

# **The Best in the Nation: A Plan for Early Care and Education**



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## **The Best in the Nation: A Plan for Early Care and Education**

The next governor of New York State stands at the threshold of an extraordinary opportunity: The chance to articulate a vision and to build frameworks that will make New York's early care and education the *Best in the Nation*.

Why does New York need to invest in the best?\*

- ◆ To help children succeed in school and throughout life
- ◆ So we can better compete in the global economy
- ◆ Because business leaders need a qualified workforce
- ◆ To reap lasting returns on investment and save taxpayers money
- ◆ Because parents need and want the best for their children

\* See Documentation, p. 6

The next governor can provide the leadership to strengthen our state economically, and improve the lives of children and families. To do this the governor will need to:

- ◆ Bring coherence by building long term structures and supports
- ◆ Expand investments, so every child comes to school ready to learn
- ◆ Assure highly skilled teachers and caregivers
- ◆ Implement a system of quality assurance
- ◆ Improve services for New York's youngest children

(For analysis and specific recommendations, see *Background and Long Term Recommendations*, p. 3)

To begin, *in the First 100 Days*, the governor will need to:

- ➔ **Establish an *Early Education for All Task Force* to develop a plan of action to bring lasting coherence and coordination to early care and education programs and services**
- ➔ **Budget for expanded investments in early education, child care, and for services in the earliest years such as early intervention and home visiting**
- ➔ **Design a system of incentives and compensation to retain teachers and caregivers; and improve supports for professional development**
- ➔ **Begin implementation of a quality assurance system, with program incentives and consumer awareness**

## In the First 100 Days the Governor Will Need to:

- ➔ **Establish an *Early Education for All Task Force***. The Governor needs to direct the Secretary to the Governor to establish this task force. Their charge would be to develop a plan of action for lasting frameworks to bring coherence and coordination to early care and education. Hundreds of practitioners and policy makers from inside and outside the field have already been at work on this. They include experts from academic, public education, non-profit and business sectors as well as individuals from federal and state agencies and members of the Assembly and Senate. Together they have developed *New York's Action Plan for Children and Families* ([www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/action_plan.pdf)). This ambitious blueprint for early education provides a good starting place for considering next steps for our state. The Secretary should look to members of this group, and others, to bring the *Early Education for All Task Force* to life.
- ➔ **Budget for expanded investments in early education, child care, and for services in the earliest years such as early intervention and home visiting.** As a down payment on this vision, the next governor needs to commit to wise investments. In the first year New York State might increase funding for prekindergarten by \$100 million, child care funding by \$140 million and home visiting by \$8 million. Another approach would be to commit to budgeting for broad expansion in all forms of early care and education, perhaps \$250 million.
- ➔ **Design a system of compensation and incentives to retain teachers and caregivers; and improve supports for professional development.** New York needs to examine its expired Professional Retention Program, the proposed Workforce Incentive Program, and other alternatives. Then the state needs to establish and begin to fund a program that will assure a stable qualified early education workforce. To do this will require financial and other incentives to remain in the field, and a system of supports – such as loan forgiveness, paid fees, and release time – that will enable teachers and caregivers to move up the professional career lattice.
- ➔ **Begin implementation of a quality assurance system, with program incentive and consumer awareness components.** In order to build improvement into the system, better educate parents and provide quality incentives for programs, New York State needs to establish a system of quality assurance. One such approach is represented is a “quality rating system” (QRS). Currently implemented in 13 states and planned in another 26 states, a QRS would rate programs according to levels of quality tied to research-based quality indicators. The success of these programs led to the formation of the NYS Work Group on Quality Rating Systems. The Work Group, which includes providers (from all venues of care), researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders is nearing completion of just such a rating scale. By examining the work undertaken by these and other experts, the next governor should put in place a concrete plan on how to achieve a fully functioning system.

# Background and Long Term Recommendations



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## **Background and Long Term Recommendations**

### **Bring Coherence by Building Long Term Structures and Supports**

To reap the many investment and other returns, the next governor needs to make quality early care and education a priority. Further, to ensure its long term strength and continuity, the governor will need to put in place lasting structures, systems and supports.

**Many components of good early care and education are in place.** New York's Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) brings together child care and public early education, programs that often function in isolation. Subsidized child care brings full day services to low-income children. The former Professional Retention Program and the Quality Child Care and Protection Act have bolstered qualifications, and improved health and safety standards. Head Start and Early Head Start serve eligible children, and child care and nursery schools are available to some extent in every community. Young children with disabilities receive education and early intervention services. And family support and parent education are available to families eligible for home visiting programs, Even Start, and other supports.

