

Early learning crucial for New York students

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On Dec. 16, New York state was notified it was not a recipient of \$100 million of federal Race To The Top Early Learning Challenge Grant money. New York's application for the grant focused on establishing a statewide five-star rating and improvement systems for all early education programs called QUALITYstarsNY, standardizing kindergarten assessment and creating a data tracking system to better coordinate children's services. This setback, although disappointing, has to serve as a wake-up call to our leaders in Albany that we cannot be caught sleeping in the Race To The Top.

Child Care Solutions, the child care resource and referral agency for Onondaga and Cayuga counties, believes we cannot abandon the initiatives set forth in the federal grant application. Although the money would have obviously eased the financial burden of implementing these programs we must keep our eyes on the finish line and continue to move forward. The parents and employers of our state need QUALITYstarsNY to establish a standardized rating system for early education and child care programs. Child care providers and educators also require training and support that will improve the quality of care and learning. QUALITYstarsNY will provide for this. Most importantly, children need high quality early learning experiences so that they will have the tools to be prepared for school and life-long success.

Finding and choosing child care should not be an obstacle course or a guessing game. New York needs to raise the bar and set standards so that parents know what kind of early care their children are receiving. Child care teachers and providers need to elevate their profession to meet higher standards so that all of the children of our state are afforded equal educational opportunities.

"We now know that 75 percent of brain growth and 85 percent of intellect, personality and social skills develop before age 5," said Marsha Basloe, executive director of the Early Care and Learning Council in Albany. "Early learning is key. And while we did not win this grant, our proposal can still serve as the blueprint to ensure our youngest children are getting the quality early learning they need to compete in a 21st century workforce.

Please let your voice be heard in Albany and urge our leaders to continue with the initiatives set forth in the Race To The Top. For the sake of our children and our states economic future, let's continue toward the finish line.

To learn more about the importance of high quality early learning, go to:
www.winningbeginningny.org.

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