



Parents as Teachers.

**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
SFY 2016-2017 State Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
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Testimony Submitted by:

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Parents as Teachers would like to thank the chairs and members of the respective human services committees for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the 2016-2017 New York State Executive Budget. My name is Lisa Foehner. I work for the Parents as Teachers national office and support Parents as Teachers Affiliate programs in New York.

For the past several years a state coalition of advocates from Winning Beginning NY, Schuyler Center for Advocacy Analysis, Fight Crime Invest in Kids, and representatives from several national home visiting models including Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child-Home, Healthy Families America, and Nurse Family Partnership have called for the expansion and growth of all home visiting models in a joint request. This year we are pleased to join our colleagues again in a joint request so that more vulnerable families can receive access to these services.

The coalition recognizes that while one or two models work in some communities, we believe that given the differing goals and continuum of families served, a multi-model approach would better meet the needs of New York communities. Program models may vary in design, eligibility criteria, content or intensity, so a range of individual home visiting program models is more reflective of the broad spectrum of family needs that home visiting can impact. Many experts support home visiting program diversity as essential to providing parents with choices, and ensuring that programs are well matched with local needs and strengths.

This testimony is specific to Parents as Teachers.

Unlike other home visiting models, Parents as Teachers currently receives no funding from New York State. Due to a lack of stable funding, the number of Parents as Teachers programs in the State was reduced from 87 sites in 2005 to only 11 sites in 2015. As you begin to make decisions about the budget I ask that you specifically support \$3 million in new funds for Parents as Teachers so that the program can serve an additional 1,000 families throughout the State. These funds will support the expansion of 11 sites, reduce waiting lists, and help to start one or two new programs in communities where these critical services are needed the most.

In New York, the 11 community based organizations that provide Parents as Teachers, are serving 1,665 families. The first Parents as Teachers site in New York launched in 1986 in Binghamton City School District. The current 11 programs are located in **Westchester, Chautauqua, Monroe, Broome, Steuben, Yates, and Rockland** counties. Many sites carry waiting lists. **Additional funding is needed to increase access to Parents as Teachers services.**

Parents as Teachers is a nationally recognized voluntary, evidenced-based maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting and family support model that focuses on improving early childhood development, family well-being, and helping parents be their child's first best teachers so that children grow up healthy, safe and ready to learn. Parents as Teachers is the most widely replicated home visiting model in the country serving families in all 50 states and in 110 tribal communities. And this is for good reason--Parents as Teachers is a wise investment in the long-run. Parents as Teachers is a proven strategy for reducing the need for remedial education, increasing school readiness, reducing child abuse and neglect and crime, promoting family self-sufficiency, and parent involvement in their children's care and education. Policy analysts have found that **Parents as Teachers has a cost benefit ratio of \$3.39—it saves taxpayers money.**¹

Parents as Teachers is a voluntary program for families that seek greater knowledge to nurture developing brains and help their children achieve healthy growth and development. As neuroscience has demonstrated, brains are built over time, from the bottom up. The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that involves the reciprocal influences of both genetics and early experiences and begins before birth and continues to adulthood. Early experiences are much like the construction of a solid, stable building forming a foundation on which everything else is built. When it comes to the healthy development of infants and toddlers, this means that the quality of that architecture directly results in either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all learning, health and behavior that follow. Because children don't arrive with instruction manuals, parents often lack resources, support, experience and knowledge of basic parenting skills—which are critical to success during pregnancy and through Kindergarten. Parents often want and need extra knowledge and support so they can build a strong family.

The premise of Parents as Teachers is simple: providing parents with the tools and training that they need to support their families and to ensure that their children are healthy, safe and ready to learn. Trained parent educators, who are often early childhood educators, social workers, nurses or other trained professionals, work through local schools, hospitals, or other agencies to strengthen families.

The model includes four components: personal visits; child screenings; a resource network; and group connections. Personal visits are individualized, strength-based visits where parent educators focus on child development and parent-child interaction, and empower parents to interact with their children in a way that facilitates healthy development. The screening portion of the program helps parents identify possible developmental delays and health problems so that children can be linked to appropriate services and therapies. In some cases, Parents as Teachers is the first link between an infant or child and the State's Early Intervention program. Parents as Teachers programs also offer a strong community resource network bridging the gap between resources available and families' needs. Group meetings allow enrolled parents to meet with other parents as a support group; allowing them to practice parenting skills, learn from other parents, and observe their children interacting with other children.

Parents as Teachers is an evidence-based model, proven by nearly 30 years of independent evaluations and rigorous research, including randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental studies.¹¹

Outcomes include:

- improved language and literacy for young and school age children
- increased entire family engagement in children's learning and engagement with their schools,
- increased school achievement for children
- reductions in the achievement gap for low income children at kindergarten entry
- identification and treatment of developmental delays well before the K-12 years
- improved parenting knowledge and skills
- reduced child maltreatment
- increased family self-sufficiency
- child health outcome, such as:
 - increased child immunization rates
 - lower body mass index rates
 - higher birth weights
 - improved family well-being
 - increased family health literacy

Parents as Teachers is an essential component to the state's home visiting system because Parents as Teachers bridges a gap. Most home visiting programs in New York focus their efforts on first time pregnant moms before 28 weeks of pregnancy, or mothers in just the first couple years—leaving a gap in services for many families. Parents as Teachers has a core value of working with moms and dads, prenatally all the way through their children's first year of kindergarten. Enrollment can happen at any time along this continuum.