However, while this impressive array of services represent a commitment to early care and education, *there is little on-going coherence or coordination between the many programs and services.* Most of these services lack sufficient funding to serve their targeted population; and for those they can serve, most must cut corners on quality.

From a family perspective, whether poor or middle class, with children very young or older, with needs typical or uncommon, making sense of the maze is daunting. As children move so quickly from birth through five, parents struggle to make sense of what is available to them.

Lack of coordination can lead to administrative inefficiencies as well. One example of where a governor could take the lead in coordination would be to include education for 3's and 4's, in all settings, in the school aid formula as part of a statewide Campaign for Fiscal Equity solution. Universal Prekindergarten is presently administered as a grant, which leaves it vulnerable from year to year and makes interagency coordination difficult. Early education needs to be normalized and permanently woven into the school aid formula. The governor is in the position to work with the legislature and use his influence with the Board of Regents and other agencies to bring early education into the mainstream.

The next governor must leave in place lasting structures, mechanisms and supports to bring coherence in terms of efficient administration, and in terms of what makes sense for children and families.

### **Expand Investments, So Every Child Comes to School Ready to Learn**

Though a pioneer in the past, New York State no longer sufficiently meets the needs of young children and their families. According to Kids Count ([www.aecf.org/kidscount](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount)), New York ranks 20th in the United States on ten measures of children's well-being. In reading, fourth graders in 18 states perform better than New York's children. 26 states outperform our children in math. *Preschool prevents these deficits* (see p. 5).

Of our past commitments, we have not yet fulfilled our promise of prekindergarten for all; the number of children in quality child care has stalled; and services for infants and their families fall far short of the need. In 1997 New York committed to fully funding Universal Prekindergarten. The five-year plan, long ago eclipsed by inflation, proposed \$500 million per year; but funding had been stuck at \$201 million. This year \$50 million was added, but to educate each four-year-old will require more, and three-year-olds more still. Many upstate communities have no UPK, while downstate Mayor Bloomberg is looking to expand. He notes, “investing in Pre-K for three-and-four- year-olds...translates into a strong foundation for school readiness, academic success and adult achievement.”

Funding for child care has stalled and caps at the federal level mean that inflation will likely take its toll over the next several years. Here too we have fallen behind long term estimates of need. Quality child care not only provides proven benefits for young children, it frees parents to be more effective workers.

This is also the right time for New York to enact paid family leave legislation. Recent polls indicate that paid family leave is a priority for New Yorkers. Studies have found that 79% of working women believe access to paid family leave is more important than increased pay, promotions and job flexibility; that workers’ top career concern is finding time for their families; and that 82% of employees indicated support for the federal Family Medical Leave Act.

The United States is one of the only industrialized countries without paid family leave. As a result, states are increasingly considering legislation. In 2002, California became the first state in the nation to adopt paid leave. Funded through their state disability insurance program, the law provides six weeks of partial pay to workers who take leave to care for a new child or seriously ill family member. Similar paid leave bills have been introduced in 27 other states. New York State is uniquely positioned to expand on the existing Temporary Disability Insurance infrastructure as a way to provide paid family leave benefits.

### **Assure Highly Skilled Teachers and Caregivers**

Research shows that a consistent relationship between a child and teacher is key to a child’s development. The National Governors Association notes that “in formal group settings, quality ... hinges on small classes, well prepared teachers, close teacher-child relationships, and family involvement” ([www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0501GOVGUIDEREADINESS.pdf](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0501GOVGUIDEREADINESS.pdf)). Yet according to the Department of Labor early education and child care workers receive lower pay than other occupations, including retail sales and parking lot attendants. Because of this, many cannot obtain the education and training they need to ensure quality. For years the state administered the effective Professional Retention Program, which provided stipends to those continuing in the field, but this program has expired and it, or another approach to retain teachers and caregivers, needs to be implemented. Also, to help more prekindergarten teachers achieve certification, New York needs to institute a Workforce Incentive Program, such as the one proposed by the PreK Coalition. This program would provide for loan forgiveness, paid fees for test preparation, and support to programs to provide release time for teachers attending classes. It would also include a fund to provide equity in compensation for teachers in public schools and other prekindergarten settings.

