



Quality Matters

New York State Needs a Quality Rating Improvement System to Improve Early Learning and Cut Crime

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *NEW YORK* takes a hard-nosed look at what works—and what doesn't work—to cut crime and violence. We know that early care and education programs help kids get the right start in life and avoid future crime, but programs must be high quality to do it. In addition to being tough on crime, we need to invest in programs that prevent kids from becoming criminals in the first place. The research shows that early investments in the care and education of young children can make all New Yorkers safer. The early years are a crucial time in children's development and the quality of the environments and relationships with the adults around them are key. For a majority of young children today, non-parental care is a part of their daily experience. Over 870,000 New York children under the age of 6 have all parents in the workforce. Most of these children spend time in some form of child care each week. To reap the benefits of reduced crime and enhanced school success, it is essential these programs be high quality.

Only High-Quality Programs Deliver Solid Results

High-quality early care and education programs have several key characteristics, including:

- Highly-skilled teachers with appropriate compensation;
- Comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula;
- Strong family involvement;
- Small staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets sufficient attention;
- Small, age-appropriate class sizes; and
- Screening and referral services for developmental, health, or behavior problems.

A recent 11 state analysis showed that when pre-k teachers were more responsive and sensitive, children showed better social adjustment and fewer behavior problems than children in moderate-or low-quality classrooms. And when pre-k teachers provided moderate- to high-quality instruction in their classrooms, children showed more advanced academic and language skills than children in low-quality classrooms. Research shows, however, that children in low-quality settings do not benefit from these programs. The 11 state study found children in low-quality classrooms did not show any gains in academic skills or reductions in behavior problems. Other studies have found that children in lower-quality care were more likely to display behavior problems. Even more troubling, research shows that young children can be harmed by low-quality care. For example, a study of children in home-based child care in a metropolitan area in another state found that 40 percent of the children showed high stress levels while at child care that were potentially harmful. Researchers found that these elevated stress levels, measured by stress hormones, were associated with being in care that was characterized by harsh and inconsistent treatment by their caregivers. A follow-up 6 months later found the children with high levels of stress showed more fear and anxiety in their child care setting, as well as signs of sadness, anxiety, and withdrawal.

New York State Needs QUALITYstarsNY to Improve Early Learning

New York State has no uniform standards for the different early care and education environments across the state and therefore there is no systematic way to ensure that programs are high quality. We have an opportunity to change this and to improve the quality of early education programs by adopting the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) known as QUALITYstarsNY. This system would encourage early care and education program providers to participate in a voluntary review process based on a number of quality indicators used to rate the program. The rating system aims to:

- Monitor the quality of early care and education programs;
- Help parents find programs rated as high quality; and
- Provide technical assistance and incentives to improve program quality.

Research from other states shows this can work. Currently, 23 states have implemented a statewide QRIS and a number of evaluation studies have been conducted or are underway. Separate evaluations of four different states' local rating systems have shown that a QRIS can improve the quality of rated early childhood education programs. These studies found that early care programs participating in the QRIS improved their quality over time. This increased quality can translate into improved children's outcomes. For example, the low-income children participating in Missouri's quality rating system who were in higher-quality programs had significantly greater gains in social and behavioral skills, motivation, and vocabulary than the poor children in lower-quality programs.

High-Quality Early Learning Saves Money

Investments in high-quality early care and education investments provide an excellent return. The Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan cut crime, welfare, and other costs so much that it saved more than \$16 for every \$1 invested. And the Chicago Child-Parents Centers produced over \$10 in benefits for every dollar expended. The savings generated by the program from just the 100,000 children served in Chicago add up to \$3.7 billion. In addition to these savings, there are the immeasurable benefits from reducing victims' pain and suffering that result from reduced crime.

Conclusion

More than 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and violence survivors who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *NEW YORK* recognize that among the most powerful weapons to prevent crime and violence are high-quality early care and education programs that help kids get the right start in life. In tough economic times this investment in improving the quality and accountability of New York's early care and education programs is critical. The *only* way we are going to get the return on our early education investment is if we make sure that we are investing in quality programs. It is time to start implementing QUALITYstarsNY statewide.