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*New Britain*

### **Lombardi: "We're Witnessing A Movement To Create An Early Education System" Clubs & Organizations**

*Submitted by Jessica Ciparelli, CT Early Childhood Alliance, on 2010-07-22.*

Dr. Joan Lombardi, deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, joined 120 community leaders, child care providers and teachers, legislators, school superintendents, child advocates, parents, philanthropic leaders and concerned citizens at Central Connecticut State University on July 19 to discuss early childhood at a forum entitled "Healthy, Safe and Ready to Learn."

Three Discovery communities - Torrington, New Haven and New Britain - showcased their early childhood blueprints. Discovery communities, an initiative of the Graustein Memorial Fund, are creating comprehensive birth-to-eight local action plans. These plans enable communities to focus and measure their progress toward school success for every child.

Cheryl Kloczko, the Torrington superintendent's designee to the Torrington Early Childhood Collaborative, spoke of the importance of breaking down silos of government, the school system and other agencies to establish a partnership to meet the needs of Torrington residents. Two successes include a program that helps distribute gently-used clothing to families for the start of the new school year and the Readiness Fair, featuring the "CHIP" child identification system and "play and learn" stations.

Yvette Highsmith-Francis, of the New Britain Community Health Center and co-chair of New Britain Early Childhood Collaborative's health committee, spoke of New Britain's spirit to overcome the odds of some staggering statistics. Three out of five children live below 85 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$40,000 for a family of four). Seventy-five percent of the city's new mothers are eligible for WIC and 29.6 percent of the city's moms are without a high school diploma, compared to 13 percent statewide. A mother's education level is often indicative of how well her child will fare. She also revealed that 30 percent of New Britain 4-year-olds are considered obese, compared to 18.4 percent nationally.



Jessica Ciparelli

Left to right: David Nee, executive director of the Graustein Memorial Fund, Dr. Joan Lombardi and Merrill Gay, executive director of the New Britain Early Childhood Collaborative.

"I think it was that statistic that took our breath away," she said.

She noted that local pediatricians, the head of pediatrics at Hospital of Central Connecticut and the community health center were engaged in conversation, bridging the link between a child's health and academic success.

Lombardi applauded the communities for helping turn the tide for the state's youngest citizens.

"What happens in the early years impacts health and learning," Lombardi said.

Lombardi expressed the importance of creating common standards across programs, learning standards and data collection. She also noted the move toward a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for quality assurance and making sure school systems are ready for children.

"We're witnessing a movement to create an early education system. What you're doing is really important."

Lombardi's presentation was followed by a panel discussion, moderated by Elaine Zimmerman, executive director of the Commission on Children.

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