



Cradle to Career: QUALITY

Education is a lifelong experience that begins well before a child ever sets foot in a classroom and continues long past a cap-and-gown commencement.

Today's students are tomorrow's innovators, business leaders and policy makers; and the performance of our nation's economy is directly linked to their success. But children's chances for success do not just rest on what happens from kindergarten through high school.

The first five years of a child's life lay the foundations for language, academic abilities, habits and social and emotional development. The window for change does not close after age 5 but "catch up" is costly. Worldwide more than 200 million children under 5 are failing to reach their developmental potential.¹

In New York State, over 300,000 children from infancy to age 5 participate yearly in a variety of early care and education programs including child care centers, family child care homes, pre-kindergarten classes and Head Start. And the quality of that care will help shape the rest of their lives. But not all early childhood programs are equal.² We know that one out of three children in New York State starts Kindergarten already behind in basic skills.³

Study after study has shown that those who receive high-quality child care are more likely to succeed, starting in kindergarten and continuing through adulthood. The foundation for this success must be laid early on, when children are infants and toddlers.

Quality matters and is essential for enhancing learning and development for the long term with high economic returns.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

- *Children who receive higher quality child care have better math skills prior to school entry.*
- *Toddlers who receive higher quality child care had fewer behavior problems than those who received lower quality care.*
- *Children who receive higher quality care score higher on tests of cognitive and academic achievement.*
- *Teenagers who received higher quality child care during the early years are less likely to engage in problem behaviors than those who received lower quality care.*⁴

While the programs and supports available to New York's youngest citizens are designed to effectively support learning and development, many suffer from low-quality implementation and others lack sufficient intensity to support long term success and positive impact.

What does quality look like? A high quality program provides a safe nurturing environment that promotes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.

COMPONENTS OF A HIGH QUALITY PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- *Quality teacher-child interactions*⁵
- *A developmentally appropriate curriculum*
- *Adequate teacher training*
- *A safe environment*
- *Small group size and low adult to child ratios; and*
- *Parent-teacher communication (family engagement).*⁶

The Workforce is key to quality. We know that interactions between teachers and children are powerful methods of supporting development and learning. Effective teachers know what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet individual student needs and are confident that the strategies they select work. We know that a teacher has more impact on student learning than any other factor controlled by school systems, including class size, school size, and the quality of after-school programs or even which school a student is attending.⁷ Teacher training, classroom support, and individualized interventions are needed to provide stability for young children in early education and care programs so that learning can continue.

Research has shown that a key lever in influencing the overall quality of an early education and care program is the quality of its educators. Young children exposed to early educators with high pedagogical standards exhibit higher levels of child cognitive and language development than their counterparts who do not have high-quality early educators — and these children are more likely to be productive members of society in the long-run.⁸ A 2010 study by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation noted that:

“Dramatically improving education means ensuring that every student has an effective teacher in every classroom.”

The median salary for a child care worker with more than 20 years’ experience is \$35,000 — only slightly higher than a pizza delivery person (\$30,000 with 5-9 years’ experience) and significantly less than a dog walker (\$60,000 with 5-9 years’ experience).⁹ If we don’t make a strong investment in the quality of our workforce, we will continue to see an undereducated, or an overeducated and underpaid, workforce. And our children will suffer for it. Quality costs; but lack of quality early childhood education programs already costs society far more.

To move quality forward, the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) supports critical policy steps including high standards for learning and teaching, adequate funding, and a quality rating framework that focuses on effective program implementation and measurable success in children’s growth and development. QUALITYstarsNY represents a clearly defined plan for looking at how well programs and providers implement quality practices and for promoting and maintaining quality going forward. The implementation of QUALITYstarsNY promises better outcomes for children and ensures that parents and taxpayers are making the smartest investments with the highest returns for all of the State’s children.

REFERENCES

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- ³ *UNC Chapel Hill – early childhood institute*, http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/ed_early_years.pdf
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- ⁵ Quality: What it Looks Like, Invest in US (<http://www.investinus.org/sites/default/files/Invest%20In%20US%20Quality.pdf>)
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- ⁸ Rolnick, A. J. & Grunewald, R., (2003). Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return. FedGazette. Minnesota: Minneapolis.
- ⁹ Data on salary disparities from Payscale.com.