



ECAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNOR HOCHUL – September 2024

The New York Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is pleased to submit four recommendations, with corresponding action items, to Governor Hochul for consideration for State Fiscal Year 2025-2026 planning.

Background: The ECAC was established 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, workgroup participation, and annual community “Town Hall” conversations and listening sessions.

Mission: The ECAC’s mission is to provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues.

Recommendations: These recommendations were collectively developed by the ECAC to promote equitable access to quality services, resources, and experiences that New York’s young children and their families need to thrive.

Recommendation #1: Create a statewide policy framework to foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in early childhood programs and services.

New York State agencies and partners are committed to dismantling racial barriers and boundaries that exclude any child, family, or group from accessing services and opportunities needed to support children’s success and development in the early years.

The ECAC holds a deep commitment to social justice and racial equity, as a process and a goal. We recognize that to uphold our vision and mission to support young children’s development, we must actively, critically, and continuously work to disrupt and dismantle systemic racism in early childhood systems in New York. It is our responsibility to address the inequities impacting the lives of children and families on individual, institutional, and structural levels. In doing so, we interrupt and address disproportionate outcomes and build systems that provide all children equitable access to services, resources, and experiences.

The ECAC Equity Committee is committed to the **development of a statewide framework** that would include, but is not limited to, reviewing state agencies’ policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that all cultures, genders, languages, and abilities throughout the state of New York are included and supported. The framework will consider:

- How to establish environments that affirm cultural and linguistic identities
- Fostering positive holistic development outcomes in all state offices
- Elevating historically marginalized family voices
- Empowering families with opportunities to become agents of social change (i.e., parent groups/voice)

- Developing resources to comprehensively support the development of every child

Action Steps:

- 1) Create a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) framework to be used by all state agencies responsible for the provision or oversight of early childhood services. (\$400,000)
- 2) Direct state agencies to adopt newly-created DEIA framework.
- 3) Require training for all state employees and vendors/contractors on the principles of DEIA, similar to the requirement for sexual harassment prevention training.
- 4) Require the review of all new policy and funding opportunities through a racial and equity lens so that no district or community lacks state resources to respect and support families.

Tools to Implement:

- Diversity Data Policy Questions and Guide Points for Policy <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/policy-equity-assessments>
- Intercultural Development Inventory Tool <https://www.idiinventory.com/>
- NYS Education Department, Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework <https://www.nysed.gov/crs/framework>

Recommendation #2: Increase the data capacity of New York’s early childhood workforce registry.

New York must support the early childhood workforce and State agencies by increasing the scope, representation, and data capacity of New York’s early childhood workforce registry.

Background: Workforce registries across the country, including the Aspire Registry in New York, collect, track, and report data about the early childhood workforce in licensed/regulated settings. This data is part of the critical infrastructure registries provide to inform state agencies and policymakers, advocacy groups, and researchers about the needs and opportunities for the workforce. Licensing agencies, QUALITYstarsNY, child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), higher education institutions, and others use registry-verified data to confirm that the workforce has the required credentials, experience, and training. In addition, Aspire Registry data are used to create workforce reports, track progress, identify real-time workforce needs, and inform workforce compensation initiatives, as well as support existing infrastructure to enhance data dashboards, profiles for progress, and accountability indicators.

The Aspire Registry also participates in the National Workforce Registry Alliance, ensuring that New York’s workforce is represented in one of the largest national workforce data sets available in the United States. In 2023, the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (the implementing agency of the Aspire Registry) conducted a survey on current early childhood workforce benefits, and that data informed other statewide groups, including the ECAC and the New York State Child Care Availability Task Force.

The Aspire Registry has served New York’s early childhood workforce and stakeholders for 12 years. It now represents over 70% of licensed early care and education centers in the state, or 40,000 people, including staff in a range of child-serving roles (i.e., teachers, assistant teachers, directors, early interventionists, home visitors, parenting educators, and mental health consultants). Home-based child care providers, an essential part of New York’s child care mixed delivery system, are also represented in the Aspire Registry, but at lower numbers: 17% of Group Family Child Care providers, and 11% of Family Child Care providers. This is an area of opportunity and where the Registry needs to focus expansion efforts.

The Aspire Registry currently receives licensing data from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Integration of the Facility Application and Management System (FAMS) data system used by OCFS and the Aspire Registry will help support the State's overall child care quality improvement efforts. Notably, the Aspire Registry has already linked to the Pyramid Model Implementation Data System to provide early childhood workforce data.

