

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**NEW YORK STATE BIRTH THROUGH FIVE (NYSB5)
PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT
NEEDS ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

October 1, 2019

Conducted by

**The Center for Human Services Research
University of Albany
State University of New York**

Executive Summary

Overview

New York's commitment to building a stronger and more effective Early Childhood Care and Education system (ECCE) system is evident. Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the actions and support for young children and their families have been demonstrated by:

- More than doubling the State-Administered Prekindergarten program, bringing the total amount of funds in NYS from \$385 million to just under \$900 million in six years;
- Codifying the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to make recommendations to improve the early care and education system in New York State (NYS). The ECAC is engaged in analyzing the needs identified in this NYSB5 report to develop a responsive Strategic Plan;
- Enacting the nation's strongest and most comprehensive Paid Family Leave policy;
- Directing the NYS Department of Health (DOH) to lead the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid Initiative, which brought together a cross-section of over 200 experts from education, child development, healthcare, child welfare, and mental health, to create a groundbreaking 10-point plan on how to improve outcomes for our youngest New Yorkers;¹
- Expanding and making NYS a leader in ensuring all children have access to health insurance; and
- Creating the Child Care Availability Task Force, co-chaired by the Lieutenant Governor, and the Commissioners of the NYS Department of Labor (DOL) and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and comprised of early childhood experts to address access to quality, affordable child care in NYS.²

New York was pleased to be awarded the NYS Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (NYSB5), which supported a Statewide Birth through Five Needs Assessment to analyze the current landscape of the NYS ECCE system. This Needs Assessment was conducted by the Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) at the University of Albany, State University of New York (SUNY), in partnership with the NYSB5 grantee, the NYS Council on Children and Families, the ECAC, and the State's child-serving agencies and stakeholders. Conducted from January 2019 until September 2019, this NYSB5 Needs Assessment used a methodical approach to comprehensively analyze the NYS birth through five ECCE system, and this resulting report includes the components and methodology followed. Notably, this Needs Assessment provides a first-ever opportunity for the State to examine the interrelatedness of the national, state, and local ECCE services and supports and to focus on historically overlooked populations, namely vulnerable children and families.

To understand the nuances of the ECCE system, a significant amount of data was collected from the early childhood field. It should be highlighted that unprecedented and significant feedback

¹ Zero-to-Three (2018). *New York Launches First 1000 days on Medicaid Initiative*. Retrieved from <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2520-new-york-launches-first-1000-days-on-medicaid-initiative>

² Cuomo, A.M. (2018). *Governor Cuomo Announces Launch of the Child Care Availability Task Force*. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-launch-child-care-availability-task-force>.

was collected from direct care staff, administrators, and families based on approximately 2,200 survey responses and over 30 regional in-person focus groups. In addition, interviews were conducted with policymakers from State partner agencies. Gathering information from the families, providers, and administrators of the State's vast early childhood system using various modalities has provided data rich in experiences and areas for improvement.

An overarching finding of this Needs Assessment is that a more coordinated ECCE system is needed to provide children and families with swift access to resources, clear quality standards, and easy navigation to the service system. Two coordinating bodies in NYS are dedicated to improving services for children and families – the NYS Council on Children and Families (CCF)³ and the Governor's ECAC.⁴ Since 1977, CCF has worked to coordinate the New York State system of services and supports for children and families. In 2009, the ECAC was established to provide counsel to the Governor on issues related to young children and their families. The ECAC is comprised of approximately 50 experts, representing all sectors of the State's ECCE system, and is codified under CCF.

Through the labors of the many dedicated members of the ECAC, progress has been made on system coordination and quality. These include:

- Developing early learning guidelines;
- Conceptualizing an early childhood coordinated data system;
- Promoting a coordinated approach to family involvement;
- Providing guidance to the ECCE field on reaching and enrolling more children experiencing homelessness;
- Promoting the implementation of maternal depression and universal developmental screenings;
- Providing resources to ECCE providers on how to braid and blend funding;
- Advancing the professional development of the early childhood workforce; and
- Developing QUALITYstarsNY, New York's statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Significant strides to collaborate and collectively support children and families in NYS have been made; however, it is evident that more needs to be done to better align and coordinate ECCE services and supports. For years, early care and education experts have advocated for one agency to oversee NYS's ECCE system to ensure access to high-quality, equitable, and comprehensive early care and education programs and services so our youngest New Yorkers are healthy and developmentally on track for success in school and later in life.

Needs Assessment Components

CCF, as the lead agency for the NYSB5 federal grant, worked with the ECAC and its partner agencies to develop the components of the Needs Assessment which include the following:

³ Per NYS Social Services Law § 483-b, CCF is authorized to coordinate the State health, education, and human services systems as a means to provide more effective systems of care for children and families and comprise commissioners and directors of 12 State agencies serving children and families.

⁴ In 2016, the ECAC was codified under CCF (NYS Social Services Law § 483-g).

