NYS
Early Childhood
Advisory Council

Building Success for Children
Ensuring Success for New York

—— nysecac.org ——

# January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2027

# Strategic Plan

## FOUR-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

## DRAFT

# The NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan

**May 2023**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) was established under Governor Paterson in response to a recommendation by the Governor's Children's Cabinet to work toward the development of a comprehensive service system for young children and their families and to comply with the federal Head Start Act that required each state to designate or establish a council to serve as the State Advisory Council on early childhood education and care for children birth to school entry. In 2016, the ECAC was codified under the New York State Council on Children and Families (NYS Social Services Law section 483-g).

To ensure diversity in expertise, perspectives, and experience, the ECAC members represent state agencies, community-based non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, higher education, unions, and other critical entities across the state. All members are appointed by the Governor. The ECAC also seeks other perspectives through its Parent Advisory Council, work group participation, and annual community Town Hall conversations and listening sessions.

The ECAC's mission is to provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues. By monitoring and guiding the implementation of a range of strategies, the ECAC supports New York in building a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children. The work supports the vision and belief that every child in New York State should be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

This three-year strategic plan covers the period from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2026. It builds upon the successes and learnings of previous strategic plans and responds to current environmental factors affecting early childhood care and education and services.

The plan outlines goals and recommendations for the next three years and concludes with a summary to monitor the plan's progress.

# VISION

The ECAC believes every child in New York State should be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family that is supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

# MISSION

The ECAC will provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues. By monitoring and guiding the implementation of a range of strategies, the ECAC supports New York in building a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children.

# EQUITY STATEMENT

The ECAC holds a deep commitment to social justice and racial equity, as a process and a goal, as evidenced by our work across the state. We recognize that, in order to uphold our vision and mission to support young children's development, we must actively, critically, and continuously work to disrupt and dismantle systemic inequities due to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, legal status and family structure. It is our responsibility to address the inequities impacting the lives of children and families on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. In doing so we build systems that provide all young children and their families with equitable access to the services, resources, and experiences in order to thrive.

# CORE VALUES

**Lead with Race:** The ECAC leads with race in recognition that the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities are pervasive throughout society, government, systems, and institutions. Racial inequities, across all indicators for success inhibit the ability of families and communities to provide for their children's well-being and success.

**Equity is Central:** Equity is central to the work because groups of people are still marginalized based on identity and ability (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ability, first language, economic class), obstructing families and communities from being able to support the well-being and success of their children.

**Holistic Approach:** A holistic approach recognizes the whole child's development – social, emotional, physical, cognitive – and elevates the importance of family and community assets and resources to positively impact a child's life.

**Family-Centered:** Family-centered early care and education services respect the family's central role as caregiver, advocate, and decision-maker for the child. A family-centered approach builds a foundation of collaboration between families and professionals and is predicated on family's ability to have their basic needs met.

**Community-Centered (Nothing for Us Without Us):** No policy or program should be developed or decided by the ECAC or any other representative without the full and direct participation of the families and communities affected.

**We Are Stronger Together:** Cross-agency collaborations and partnerships among families, organizations, and communities create opportunities to drive systemic change in early childhood care and education.

**Data-Driven & Evidence-based:** Early childhood data helps the ECAC understand young children's care, developmental, and health needs. It informs decisions and results in evidence-based programs and policy recommendations. Data also highlights gaps and disparities that must be addressed to lead with race and achieve equity.

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The ECAC was established in 2009 to build and implement a comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system in New York State.  The ECAC addresses human services, early care and education, social-emotional development, health care, and other services for young children beginning in pregnancy.

This plan builds on the reported accomplishments and learnings of the ECAC 2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan, as well as the findings of the 2022 environmental scan, which included 44 survey responses, five key-informant interviews, and a planning retreat in August 2022.

Below is a summary of the findings and description of the evolving landscape of early childhood care and education.