Currently, many early childhood professionals, especially prekindergarten teachers, utilize two different professional workforce systems – the Aspire Registry for their professional development and education and the TEACH system at the New York State Education Department to maintain their teacher certification credentials. Data sharing between these two systems will eliminate the need to input data into both systems, thereby reducing the administrative burden on educators.

Increasing home-based provider representation in the Aspire Registry will decrease the administrative burden for home-based providers, by providing an easily accessible resource for child care small business owners to access and track the professional development resources they need to maintain their operating permit/license. It also will provide much-needed data about the areas of opportunity that New York can focus on to support home-based early childhood providers, especially in identifying education and professional learning gaps and opportunities.

Action Steps:

- 1) Provide funding (\$2 million) for the Aspire Registry to expand outreach and support to serve more of New York's child care and early childhood education workforce, with a focus on family/group family home-based child care providers.
- 2) Provide initial funding (\$500,000) for the initial planning phase for integration of New York's statewide workforce data systems.
- 3) Provide funding (\$100,000) for a bi-annual workforce study to examine data from the Aspire Registry, as well as solicit data directly from workforce participants, to identify ongoing and changing needs and opportunities. ECAC Workforce Committee members will provide input and guidance about survey topics and areas of focus.

Recommendation #3: Increase access to early childhood screenings, evaluations, and services.

All young children receive the screenings, referrals, evaluations, and services that are recommended through the Early Intervention Program (EIP) and Preschool Special Education Program. Toward this effort, evaluation rates for EIP and Preschool Special Education rates should be studied to identify whether the rate structure reflects the regulatory requirements to ensure timely evaluations. Additionally, the EIP program should receive a targeted funding increase for all services.

Background: The New York State Early Intervention Program (EIP) is one of the nation's largest early intervention service delivery systems, serving children from birth to three years of age. On an annual basis, the New York State EIP receives over 73,000 referrals and completes over 55,000 multidisciplinary evaluations. Currently, the number of EI practitioners and evaluators is insufficient to meet the demand in New York State. Many children who would benefit from EIP aren't receiving services, and children who are receiving them aren't always receiving them in a timely matter. From July 2018 through February 2022, approximately 189,000 children with a suspected or confirmed disability were referred to the New York State EIP. Of these, 27,000 (14%) never received an evaluation. Of the nearly 152,000 children who were evaluated, 98,000 or 64% were determined eligible to receive services, but about 2,000 (2%) of eligible children never received an individualized plan. Of the 95,000 children who did receive an individualized plan:

- Nearly 51% or about 48,000 children did not receive all types of the therapeutic services to which they were entitled.
- About 28% or 27,000 children did not receive authorized services within the required 30-day time period.
- About 3% or 3,000 children did not receive any of their authorized therapeutic services.

Further, racial disparities in access to EIP services exist. White children generally are referred at a younger age, and Black children are less likely to receive services within the prescribed time frame. (*Oversight of the Early Intervention Program*, New York State Office of the Comptroller, February 28, 2023).

From the ages of three to five years, children are served by New York State’s preschool special education (4410) program. This program annually serves approximately 80,000 children. Similar to EIP, preschool special education programs are facing a provider shortage, impacting the availability of programs and services to preschool students with disabilities. The expectation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is that all children referred for an initial evaluation for special education services are evaluated within 60 days of parent consent. The five-year average performance rate for New York State is 90%, (which includes both preschool and school-age children referred for evaluation). New York State reports the percentage of children transitioning from EIP to preschool special education by their 3rd birthday. New York State’s five-year average performance rate on this indicator is 81%.

EIP and preschool special education funding should be increased to reflect the actual cost of service to reflect adequate compensation for certified and licensed professionals necessary to meet the needs of the child. In addition, it is noted that New York State included a 5% rate increase in the 2024-2025 State Budget for EIP, but that rate has not been implemented to date. This is a problem because some children are not getting the EIP services for which they are eligible, and programs are operating without receiving the anticipated 5%, which impacts agencies that are already struggling financially.

