



January 9, 2012  
Achievement Gap Task Force

Testimony of Elena Trueworthy, Executive Director, Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative  
on behalf of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on high-impact strategies for addressing Connecticut's achievement gap. I am Elena Trueworthy, Director of the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative. The Collaborative is an initiative of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Serving over 350 members representing child care, businesses, higher education, and others for the past 23 years, the Collaborative is committed to promoting and sustaining high-quality child care in the Greater Hartford region.

Today, I am testifying as a Steering Committee member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide membership and advocacy organization committed to improving the developmental outcomes for all children, birth to 8, in the areas of early learning, health, safety and economic security.

The evidence is clear and overwhelming. Investing in a strong, coordinated and consolidated early care and education system that includes health, nutrition, and mental health will reduce the preparation gap experienced by many children before they even enter the public school setting. From birth, all children need language-rich, developmentally-appropriate, stimulating environments that encourage brain development, early literacy skills, and social-emotional competence. These are the foundations for strong academic achievement, which can be found in high-quality early childhood settings including the home, neighbor-care and center-based child care programs.

For this strong foundation to result in an equally strong finish, our K-12 system must work to align learning standards by building on the fundamentals learned in the early years. It is important that K-12 leaders continue to increase their understanding of early childhood development and its importance in producing children ready for the next step in their education.

In study after study, early childhood education has proven to increase academic achievement in both the short and long terms. One of the most often-cited studies is the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study. This study finds that low-income children immersed in a high-quality early education program that includes preschool and home visitation were less likely to be placed in special education and had a significantly higher average achievement scores at age 14. The long-term effects include higher rates of graduation, employment, and earnings, and less health and mental health impairments.

Findings from the Minneapolis Federal Reserve study of 2003 highlight the important economic impacts of early childhood education, including a return of investment of \$16 returned for every \$1 spent, supporting the necessity of more public funding for early childhood as a way to improve educational outcomes *and* macro-economic outcomes.

Given the overwhelming body of research about the impact of early childhood education on academic achievement and the economy, what does this mean for Connecticut?

We are fortunate to live in a state where policy makers are aware of these studies and have acted to create a number of high quality programs to reach young children.

However, two problems are evident with our current efforts. First, they are underfunded. One of the key findings of the 2011 CT Voices for Children Early Care and Education Progress Report was that Connecticut's programs in 2011 were funded at more than 10% below 2002 levels. One of the outcomes of underfunding is that wages for early childhood teachers are extremely low. In fact, early childhood teachers are one of the lowest paid professions according to the CT Department of Labor. At the same time, in an effort to improve the skills and quality of teachers, Connecticut has enacted strict degree requirements for early childhood teachers. This is an equation that does not add up. To attract qualified teachers to the profession, wages must correspond with required skill levels or degreed teachers will seek other jobs.

There must also be support for the advancement of current workers in the field. Workers are not making worthy wages and are struggling to attain degrees because of the financial requirements and also language barriers. To support adult English Language Learners (ELL), the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative along with Capital Community College and the Hartford Department of Children, Families, Youth, and Recreation created a pilot called, *Paving the Way*, with the support of the Hartford Foundation's Brighter Futures Initiative and the Kellogg Foundation. This project is taking ELL students who normally would have to take numerous classes to learn English before earning any credit towards their Early Childhood Education degree, can now take credit-bearing classes and learn English simultaneously. This initiative saves the students time, money, and frustration and paves a way for them to attain their degree. It is models such as these that should be supported and replicated to meet the immediate needs of the workforce.

The second problem Connecticut faces is that our current early care and education efforts lack coordination. Programs often operate in isolation, and in multiple state agencies. A lack of coordination means inefficiencies and lost opportunities. Other states such as Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina and Washington have consolidated early childhood into one office, which has resulted in increased alignment and streamlined services.

Significant efforts have been made in 2011 that will help to advance early childhood in Connecticut. One of those efforts was Connecticut's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application. While it did not win, the application produced a roadmap of next steps to improve our early childhood efforts including increasing access to preschool with 1,000 additional slots.

Also in 2011, the legislature enacted, and the Governor signed, Public Act 11-181, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Child Development. This legislation is intended to address the issues of coordination and alignment in our early childhood system. Establishment of a coordinated system will result in improved access and, as a result, better outcomes when it comes to our achievement gap. A coordinated system will:

- consolidate and streamline current services
- improve program coordination
- create urgently needed alignment across the developmental continuum
- produce efficiencies by eliminating duplication
- increase accountability for improving quality
- create the capacity to measure the performance of programs as well as effectively assess the progress of the social, emotional and educational success of children from birth to 8.

Steps to implement Public Act 11-181 have been minimal, and this task force and the legislature at-large can, and should, take action to ensure that Public Act 11-181 is implemented.

In conclusion, the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance offers the following suggestions for Connecticut to better prepare young children for elementary school and beyond:

1. Increase funding for early care and education
2. Increase access to programs
3. Reform our patchwork approach to early childhood
4. Invest starting at birth.

Universal preschool is a commendable goal, but alone will not close Connecticut's achievement gap.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.