

**The New Britain Herald (newbritainherald.com)**, Serving New Britain, Conn., and surrounding areas

---

News

## Helping city's youngest

Monday, July 19, 2010 10:28 PM EDT

By Lisette Velasquez

Staff writer

---

NEW BRITAIN — The state's Early Childhood Alliance was hailed by a federal official as a leader in child development Monday at Central Connecticut State University.

The New Britain collaborative was one of 23 community efforts in the alliance recognized for its strides in supporting early learning and development.

From educators, parents and child-care advocates to policy makers and health care providers, a union of early childhood leaders came together at CCSU to celebrate the strides of communities throughout the state in streamlining resources, engaging more parents and improving the success rate of children in schools.

"I came to Connecticut to celebrate what you've already heard. You have provided leadership on so many issues," said Dr. Joan Lombardi of the U.S. Department of Education.

With 30 years in leadership on children's issues, Lombardi, who is the deputy assistant secretary and interdepartmental liaison for Early Childhood Development for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, presented an overview on early childhood development initiatives at the federal level.

"You've chartered a course, partnered with parents as leaders and built up your communities. You are part of a bigger movement," Lombardi said.

As the purse strings on federal funding are beginning to tighten, and more focus is directed at efficient and effective accountable spending, Lombardi advocates and commends communities who are focusing on community collaborations that are impacting on the development of early childhood initiatives that she said are aligned with initiatives the federal level.

Twenty-three state communities have completed a community blueprint for early childhood, and 19 more are organizing one. New Britain was one of the 23 communities that also have strong partnerships with health care providers to ensure a healthier start for children in the city.

Five to seven years ago, only 43 percent of the city's most vulnerable residents, from birth to age 5, had access to early childhood development programming. Through a successful partnership collaborative that has become the New Britain Early Childhood Collaborative, today about 80 percent of children in New Britain have access to early childhood programs that address educational, health, social, emotional and economic needs of the family and to help ensure children are successful in school.

"In New Britain we know that 75 percent of new mothers are eligible for WIC, we have one of the highest poverty rates in

the state with family household earning approximately \$18,000 a year. New Britain also had the lowest third-grade reading scores in the state," said Yvette Highsmith-Francis of the New Britain Community Health Center and a partner in the collaborative.

These are just some of the issues Highsmith-Francis said that impact children's success in school before children even enter the school system. New Britain is making strides in not only closing the achievement gap, but eventually eliminating it.

"In the last five years, New Britain has made an incredible jump in progress. Our parents are becoming more involved and are part of the processes," said Kim Jackson, New Britain's district facilitator of family education services.a

---

URL: <http://www.newbritainherald.com/articles/2010/07/20/news/doc4c450814ca105835866734.prt>

© Copyright 2010 The New Britain Herald, a Central Connecticut Communications Property. All rights reserved