Action Steps:

- 1) Study evaluation rates for EIP and Preschool Special Education by Providing funding (\$400,000) to support a statewide analysis of evaluation rates by the NYS Education Department and the NYS Department of Health that will include:
 - Evaluating the adequacy of child evaluation reimbursement rates to support the supply of evaluators, which in turn can support evaluations being conducted within required timelines. This information will help identify potential gaps in funding and inform recommendations for aligning reimbursement with the actual cost of service (rates with wages for these positions, understanding the root causes of service delays across the state).
 - Evaluating the possible impact on access to evaluations resulting from the parent choice clause of New York State Education Law section 4410, which allows parents to select the evaluator for their child, to help inform whether the law should be amended to align with school-age special education evaluations that require school districts to conduct the evaluation, with parents retaining the right to obtain an independent evaluation at public expense.
 - Assessing the availability of evaluation providers and the impact on children in rural vs. urban communities receiving EIP and preschool special education evaluations in a timely manner to help inform the development of recommendations to address the unique challenges faced in rural and urban areas.

This work will complement a tuition methodology study being conducted by NYSED and the Early Intervention Coordinating Council’s Provider Workforce Capacity Task Force. Notably, this separate study will consider the evaluation programs under EIP and preschool special education to ensure that New York State is able to meet evaluation timelines required under IDEA.

2) Support additional resources to ensure children receive EIP and preschool education services by:

- Determining the most effective way to provide EI services and fund the EI system without administrative and service delivery reductions.
- Recommending that a State Plan Amendment (SPA) be submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and implement the 5% rate increase approved as part of State Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget.
- Providing an additional 5% rate increase for SFY 2025-26, building on last year's commitment to reimburse EI providers for the actual cost of services and adequately compensate the certified and licensed professionals who are necessary to meet the needs of children.
- Exploring the creation of a loan forgiveness program to attract new providers into the EI system. Like other state loan forgiveness programs, new providers should be required to serve at least 30% of Medicaid/uninsured. Newly licensed providers have a choice of where to work. EI will never be able to compete with hospitals, nursing homes, and other settings. Loan forgiveness is a way to attract new providers into EI to serve our youngest children with delays.
- Increasing preschool special education rates to meet the service needs of eligible children.

Citations:

- [Special Education State Performance Plan \(SPP\)/Annual Performance Report \(APR\) | New York State Education Department \(nysed.gov\) https://www.nysed.gov/special-education/spp-apr](https://www.nysed.gov/special-education/spp-apr)
- [Early Intervention Program Data and Statistics \(ny.gov\) https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/community/infants_children/early_intervention/](https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/community/infants_children/early_intervention/)

Recommendation # 4: Develop a roadmap to implement universal access to home visiting in New York.

New York should develop a roadmap to guide the implementation of universal access to home visiting services for expectant families and when babies join a family anywhere in the State.

This roadmap will build on the [First 1,000 Days](#) recommendations, and evaluate universal home visiting pilots, funding mechanisms, and expansion of existing programs.

Background: Home visiting programs are voluntary, evidence-based, or evidence-informed programs that deliver services and support to families from early in pregnancy through the first few years of a child's life. Expectant parents and parents of young children are paired with a trained home visitor—a nurse, social worker, paraprofessional, or community-based visitor, depending on the program. Although home visiting services differ across models, home visitors typically provide direct education and support about pregnancy, parenting, safe sleep practices, early literacy, and healthy child development; gather information to tailor services; and provide case management. Home visitors also serve as community connectors, linking the family to medical providers, mental health and domestic violence services, food, housing, community resources, child care, and the next educational steps for their children. Entry to programs can be anywhere along the continuum, coinciding with family need and readiness to engage.

The recommendation is for New York State to develop a roadmap that would guide the implementation of universal access to home visiting services across the New York State. One model to consider would be a community-wide, "light touch" model, in which families receive up to four home visits; one during pregnancy and up to three more after birth, with referrals to other local, community-based programs when need for longer engagement is identified. Universal access to home visiting services would:

- Provide preventive support to all families, saving money for the state by supporting children and families and avoiding larger costs later in the child's life.

- Reach families who might benefit from services or would like to have a connection to assistance but are not identified by current systems.
- Reduce the stigma of being offered services or requesting services because the benefits are offered to all families.
- Provide a bridge or warm hand-off if families would like a connection to a more intensive set of services.

Action Steps:

- 1) Create a universal home visiting roadmap for New York State, by convening state and local agencies, community-based organizations, parents, and other stakeholders.
- 2) Use existing home visiting models and pilots to inform the creation of the state's universal home visiting program.
- 3) Evaluate funding mechanisms building on work done previously by the ECAC in the [Blending and Braiding to Support Early Childhood Home Visiting in NYS Guide](#) and the work of the Education Trust-NY on New York's Home Visiting Cost Model.