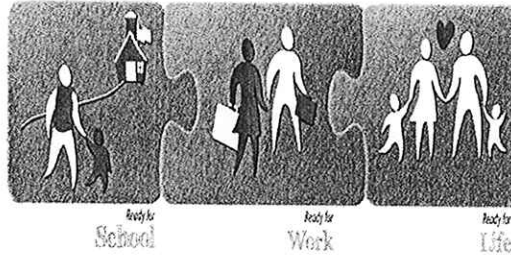
**Reach Out and Read specifically addresses the requirements in Section (C)(4)(a) and (C)(4)(c) (See attached Reach Out and Read research summary.)**

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# Child Daycare



## Serving:

Ansonia  
Bloomfield  
Branford  
Bridgeport  
Bristol  
Brooklyn  
Chaplin  
Danbury  
Derby  
East Lyme  
Enfield  
Greenwich  
Griswold  
Groton  
Guilford  
Hamden  
Hartford  
Killingly  
Manchester  
Mansfield  
Meriden  
Milford  
Naugatuck  
New Britain  
New Canaan  
New Haven  
New London  
New Milford  
Newington  
Newtown  
North Haven  
Norwalk  
Norwich  
Plainville  
Plymouth  
Southington  
Stamford  
Torrington  
Vernon  
Wallingford  
Waterbury  
Waterford  
Watertown  
WestHaven  
Winchester

My name is Mary Burnham I am co-chair of the State Funded Child Day Care Director's FORUM. State Funded Centers have been providing quality education for low-moderate income families for 40 years making them the first network of universal pre-schools in CT. These centers ensure employment for low-moderate income families and provide jobs for CT early childhood education teachers. All these centers are NAEYC accredited and provide high quality education for young children. Currently there are 102 State Funded Child Day Care Centers in Connecticut, located in 53 municipalities serving approximately 4,300 children daily.

Over the past legislative session we worked very hard to get bill 1103 passed which will create a coordinated system of early care and education in the State of CT.

This bill should put CT in good standing as it applies for RTT funds.

There are several items that the application should include:

1. In the application, it must be made clear that an early care and education system includes birth through age eight. This will require coordination between present early childhood programs and the public schools and it will require an alignment of developmentally appropriate curricula through age 8.
2. In the application, QRIS will need to be addressed. The QRIS system needs to be developed so that programs that achieve the top level (NAEYC accreditation) will not have to demonstrate the requirements of the levels below the top. In other words, each level should be able to be accomplished independently. Additionally, ALL programs should have to meet State licensing regulations.
3. In the application, assessment/testing will need to be addressed. First and foremost, these assessments need to be done through observation and they must be developmentally appropriate. AND, they need to be used to assist teachers in developing developmentally appropriate curricula for ages birth through eight. In the application, it needs to be made clear that these assessments will NOT be tied to the funding of programs but instead ensure developmentally appropriate curricula.
4. As CT develops an early care and education system, it is vital that those who work in early care and education programs are included in the planning and development of such a system. After all, these are the people who know the system best – the good, the bad, and the ugly. As State Funded Center directors, we are anxious to assist the State in developing a better system for CT families, children, and programs.

## To and Through –Race to the Top/ Early Learning Challenge Grant Hearing

### Testimony –

Good Morning distinguished panelist, honorable members of the legislature and fellow citizens, my name is Susan Vater and I work with the Village for Families and Children in Hartford. The Village is an organization that provides home visiting, family center and center-based school readiness programs and we partner with Hartford child and family development organizations and partners. I am here today speaking on behalf of the thousands of Connecticut's youngest citizens, "high needs" children who may be getting to the right door but not through it.

As Governor Malloy and others this morning talked about, Scientists can now credibly say that the early childhood years – from birth to age 5 – lay the foundation for later academic success, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, and a lifetime of sound physical and mental health. Conversely, deep poverty, lack of exposure to a quality early education and care environment, abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence in early childhood can all lead to toxic stress. When it occurs, toxic stress can actually damage the architecture of the developing brain, leading to disrupted circuits and a weakened foundation for future learning, health and societal contributions.

