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Early Education and Out-of-School-Time Organizations Band Together As State Weighs Re-investment in Children

“Put MA Kids First” Forms Amid Heightened Attention to Early Learning

(Boston) -- January 30, 2015 -- A group of more than two-dozen early childhood education organizations and out-of-school programs have formed a new coalition to help shape public policy on a critical part of the state’s education system.

“Early education and care is not an option – it is an essential element of a successful education system,” said Marie St. Fleur, president and CEO of the Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children and the former Chair of the House Education Committee. “We need to strengthen early education and out-of-school time by investing in successful, high-quality programs, as well as developing a well-qualified and fairly compensated work force.”

The launch of “Put MA Kids First”, a Coalition to Promote Early Education and Out of School Time, comes amid heightened attention to the state’s commitment to early education and care and out-of-school time.

Over the last 15 years, state spending on early education and care has dropped by \$114 million – more than 50 percent -- just as research has conclusively demonstrated that children’s brains develop rapidly through the birth-to-5 age period.

“Our level of commitment to children has swerved in the wrong direction at the wrong time,” said St. Fleur, spokesperson for the coalition.

Massachusetts’ students have scored near the top of national standardized tests, but persistent gaps in achievement among Black and Hispanic children have raised questions about equity and appropriate ways to invest in early learning to create a long-term foundation for literacy and math skills.

Federal programs pay for 92 percent of the state’s early education services. Private, community-based early education centers, family child care providers and programs

including Head Start and YMCAs are significant providers of these services. But there is a huge gap in pay for early education teachers – salaries for degreed teachers start at about \$25,000, far less than for K-12 teachers. The low pay has resulted in turnover rates of about 28 percent, which exacerbates the chronic underfunding of the system.

Support for early education and care, as well as out-of-school time programs, appears to be growing in Massachusetts and nationally.

The National Council of State Legislatures recently issued a report asserting that more states are boosting investment in early education as part of an economic development strategy, following research that shows children who participate in high quality early education programs have significantly better outcomes in educational attainment and careers. These children are less likely to repeat a grade, require remedial services, engage with the criminal justice system, are more likely to complete high school and graduate from college, and they will pay more in taxes and require less health care spending.

In Massachusetts, the state's Department of Early Education and Care has requested a 9 percent budget increase for 2016 Fiscal Year, and legislators are calling for universal pre-K and other significant commitments to early education and out-of-school time.

In addition, last month, President Obama announced \$60 million in grants over four years to early education programs in five Massachusetts cities: Boston, Lowell, Lawrence, Springfield and Holyoke.

In January, the Rennie Center issued a report urging the development of a "community-based, mixed provider approach to expand access to quality pre-kindergarten options so that more Commonwealth students have access to these foundational learning experiences."

"We must seize the opportunity now to demonstrate our commitment to early education and care and out-of-school time," said St. Fleur. "We can give all children a smart start in life by making the right investments now."

The following organizations are members of the Coalition:

Action for Boston Community Development

Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs

Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children

BOSTnet

Catholic Charities Boston

Child Care Resources/Children's Aid and Family Services - Seven Hills Foundation
Children's Investment Fund
Community Action of the Franklin,
Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions
Community Teamwork
Ellis Memorial
For Kids Only Afterschool
Guild of St. Agnes
Horizons for Homeless Children
Massachusetts Association of Early Education and Care
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership
Massachusetts Association for Community Action
Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network
Massachusetts Head Start Association
Massachusetts Independent Child Care Organization
NorthStar Learning Centers
Nurtury
Parent-Child Home Program
SEIU Local 509
Stand for Children
Strategies for Children
The Community Group
Wheelock College

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