

Stories



WILLIAM CASPAR GRAUSTEIN
MEMORIAL FUND

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Greater Hartford Literacy Council Hosts Dr. Janice Gruendel

Over 75 percent of Connecticut's kindergartners have attended preschool, nursery school or Headstart before entering kindergarten, but in some districts, particularly larger urban districts, this number shrinks to less than half of incoming students. Numerous studies and research reports have linked preschool experience and success in school and beyond. Quality early childhood education has been shown to improve language and literacy skills, problem solving and motor skills necessary to prepare children to learn in school. Lack of preschool education is believed to contribute to the achievement gap.

Governor Jodi Rell has identified early childhood education as a priority issue for her administration and within months of becoming the acting governor of Connecticut she appointed Dr. Janice Gruendel, Co-Founder and Co-President of Connecticut Voices for Children to work directly with the Connecticut State Board of Education to develop plans and recommendations to expand and finance early childhood school readiness programs across the state as well as seek new strategies to help close Connecticut's achievement gap.

In February, Governor Rell presented her proposed state budget, which included a \$26 million investment in early childhood over the next two years. Janice Gruendel presented on the details of this proposal at the Greater Hartford Literacy Council quarterly luncheon, stressing the importance of "expanding on the great work that Connecticut has done in passing the School Readiness legislation in 1997 — and developing an excellent set of benchmark standards that are among the best in the country."

Dr. Gruendel pointed to the need to both expand the system and improve the quality of programming, both of which goals would involve significant funding beyond what is available. Dr. Gruendel compared early care and education issues to a Rubik's Cube, "a frustrating hunk of plastic that is doable, but very hard. If you



Carl Guerriere, Executive Director/Literacy Advocate, Greater Hartford Literacy Council



Dr. Janice Gruendel

move one side, it moves something else. It is very complex, but solvable in a systematic way." She also emphasized the importance of focusing on how the major systems that impact children fit together, including early care and education, health, family support and early intervention.

To learn more about the Greater Hartford Literacy Council, visit their website at www.greaterhartfordreads.org.

Governor Rell's 2005-2007 Early Childhood Investment Initiative

The Governor's proposal is comprised of the following key elements:

- **Early Childhood Investment Advisory Cabinet:** Key agencies would operate as a coordinating body and report to the Governor. Agencies involved would include the Department of Children and Families, the State Department of Education, the Department of Mental Retardation, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Public Health, the Office of Policy and Management and others. This group would work on interagency coordination, strategic planning, data management, budget linkages and quality and accountability improvements.

Amount allocated: No allocation. Funded with existing resources.

- **Research and Policy Council:** Representatives from business, government, higher education, philanthropy and other groups would come together as a network to develop strategies for improving quality and expanding the early education system. This Council would advise the Cabinet.

Amount allocated: \$300,000 each year

- **Quality Rating System for Existing Programs:** Early childhood centers would be rated based on quality indicators and a consumer friendly quality rating scale would be developed. This system would initially be applied to any center that receives state funds, and then incentives would be offered to encourage other centers to participate.

Amount allocated: \$200,000 in the second year

- **Preschool Curriculum Training:** Providers would be trained to provide high quality early education using the State Department of Education Preschool Curriculum Framework. Child care subsidies would be linked to quality care.

Amount allocated: \$300,000 each year

- **Data Systems Improvement:** Strategic investments would be made in data collection, management and reporting to aid early childhood strategic planning and performance assessment.

Amount allocated: \$200,000 each year

- **Technical Assistance in Capital Planning:** The state would provide debt financing for capital improvements and space development.

Amount allocated: \$250,000 each year

- **School Readiness Plus: Community Public-Private Partnership Program:** The state would support local efforts where communities come forward and organize around their com-

mitment to prepare children for school. This funding would be used to increase school readiness slots and other program needs as identified by the communities.

Amount allocated: \$5.5 million each year

- **Workforce Scholarships:** Would provide 300 scholarships for the continued education of the early care and education workforce.

Amount allocated: \$1 million each year

Suggested Reading

- Connecticut Voices for Children has released a **Summary of Governor's Proposed FY 06 Revenue Changes** outlining Governor Rell's proposed revenue changes in a variety of areas.
- Dr. Gruendel referenced the National Governors Association report entitled **Building the Foundation for Bright Future** as an excellent resource.
- The Greater Hartford Literacy Council commissioned a report on the status of literacy needs in the Greater Hartford Region called **Take Action for Literacy: The Status of Literacy in Greater Hartford**.
- **Entry to Kindergarten Assessment:** Children entering kindergarten would be assessed to better prepare teaching staff to support their learning.
Amount allocated: \$400,000 in FY06 and \$800,000 in FY07
- **School Readiness Programs: Payment Increases:** This funding would be used to increase rates for existing School Readiness Programs.
Amount allocated: \$2 million in FY06 and \$4 million in FY07
- **Great Beginnings Program:** All parents in the state would be provided with regular, essential information during the first four years of their children's development.
Amount allocated: \$200,000 each year
- **Capital: Existing Centers:** These funds would be devoted to grants-in-aid for capital improvements and wiring for technology for School Readiness Programs.
Amount allocated: \$200,000 in FY06 and no allocation in FY07
- **Capital: New Spaces Debt Subsidy:** Would support the development of approximately 1000 new early education spaces.
Amount allocated: \$1 million each year



“Together we can build a better way for kids and families in Connecticut ... and frankly, we have no choice,” said Dr. Gruendel as she concluded her remarks at the Greater Hartford Literacy Council Quarterly Luncheon. “The state isn’t a very good parent ... that is the job of families and communities. We need to give them the tools they need to do that.” ■

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund works collaboratively to improve education for Connecticut’s children by supporting school change, informing the public debate on educational issues, and strengthening the involvement of parents and the community in education.

The Greater Hartford Literacy Council Website (www.greaterhartfordreads.org) offers more information on:

- Local, regional, statewide and national data and statistics
- Research and information on literacy issues
- An event calendar of literacy events and trainings