Parents as Teachers also has flexible eligibility criteria to accept families with multiple children. Parents as Teachers addresses individual family needs and is adaptable to various target geographic, demographic and family risk factors. For example, many Parents as Teachers programs serve medically fragile children, teens, veteran and military families, homeless and transitional parents, as well as parents that have disabilities or deal with substance abuse.

In order to move New York toward a robust voluntary early childhood home visiting system, we need funding and infrastructure that enhances and supports existing evidence-based home visiting programs and systems. This can be done by providing opportunities for local and state stakeholders to partner

with one another and coordinate a continuum of early childhood home visiting services that can address a wide range of family needs and achieve results that save money.

Evidence-based home visiting—by Parents as Teachers and other national models—is a huge success story in New York. Expanding and enhancing home visiting is a strategic opportunity to strengthen families and ensure from birth to school, children can grow up healthy, safe and ready to learn. I sincerely hope that you will consider building a system of quality evidence-based home visiting programs, and respectfully request you to support \$3 million in funding in the 2016-17 State Budget to expand the services of Parents as Teachers.

For your information and for the record, I have attached two success stories from families in New York, and request they be included in the hearing record. The stories are from:

- Bedford Central School District
- Binghamton School District

¹ A Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) report entitled "Return on Investment: Evidence-based Options to Improve Statewide Outcomes," found that Parents as Teachers has a benefit to cost ratio of \$3.39. The Washington State legislature has directed WSIPP to identify "evidence-based" policies. The goal is to provide Washington policymakers and budget writers with a list of well-researched public policies that can, with a high degree of certainty, lead to better statewide outcomes coupled with a more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. The summary report information can be found here: <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/118> Programs are searchable by name.

² Drazen, S.M. & Haust, M. (1993). *Raising reading readiness in low-income children by parent education*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Drazen, S. M. & Haust, M. (1995). *The effects of Parents and Children Together (PACT) Program on school achievement*. Binghamton, NY: Community Resource Center



Parents as Teachers.

Bedford Central School District



Parents as Teachers of Bedford Central School District (BCSD) located in Westchester, New York, serves the communities of Mount Kisco and Bedford Hills. BCSD truly values the impact of improving child health and learning outcomes.

"One component of the Parents as Teachers evidence-based home visiting model is to provide annual health and developmental screenings to help parents identify possible delays," says Danielle Levin, the school district's

Preschool Coordinator. "Research shows the earlier we detect delays and connect families to services, the more likely children will be ready for school. This year alone, Parents as Teachers programs across the state of New York screened more than 1,100 children."

When "Nelinda," a trained parent educator, first met "Sylvia" and her 14 month-old son "Lorenzo," the mom was overwhelmed, exhausted and depressed. She described her toddler as having inconsistent sleep patterns, difficulty interacting with others, delayed language skills, and difficulty understanding and responding to others' emotions like affection and anger. Sylvia also told her parent educator she couldn't take her eyes off of her son because she constantly feared for his safety.

During one of the first visits with the family, Nelinda conducted an initial developmental screening on Lorenzo. Over the next several weeks, she also connected Sylvia to the Westchester County Early Intervention psychologist for additional evaluations and services for Lorenzo. As a result of these additional evaluations, Lorenzo was diagnosed with autism. Fortunately, through early intervention, Lorenzo received intensive services that addressed his special needs.

Over the next two years, Lorenzo made steady progress; he learned to talk and his behavior improved dramatically. Sylvia and Lorenzo were also supported along the way with regular visits from Nelinda which Sylvia participated in eagerly. She learned about Lorenzo's development and received information and support specific to his needs around potty training and social interactions. Sylvia also learned strategies to make parent-child activities more appropriate and impactful for Lorenzo's needs.

Their family progress was so successful that Sylvia was invited to share their success story at a parent support group for parents of children with autism. When Lorenzo graduated from Parents as Teachers last spring, Sylvia told Nelinda, "You showed me the road, and I took the journey!" reinforcing one of Parents as Teachers' core values: that parents are their child's most influential teachers.



Parents as Teachers.

Binghamton City School District

Leslie Miller, RN, is in her last semester of Binghamton University to complete her Bachelor of Science in nursing. Leslie hopes to seek a career as a nurse with an emphasis in community health.

"Having a baby is supposed to be the most joyful, exciting time in a mother's life. But as I welcomed my second child – my beautiful son, Cayden – I felt like I was drowning.



Cayden had multiple rare health conditions that required appointments with neurologists, endocrinologists, developmental pediatricians, and others. I didn't have anyone to help me cope with having a baby with such severe medical conditions while also raising another child on my own. I suffered from post-partum depression after Cayden's birth. I felt so overwhelmed and alone.

But it turned out I wasn't alone. By enrolling in Parents as Teachers through Binghamton City School District, I began receiving visits from a trained parent educator, Mary Ellen, twice a month from Cayden's birth until he turned six. As a mother, I felt empowered to have a professional I could ask questions of and get advice from; someone I could trust with questions about my children's development and health.

I was very nervous about having a baby with such serious health issues and I wanted to make sure I understood how to assess his developmental growth. Mary Ellen nurtured my confidence by focusing on my strengths and what I was doing right – not critiquing what I was doing wrong – and I felt like a more successful parent.

Mary Ellen also connected me to community services throughout my son's first six years. I knew just who to call for support and advice when Cayden required evaluations or had problems in school. Parents as Teachers inspired me to be my best. My parent educator didn't give me the answers but led me through a thoughtful process of problem solving.

I can tell you firsthand that evidence-based home visiting is a very effective way to increase parent knowledge of their child's development, provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, and help get kids ready for school.

By empowering parents with strong parenting skills, we can ensure the next generation is prepared to be successful in school, career, and life - just like Cayden."