The greatest harm comes from the cumulative burden of multiple risk factors. With each additional risk factor, the odds of long-term damage to brain architecture increase. How many risk factors do you think a "high need child in Hartford is exposed to before they turn 5, turn 3 ... have their first birthday?

We can thus comprehend why children aren't succeeding in Kindergarten and are challenged to find a supportive and therapeutic early care and education environment that can intervene during this critical time.

Children in Hartford are at high risk for poor outcomes due to an accumulation of factors that include poverty, health problems, and barriers to care. As a result, Hartford has the highest number of referrals to the state's developmental surveillance and early intervention programs. Yet, too many children are not connected with needed services because they do not qualify or are lost to follow up

Because of significant investments in public awareness, provider training and easy-to-use, reliable tools, identifying high needs children has become easier, and as a result, many are able to get to the doorway of needed services. Developmental screening has become routine at pediatrician's offices, Brighter Futures Family Centers and preschools. And, Help Me Grow supports developmental surveillance statewide. Unfortunately, too many do not get through the door and connected to care. Most need further assessment to determine the most appropriate intervention, and in many cases, after waiting for evaluations, they do not meet the eligibility criteria for indicated services such as preschool special education or Birth to Three and may – or may not – receive

directions to another door. As you can imagine, an unacceptable number of children fall through the cracks. Due in part to the efforts of many, health and education have come together to leverage their resources, coordinate and most importantly provide a developmental surveillance campaign that has identified a high number of children who need something more than an ongoing developmental screen but less than a very costly and often very lengthy tertiary level assessment.

In addition to quality early childhood school readiness programs, what do children with "high needs" need?

We need developmental and behavioral health services for these children who require specialized intervention. We need increased capacity to provide mid-level developmental assessments which have been piloted and integrated into care at the Village for Families and Children. These mid-level comprehensive developmental assessments, ensure children identified through surveillance and screening will receive timely evaluations that efficiently and effectively use scarce resources. Forty-two percent of children referred to the state's Birth to Three program in 2007 did not qualify for early intervention services. Families typically learn of this after waiting for and ultimately receiving a full evaluation. A mid-level developmental assessment program triages such children to intervention and appropriate preventative and therapeutic services quickly and at lower cost. Similarly, mid-level assessments of children with behavioral problems could rapidly triage some children into community-based therapeutic support services, while preserving scarce and much more expensive and intensive children's mental health services for children with more serious and complex needs.

I am here today to also ask the proposal committee to not only commit to a comprehensive mid-level developmental assessment process for high need children but to also recognize that there needs to be a model of early education and care for the children who are identified as needing something different and more. Unaddressed social-emotional and behavior problems during the preschool years are the leading predictor of long term educational and social emotional challenges for children. Rather than receiving behavioral health support, children with challenging behavioral issues are often expelled. Dr. Gilliam in a policy brief entitled Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion, cited studies that found 6.7 expulsions per 1,000 preschoolers enrolled in state-funded programs nationally reported. Rates were higher for older preschoolers and African Americans. Boys were more than 4.5 times to be expelled than girls. Children, who are expelled from preschool, do not receive the educational benefits of an early childhood program and enter Kindergarten behind their peers who complete preschool. Since the behavioral health and subsequent developmental delays are not being addressed at an early stage, these challenges

continue to impede the child's ability to learn in school. There is very limited capacity for early education programs in Hartford, to address developmental or behavioral issues. Often these children are simply expelled from early education programs rather than receiving the specialized care needed to address the behavioral issues. When children suffer from severe behavioral problems, it limits their ability to participate fully. Thus, the children most in need of the protective factors offered by a high quality comprehensive preschool, don't receive it. As a result, these children enter Kindergarten lacking school readiness and with those same behavioral issues that continue to impede them from learning.

This gap needs to be addressed. A therapeutic pre-school for children with challenging behaviors that can serve as a model for other regions and providers is desperately needed. By addressing these behavioral issues through a therapeutic component integrated into an early education program, children with the most challenging issues will receive the specialized assistance they need.

There are pockets of developmentally informed and sophisticated care for high needs children happening through out the state but it is costly and not nearly at the capacity it needs to be. One could say the achievement gap starts here; and starts early in life!