



# New York State's High-Quality Infant and Toddler Services System

**ECAC Vision: All children are healthy, learning and thriving in families that are supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.**

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## Introduction

New York State is committed to the provision of comprehensive, high-quality services for infants and toddlers (children birth through three), that begins before the child is born with pre-conception care for all families, accessible evidenced-based parenting education for prospective parents, screening for service needs as early in the pregnancy as possible, and referral for services to address identified needs including comprehensive home visiting services for vulnerable families. New York's goal is that all parents receive the knowledge and supports they need to nurture and enhance the child's growth and development.

Once a child is born, New York's system of services seeks to provide comprehensive health care for all children, including routine developmental screenings, and access to all needed health, mental health, oral health, and therapeutic and educational services indicated for optimal development.

Outside of the home, New York's system of high-quality early childhood education services for infants and toddlers makes available warm, relationship-based centers and family child care homes that provide services within a continuity of care model. This model of service delivery supports children in developing to their full potential and ensures parents and extended family members are supported in their roles.

The provision of high-quality services depends on dedicated and competent service providers. For that reason, New York's high quality system of services for infants and toddlers works to establish a workforce that possesses the education, training, and experience that is fully aligned with the competencies incorporated in the ***New York Core Body of Knowledge***. The importance of the workforce in meeting the needs of young children is recognized and so New York is working to ensure that staff and administrators are fairly compensated and that compensation increases as qualifications rise.

To support the development of a competent workforce, New York is working to integrate its professional development system. It is doing this by working to unite the workforce across sectors by promoting common knowledge, competencies, and standards; inspire, support, and empower the workforce to commit to career pathways and professional growth; and ensure the workforce has access to education and training opportunities that are provided by qualified instructors. It is also seeking to ensure that all professional development opportunities include content areas relevant to their work with children and families, delivered using methods and formats that meet the needs of diverse adult learners, and change behavior and contribute to improved practice. To support the workforce in establishing and implementing professional development plans and to track New York's progress in meeting its' professional development system goals and objectives, New York has developed a workforce registry (Aspire).

New York's system of infant and toddler services has developed gradually over several years. Numerous agencies, organizations, and individuals have contributed to that work, in some cases working individually to develop various components, in other cases building coalitions to call more attention to infant-toddler services and the needs of young children and their families. In 2009, with the establishment of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), New York created a mechanism to coordinate these individual efforts and begin implementation of a strategic plan to develop a comprehensive system of supports and services for children prenatally to age eight. While the ECAC is charged with building a system of services designed to

meet the needs of children across a broader age range, it has, since the beginning of its work, focused specific efforts on meeting the needs of the state's youngest and most vulnerable children. This has been accomplished by intentionally incorporating the research regarding the components of high-quality services for infants and toddlers into the development of our quality rating and improvement system, Core Body of Knowledge, Early Learning Guidelines, early childhood educator professional development programming, parenting educator training, and other elements of our services system. While some of the elements of a high-quality system of infant and toddler services need to be developed, New York is fortunate in that many of the components of the system already exist. For these system components, the work of the ECAC has been focused on strengthening, expanding, and linking sometimes fragmented system elements into a coherent whole.

Through the ECAC, New York State seeks to maximize the benefits provided by the Early Head Start Child Care Partnership funding opportunity to move the state toward more fully realizing its vision of a high-quality system of services for infants and toddlers. At the same time, the ECAC will work to support the success of funded partnerships by linking them to other components of our developing system of infant and toddler services, while, ensuring that these partnerships become integral components of our birth to age eight continuum of care.

### **New York's System of Services for Infants and Toddlers**

New York has available a robust system of services to support the successful implementation of the Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships. New York sees the proposed partnerships as greatly strengthening this system, while at the same time being supported by it. Once Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships are funded, the ECAC and its partners will begin concentrated efforts to ensure that these new programs are linked to and benefit from the state's resources, while ensuring that these new programs are fully integrated into our system of services. New York's high quality system of services for infants and toddlers is organized into four areas: Coordinated and Responsive Systems, Healthy Children, Early Learning, and Strong Families. These four areas are reinforced with an emphasis on workforce, data, and finance components. A description of the resources that make up this system of services follows below. In many cases, the resource is focused on a broader age range, but, in all cases includes infants, toddlers and their families as part of their target population.

