



## ECAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNOR HOCHUL

The New York Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is pleased to submit these recommendations, with corresponding action items, to Governor Hochul for consideration for State Fiscal Year 2027-2028 planning.

**Background:** The ECAC was established to make recommendations to the Governor to support the development of a comprehensive and high-quality service system for young children and their families. In 2016, the ECAC was codified under the New York State Council on Children and Families (CCF) (NYS Social Services Law § 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 committee 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.

**Vision:** The ECAC’s vision is that every child in New York State will be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family that is supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

These recommendations were collectively developed by the ECAC to advance this vision and mission and are grouped into three categories: 1) Early childhood workforce; 2) Developmental Health; and 3) Systems alignment.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Workforce issues across all the systems that serve young children in New York continue to be a challenge to meeting the needs of more than a million children birth to 5 years old and their families.

To ensure that all of New York’s young children have access to quality care and comprehensive services, the ECAC strongly recommends that the state incentivize and support workforce expansion and quality improvement. Supporting the early care and education (ECE) workforce is vitally important to New York’s ultimate goal of supporting young children in universal child care, universal prekindergarten, Head Start, Early Intervention, and preschool special education. The ECE sector is facing a teacher shortage even steeper than the K-12 system – an aging workforce paired with a sharp decline in educators entering the field – while also struggling with remarkably low compensation and benefits.

Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, the state has made historic investments in the ECE workforce, providing, for example, bonuses with Workforce Retention Grants in 2023 and 2024. However, further public investment is needed to support the true cost of providing universal quality care and education, which must include appropriate compensation and workforce supports.

Each of the recommendations below not only builds on progress that the state has made over the last five years, but amplifies other state efforts, including Child Care Availability Task Force recommendations, projects supported by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five initiatives led by CCF, and recommendations from the UPK

**Recommendation 1:** Adopt the ECE career ladder (see attached) that supports ECE professional workforce autonomy and quality and utilize the corresponding role-based salary scales as a tool for investment planning, rate setting, and contracting for universal early care and education (including UPK).

**Background:** An ECE career ladder was developed by a group of ECE stakeholders<sup>1</sup> in New York and reviewed by educators, program leaders, funders, government agency representatives, elected representatives, advocates, organized labor, CCRCs, and community coalitions across the state. A comprehensive career ladder is a foundational and necessary tool to ensure quality staffing in the expansion of universal ECE across the state.

**Action Steps:**

- Incentivize the use of the career ladder and salary scale in “First 3” pilot counties (Dutchess, Monroe, Broome) that are adopting universal child care for children birth through age three by providing additional funding to fully fund salary scale wages for participating programs.
- Provide additional funding to incentivize school districts with UPK funding (including 2-K and 3-K) that contract with community-based programs to utilize the salary scales for contracted sites.

**Recommendation 2:** Increase scholarship support for current and future early childhood educators through CUNY/SUNY Reconnect, the Educational Incentive Program, and the QUALITYstarsNY Academic Scholarship.

**Background:** The CUNY and SUNY Reconnect program, serving non-traditional students who make up a majority of the ECE workforce – educators aged 25-55 who are pursuing their degrees part-time while also working full-time and caring for their families – provides tuition and support for associate degrees for early childhood educators. This program was launched in 2025 and had a successful first year.

The NYS Educational Incentive Program (EIP) currently supports income-eligible professionals working in OCFS-licensed settings with annual scholarships of up to \$2,500 for college coursework and professional development. EIP has also been an important component of the early childhood apprenticeship programs around the state.

QUALITYstarsNY (QSNY) currently supports scholarships for 500+ staff in QSNY-participating programs pursuing credit-bearing certificates and degrees, by earmarking \$650,000 of its budget for this purpose. But this amount does not cover all eligible applicants each semester.

**Action Steps:**

- CUNY/SUNY Reconnect – increase funding to allow for more degree programs to access the Reconnect program once colleges have made the required modifications to be eligible to participate. Expand eligibility for Reconnect to include comprehensive colleges that offer associate degrees in early childhood education.
- Educational Incentive Program – increase annual funding by \$2M to bring total to \$10M annually to serve an additional 800 people per year. Modify the program to utilize the abovementioned ECE career ladder to allow for

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<sup>1</sup> The stakeholder group, the New York Early Childhood Workforce Collaborative, is made up of representatives from the NY Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, the NY Association for the Education of Young Children, the Early Care and Learning Council, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the Center for Urban Affairs at the New School, the Day Care Council of New York, and other subject matter experts.

increased scholarship amounts as participants advance along the career ladder. Require EIP recipients to have Aspire Registry profiles in order to be able to track outcomes and impacts of EIP funding.

