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Progress Report on CT Early Care and Education Says Poor Coordination and Inadequate Funding Limit Access

NEW HAVEN - Following Connecticut's loss in the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge funding competition and the Governor's call this week for education reform legislation, a report on the state's early care and education system finds that a lack of central coordination of early childhood programs and stagnant or declining funding levels are leaving many children in need of early care unserved. The organization called on state legislators and Governor Malloy, who has identified increasing access to preschool as a priority, to maintain early childhood program funding and to develop a more integrated approach to child care and early education.

"High quality early care and education can help our state's children be more academically and socially ready for kindergarten," said Sarah Esty, Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children and co-author of the report. "The early education we provide now will have long-term consequences for our children's school performance and the health of our economy."

Key findings in the report include:

- **Connecticut's patchwork of early care and education programs needs reform to create a coordinated and comprehensive system.** Connecticut's publicly-funded early care and education programs rely on multiple funding streams controlled by multiple agencies with varied reporting and eligibility and data requirements. This creates confusion and complications for both providers and parents, according to Connecticut Voices.
- **Funding for early care and education has been stagnant and is more than 10% below 2002 levels.** Total state funding for early care and education increased by less than 1% between 2010 and 2011, and remains substantially below levels from early in the decade.
- **Connecticut is not serving many of the children who need help.** Despite the need for child care from working families struggling through the recession, over 86% of infants and toddlers, and at least 25% of preschoolers living in struggling families (families earning under 75% of the state median income) remain unserved by any state or federal subsidy for early care and education.

- **The state lacks the data necessary to determine which aspects of the early care system are working effectively.** The report indicates that there is not sufficient data gathered to evaluate the impact of Connecticut’s early education services on a child’s later school success or which programs are having the greatest impact.

To improve access to and quality of child care programs, Connecticut Voices recommends that the Governor and state legislators:

- Maintain and ultimately increase funding for early care and education.
- Move forward on creating plans for a more coordinated system of early care and education that works to integrate existing program "silos," gather data to evaluate and improve quality of care, and fund services based on the actual costs of providing care.

Early care and education has recently been a significant focus of attention among Connecticut policy makers. In the 2011 legislative session, legislation was approved to create a planning process for a more coordinated early care and education system. Connecticut’s application for federal Race to the Top education funding focused on improving quality in the state’s early education services. Also, Governor Malloy called this week for education reform legislation that “enhances families’ access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities.”

“Connecticut has many high-quality early care and education services already in place, and our Race to the Top application provided an excellent road map to achieving a more coordinated system that will ultimately lead to better long-term results for children,” said Cyd Oppenheimer, Senior Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices and co-author of the report. “We know that our Governor and policy makers understand the importance of early care and education and will remain true to their commitment to better coordination and increased funding.”

Connecticut Voices is a research-based think tank that works to advance policies that benefit the state’s children, youth, and families.

The report, “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2011,” can be found on the Connecticut Voices website at www.ctkidslink.org. A separate appendix on the site contains more detailed data and source information.

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