## **Implement a System of Quality Assurance**

In order to build improvement into the system, better educate parents and provide quality incentives for programs, New York State needs to establish a formal system of quality assurance. Currently implemented in 13 states and planned in another 26 states, a Quality Rating System (QRS) would rank programs by levels of quality tied to research-based indicators. The Quality Rating System should apply to all types of early care and education. In typical systems, each program performs a self-assessment, and at higher rating levels is assessed by an outside expert. Where a program falls short of the highest rating, an improvement plan is developed to assure ongoing progress. A program's rating is then widely publicized on the Web, at program sites, referral agencies, etc., so that parents can make informed choices.

The success of QRS programs across the states led, in March 2005, to the formation of the NYS Work Group on Quality Rating Systems. Administered by the NYS Child Care Coordinating Council, the Work Group includes providers (from all venues of care), researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders. They have been working in subcommittees on rating scales, assessment, provider support and consumer education. A design group is now building on this to create the rating scale. This fall, focus groups will be held on the rating scale, to solicit additional input from providers and parents across the State and to educate policymakers about the potential for QRS to link financing and quality initiatives to produce more effective early care and education (<http://nccic.org/poptopics/ts-impactqualitycc.html>).

## **Improve Services for New York's Youngest Children**

Brain research indicates that the first five years of a child's development are key to later abilities. The early months and years of life are a crucial developmental stage when a child forms the core of conscience, develops the ability to trust and relate to others, and lays down the foundation for lifelong learning and thinking (*From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Child Development* [fermat.nap.edu/openbook/0309069882/html/index.html](http://fermat.nap.edu/openbook/0309069882/html/index.html)).

Yet, supports to infants and their families lag. Research shows that home visitation services – which provide in-home parent coaching and other services to at-risk parents of newborns – help children get the right start in life by significantly reducing abuse and neglect, by fostering positive child development, and by setting families on the road to school and life success.

If New York State is to reap the benefits of quality early education and compete successfully in the global economy, we must address children's needs from the earliest years. To do this, as part of the overall structures the governor puts in place, a panel of experts should examine the existing system and implement or strengthen services such as early intervention, family support, parent education for all children and families.

# Why New York Needs the Best: Documentation



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## **Why New York Needs the Best: Documentation**

*(This plan is predicated on quality. To understand what quality in early education is, please see the accreditation standards of by the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([www.rightchoiceforkids.org](http://www.rightchoiceforkids.org)). A brief overview follows.)*

**To help children succeed in school and throughout life.** In a study of five states, state-funded preschool produced an increase in children’s vocabulary scores, a strong predictor of general cognitive abilities. Children scored significantly higher in early math skills and state-funded preschool had strong effects on children’s understanding of print concepts with a 39% increase in print awareness. Children who attended state-funded preschool before kindergarten know more letters, more letter-sound associations and are more familiar with words and book concepts ([nieer.org/resources/research/multistate/fullreport.pdf](http://nieer.org/resources/research/multistate/fullreport.pdf)).

Numerous other studies demonstrate that children require less special education, are retained in grade less often, graduate more often and more quickly. In later life, children from high quality early education earn more and are more likely to own a home. They need fewer social services and are arrested less often ([www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/researchbriefing\\_longterm\\_impacts.pdf](http://www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/researchbriefing_longterm_impacts.pdf)).

Quality early child care and education has a profound positive impact on the health and well being of children, and therefore on society. These well documented benefits are both immediate and long term. Opportunities for screening and prevention, increased access to health care, decreased high risk behaviors and improved mental health are among the proven outcomes ([www.docsfortots.org/resources/talkingPoints/documents/PreK2Pager\\_Final.pdf](http://www.docsfortots.org/resources/talkingPoints/documents/PreK2Pager_Final.pdf)).

**To Better Compete in the Global Economy.** According to a 2005 Zogby International survey targeting the largest Fortune 1000 companies, there is “unease about the American workforce, and the U.S.’s ability to compete in the global economy.” But 88% felt that “investments in effective preschool programs for children are important if the U.S. is to remain competitive.” ([www.ced.org/docs/poll\\_earlyed2006zogby.pdf](http://www.ced.org/docs/poll_earlyed2006zogby.pdf)). In its *Policy Statement on Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Economy* the New York State Board of Regents calls for comprehensive early education from birth through fourth grade to “close the achievement gap earlier” ([www.regents.nysed.gov/2006Meetings/January2006/106emscvesida1.htm](http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2006Meetings/January2006/106emscvesida1.htm)).

