



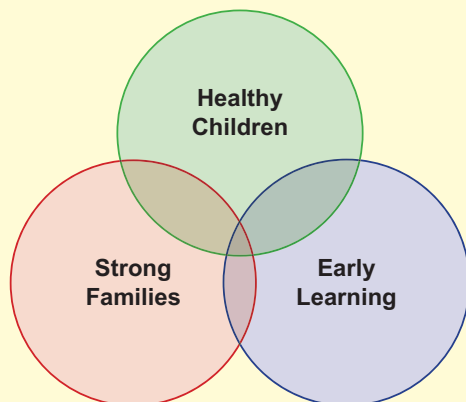
## NEW YORK STATE'S EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL

In 2009, New York State made a landmark investment in its children and in its future by creating the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), which is working to build a comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system in New York State.

The ECAC has the collective expertise to help New York's policymakers make the best investments in our children. It is comprised of key leaders in early care and learning, health care, child welfare, and mental health, as well as state agencies, advocacy organizations, foundations, higher education, unions, and others who serve young children and their families. **Together, we share one common goal: creating a path for every child to succeed.**

To meet this goal, the ECAC is focusing on four areas:

- Strong Families
- Healthy Children
- Early Learning
- Coordinated and Responsive State Systems



### THREE KEY PRIORITIES

In these tough economic times, it is more critical than ever that we make smart investments. From the four focus areas listed, the ECAC has identified three immediate priorities that will have the maximum impact on young children, while delivering a significant return on investment. Work is underway in all three of these areas:

- ▶ **Welcoming New York's Babies:** Children are not born with operating instructions. Parenting education materials, coupled with home visiting, have proven successful and cost-effective in educating new parents, particularly those most at risk, by connecting them to vital services and reducing health care costs.
- ▶ **Implementing QUALITYstarsNY:** QUALITYstarsNY is New York State's quality rating strategy for early learning programs. It is currently being field tested in 13 communities across the state. Much like those used in hotels and restaurants, this rating and improvement system for all early learning programs (e.g., child care, Early Head Start and Head Start, nursery schools, special education, Universal Prekindergarten) will give parents uniform data to help choose the best option for their child. It also ensures tax dollars are invested wisely to improve the quality of early learning programs and provides a road map for service providers on how to offer the best possible service to children.
- ▶ **Creating a Continuum of High-Quality Early Learning (Prenatal to Age 8):** Creating a path for every child to succeed starts with a state-wide system of quality early learning programs. Research has shown the most important investment we can make in a child—in terms of cost and return—is in high-quality early learning.

## Welcoming New York's Babies: Providing the Care, Tools and Support Parents Need

**ACTION NEEDED:** Create a “Welcome Baby” initiative to support families with young children. This includes early access to supports for all expectant mothers and their families, dissemination of “New Parent Kits,” and implementation of home visiting programs.

Delivering or adopting a child can be both exciting and frightening. While many new parents receive the support they need from family and friends, some require additional education and assistance to strengthen their family and care for a child. A Welcome Baby initiative would provide the care, support and tools every parent needs to get their child off to a good start.

### EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL

Many expectant and new families could benefit from knowing that supports and services are available to help prepare for the arrival of their child. Vulnerable or at-risk women and families may need a range of health and human services to ensure a healthy pregnancy and suitable care. A user-friendly system that assesses need for services and provides links to the appropriate resources can help make sure that every family is ready to welcome and care for their child.

### NEW PARENT KITS HELP WELCOME NEW YORK'S BABIES

A *New Parent Kit* would organize the barrage of information offered to new parents into a complete, user-friendly package that includes:

- ▶ A book and DVD about the “ages and stages” of child development, including tools for good parenting.
- ▶ A reference guide for handling common infant illnesses and basic first aid practices.



- ▶ Information on local programs and resources, such as enrolling a child for health insurance and finding quality child care.
- ▶ A children’s book to begin a baby’s own library.

### HOME VISITING PROGRAMS HELP WELCOME NEW YORK'S BABIES

Home visiting programs connect social workers, educators, nurses, and other trained staff with young families, ideally during the prenatal period. These programs report dramatic drops in premature, low-weight births and significant improvements in school readiness—yet most children are missing out. About half of the 250,000 babies born in New York State each year live in low-income, at-risk households—*yet just 12,000 families are receiving regular home visits.*

The state is currently utilizing new federal funding to strengthen existing services, support expansion of home visiting programs, and lay the foundation for a comprehensive system. However, the state must continue to support home visiting in order for this effort to be successful.

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## Implementing QUALITYstarsNY: A Rating and Improvement System for Early Childhood Learning

**ACTION NEEDED:** Fund statewide implementation of QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY). We often depend on “star ratings” when choosing a hotel or restaurant—yet parents in New York State have no universal system to compare the quality of programs when choosing which child care option is best for their family.

Fully implemented, QSNY will provide parents with valuable tools to make good choices about early child-

hood programs. Equally important, it will put programs on the path of continuous quality improvement and offer assistance to those seeking to improve their rating.