- Connect applicants for EIP funding to be used for college coursework with the Career Development Centers across the state for support in accessing information about additional higher education and financial aid resources that are available to support the workforce.
- Increase the allocation of EIP funding to QUALITYstarsNY Quality Scholars to \$1M. The Quality Scholars allocation of \$420,000 has been flat for almost 10 years, while the number of participating programs has almost tripled during that time. Allocation of funding through Quality Scholars ensures that professional development funding supports overall program quality improvement efforts, in addition to the individual's career progression.
- Increase funding for QUALITYstarsNY by \$1M to bring the total to \$21M (currently at \$20M) to expand the QUALITYstarsNY Academic Scholarship to support up to 750 more educators to increase their qualifications as part of the overall program quality improvement process.
- Establish a scholarship program that is analogous to EIP to support professional development and preparation for staff in preschool special education (4410) programs (for programs that are not eligible for EIP funding in the current system).

**Recommendation 3: Improve professional development offerings for the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.**

**Background:** Because of its value as an entry level credential, a significant portion of the publicly-funded scholarships for the ECE workforce are used to access CDA courses (e.g., 30% of EIP's \$8M budget goes toward CDA courses and exam fees). However, gaps remain in ensuring the overall quality of instruction and success in recipients earning the credential. The process of earning the CDA credential is often unclear to both trainers and training participants, and there is confusion about the types of CDA credentials available and where they are applicable.

**Action steps:**

- Fund the creation and implementation of a statewide Train-the-Trainer (TOT) professional development series to be required for any trainer offering CDA courses and utilizing public funds to do so (primarily EIP, but also other publicly-funded CDA training opportunities). (\$500,000)
  - The TOT should include a review of the CDA competencies, the various types of CDA credentials available, and a description of the overall process of earning the credential from the Council for Professional Recognition, which includes training hours, field work hours, a portfolio, and an exam.
  - Upon completion of the TOT, it must be made available at no charge to all current CDA trainers (260 trainers) in the Aspire Registry, EIP, and other publicly-funded training organizations.

**Recommendation 4: Support the workforce in community-based ECE programs (centers and home-based) to earn the degrees and credentials required to participate in New York's universal Pre-K expansion.**

**Background:** Previous universal prekindergarten efforts across the state have had the unintended consequence of destabilizing community-based ECE programs jeopardizing the stability and availability of care for children ages birth through three years old. Differences in qualification requirements have created incentives for ECE staff to make choices that impact program quality and the best outcomes for children and families.

As New York expands Pre-K to serve all 4-year-olds, counties and school districts must include community-based programs in their planning to ensure that care and education for younger children remains available. The NYS Education Department's Office of Early Learning and the Division of Child Care Services in the NYS Office of Children and Family Services recently released a [joint report](#) detailing steps to address these issues. The ECAC supports those ongoing efforts, especially around the workforce.

**Action Steps:**

- Support and uplift the teacher qualification recommendations from the UPK Collaboration Council
  - Best practice models for workforce development, including apprenticeships, to support educators to earn B-2 teacher certification.
  - Provide resources and support for recruitment and retention of qualified pre-K teachers in CBO and home-based settings, including a crosswalk of NYSED and OCFS educator requirements.
  - Provide guidance to CBOs and home-based child care providers and networks with NYS-funded Pre-K programs about how to count school district-sponsored professional development offerings toward OCFS training requirements and how OCFS-required professional development can be acknowledged for NYSED professional learning requirements.

**Recommendation 5: Increase support for Early Intervention provider recruitment and retention to ensure all eligible children receive the services and therapies to which they are entitled.**

**Background:** Across the state, infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities who are eligible for EI services are waiting weeks and months for services to begin. New York State's Early Intervention program does not reach all eligible children, primarily due to a shortage of therapists and service providers. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the NYS Office of the Comptroller, and the NYS Early Intervention Coordinating Council, approximately half of eligible children are not receiving their services on time.

