

**Mara Aspinall, President and CEO, On-Q-Ity and  
Paul C. O'Brien, President, The O'Brien Group, Massachusetts**

For the past decade, the nonprofit advocacy group Strategies for Children has led the campaign for high-quality early education in Massachusetts. Key to its power has been the deep and broad involvement of business leaders, especially Mara Aspinall, President and CEO of On-Q-Ity and former President of Genzyme Genetics, and Paul O'Brien, President of the O'Brien Group and former Chairman of New England Telephone. As co-chairs of the group's Early Education for All Campaign Advisory Committee (CAC), they have helped mobilize the CAC's 50+ members of unusual and unlikely allies to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of high-quality early education.

Representing a unique combination of Massachusetts' "traditional" (utility) and "new" (high tech) economic bases, O'Brien and Aspinall have energetically engaged business in the Campaign by

- making presentations to trade associations, local Fortune 100 companies, the statewide association of Chambers of Commerce and targeted regional chambers,
- hosting business education seminars,
- testifying before legislative committees,
- meeting with state House and Senate leaders and Governor(s), and
- participating in media outreach, including authoring opinion pieces, talking to reporters and meeting with editorial boards in newspapers across the state.

Aspinall is credited with helping to publicize the link between investments in early education and the state's economic vitality. She emphasizes the power of data (for example, analyses of return on investment and brain development research) to cultivate support from business and other Campaign members. As she puts it, these facts are the "antidote to the anecdote."

She understands, as well, that the campaign's success depends on an effective union of business executives, civic leaders and early childhood advocates. "We need to work together," she states. "Traditional early childhood advocates can't do it alone. Business leaders can't do it alone. Advocates, with input from their business partners, need to define the policy agenda and business leaders need to help governments prioritize young children's education. Business leaders need to be the unlikely allies for children and be willing to proactively help find sustainable revenue for early education. Advocates need to welcome business leaders into the fold and be willing to both teach and learn."

O'Brien, who also serves as chair of the Strategies for Children, Inc. board, helped develop CAC's strategy, recruited Aspinall as his co-chair and harnessed the business community in order to move the Campaign's vision forward. Highly visible and influential because of his former position with one of Boston's major business organizations and the state Chamber, he sees early education as an extension of his interest in investments: "If quality early education is available, it can be a salvation to children and is increasingly important in an economy that is becoming less physical and more brain-oriented." O'Brien also understood early on the importance of keeping the Campaign's attention on children and their well-being, as opposed to the individualized sector interests of the Campaign's diverse membership, thereby making it possible for the Campaign's diverse membership to transcend vested interests.

In 2004, O'Brien's and Aspinall's behind-the-scenes advocacy efforts helped establish the nation's first consolidated, independent state department of early education and care. The Department of Early Education and Care was created to ensure that a streamlined, accountable, administrative structure was available to oversee the state's early learning system. It manages a comprehensive early education program, a kindergarten readiness assessment and monitoring system and a workforce development initiative. This department was recognized as an essential precursor to passage of pre-k legislation. In 2006, Massachusetts' early childhood advocates scored a victory when the House and Senate unanimously passed a bill creating the universal pre-k program in statute—

always subject to appropriation, only to have it vetoed by the governor. However, they regrouped, and in 2008, O'Brien's and Aspinall's on-going efforts helped to secure the creation and funding of a pre-k pilot program through the governor's budget, with initial funding of \$4.6 million. In that session, the legislature also formally passed "An Act Relative to Early Education and Care," which put the Massachusetts Universal Pre-k program in statute. Business leaders' sustained focus over the last eight years has been key to the state's legislative successes on behalf of its young children, including current efforts to minimize the impact of the state's budget difficulties on pre-k. As expressed by Carolyn Lyons, a staffer at Strategies for Children, "we wouldn't be where we are without them."