Currently, 30 states use a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that sets universal standards for all child care/early learning programs. QSNY is modeled on these successful systems and is currently being field-tested in 13 communities across the state.

## QUALITYstarsNY PROTECTS TAXPAYERS

By adopting a uniform system for assessing child care/early learning centers and both home and school-based early childhood programs, QSNY will ensure more cost-effective state investments. A system like QSNY will focus limited state resources on programs that work and those with the greatest potential to improve and provide the greatest return for taxpayers.

## QUALITYstarsNY IS INCLUSIVE

The QSNY system is designed to encompass a wide variety of early learning programs and settings. These include family, group family, and center-based child care; nursery schools; Early Head Start; Head Start; special education; and Universal Prekindergarten programs.

This format ensures parents have access to information about a broad spectrum of programs when making important decisions for their children.

## QUALITYstarsNY IMPROVES EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

While QSNY creates a universal system to assess and communicate the quality of New York State's early childhood programs, it is more than a ranking system. The QSNY system provides a clear roadmap and technical assistance for those programs seeking to improve their quality rating. Raising the quality of programs is an important step toward building a comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system in New York State that ensures that all children enter school prepared to succeed.

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## *Creating a Continuum of High-Quality Early Learning:* The First Step toward a Cradle to Career Framework

**ACTION NEEDED:** Invest in the development of a high-quality system of early learning programs that connects programs from the prenatal period through the elementary years, thereby providing children the greatest chance for academic success.

Effective early childhood education is critical to children developing the package of cognitive and social skills that will power a lifetime of learning. Science continues to prove that early learning is essential for school and college readiness and, ultimately, success as a healthy and productive citizen.

The first step in this framework is a stronger focus and smarter investment in the early years. Key steps include: better coordination and delivery of services, development of an effective early childhood workforce, and the assurance of supportive transitions as children move up the education ladder. Together, these components will create a strong foundation for a successful cradle to career approach.

## BETTER COORDINATION WILL IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND OUTCOMES

Unfortunately, early education and social services for New York State's children are currently delivered through a patchwork of health, education, and human service agencies at the local, state, and federal level. We are investing several billion dollars a year in a fragmented system where many children are falling through the cracks.

Child care services, Head Start, Universal Prekindergarten and K-12 programs in public schools operate as separate systems with different eligibility standards,



program and quality standards, and limited communication about early learning goals for each child. By taking simple steps to better coordinate services, New York State can serve more children with far better results. Further, children who receive effective services early in life usually require fewer costly interventions when they are older.

## EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND LEADERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS

Research shows the quality and consistency of early relationships has a significant impact on a child's ability to learn. Skills such as sensory processing, self-regulation and problem solving are established in the first few years of life. Nurturing and responsive early education builds the healthy brain structure a child needs to succeed.

Investment in a universal professional development system will ensure that all early childhood teachers have the child development knowledge needed to foster the

relationships and skills that infants, toddlers and young children need to thrive. Directors with a strong background in early childhood, management, and leadership experience can ensure that programs meet the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of *all* children.

## **SUPPORTIVE TRANSITIONS MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Change is challenging for everyone. And at each transition in the early education continuum, best practices must be adopted to ensure children can acclimate to a new setting quickly. Research shows when support strategies are implemented in the current and next setting, children lose less instructional time, make stronger social and emotional connections to the new teacher and school, and learning gaps are minimized or eliminated. This requires greater understanding and collaboration among early childhood teachers and program administrators.



## ***The New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council: Vision and Expertise to Help Our Children Succeed***

By bringing together key leaders and experts from every facet of early care and learning, the ECAC is already working to develop New York State's plan for a high-quality early learning system. Authorizing the ECAC to oversee implementation is the next logical step, saving valuable time and resources by building on nearly two years of work.

The ECAC's goal is to create a path for every child to succeed. The first step is a comprehensive early learning system that creates the foundation for New York State's cradle to career framework. While top priorities have been outlined above, the full plan would include the following goals:

- ▶ Creation of uniform systems of child assessment and program quality rating and improvement—QUALITYstarsNY in all settings.
- ▶ Creation of a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the early childhood workforce.
- ▶ Alignment of the Early Learning Guidelines with the UPK through 12 learning standards, with the goal of aligning curriculum.
- ▶ Development of core competencies for the early learning workforce.
- ▶ Implementation of comprehensive data systems to track child progress for children,

support program quality improvement activities, and ensure effective use of program resources.

- ▶ Implementation of integrated approaches to ensure that all families have access to family support services, including parenting education and home visiting.
- ▶ More effective use of child care, Head Start, and UPK resources, as well as Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education.
- ▶ Expansion of child care options and creation of a more integrated statewide system for child care services.
- ▶ Creation of strategies to support successful transitions from one education setting to the next.
- ▶ Increased access for parents to high-quality early childhood services that prepare children for successful school experiences and support parents' ability to work.

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