# Successes of the ECAC 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

The ECAC membership (summer 2022) reviewed the accomplishments of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan responding to the following prompts:

- What about the current Strategic Plan worked?
- What was missing from the current Strategic Plan?
- What are opportunities for future work?
- How will the future plan be implemented? (*Roles, Responsibilities, Function & Logistics*)

Funding

- The plan was organized around the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (B5) initiative. The conclusion of the B5 grant, in December of 2023, presents the ECAC with the challenge of identifying priorities that do not require special funding, while continuing to set the stage for priorities to be acted upon as funding becomes available.
- Going forward fiscal needs should be identified for all priorities.

Other reflections of note included:

- The emphasis on equity was considered by the ECAC membership as critically important.
- Cross-systems collaboration was effective in leveraging multiple areas of expertise.
- Expansion of the successful Career Centers (established in all ten economic development regions) should continue to be a priority, along with an overall continued focus on workforce development.
- Matching Strategic Plan priorities with legislation and policy opportunities has been successful and should continue.
- Need to expand the communications plan to elevate the expertise and voice of the ECAC.

Membership

- Establishment of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in 2021 was a success, but work is needed to achieve greater engagement.
- Include a representative from the Department of Health's Office of Health Insurance Programs (Medicaid) on the ECAC.
- Determine how to make sure all areas of the state are represented.
- Engage the business sector.
- More effective onboarding process for new members to the ECAC.

Strategic Plan Document Structure

- Yearly progress indicators worked well.
- The next plan should have fewer goals.
- Objectives should have greater clarity and specificity, including data and metrics.

## Survey & Interview Reflections on the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

Survey respondents and interviewees thought the ECAC's mission remained relevant.

They expressed that the next Strategic Plan should be organized around fewer goals. Priority areas of the ECAC's current strategic plan identified as important to carry forward included: 1) service coordination and availability of services, 2) ECAC practices, 3) data systems and data-driven decisions, and 4) workforce issues. Workforce, service coordination and availability of services, and funding were the top three priority areas for the ECAC to advance to the Governor's Office.

**fewer goals**

## The Impact of COVID-19

When asked about the impact of the COVID pandemic, survey respondents and interviewees stated that the COVID pandemic most certainly had a detrimental impact on children birth to 5 years of age, as well as the early childhood sector as a whole.

The added stressors of the COVID pandemic revealed racial and other disparities and inequities embedded in the early childhood system.

**eliminate inequities**

Furthermore, like with other industries, the pandemic led to financial distress for many early childhood programs, amplifying the need for child care and early education as well as highlighting workforce gaps and inequities for low-income communities.

Interviewees also noted that COVID adversely affected the 2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan's implementation. But added that compared to other states, the ECAC had achieved some remarkable successes, including Pyramid Model Implementation expansion and the creation of early childhood Career Centers in all ten regions of the state.

A number of serious concerns, created by COVID, were identified that greatly impact early childhood policy, service delivery, and the workforce, were considered critical to the ECAC's efforts going forward. They are listed below:

Policy Issues:

- Eliminate inequities and provide access to affordable high-quality early care and education for all families.

- Provide funding to support families' ability to pay the true cost of child care and fair compensation for the early education workforce, while ensuring the fiscal viability and sustainability of programs.
- Review health and safety practices, policies, and procedures to ensure the health needs of all children and the early childhood workforce are met.

Service Delivery Concerns:

- Address isolation, racial equity, and social cohesion. Advance program models informed by data to address disparities driven by race, poverty, and other factors.
- Identify ways to better utilize technology and social media in some service delivery.

- Develop strategies to effectively respond to trauma affecting families and young children.

**data driven**

Workforce Issues:

**strengthen, support, and grow the EC workforce**

- Develop strategies to respond to secondary trauma and fatigue affecting the workforce.
- Develop new strategies for strengthening, supporting, and growing the workforce with a focus on alleviating child care deserts, increasing partnerships, and providing competitive compensation and benefits.