A recent article in the Journal of the American Medical Association demonstrates that when an infant or toddler receives Early Intervention services like speech, occupational and physical therapy before age 3, they are significantly more likely to meet proficiency standards in third grade language arts and math.

**Action Steps:**

- Provide funding (\$7M) for loan forgiveness for EI specialists and allied professionals (speech, occupational, and physical therapists), similar to what is currently offered to doctors serving in underserved areas of the state.
- Attract more professionals to EI and preschool special education by allowing for fieldwork hours delivered under the supervision of Early Intervention providers providing facility, group, home, and community services to count towards licensure and credentialing requirements for Early Childhood Special Education, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.
- Explore the integration of EI competency language into continuing education requirements for occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech language pathologists.
- Explore the creation of an Interdisciplinary Extension in Early Intervention and an Annotation for Teaching-Supporting Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Early Intervention utilizing existing models for annotations and extension under NYS Education Law.
- Implement the workforce recommendations of the State Early Intervention Coordinating Council.

## DEVELOPMENTAL HEALTH

### **Recommendation 6: Expand proven family-centered early childhood developmental screening initiatives that help families identify delays as early as possible and access services to support healthy growth and development.**

**Background:** Parents are the cornerstone of a strong early childhood system. Accordingly, universal strategies that support families understanding child development and equipping them to recognize and celebrate developmental milestones and identify potential developmental delays are one of the best investments we can make as a state. New York currently ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the country for developmental screening, with less than one-quarter of parents with children ages 9-35 months reporting completing a standardized developmental screening tool in the past 12 months,<sup>2</sup> and only 17.5% of children received formal developmental screenings before school entry at five-years-old.<sup>3</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends both developmental monitoring (also called surveillance) and routine standardized developmental screening for all children. There are many free tools that encourage ongoing, parent-engaged, developmental monitoring to help families understand their child's development and connect with appropriate services.

Early identification of developmental delays and disabilities in young children and connection to needed services is crucial for setting the foundation for healthy lifelong development.

- 1 in 6 children aged 3–17 years have developmental disabilities (conditions that affect how children play, learn, speak, act, or move).<sup>4</sup>
- Many children with a developmental disability are not identified until after starting school.
- Early intervention (before school age) can have a significant positive impact on a child's ability to learn new skills as well as reduce the need for costly interventions over time.

Through multiple state efforts, including the Department of Health's expansion of Medicaid to explicitly cover developmental screening and CCF's implementation of the federal PDGB5 and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant activities to promote awareness of developmental milestones, New York State agencies are aggressively promoting family-engaged child developmental monitoring in partnership with community organizations. This is a strong start, yet expansion of these efforts is needed to reach more families.

Help Me Grow is an initiative that uses a collective impact model to help New York families and caregivers track young children's ongoing progress in building physical, social, behavioral, communications, and thinking skills, and improve the ability of families, caregivers, health and human service providers, and educators to work together. Help Me Grow currently serves 17 counties in New York State through five regional or county-based HMG initiatives, located in the Finger Lakes, Long Island, Onondaga County, Western New York, and Oswego County. Local 211 programs are a key partner for these initiatives, to ensure that families receive accurate information to connect them to available services and resources in their communities.

### **Action Steps:**

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<sup>2</sup> America's Health Rankings (Value and rank based on data from 2023-2024). [Explore Developmental Screening - Children in the United States | AHR](#)

<sup>3</sup> Hirai, A., Kogan, M., Kandasamy, V., et. al. Prevalence and Variation of Developmental Screening and Surveillance in Early Childhood. *JAMA Pediatrics* (September 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Zablotsky B, Black LI, Maenner MJ, Schieve LA, Danielson ML, Bitsko RH, Blumberg SJ, Kogan MD, Boyle CA. Prevalence and Trends of Developmental Disabilities among Children in the US: 2009–2017. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 144(4):e20190811. As cited in: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 22). *Developmental monitoring and screening*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/screening.html#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20about,well%20they%20do%20in%20school.>

Note that the CDC's definition of a "developmental disability" differs from the definition of developmental disabilities in the NYS Mental Hygiene Law: <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/MHY/1.03>

Building upon the lessons learned from the state's successful initiatives described above, the following investments to increase family-engaged child development monitoring and support throughout the state are recommended.