### **Coordinated and Responsive Systems**

Children and families often have more than one need, therefore supports and services must be coordinated so that it is easy for families to address multiple needs without having to independently seek out every support and service that they require. The ECAC recognizes that it is not enough to have available a set of supports and services designed to address the needs of children and families. These supports and services need to be easily accessible, coordinated, and effective. For that reason, New York State has taken several steps to ensure that its system of services is coordinated and responsive to wide range of child and family needs.

**Statewide system development and coordination** - The primary step that New York State has taken to build that comprehensive system of supports and services was establishing and empowering the Early Childhood Advisory Council to take the steps needed to weave this system together. The ECAC is comprised of members who have a wide range of expertise in early childhood representing programs ranging across early childhood education, health care, child welfare, and mental health. Members also represent numerous kinds of organizations including state agencies, local government, professional organizations, advocacy groups, foundations, higher education and unions. Following its establishment, the ECAC identified critical areas of focus for which it created six targeted work groups including: Promoting Healthy Development (health and social-emotional development), Strong Families (strategies to support families), Quality Improvement (quality rating and improvement system), Workforce Development (professional development system), Data Development (early learning longitudinal data system), and Finance (cost estimation model and financing strategies). These groups demonstrate the comprehensive approach the ECAC employs to accomplish its mission.

**Community-level system development and coordination** – Communities throughout the state have or are establishing structures at the local level to strengthen and expand services to young children and their families. Many of these community initiatives are locally generated. One initiative, CORE, has been developed by the Cuomo administration to align programs, policies and funding across government agencies to help address issues faced by high need communities. CORE is working in two high need communities (Albany and Newburg). Many more are part of larger national community building efforts. These include:

- **Early Development Instrument** – two communities (Westchester County and Westbury, Long Island) are using the Early Development Instrument as a tool for assessing how well children are developing and for guiding community efforts to help children reach school healthy and ready to succeed.
- **Campaign for Grade Level Reading** - working in 140 communities across the country including 7 communities in New York State (i.e., Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, New York City, and Madison and Chemung counties).
- **Promise Neighborhood** – working in 100 communities nationally including 5 New York communities (Harlem, Sunset Park and Flatbush (Brooklyn), Astoria (Queens), Buffalo, and Hudson).
- **Cradle to Career** - established in Cincinnati and located in 12 New York communities (Albany, Bedford Stuyvesant, Clinton County, Geneva, Harlem, Rochester, Astoria/Queens, Farmingdale, Mohawk Valley, Yonkers, Long Island City, and Morrisania (The Bronx)).

The ECAC is working to bring attention to these efforts and to connect them to state resources.

**Resource and referral services** – New York’s statewide network of 35 Child Care Resource and Referral programs (CCRRs) provides parents, employers and others with the information and other resources needed to navigate the array of early childhood education services available in the state, while supporting providers in the development of high-quality services. Often CCRRs serve as the hub for activities to strengthen local early childhood service systems. Specifically, CCRRs provide:

- **Parents** - information on choosing high-quality care for their children, referrals to programs and providers, support in determining eligibility and obtaining child care subsidies, parent education and other services.
- **Employers** - information about early childhood education programming in their community and supportive services to meet the early childhood education needs of their employees.
- **Providers** – technical assistance in developing high-quality early childhood education programs and family child care homes, support for enrolling in CACFP and other programs, and training and on-site coaching of classroom staff to support their professional development.
- **Communities** – coordination of community efforts to strengthen and expand early childhood education services and support for community planning, public policy education, and advocacy.

**Strengthening services for infants and toddlers:** New York has developed a network of **Infancy Leadership Circles** that bring together professionals who work with children under the age of three and their families to facilitate professional networking, development, and communication to strengthen the infancy services in the state. The infancy circles can serve as an important support to funded Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships by linking them to a wide range of community partners who are committed to improving the quality of infant and toddler services.

