



January 11, 2007

Early Childhood Listening Forums Held Across the State

What is your vision for young children in our community? What are the most important community assets for children and families in our communities? How do these assets match the goals and strategies defined by the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet? What might hinder our progress in reaching the goals? What challenges do you foresee?

These are the five questions that were asked of parents, child-care providers and professionals, philanthropists and other stakeholders around the state at the Local Listening Forums that were scheduled throughout Connecticut in September and early October. Approximately 945 citizens participated in 14 forums. These groups were assembled to hear about the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet ("the ECE Cabinet"), established by Governor Jodi Rell in 2005 and the recently released report by the ECE Cabinet called *Ready by 5 and Fine by 9*.

The ECE Cabinet was established with the goal of ensuring that young children enter kindergarten ready to learn and achieve demonstrable early academic success in basic skills during their elementary school years. ECE Cabinet members have spent the last year putting together the framework for investing in early childhood outlined in *Ready by 5 and Fine by 9*.

The purpose of the Listening Forums was to share the Cabinet's framework, goals, values, and priorities with the broader public and get input on the needs and concerns that participants have identified.

A draft report of the forum feedback was given to the Early Childhood Cabinet at their November 8th meeting and has been posted on the Early Childhood Listening Forums website. This is the statewide aggregate report. In coming months, it will also include appendices of summary reports from each of the forums.

Seven common themes were heard across all of the forums. These themes were as follows:

- Parents must be partners in all aspects of their child's care and education.
- Parents and caregivers need information about child development, expectations and services.
- Information and services must be culturally competent.
- There needs to be coordinated planning for services for children and families with control of resources at the local level.

The 3 Goals of the ECE Cabinet for CT's children:

- Reach appropriate developmental milestones from birth to age 5.
 - Begin kindergarten with the knowledge, skills and behaviors needed for success in school.
 - Have K-3 education experiences that extend children's birth-to-5 learning and ensure consistent progress in achieving reading mastery.
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- There should be universal access to quality preschool.
 - Society must place higher priority on early childcare and education.
 - Early childhood education workforce should be trained and paid appropriately.

These themes are described in more detail in the report, including the challenges in achieving the goals.

To stay updated on the outcome of this process, visit the United Way Early Childhood Listening Forums website. ■

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.

To download *Ready by 5 and Fine by 9* and learn more about the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, visit www.ecpolicycouncil.org/cabinet.php.