

A bridge to success for Connecticut schools

Published: 12:07 p.m., Friday, February 26, 2010

By [Kelly Cronin](#) and [Linda Janowitz](#)

There's a bit of surprisingly good news on the education front. The government is promoting real, meaningful education reform and putting up real, meaningful money to help pay for it.

President Obama is asking states and communities with innovative ideas to help reshape American education. To propel these ideas, two new federal funds will provide \$5 billion to inspire communities to shake up the early-education landscape.

All levels of education need shaking up, we believe, but none more than oft-ignored early learning.

School systems have long funneled energy and resources to remediation programs in attempts to keep struggling older children in school. Yet they've prevented few teens from dropping out.

While we can't ignore the serious needs of older students, it's crucial that children start off well. Far too many enter school without the early learning necessary to succeed. We must begin sooner -- the younger the child, the better -- and provide that extra boost so they don't fall behind in the first place.

Children learn more and do better when progressing seamlessly from home to child care to preschool to early grades. But a system that moves them herky-jerky from one place and grade to the next with no sense of continuity makes such seamless transitions rare.

Communities are trying to change that by creating new ways to teach and nurture young children. Promising early-learning initiatives through a [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)-sponsored project called Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) help smooth transitions from home, child care and preschool to elementary school. The goal: to make sure children are ready for school and schools are ready for them.

The word is spreading; more communities are embracing these principles and innovative practices. The [Waterbury Youth Service System](#) Inc. has successfully worked with families, public schools and local organizations to achieve school readiness and success for vulnerable young children in communities experiencing economic challenges and language barriers. Children have posted significant developmental gains, parents have gained job skills and jobs, and child care providers have become qualified to operate their own programs.

Hollandia
Spring Garden Expo '10
March 19 - March 28

Nurseries
103 Old Hawleyville Road, Bethel
203-743-0267

Gift & Garden
93 Stony Hill Road, Bethel
203-792-0268

For more Specials Visit ctgrown.com

For example, a woman who trained in the Waterbury program opened her own child care center in 1997. After raising four of her own children, she mentored several foster children and adopted three of them. All seven went on to college and professional careers. She attributes her success -- and her children's -- to training and support she received from [Waterbury Youth Services](#). Now, an umbrella community collaborative, [Waterbury Prevention Policy Board](#) and the [School Readiness Council](#), is launching a community youth plan called Bridge to Success, which will support children from birth to age 21.

Efforts are also underway to help improve learning systems by sharing lessons learned through SPARK and other early-learning initiatives, including networking activities, governors' forums and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation partnership with IDEO, a renowned design and innovation consulting firm. Instead of relying on outside experts -- the usual method for reforming schools -- communities are looking inward and tapping parents, teachers and even students to help generate solutions that work for them.

The best programs, we're discovering, link parents, teachers and students -- creating strong connections between classrooms and communities, and building an educational continuum.

We now have a chance to set our children on paths to long-term success.

And this kind of thinking -- the creation and championing of innovative programs that communities throughout America can adapt -- may well turn a time of economic crisis into one of effective and lasting education reform.

Kelly Cronin is executive director of Waterbury Youth Service System Inc. Linda Janowitz is the program director of the [WYSS School Readiness](#) and People off Welfare Earning Resources Programs.

900% Gain on Penny Stocks

Join today to receive our free newsletter, alerts,
StockPickTrading

Refinance Now at 3.4% APR

\$160,000 mortgage under \$712/mo. Free. No Obligation.
MortgageRefinance

Ads by Yahoo!