



**For Immediate Release  
June 10, 2003**

**Contact: Claudia Stepke  
646.296.7351**

**RIVERHEAD EASTERN SUFFOLK BOCES  
PARENT-CHILD HOME PROGRAM  
FOR SCHOOL READINESS AND SUCCESS  
FACES DEVASTATING BUDGET CUTS**

**\* \* \* \***

**150 GUESTS CELEBRATE AT END-OF-YEAR PARTY**

**Riverhead, NY** -- Riverhead's Eastern Suffolk BOCES Parent-Child Home Program, a proven, cost-effective school readiness program that works with parents and their two- and three-year-old children, today hosted its annual end-of-year party for over 150 attendees including local legislators, school district personnel and program families. The four-year-old program is facing possible elimination due to budget cuts, which would mean that the 45 families it currently serves will be without the vital services they need to prepare their children for school.

“We have served over 150 families in Riverhead during the past few years and, because of the program's tremendous success, the waiting list for the next school year continues to grow. Our funding is being threatened, however, and if we are not able to gain support locally, it is going to be difficult to keep the program alive,” said Sarah Walzer, executive director of the National Center of the Parent-Child Home Program headquartered in Port Washington. “If we, as a society, fail to prepare children to enter school ready to learn, we will find that we are regularly leaving children behind, because if children enter school already behind it is so much more difficult and costly for them to catch up.”

For the past 35 years, the Parent-Child Home program has consistently demonstrated that participation substantially improves children's school success rates, including their performance on standardized achievement tests. The program, founded and headquartered on Long Island, costs approximately \$2,000 per family annually and continues to grow and show demonstrable results throughout Long Island.

- more -

The program's goals include developing early literacy skills and increasing the parent-child verbal interaction. Utilizing the parent as the child's first teacher, the Parent-Child Home Program develops a foundation that ensures continuous educational success. Each family is assigned a home visitor who comes to the home twice a week for a half an hour to model for the parent and child reading and play activities. The children in the program receive a total of 20 books and 20 toys, all of which are high quality educational materials and gifts to the families. These are often the first books and the first educational toys in the home. This intensive two-year home visiting program prepares children for school success and empowers parents to realize that they are their children's first and most important teacher.

Published longitudinal data demonstrates that low-income Parent-Child Home Program participants outperform students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds on school readiness measures and go on to graduate from high school at the same rates as middle-class students, a 20 percent higher rate than other low-income students. The program works equally well in suburban, rural and inner-city communities. There are now 130 sites throughout the country, reaching approximately 3,000 families who do not have access to quality center-based early childhood or parenting programs.

Rosa Campani works fulltime for the New York State Assembly and devotes her evenings and weekends providing home visits through the Riverhead site. As the program has grown to reach a greater number of Hispanic-speaking families, bilingual home visitors like Rosa have become very important to participating families. Rosa became involved with the program because "she wanted to give something back to the community. I feel a sense of accomplishment if I can change the life of one child," she said. Rosa grew up in a very poor family where books were scarce and English was never spoken at home.

During her years with the program, Rosa has worked with over 20 families and says she is seeing a growing number of younger parents in the program who lack strong parenting skills which she feels is due, in part, to long work days and hectic schedules. "If this program is defunded, these children and their families will be heartbroken. I worked with one child who didn't converse with me at all during his first year. This year, his second year, he cannot stop talking and has developed a love for reading," she said.

The Riverhead program works with an ethnically diverse population and has specifically experienced an increase in limited English-speaking Latin Americans participants. The educational level of the parents varies from as little as three years of formal education to completion of a GED or high school diploma. The program plays a critical role in empowering parents to continue their own education and many have gone on to complete their GEDs and some have gone on to attend college.

“This program is cost-effective and critical to the government’s efforts to ensure that ‘no child is left behind,’” said Walzer. “It has proven both in the state and around the country that it is effective not only at preparing children to enter school ready to learn but also at ensuring that those children experience long-term academic success and go on to graduate from high school.”

###