## Healthy Children

New York fully recognizes that children will not be successful in school and life if they are not healthy. The health of children is fundamental to their overall well-being. The foundation for a healthy childhood begins during and even prior to pregnancy and extends throughout the early childhood years and across the age span. For this reason, New York State and the ECAC have implanted several strategies to support the healthy development of all young children.

**Affordable health care** - Recognizing the importance of supporting the health care of young children, New York has led the nation in providing access to health insurance and providing maximum benefits to children whose healthcare is provided by public programs. With the introduction of the Affordable Care Act and New York's effort to extend Medicaid benefits to the maximum number of families allowed by law, New York has taken the steps needed to make sure that every child has access to affordable health care.

**Developmental screening** – Early identification of problems or delays coupled with the services necessary to ameliorate conditions can maximize a child's potential and reduce costs for special services. Unfortunately, too few children are routinely screened and, as result, many children who may benefit from intervention go unidentified. The ECAC is working in partnership with Docs for Tots, the Department of Health and others to increase the number of children in New York State who receive routine developmental screens. This work includes promoting the benefits of routine developmental screening to doctors, early childhood education professionals, and parents and incentivizing primary health care providers to provide developmental screens by adding health care quality measures that drive reimbursement. Efforts are also underway to encourage

parents and professionals (i.e., primary care providers and early childhood educators) to share information and partner in supporting the development of the children in their care.

**Statewide network of child care health consultants** – To support child care providers in promoting the health and safety of children in their program, New York State has established a network of child care health consultants. The ECAC and partner organizations are currently working to develop a curriculum and system of training for our child care health consultants based on the curriculum developed by the former National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants and tailored to fit the needs of New York’s workforce.

**Communication between early childhood education programs and medical homes** -The ECAC is currently implementing several strategies to increase early childhood education programs’ ability to monitor the health of infants and toddlers in their care. Strategies include developing medical forms for early childhood education programs that include a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA) waiver and increasing the capacity of child care health consultants to facilitate communication between medical homes and early childhood education programs. The medical community will also receive training to increase their awareness of early childhood education system resources and methods to increase communication with programs.

**Social and emotional development** – New York State is taking several steps to meet children’s social-emotional development needs with particular attention paid to the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers. These efforts include the establishment of a Joint Early Childhood Advisory Council/Early Intervention Coordinating Council Task Force on Social-Emotional Development which is working on the development of guidance for the field on evidenced-based practices for promoting, preventing, identifying, and intervening early in the lives of young children experiencing social-emotional difficulties.

In addition, the ECAC’s Promoting Healthy Development Workgroup has been developing training resources that are informed by the guidance, to increase early childhood education providers’ knowledge and competencies for promoting the social emotional development of the children in their care. This effort involves leveraging existing professional development resources, including a cadre of trainers who are certified in ZERO to THREE *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect* curriculum, to increase early childhood education providers’ ability to support social emotional development of infant and toddlers. In addition, the Office of Mental Health has funded a network of early recognition screeners to increase the availability of specialists to provide social-emotional screening and early identification for children and youths from birth to age 21.

**Nutrition and physical activity** - The ECAC and its partners are working to support early childhood education providers to incorporate nutrition and physical activity practices into their programming. This is being carried out through a variety of strategies including: increasing the number of centers and family child care homes enrolled in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); strengthening family child care healthy beverage and meal regulations, proposing regulatory changes that would require all regulated child care centers to meet CACFP nutrition requirements; increasing the number of child care providers certified as breastfeeding friendly; supporting a network of physical activity specialists to provide training and technical assistance; and

training child care health consultants to support child care programs in adopting healthy nutrition and physical activity practices.