## 2022 RETREAT DISCUSSIONS

At the summer 2022 ECAC Strategic Planning retreat, participants were asked to creatively envision and discuss the early childhood continuum of care they would like to create for New York State. The common threads that arose from this exercise envisioned an anti-racist, comprehensive, and holistic care continuum that supports the development of the whole child prenatally through age eight.

Programs are data-informed and evidenced based. The workforce is fairly compensated, highly skilled, has support for education, training, and advancement, and is valued.

**anti-racist, holistic, family and community centered**

All children have equitable opportunities for care and learning, that are culturally and linguistically sensitive, to ensure they are ready to succeed and thrive. Families are empowered to advocate for their children, themselves, and system improvements.

Agencies and organizations are community- and family-centered. Each community has the resources and programs needed to provide families with the ability to choose, easily navigate, and access a system of quality care and education for their children. Alignment across

**alignment across agencies & organizations**

agencies and organizations is vital to maximizing impact. Conversation also noted the current political opportunity to advance policy issues.

The **six focus areas** that emerged from the discovery process (summer 2022) are:

1) Racial Equity

2) Family & Community Resources

3) Workforce Development

4) Policy

5) The Function and Structure of the ECAC

6) Early Childhood Data

# FOCUS AREAS & LEVERS FOR CHANGE

## RACIAL EQUITY

"Racial equity is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color."[1]

The ECAC knows it is impossible to achieve its mission and vision without working towards a more just and equitable society.  Addressing the inequities impacting the lives of children and families on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels is a cornerstone of this plan and the work of the ECAC.  In carrying out this critical and foundational work, systems are built that provide all young children and their families with equitable access to the services, resources, and experiences needed to thrive.

## NURTURING FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS

Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and healthy, well-resourced communities help protect children and families against the effects of poverty and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These protective factors are fundamental to developing healthy brain architecture.

Young children experience the world through their relationships with parents and other caregivers. Children can thrive when they grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing families. Families can thrive when they live in safe, stable, and well-resourced communities. Community poverty and other inequities, both rural, suburban, and urban, are detrimental to New York's children and their families.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A robust and skilled early childhood workforce, which includes all levels of educators, staff, administrators, and leaders, is fundamental to the well-being of young children, families, and society.

Nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers are essential to young children having a strong developmental foundation that will foster their success in school and life, including their capacity to participate in their communities. Additionally, early care and education professionals are "the workforce behind the community's workforce." They enable parents and caregivers to work, attend school or engage in other job training opportunities.

However, the demand for child care, specialists, therapists, and other professionals who support young children and families frequently outweighs supply in many communities.

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[1] Glenn Harris, President, Race Forward and Publisher, Colorlines; https://www.raceforward.org/about/what-is-racial-equity-key-concepts

Many factors contribute to this shortage of qualified and supported early care and education professionals, including long hours and poor compensation.

## REIMAGINING POLICY

Governance is a key strategy of systems change work.

The public sector is an initiator and organizer of the work. While states are the prime host for major federal funding streams that support early childhood, healthcare, and education and lead in policy, funding, program design, and oversight, there is no single agency responsible for all the factors that impact early childhood health and development.

To achieve the ECAC goals, state and local cross-agency collaboration and coordination are needed to assure an efficient and accountable public structure.

## LEVERS OF CHANGE

Successful implementation of the ECAC strategic plan engages change levers to bring about desired outcomes. The ECAC identified six key levers for change as critical for strengthening the system, removing barriers to access services, and facilitating stronger child outcomes.

Each lever cuts across the six areas and requires attention and planning for successful achievement of the plan's goals.

- o Equity
- o Data
- o Fiscal Policy and Funding
- o Policy
- o Infrastructure
- o Communications

## GOAL 1: Racial Equity

### Close the racial equity gap in
### early care and education and health.

**Data:**

- Acquire and use data, disaggregated by race.