- Actively advance CCF's developmental milestones outreach to promote awareness of child development, including producing materials in multiple languages to reach more families, including prenatal families. (\$500,000)
- Build on the state's efforts to expand Help Me Grow statewide, to support three new high-need/underserved communities or expand the five existing HMG systems to serve more families. (\$3 million)
- Increase funding for 2-1-1 New York Inc. statewide through OCFS or OTDA to \$3M (increase from current \$2.8M), as 211 is a key system partner for HMG initiatives and is a tool leveraged by providers serving families with young children not only to help them access services, but it is also a vital resource for families struggling with affordability to access benefits and services in their local community.

#### **Recommendation 7: Support New York's Early Intervention Program for young children ages birth to three.**

**Background:** Early Intervention, for children 0-3, is crucial for children with developmental delays or disabilities, as it maximizes their potential for growth and success by addressing challenges early in life, when the brain is most adaptable. Furthermore, it empowers families through education and resources and helps mitigate the need for costlier interventions to be provided later in life.

The current EI delivery system needs to be updated. As with developmental screening, New York now ranks last in the country in terms of timely delivery of early intervention services. Further, with such uncertainty at the federal level regarding Medicaid, it is more critical than ever to maximize this program's impacts.

The ECAC recognizes and supports the recommendations of the NYS Early Intervention Coordinating Council's Provider Workforce Capacity Task Force, focusing on addressing the disparity between the number of therapists obtaining licensure versus the number entering the EI workforce, and the certification and licensure requirements across the four most-authorized EI disciplines (early childhood special education, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy).

#### **Action Steps:**

- Implement an 8% increase to EI reimbursement rates or implement a rate-setting methodology that accounts for inflation.
- Conduct a study that includes a review of models and modalities of EI and preschool special education service delivery to determine if there are alternate, cost-effective service delivery approaches to serve more children, particularly in rural and inner-city communities, as well as a review of workforce preparation regulations and requirements. Such study should be jointly conducted by CCF, DOH, and SED (administrator of preschool special education).

#### **Recommendation 8: Expand availability of child care for children birth to age 3 who need special services.**

**Background:** There is currently a shortage of child care programs willing and able to effectively serve children with disabilities. New York's child care providers must have access to the supports and resources needed to care for the 70,000 children with special needs ages birth through three. Increased capacity for this population will enable parents' participation in the labor force and children's access to high quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs.

#### **Action Steps:**

- As a joint effort between OCFS and OPWDD, develop and implement a stakeholder engagement process, including those with lived experience, to identify specific steps that could be taken to improve the current process.
- With stakeholder input, develop and implement changes in New York's Child Care Assistance Program regulations

- and guidance to simplify procedures for parents applying for the enhanced CCAP rate.
- Improve communication with providers and parents to ensure widespread knowledge of the enhanced CCAP rate to serve children with disabilities.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS ALIGNMENT

**Recommendation 9: Better align the early childhood state systems to improve coordination, increase efficiency and ensure children and families receive seamless, high-quality services.**

**Background:** Universal early learning will exist in NY's complex mixed delivery system. Intense and ongoing coordination efforts across child care, Pre-K, Early Intervention, Head Start, preschool special education, and home visiting programs will be required for success.

Previous universal prekindergarten expansion efforts across the state have had the unintended consequence of destabilizing community-based early care and education programs, jeopardizing the stability and availability of care for children ages birth through three years old. As the state moves to expand Pre-K to serve all 4-year-olds, counties and school districts must include these community-based programs in their planning to ensure that care and education for younger children remains available. Currently, school districts must partner with community-based organizations for at least 10% of their funded enrollment, but this is not enough in most areas of the state.

NYS Education Department's Office of Early Learning and the Division of Child Care in the NYS Office of Children and Family Services recently released a joint report by the NYSED/OCFS UPK Collaboration Council detailing steps to address these issues. The ECAC supports those ongoing efforts.

### Action Steps:

- Utilize the Early Childhood Advisory Council as a partner for the new Office of Child Care and Early Learning to be established in the Governor's Office. Provide funding (\$300,000) to the NYS Council on Children and Families to support ongoing ECAC staffing and activities to further this alignment.
- Implement [recommendations](#) from the 2025 joint NYSED/OCFS UPK Collaboration Council.