**Early intervention** - New York's Early Intervention program is the largest in the country in terms of the number of children served and the amount of funding spent on these services. The Early Intervention program is supported by a large network of providers and therapists in a variety of specializations. Services are provided in natural settings including the child's home and their early childhood education program. Clinical practice guidelines and other guidance documents have been developed to ensure that the intervention strategies employed are evidenced-based and in concert with program regulations.

**Supports of families of children with disabilities** - New York has an established network of Early Childhood Direction Centers that provide information about programs and services for young children, from birth through age five, who have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities and help families obtain services for their children.

## Early Learning

Early experiences set a critical foundation for future learning. Early learning includes cognitive development and skills as well as social-emotional development. There is abundant research that shows that high-quality early childhood education has both short- and long-term benefits for children. New York State is working to provide a high-quality system of early childhood education through the implementation of two major strategies: QUALITYstarsNY, New York's Quality Rating and Improvement System and New York Works for Children, New York's early childhood educator professional development system.

**Quality improvement** - QUALITYstarsNY is the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), which provides a framework to evaluate and improve the early childhood programs that serve young children. This voluntary system addresses quality for the full range of programs that serve children from birth through kindergarten entry including child care centers, family child care homes, universal prekindergarten programs, and Head Start sites. QUALITYstarsNY establishes quality program standards and then assesses the level of quality that a site has attained. Based on that evaluation, programs receive a star rating and a quality improvement plan. Programs that meet licensing regulations can earn one Star and higher levels are attained by meeting progressively robust standards. The highest quality sites receive a 4 or 5 star rating, they provide intentional instruction and meaningful interactions that will help children to thrive throughout their early childhood experience and make successful transitions into kindergarten.

QUALITYstarsNY has three main components:

1. **STANDARDS** - QUALITYstarsNY has developed research-based professional and program standards for family child care, center-based programs housed in community based organizations, Head Start, special education preschools, school-based prekindergarten programs, and school-age care programs. The framework defines quality in four areas: the learning environment, family engagement, professional qualifications and experience, and leadership and management.

2. **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** - QUALITYstarsNY delivers quality improvement interventions to participating programs. Individualized coaching, quality improvement grants, and professional development scholarships combine to strengthen participants' teaching practices, classroom environment, and program operations.
3. **ACCOUNTABILITY** - QUALITYstarsNY outlines an accountability framework for the full spectrum of early childhood programs. For the first time in New York State, this system collects comprehensive program data on several key quality indicators known to impact teaching practices and children's outcomes. Families, funders, and government agencies have a mechanism to evaluate and guide the use of early childhood investments.

Currently, QUALITYstarsNY is being implemented in 350 programs located in high need areas of the state.

**Professional development:** The ECAC has established New York Works for Children as the state's integrated professional development system for the early childhood and school-age workforce. Established by the ECAC's Workforce Development Work Group in 2010, New York Works for Children consists of interrelated programs, services, and efforts to address workforce needs with the goal of building and sustaining an effective, committed early childhood and school age workforce. The components of this system include the following:

#### **Standards and Best Practice**

- **Early learning guidelines** - The ECAC developed the *New York State Early Learning Guidelines* which provides indicators of typical child development from birth to 5 years age across developmental domains and illustrates possible teacher responses to meet the needs of individual children. The Guidelines serve as a tool for teachers and caregivers to guide child observations, curriculum planning, and experience for children.
- **Professional competencies** - Revised in 2011, the *NYS Core Body of Knowledge* is a competency-based publication that outlines best practices for professionals working with young children, birth through age 8 in each of seven core competency areas. These practices offer a road map for building meaningful relationships with children, families, and colleagues to support the creation of nurturing, stimulating environments, and for developing oneself as a professional.

#### **Professional Preparation and Development**

- **Access to higher education** – New York has a large college and university system with approximately 150 colleges and universities in the state offering programs and degrees in early childhood education and related fields. The ECAC is working to connect those colleges and universities in a way that maximizes the tremendous resources these institutions provide to our early childhood education system. These efforts have included providing every early childhood education faculty member with copies of the *Core Body of Knowledge* and the *Early Learning Guidelines* to encourage them to use these documents as the foundation for their teacher education degree programs. As a result, many colleges use these documents as the primary texts for their courses.