**Fiscal Policy & Funding:**

- Ensure funding priorities are focused on informed by supporting high needs, historically underserved areas, and population diversity (racial, linguistic, ability, socioeconomic, etc.).

**Policy:**

- Ensure equitable choice across regions and communities to quality early childhood programs and services.
- Support a government review and reversal of racially-biased policies and practices.

**Infrastructure:**

- Develop a racially, ethnically, and culturally reflective and responsive workforce.
- Establish equitable program policies, practices, and structures (e.g., prohibit suspensions and expulsions, promote integrated settings).

**ECAC Organizational:**

- Develop an ECAC undoing racism plan and create a race equity review board to ensure all ECAC decisions consider racial equity.
- Support ECAC member commitments to address systemic racism in their agencies and organizations.

## GOAL 2: Family & Community Resources

Ensure families and communities have the knowledge, skills, supports, and resources needed to create healthy and nurturing environments inside and outside the home for young children to thrive.

**ECAC Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state, and local early care and education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.

**Fiscal Policy & Funding:**

- Expand successful ECAC initiatives (e.g., universal developmental screenings).
- Secure financial support and increase child care subsidies to enable more families to access early care and education resources, services, and programs.

**Infrastructure:**

- Ensure family access and choice to a continuum of early care and education services, including services for children with developmental, health, mental health, and oral health care needs.
- Build community systems to help families navigate and access early care, health care, and education services and supports.
- Eliminate child care deserts and support the development of a continuum of quality early care and education programs and services in all communities.

**Communication/ Partnership:**

- Develop whole-child partnerships with the Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council and Child Care Availability Task Force.

# GOAL 3: Workforce
## Foster a skilled, sustainable, and professionally compensated early childhood workforce.

### ECAC Statutory Responsibilities:

- Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the state.

- Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two-year and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state to support the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which such institutions have articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students in Head Start or pre-kindergarten programs.

### Equity:

- Target workforce recruitment, compensation equity, and development in underserved areas and communities.

### Data:

- Promote data-driven policies, programs, and statewide use of the early childhood workforce registry.

### Fiscal Policy & Funding:

- Expand successful projects (e.g., Career Centers, Aspire Registry, Pyramid Model).
- Fully fund a comprehensive system of professional development with measures for quality assurance and stable funding to recruit, build, and support the workforce.

### Policy:

- Create an early childhood education workforce compensation plan with compensation, retirement, and benefit standards (e.g., for early childhood teachers to have parity with public school teachers with the same qualifications).
- Ensure all children in New York State have access to comprehensive services.

### Infrastructure:

- Implement statewide career pathways that provide a road map for early childhood professionals.
- Identify and propose changes to address gaps and mitigate barriers to certification.
- Build workforce capacity in child care deserts.

### Communication:

- Shape the public narrative of the impact and the value of early care and education professionals.

### Partnership:

- Develop Career Center and workforce development partnerships with Regional Economic Development Councils and institutions of higher education for workforce development.

## GOAL 4: Policy
## Reconceptualize government approaches to fostering a healthy early childhood for all people living in New York State.

### ECAC Statutory Responsibilities:

- Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services, and the state agencies responsible for administering such programs.
- Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.
- Develop and implement strategies to engage business and civic leaders and organizations in early learning planning and advocacy at the state and local level.

### Equity:

- Conduct a government review and recommend reversal of racially biased policies and practices.

### Fiscal Policy & Funding:

- Collect data and utilize research to identify systems of services and programs that need funding to strengthen the overall early childhood system.

### Policy:

- Review laws and regulations impacting early care and education to advise the governor and legislature on policy and legislative actions that will create a high-quality equitable early care and education system.
- Eliminate barriers, reduce administrative burdens, and simplify the child care assistance application process and platforms.
- Expand points of entry to early care and education, services for children with developmental, health, mental health, and oral health care needs, through community-based organizations and health services and expand and improve screening, referrals, and service delivery for all young children.
- Inform policy shifts to reduce barriers to services and supports.