**Because Business Leaders Need a Qualified Workforce.** In the survey mentioned above, three quarters of business leaders state that “that universal access to pre-kindergarten would improve the workforce – and that public funding of such would also improve the workforce.” Further 87% feel that “investments in effective preschool programs for children are important for the long-term success of the U.S. economy” ([www.ced.org/docs/poll\\_earlyed2006zogby.pdf](http://www.ced.org/docs/poll_earlyed2006zogby.pdf)).

**To reap lasting returns on investment and save taxpayers money.** The return on investment of quality early care and education is well documented, with estimates of savings ranging from \$2 to \$17 for each dollar spent. These savings come from reduced costs of special education, grade retention and social services; and from higher graduation rates, improved earnings in adulthood and greater productivity. Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis notes,

The conventional view of economic development typically includes company headquarters, office towers, entertainment centers, and professional sports stadiums and arenas. We have argued that in the future any proposed economic development list should have early childhood development at the top. The return on investment from early childhood development is extraordinary, resulting in better working public schools, more educated workers and less crime ([minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm](http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm)).

Key findings of the Rand Corporation (2005) indicate that “early childhood intervention programs have been shown to yield benefits in academic achievement, behavior, educational progression and attainment, delinquency and crime, and labor market success.” Further “better-trained caregivers and smaller child-to-staff ratios appear to offer more favorable results.” They conclude: “Well-designed early childhood interventions... generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program” ([www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9145/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9145/index1.html)).

A compilation of recent research is available from the Families and Work Institute ([familiesandwork.org/eproducts/ced.pdf](http://familiesandwork.org/eproducts/ced.pdf)) and a study of the far ranging return on investment of early education is available from the Committee for Economic Development ([www.ced.org/docs/report/report\\_preschool\\_2004\\_assessingbenefits.pdf](http://www.ced.org/docs/report/report_preschool_2004_assessingbenefits.pdf)).

The National Governors Association Task Force on School Readiness identified strategies for governors and states that include: 1) ensuring that all children from birth to age five have access to high-quality care and learning opportunities; 2) providing comprehensive services for infants and toddlers; 3) expanding high-quality, voluntary preschool opportunities for three- and four-year-olds; and 4) addressing the school readiness needs of children with special needs and children in foster care. They note that,

Regardless of the setting, the quality of care children receive directly impacts their development. Traditional market forces are insufficient to support a healthy supply-and-demand relationship that ensures high-quality, affordable early care and education options for all families. States can help close the market gap by providing incentives and assistance to providers to meet high quality standards, building comprehensive early care and education professional development systems, and offering innovative financing strategies to support quality care environments ([www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0501GOVGUIDEREADINESS.pdf](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0501GOVGUIDEREADINESS.pdf)).

**Parents Need and Want the Best.** According to Children’s Defense Fund of New York, 58% of children under six have both parents in the workforce. In one New York State study, asked if they support state funding so all parents who want to could to send their children to high-quality programs, most New Yorkers (74% parents and non-parents) agreed or strongly agreed. Among the findings cited in *A Parent Report Card: Universal Prekindergarten in New York City*, 99% of respondents said they felt the program would prepare their child for kindergarten ([www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/researchbriefing\\_parents\\_voters.pdf](http://www.winningbeginningny.org/brochure/documents/researchbriefing_parents_voters.pdf)).

**To Prevent Crime.** Two reports from Fight Crime Invest in Kids (*America’s Child Care Crisis: A Crime Prevention Tragedy* and *Quality Pre-Kindergarten: Key to Crime Prevention and School Success*) thoroughly document the positive impact of quality early care and education in

crime prevention ([www.fightcrime.org](http://www.fightcrime.org)). Fight Crime is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization led by more than 2,500 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence and leaders of police officer associations.

**According to the accreditation standards of National Association for the Education of Young Children, the nation's largest early childhood professional association, quality early education programs should:**

- ◆ Promote **positive relationships** for all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth.
- ◆ Implement a **curriculum** that fosters all areas of child development: cognitive, emotional, language, physical, and social.
- ◆ Use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate **effective teaching approaches**.
- ◆ Provide **ongoing assessments** of a child's learning and development and communicate the child's progress to the family.
- ◆ Promote the **nutrition and health** of children and protect children and staff from injury and illness.
- ◆ Employ a **teaching staff** that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development, and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
- ◆ Establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's **family**.
- ◆ Establish relationships with and use the resources of the **community** to support the achievement of program goals.
- ◆ Provide a safe and healthy **physical environment**.
- ◆ Implement strong personnel, fiscal, and program management policies so that all children, families, and staff have **high-quality experiences**.