- **Articulation agreements** – The State University of New York’s two and four-year colleges and universities are fully articulated creating a direct pathway for early childhood educators in New York State. In addition, many two-year early childhood education programs offer CDA coursework that articulates into Associate degree programs.
- **Credential programs** - In addition to the nationally recognized Child Development Associate Credential (CDA), New York has established credit-bearing credentials for early childhood education administrators, staff, and providers including the Children’s Program Administrator Credential, Infant Toddler Care & Education Credential, and the Family Child Care Credential. Administered by the NYS Association for the Education of Young Children and recognized by the state of New York, the credentials have been developed to build and recognize educational attainment and skill development in each area. Specialized coursework has been made available across the state through a variety of colleges, universities, and training organizations to support early childhood practitioners in obtaining these credentials.
- **Skilled trainers** – The Early Learning Trainer Credential was developed as part of an overall strategy to ensure that training provided to early childhood educators is of high quality. Trainers who earn the credential must be able to document that they have experience working with children and families and providing professional development, as well as an education that is specific to early childhood education.
- **Workforce data system** - Aspire is New York State's registry and statewide training calendar for early childhood and school age professionals. Teachers, providers, directors, trainers and anyone who works with children can use Aspire to keep track of important information about their career, including education, employment history and other professional development or contributions.

### **Additional Resources to Support Program Quality and Professional Development**

**Strong regulatory foundation** – New York’s efforts to improve the quality of its early childhood education programs is built upon a strong regulatory foundation. New York’s child care regulations have been rated as second to only the Department of Defense’s child care program regulations for comprehensiveness and regulatory oversight. While Head Start Performance Standards are in many cases, more comprehensive, New York child care programs adhere to a higher set of standards than programs in other states.

**Training and consultation in infant/toddler services**– Through funding made available by the Office of Children and Family Services, Child Care Resources and Referral agencies (CCRRs) have established a network of 25 Infant Toddler Specialists who work with early childhood education providers on improving the quality services that they offer infants and toddlers and their families. Services include information and on-site consultation on best practices in infant and toddler care. In addition, to the state’s network of infant toddler specialists, New York has sponsored approximately 100 trainers including faculty of early childhood educator

programs to become certified Program for Infant and Toddler Care (PITC) and has also supported 80 trainers to obtain Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN) certification.

**Coordination of training and technical assistance resources** – New York is working to coordinate the wide range of training and technical assistance providers in the state to ensure that programs have access to these resources and that the training and technical assistance provided are high quality. To support, the implementation of Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships, specific efforts will be taken to ensure the coordination of training and technical assistance providers focused on infants and toddlers including, but not limited to, infant and toddler consultants (25), certified Program for Infant Toddler Care (PITC) trainers (100), certified Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect trainers (80), Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Network, local Child Care Resource and Referral programs (35), and others.

**Distance learning** – The SUNY Research Foundation Professional Development Program through a contract with the Office of Children and Family Services works to provide high quality training and financial aid to support staff and family child care providers in meeting their professional development needs. Through this contract eight video conferences on a range of topics are made available in over 100 locations across the state. In addition, on-line training programs are also made available so that early childhood educators can obtain training when their schedule allows. Both the video conferences and the on-line training include courses specifically addressing the needs of staff and providers caring for infants and toddlers and both have received awards for the quality of their products.

**Family child care support-** Two unions, VOICE/CSEA in areas of the state outside of New York City and United Federation for Teachers in New York City, work with registered family and licensed group family child care providers to assist and support them with business operations, regulations, licensing, subsidy payments, CACFP, professional development, and quality improvement.

