



TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2013-2014 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Our thanks to Senator DeFrancisco, Assemblymember Farrell, Senator Smith, Assemblymember Titus, Senator Felder and Assemblymember Lupardo, and to the other members of the Finance, Ways and Means, Social Services and Children and Families Committees for the opportunity to present testimony to you today regarding the Executive Budget Proposal.

Research has found that high-quality expanded learning opportunities offer students academic benefits including increases in test scores and achievement, improved attendance, and higher graduation and promotion rates. They have also demonstrated positive impacts on social-emotional development and decreases in risk behaviors. They bring to low-income students the kinds of enrichments that more affluent students have access to regularly – art, music and drama, hands-on science, organized sports, and service and career exploration opportunities – and are critical for positive youth development, for exposing students to role models and potential mentors, and for stemming summer learning loss.¹

Expanded learning opportunities can play a major role in the lives of children and families, and may be of particular value to children facing challenges—whether those challenges stem from learning disabilities, attending a struggling school, or needing more adult support—and low-income working families, who might otherwise have difficulty affording a safe, educational place for their children to be between the hours of 3 pm and 6 pm. Through this year’s State Budget, the Legislature has the opportunity to invest in children and working families through increased access to expanded learning opportunities for youth across New York State.

Advantage After School

The Advantage After School program has been a critical funding source for high-quality afterschool programs across the state, but its reach has been curtailed by a 37% cut in funding over the last three budget cycles. Last year’s competitive application process received 350 proposals, of which only 45 could be funded (and of those, only 39 were fully funded). A funding rate of barely over 10% of applicants left many previously funded, high-quality programs serving high-needs students, such as a program run by the acclaimed Berkshire Farm Center that served students in one of Albany’s highest-poverty neighborhood, unfunded for next year. Returning

¹ For more information on the alignment between expanded learning opportunities and New York State’s school reform agenda and on the most recent research on the effectiveness of these programs, please visit http://www.nysan.org/section/initiatives/elo_and_school_reform.

Advantage to the \$28 million level at which it was funded in the 2009-10 state fiscal year would allow at least 10,000 additional students the opportunity to participate in engaging, enriching activities that keep developing their academic and social skills for hours after the school day ends.

The 150 Advantage programs currently serving approximately 40,000 students at 197 program sites have shown impressive results and made a real difference in their communities. The Addison Valley program in Addison is one of the only available options after school for their very rural community, and they average a daily attendance of almost half of the eligible students. The Berkshire Farm Center program in Albany reports their proudest accomplishment to be a substantial increase in parental involvement with the school, as the later hours allows parents to attend events and talk with program and school staff after work. The program at the middle school in Corning echoes that sentiment, reporting that approximately half of the families they serve attended a recent Family Night dinner.

Although academic improvement is neither the only goal of Advantage programs nor the only way that their successes should be measured, the homework help, tutoring, and enrichment offered by Advantage programs has made a measurable difference for many students. Quad A for Kids in Rochester, while focusing on helping children develop constructive curiosity, close personal and group relationships, and good decision-making skills, has also produced statistically significant gains in student school attendance and math and reading test scores. Quad A students attended an average of 9 more days of school than non-attendees, and were more likely to have a 3 or a 4 on the state's math and English language arts proficiency exams. Corning reports that 90% of participants improved their grades in at least one academic subject and All Saints similarly reports helping 200 students to improve their grades.

Advantage programs for older students are charged with helping youth develop their career potential, and programs offer mentoring and skill building with a focus on youth development and local employment opportunities. Hudson Bluehawk Nation Afterschool Program (HBN ASP) in Hudson provides a Counselor in Training (CIT) program for 9th graders who are former participants in the K-8 afterschool program and hope to become staff. Site Coordinators guide them in a familiar setting to learn basic job readiness skills including professional behavior, successful navigation of the application process, and teamwork. HBN ASP is proud to say that "we grow our own" as approximately 35% of their staff are former CIT members. As part of their Advantage program, Gateway Youth Outreach in Elmont runs a truly unique career mentoring program in partnership with the New York Racing Association and the McLaughlin Racing Group focused on engaging students with opportunities in the local horse-racing industry. All Saints Advantage Afterschool program in Buffalo reports encouraging a culture of workforce participation and assisting fifty participants to complete summer youth employment applications last year.

In a diversity of ways, Advantage programs are helping their students grow and engaging their communities in supporting that growth, supplementing what is available through schools, families, and the child care system. At an annual per child allowable cost of \$1,375 (with many programs serving students at a lower per child cost to the state) and an ability to leverage other public and private funds, Advantage programs are a substantially less expensive child care option for the state to use in assisting low income working families than child care subsidies, which

average \$6,200 in annual per child costs (although the cost is probably somewhat lower for school-aged children). Although this is unlikely to be a one-to-one tradeoff, given the competitive process by which Advantage program locations are chosen and the fluctuating nature of subsidy eligibility, it is nonetheless likely that more afterschool options would reduce demand for school age child care subsidies—and would create greater stability for children, as their afterschool situation would not change with parental employment or eligibility. Research has repeatedly shown that children with a safe, supervised, engaging place to be between 3 pm and 6 pm are less likely to be arrested, engage in drug use or sexual activity, or otherwise diminish the probability that they will grow into healthy, productive adults.

An increase in Advantage funding would be a wise investment in our youth. As the incredibly competitive application process last year revealed, New York has a strong pool of very high quality programs that could begin serving more students immediately if the Legislature were to allocate additional funds, and we hope that you will consider doing so.

Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention / Special Delinquency Prevention Program

Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention / Special Delinquency Prevention Program (YDDP / SDPP) funding has supported the operation of youth bureaus across New York—supporting a multitude of youth development programs from summer recreation to workforce preparation to pregnancy prevention to mentoring to afterschool programs—and the Out-of-School-Time afterschool program in New York City. YDDP and SDPP are based on the proven premise that youth without access to safe, engaging, supervised activities are more likely to be caught up in delinquent behavior, leading to greater costs to the state and a loss of positive options for many of those youth as they reach adulthood. YDDP and SDPP were cut by 50% in the FY2011-12 State Budget, with a correspondingly drastic reduction in services to youth.

The Executive Budget proposes to combine these two funding streams into a single Youth Development Program. While we recognize the potential administrative efficiencies to be gained from this consolidation, particularly as the reductions in SDPP have left it a comparatively small program, we have several concerns about the possible consequences of some of the changes accompanying the proposed consolidation.

- *Elimination of the local match requirement.* YDDP funds currently require a 50% local match, and thus YDDP serves as an important lever for families and other youth advocates pressing for local investments in youth. Without the local match requirement, we fear that some counties would make the penny-wise, pound-foolish decision to disinvest in their youth, leaving far too many students with no place to go after the school day or school year ends. In some counties, eliminating the local match could mean up to another 50% cut in the amount of funding for youth development activities.
- *Increased focus on at-risk youth.* While SDPP has traditionally focused specifically on engaging at-risk youth, YDDP has been broader in its reach. We are concerned that the narrowing focus could chip away at this funding stream's rarity as one of the few **prevention**-focused funding state streams. Moreover, particularly as the effects of the recession continue to linger, safe, affordable options for their children are important to many working families, regardless of whether they meet common definitions of being

high risk. The state should continue to support enrichment and development opportunities for all youth in need of a safe place to go.

- *Elimination of allocations to city and town youth bureaus.* While we fully understand the desired administrative efficiencies from the simplification of the youth development program allocations, we are concerned about the potential consequences of having funding decisions made only at the county level, particularly in cases where cities with large percentages of low-income residents are located in counties with high wealth areas outside the city limits. Particularly if the local match requirement is also eliminated and the focus narrowed to at-risk youth, there seems to be a genuine risk of county-level disinvestment in children and youth in some areas.
- *Lack of specificity regarding the allocation formula and distribution requirements.* The proposed statutory language is vague as to how the new funding stream will be allocated and what the restrictions will be on how counties and New York City must oversee and distribute the funds. While the proposed language permits use of the funds for the operation of a youth bureau, it does not specify that the funds must be distributed through such a youth bureau. In some cases this could allow a desirable streamlining of local bureaucracy, but in others could be a recipe for allowing these funds to drift toward other purposes, losing the prevention and youth development purposes in narrower workforce or juvenile justice programs.

We urge the Legislature to carefully consider the possible consequences of this consolidation proposal and investigate whether the desired end of reduced administrative costs for the state and counties can be achieved without loss of opportunity for New York's youth. If the local match requirement is eliminated, the State should consider increasing funding for the Youth Development Program to prevent the loss of local dollars from causing a corresponding cut in already reduced services to youth across New York.

Summer Youth Employment

Summer Youth Employment (SYEP) dollars are a double investment in youth by the state. Working as staff for summer programs for younger children is the most common work assignment for SYEP participants, so SYEP allows summer programs to serve more children while supporting older youths in their transition to the workforce. Almost 50% of SYEP placements in New York City are in summer programs, and because students age 16 and older count in the state-mandated staffing ratios, SYEP dollars allow tens of thousands of younger children the opportunity to attend a summer program every year.

While we are fully supportive of the proposed minimum wage increase, funding for SYEP should also correspondingly increase to ensure that at least as many youth are able to work this summer as worked last summer. Raising the minimum wage by \$1.50 will mean an estimated \$12 million increase in the overall cost of the program. We ask that the State consider returning funding to the \$35 million level so that there is enough state support that all counties can continue to offer SYEP to as many youth as worked last summer. Doing so will maintain this important pathway for assisting youth to enter the workforce and maintain support for summer programming for younger students.

Child Care Subsidies

Having a safe, affordable, enriching place for their children to be when they are not in school is a basic need for all working parents. New York State now faces a crisis in child care funding for low-income working families due to increasing need, increasing costs, and other demands on TANF funds as counties struggle to respond to the lingering effects of the recession. While the majority of child care subsidies go to cover early childhood care, a substantial portion goes to school age child care.

In the Executive Budget, the State has maintained its generous commitment from the FY2012-13 budget to contribute general funds for two years to fill the shortfall in federal funding, but makes no allocation above that level to respond to the growing crisis. More than a third of counties have reduced eligibility levels over the last few years, leaving low-wage working families who live at still devastatingly low income levels of 125% or 150% of the federal poverty line and who don't have access to free afterschool programs to make painful choices around accepting inadequate care for their children or dropping out of the workforce. Either option runs the risk of further trapping children born to low-wage working families in cycles of poverty as they miss out on the enrichment activities, homework help, physical activity and careful supervision their wealthier peers are getting at day care or fee-based afterschool programs.

As part of the Winning Beginnings coalition, NYSAN recommends that the Legislature consider increasing the State's contribution to the child care subsidies program by \$92 million to help return eligibility levels across the state to more realistic levels. This funding would restore child care subsidies in New York to the level of funding available in FY 2010-11. As discussed above, we also recommend that the Legislature consider expanding the Advantage After School program, as more free afterschool programs could help meet some of the need currently being filled through school age child care subsidies.

The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) is a public-private partnership dedicated to promoting young people's safety, learning, and healthy development by increasing the quality and availability of programs available outside the traditional classroom. The positions taken and statements set forth in this document do not necessarily represent the views of all NYSAN members.