### Infrastructure:

- Assess and improve accountability practices for agencies collecting and managing data relevant to early care and education.
- Strengthen transitions within early childhood (i.e., from Early Intervention (EI) to the Committee for Preschool Special Education (CPSE), from early childhood into kindergarten).

### Communication:

- Amplify the value and public good served by early childhood service, including those serving children with developmental, health, mental health, and oral health care needs.

## GOAL 6: Early Childhood Data
**Develop recommendations for ensuring that the ECAC, state agencies, and communities across the state have the data needed for developing and managing high-quality early childhood programs and services.**

**ECAC Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry, including an assessment of the availability of high-quality pre-kindergarten services for low-income children in the state.

- Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state, and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.

- Develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system for public early childhood education and development programs and services throughout the state.

**Infrastructure:**

- Identify gaps in the data needed to support effective early childhood programs and policies and recommend strategies for data collection and making data readily available.
- Develop recommendations for integrating data on early childhood programs and services across agencies.
- Identify and make readily available indicators of child and family well-being to support program development, system improvements, and measure the effectiveness of state efforts to address the needs of young children and their families.
- Collect and provide access to data, disaggregated by race, primary language spoken, geographic location, gender etc., as standard practice for all early childhood programs and services.

**Fiscal Policy & Funding:**

- Develop recommendations for funding the data collection and integration needed to support state and local program and policy decisions.

## Strengthen the ECAC to drive change, lead, inform, and build a strong early childhood system.

**ECAC Statutory Responsibilities:**

- **Develop recommendations for increasing public-private investments in early childhood and strategies for maximizing resources.**

- Hold public hearings and provide an opportunity for public comment on the activities described in subdivision three of the ECAC law.

- Develop and implement strategies to engage business and civic leaders and organizations in early learning planning and advocacy at the state and local level.

- Increase business, civic and public awareness of the importance of early childhood education, including, but not limited to, the distribution of literature through mail or online, organizing of meetings and events to promote the cost benefit of investments in learning and the hosting of an annual economic summit on early childhood investment.

- The ECAC shall submit a statewide strategic report addressing the activities described in subdivision three of the ECAC law to the director of the Head Start Collaboration office, the Governor, the Speaker of the assembly and the president of the senate. After submission of a statewide strategic report, the ECAC shall meet periodically to review any implementation of the recommendations in such report and any changes in state and local needs.

**Equity:**

- **Form an Equity Review Board and establish an equity rubric to evaluate and implement more equitable early childhood programs and practices.**

**Data:**

- **Establish performance indicators for the ECAC.**

**Fiscal Policy & Funding:**

- **Secure funding for successful ECAC initiatives.**

**Infrastructure:**

- **Strengthen the engagement of the ECAC Parent Advisory Council (PAC).**

- **Extend ECAC membership invitations to fill gaps in expertise and diversity.**

**Communication:**

- **Develop a communication plan to increase family and community engagement.**

- **Develop an onboarding and exit process for ECAC members.**

# MONITORING PROGRESS

This 4-year strategic plan is realistically ambitious, especially with respect to expectations for the ECAC's provision of advice to the Governor on how to build a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children.

The ECAC recognizes progress on all the priorities and strategies may not advance at the same rate. Monitoring progress regularly will indicate the extent to which the plan's goals are met and inform how to adapt and improve the plan accordingly.

On an ongoing basis, the ECAC will:

- Ensure that activities are being performed within the defined parameters.

- Ensure that activities are being developed in accordance with the values that guide the ECAC.

- Record and track all priorities and action plans created as part of meeting the Strategic Plan goals.

- Provide quarterly updates on the progress of the Strategic Plan's implementation, including barriers and adjustments needed.

The ECAC is ready to take on the challenges listed above.  The ECAC will work to strengthen the early childhood system in NY so that all young children and their families have what they need as early in their lives as possible to live up to their full potential.