**Shared services-**The ECAC has established Shared Source ECNY to strengthen the capacity of early childhood education programs to provide high-quality services and to strengthen their financial viability. Access to Shared Source EC NY is through a website that provides access to a range of tools and resources needed to improve quality, share learning, and reduce costs for providers, including: program quality resources and information vetted and updated by national early education experts; customizable forms and policies (e.g., Family Handbook and job descriptions); and exclusive cost savings programs on child products and supplies, payroll, insurance, and office supplies. Shared Source EC NY provides a central point of access for national, state and New York City regulations, policies and forms. Administrators, directors, and teachers as well as other early care and education staff will find resources relevant to their roles. Providers of technical assistance will also find resources enhancing their ability to support early care centers, family care and group care providers and other programs.

**Cultural education** – New York has a large network of libraries and museums that provide a range of services designed to support the education of young children and their families. Programs such as Cool Culture in New York City, and Ready to Read at New York Libraries (statewide) serve to link early childhood education programs to these significant resources.

**Public television:** New York State, through the Board of Regents, charters as educational institutions and provides funding to the statewide network of public television stations to support their services to schools, teachers and families. Through this funding, public television education specialists work with professionals involved in infant and toddler services to train them on how to use PBS Kids programs and online materials to help children be ready to succeed in school; to help parents and care providers understand how to control and manage the proliferation of technology-based media; and to promote developmentally appropriate, noncommercial media for families.

## Strong Families

The ECAC recognizes the important role that families play in a child's early life, and that they are the foremost influence on development. Children's health, development and overall well-being are inextricably linked to the ongoing support and nurturing they receive from their family, and in turn, the protection of strong and stable family relationships. Recognizing the importance of strong and stable families in the lives of young children, the ECAC and its partners are working to ensure that all families have the supports and service they need to raise healthy children.

**Engaging families** – The ECAC's Strong Families Work Group is leading efforts to support programs serving young children and their families to develop policies and practices that effectively engage families in positive working relationships to support the health and development of their children. Using the Strengthening Families Protective Factors and the Head Start Family Engagement Framework as their guides, the Strengthening Families Work Group is working to:

- Increase access to training on evidenced-based family engagement practices;
- Develop tools to support program efforts to more effectively engage families;
- Survey state agencies on their family engagement policies and practices; and
- Develop recommendations to improve the statewide coordination and effective implementation of family engagement policies and practices.

**Educating parents** – Through the efforts of New York State Parenting Education Partnership (NYSPEP), New York is working to strengthen and expand parenting education across the state. NYSPEP is a cross systems network of almost 1,500 practitioners, program managers, researchers and policymakers working toward implementing several strategies designed to promote, provide, and improve evidence-based parenting education, in order to enhance parents' skills, knowledge and behavior. These strategies include:

- **Increasing access to parenting education** – through a well-publicized website and helpline that provides information on parenting education services across the state.
- **Supporting new parents** – through the development of a *New Parent Kit* that will be provided to all parents of newborns.
- **Credentialing parent educators** – through the development of four tiered credentialing program.
- **Providing training on evidenced-based parenting education** – through the provision of regional conferences that provide the professional development needed to support obtaining the Parent Educator Credential.

- **Supporting parent leaders** – though the establishment of a network of 16 Community Cafés that support parent leadership development by engaging them in community development activities.

**Supporting families** – New York State supports a statewide network of Family Resource Centers that provide a range of programs and services including parenting education and support, connections to community resources, and play spaces for children. These programs, which are typically located in high need communities, often serve as the link between families and the wide range of resources available in community to meet their needs.

**Meeting the needs of vulnerable families** - New York is working to develop a comprehensive system of home visiting services to meet the needs of all vulnerable families with young children. The system includes developing a system for assessing service needs of all families as early in the pregnancy as possible. Families that show a need for services would be referred to programs and services designed to meet their needs, this would include comprehensive home visiting services to for those families identified as experiencing multiple difficulties. Through the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV), New York is gradually building a large network of home visiting programs. In addition to the eight programs funded through MIECHV, New York has six Nurse Family Partnerships, and 24 Healthy Family New York programs, and 61 Early Head Start programs all focused on meeting the needs of pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers. In addition, New York has a network of Parent as Teachers and Parent-Child Home Programs that provide home visiting services designed to improve early literacy, parenting, and school readiness.