

## **Invest wisely in early education**

Visit Site: [Times Union](#)

June 25, 2011

Hurray for the [Times Union](#) editorial board's recommendation in the June 19 editorial, "Still failing after all these years," that it's time to focus on early education.

The state pours money into quick fixes aimed at K-12 students. These interventions are important but cannot be the only focus.

District superintendents say that the largest achievement gap exists on the first day of kindergarten. According to Harvard's Jack Shonkoff, from the time of conception to the first day of kindergarten, children's development progresses at a pace exceeding that of any subsequent stage of life. Cost-benefit analysis studies, such as that conducted by [Nobel Laureate James Heckman](#), found a \$12 return on every \$1 spent on early childhood education for at-risk children. Why do we wait to invest?

In New York, child care assistance supports children's early care experiences so that low-income parents can work. Nearly 50 percent of this support, however, is used in legally exempt, unregulated care. Our children in poverty need access and support for licensed, high quality early childhood education, with professionally trained teachers.

Our state has enrolled 45 percent of all eligible 4-year-olds in "universal" pre-kindergarten. We need to invest more wisely in this important program, by allowing districts to use funding for full-day programs and transportation, thereby increasing access.

And we need to pay greater attention to the years before school entry by helping strengthen families with voluntary home visiting.

It's time to restructure where our resources are allocated to ensure the long-term investment in New York.

Marsha Basloe Early Care & Learning Council  
Kate Breslin Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy  
Albany

This letter was written on behalf of the coalition Winning Beginning NY.