

Prevention That Works

Every year, New York State invests more in remediation—fixing existing problems—than it does in prevention. In these tough budget times, advocates are often told that funding must go to programs that assist those who are already in need. This strategy fails to recognize that without immediate assistance offered through prevention programs, additional people will eventually require more costly services.

New York State must develop and invest in a long-term, comprehensive prevention and early intervention vision. Such a vision will strengthen families and lay a solid foundation on which children can build a successful, healthy future. Such a vision will also strengthen society and save money.

Studies clearly show that prevention and early intervention have both short- and long-term benefits to individuals, as well as saving public money. For example, for every preschool dollar spent, states are projected to recoup 36 to 77 cents in school savings and 50 to 85 cents in reduced crime costs.¹

High-quality Pre-K also increases high school graduation rates by as much as 44%.² In addition, adults who participated in Pre-K as children exhibit a number of positive outcomes. They are less likely to become smokers, use drugs, or engage in risky or violent behavior. They are more likely to have health insurance, be employed, and visit a doctor/dentist regularly. They also have lower rates of teen pregnancy and depression.³

Other early care and learning programs, such as home visiting, also show benefits to children and families. Investments in home visiting programs reduce costs associated with foster care placements, unintended pregnancies, hospitalizations and emergency room visits, and other costly interventions.¹ Other longer-term outcomes for children include stronger school performance, fewer behavioral problems, and higher high school graduation rates.

Programs that include life skills training for parents can result in reduced welfare dependency, higher educational completion and increased job retention. These programs have also been shown to reduce the frequency and severity of abuse and neglect.ⁱⁱ The decrease in maltreatment is a direct result of increased parental skills—parents learn in home visiting programs how to manage their anger, how to discipline their children effectively and without violence, and how to ask for help and support when they need it.

Early identification and intervention is just as important as prevention. New York State's *The Children's Plan: Improving the Social and Emotional Well Being of New York's*

¹ *The Economic Promise of Investing in High-Quality Preschool*; Committee for Economic Development; 2006.

² *School or the Streets: Crime and New York's Dropout Crisis*; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids NY; September 2008.

³ *Investing in Early Care and Education is a Powerful Public Health Initiative for New York's Children*; Docs for Tots NY; April 2008.

Children and Their Families, issued by the Office of Mental Health on October 1st, stated that “nearly 70,000 young children will be expelled from preschool [in New York State] for behavioral reasons each year. The expulsion rates for preschool children far exceed the rates for K-12.” Obviously, intervention is warranted—the earlier the better.

One promising prevention and intervention strategy is Child and Family Clinic Plus, which currently provides statewide assessments in normative settings including child care, Pre-K programs, and schools. As of late June 2008, almost 36,000 children had received a mental health screening or comprehensive assessment. 12,901 were admitted for treatment, and 2,865 were receiving in-home treatment. Just imagine how long those children might have suffered silently, falling behind in school and with their peers, if Clinic Plus had not been available and easily accessible.

Another positive intervention is family engagement, which is proven to positively impact student performance in school. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law holds Title I schools more accountable for student success. Under NCLB states received grants to establish school-based or school-linked Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs). New York State has two—FACTS (Families and Communities Together with Schools), sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County; and EPIC (Every Person Influences Children), with branches in the Bronx, Buffalo, Fallsburg, Monticello, Rochester, Syracuse, Queens and Yonkers. The PIRCs provide resources and technical assistance to parents in order to increase their involvement in their children’s education. The PIRCs, in partnership with the PTA, are currently working on strategies to drive systemic change at the state and local levels that will help close the achievement gap. As part of that initiative, Governor Paterson recently designated October as Parental Involvement in Children’s Education Month.

Prevention and early intervention when children are young can help decrease the number of those children who grow up to be disconnected youth—young people who are not in school and not working. Of the 63,000 youth considered “disconnected” in 2006, it’s safe to say that many fell into other groups, as well—high school dropouts, pregnant teens, runaways. Others had spent time in the child welfare, juvenile justice, or mental health systems. New York State must intervene effectively with children and families in contact with those systems, while simultaneously preventing children and families from entering those systems. Only a concurrent strategy will serve to decrease our vulnerable populations and provide both short- and long-term benefits.

ⁱ Cornell, Emily; *The Benefits and Financing of Home Visiting Programs*; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices; June 2002.

ⁱⁱ Dar, Deborah; *Supporting Children and Families through Home Visitation Strategies*; Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; presentation 2007.