

Andrew Cuomo, Attorney General  
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Dear Attorney General Cuomo,

We are writing to you on behalf of New York's children. We agree that New York must reduce costs, motivate the economy, and lead in education reform. To truly motivate the economy and reform education, a few key policy changes are necessary. We will not impact the graduation rate or greatly improve our workforce until we level the playing field for children during their youngest years, because, once behind, it's difficult to get kids back on track, and we all pay the price. Currently, 20% of kindergarteners lag behind cognitive benchmarks and nearly 1/3 are behind on social and emotional measures. Nobel Laureate Economist James Heckman's research indicates that once this learning gap happens, it is almost never remediated. **To get New York back on track, evidence-based policies targeting the first eight years of life must be enacted - this is backed by solid economic returns and one of the best ways to foster economic growth.**

### Why children?

The World Bank released a 2010 report stating "Early childhood development is the foundation of human capital formation, has the highest rate of return in economic development, and is the most cost-effective way to reduce poverty and foster economic growth."

Investing in young children is not just compassionate, it's smart. How children spend their early years puts them on the path for success – or failure- as students, workers, and citizens. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to graduate from high school, avoid teen pregnancy, and attend college if they participate in programs like the Nurse Family Partnership and attend high quality child care. Because of these improved life outcomes, cost-benefit analysis has shown the benefits for society as well. There is a \$5 ROI per dollar for evidence-based home-visiting parent programs and a \$6-\$7 ROI per dollar for high-quality early education.

New York's next Governor can use this evidence to ensure an improved economy. **We recommend three specific areas of focus with initial low-cost policy solutions:**

1. **Support evidence-based home-visiting programs.** Recognize parents and caregivers as children's first and primary teachers. Address not only formal education settings, but also parenting programs, informal care arrangements, and home-based child care providers. **New York's next governor must access new federal dollars and prioritize continued NYS spending on evidence-based home-visiting programs for new parents.**
2. **Stabilize the system for distributing child care subsidies.** Eliminate the extreme inequities of the current patchwork of county-specific policies. **Set state-wide standards, including a consistent eligibility level of at least 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, parent co-payments at a reasonable percentage of total income based on a model of affordability (10-15%), and provider reimbursement at a higher rate for outstanding quality that leads to improved outcomes for children.**
3. **Lead the country in recognizing that graduation rates and college attendance are tied to the first eight years of life.** Coordinate standards and services for children 0-8 under one entity to ensure that developmentally appropriate practices are upheld in all settings: home visitation, child care, and school. **Insist that SED, OCFS and others work together to link policies and dollars to create high-quality learning environments for children 0-8 in order for students to achieve proficiency by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Among the elements included in the quality learning environments, in addition to qualified and effective teaching staff, must be the availability for daily physical activity.**

**Why listen to the Rochester Community?**

Rochester has a history of leadership in social policy and children’s services. Our community has among the highest quality center-based child care and PreK programs measured in the U.S. Rochester is the home of leading evidence-based early childhood programs. We have spent 20 years strategizing and connecting to improve outcomes for children while reducing inefficiencies and improving coherence. We understand and have embraced the need to incorporate research, use evidence-based programs, and forge public-private partnerships. Businesses, foundations, community-based organizations, the United Way, Rochester City School District, City of Rochester, and Monroe County have all come together to move things forward for children. But it is not enough: we, and the State, need to do more.

**Why change in New York State?**

Currently, many of New York State’s public policies for children 0-8 are unaligned and uncoordinated. While the first eight years of life are the most critical for educational success, New York has too few policy links between home visiting, child care, universal pre-kindergarten, and elementary schools. Policies must acknowledge the first five years as a child’s school readiness preparation. We are grateful for NYS’s solid investment in PreK; this valuable attention and investment must be partnered with developmentally-appropriate practices for children in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. Dramatic change in policies and guidelines that surround PreK are needed. While OCFS guidelines call for safe and healthy practices in subsidized child care and the State Education Department sets comprehensive quality standards for cognitive development, neither offers a continuum of high-quality developmentally appropriate standards.

Traditionally, child development has been seen as an issue for families and community agencies. Today, some leaders across the country are realizing that improved policies regarding the first years of life are necessary if we are going to move the needle in education and economic development. New York’s next Governor can further this pioneering work. **Thank you for your consideration and action regarding the future of our children, families, and New York State. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss this further.**

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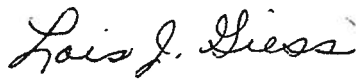
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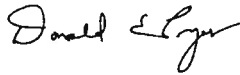
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