- Definitions of key terms including quality early childhood care and education, availability, vulnerable or underserved and children in rural areas;
- A description of the population of children who are vulnerable or underserved;
- Identification of the unduplicated number of children being served in existing early care and education programs;
- Identification of the current quality and availability of early childhood care and education, including availability for vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas;
- A description of the data gaps that are most important for the State to fill in to best support collaboration between ECCE programs and services and maximize parent knowledge and choice;
- Identification of gaps in data or research about the quality and availability of programming and supports for children birth through five, considering the needs of working families and families seeking employment or in job training;
- A description of the State's current measurable indicators of progress that align with the State's vision and desired outcomes;
- A description of key concerns or issues related to ECCE facilities;
- An analysis of the barriers to funding and provision of high-quality ECCE services and supports and identification of opportunities to more efficiently use resources; and
- A description of transition supports and gaps that affect how children move between early childhood care and education programs and school entry.

Methodology

The NYSB5 Needs Assessment used a mixed methods approach to gather and analyze statewide data related to the ECCE system. The methods consisted of:

- **Environmental Scan:** Over 75 NYS and national reports, briefings, needs assessments, and published statistics were reviewed.
- **Census and Other Data:** An analysis of regional trends was conducted to identify vulnerable populations across NYS.
- **Electronic Survey:** A survey was designed with input from a variety of stakeholders across the mixed delivery system (MDS). It was disseminated through listservs, newsletters, and social media; a paper version also was available. The survey was translated into six languages (Spanish, Chinese, Haitian/Creole, Russian, Bengali, and Korean). Over 2,200 responses were received (818 administrators, 731 direct care staff, and 667 parents).
- **Focus Groups:** A total of 32 focus groups were convened with 77 administrators, 78 direct care and instructional staff, and 83 parents in nine regional locations in NYS.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** Seven telephone interviews were conducted with 17 key NYS agency staff.

Summary of Findings

The NYSB5 Needs Assessment confirmed that the NYS ECCE system is complex. There are five different agencies with direct oversight responsibility and regulatory authority for ECCE programs in NYS, with multiple others providing additional services and supports to young children and their families. The scale of the system, cross-sector configuration, range of funding mechanisms, and

different statutory and regulatory authorities contribute to a fragmented and inequitable system in terms of access, affordability, and workforce and program quality. Specifically, the NYSB5 Needs Assessment findings are described below and grouped according to the following categories: System Building; Data and Workforce Development; Access to Quality Programs; and Vulnerable Populations. Overall, the findings underscore the overarching need for better coordination and alignment of ECCE programs and services.

System Building

- The State's expansive early childhood infrastructure and investment in ECCE programs and services reflect a strong commitment to supporting young children and families. Yet, the State's current ECCE system, with multiple oversight agencies and corresponding differences in governing laws, regulations, and policies, varying funding streams and eligibility requirements, and varying workforce qualifications and compensation scales, translate into inequitable accessibility and quality of ECCE opportunities, especially for the State's most vulnerable, and inefficiencies in the provision of services.
- Groundbreaking cross-sector ECCE collaborations exist, such as the First 1,000 Days on Medicaid Initiative led by the Department of Health (DOH) and Board of Regents' Early Childhood Workgroup's Blue-Ribbon Committee; however, more coordination is needed among these innovative collaborations.
- Programs are blending and braiding funds to better support early childhood programming, as illustrated by Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships; however, this MDS example is limited in its reach.
- Transition processes between ECCE programs are supportive for many children and families, but transition supports do not currently reach all NYS children and families.
- NYS has a variety of unique ECCE program settings, yet many share common facility concerns, such as those related to locating affordable and safe space and building upkeep.

Data/Workforce Development

- Gaps in understanding the ECCE needs of families exist; additional gaps exist in the State's ability to evaluate the success of its investment in ECCE programs and services.
- Existing professional development tracking systems for the early childhood profession are siloed and underutilized, creating a missed opportunity for professional growth in the ECCE field.
- Significant strides to professionalize the ECCE workforce in NYS have been made; however, compensation for professionals in the ECCE field lags behind other fields, making it challenging to attract and retain high-quality staff. This challenge is especially significant for child care professionals who earn a lesser wage than those working in the education system.
- NYS receives and provides extensive technical assistance (TA) to all ECCE programs. Examples of cross-system training exist, such as the Pyramid Model for Supporting the Social and Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children, which is concurrently delivered to multiple types of ECCE programs/professionals; however, generally, there is limited professional development or TA alignment between systems.

Access to Quality ECCE Programs

- To date, NYS does not have the necessary data to comprehensively analyze ECCE needs, though these Needs Assessment findings support the general view that the State does not have a sufficient supply of ECCE programs and support services, especially in rural areas and statewide for infants and toddlers.
- Due to the multiple state and local agencies overseeing and administering ECCE programs, each with its own mission, priorities, governing rules, regulations, and laws, it is a challenge to agree upon a common lexicon. Notably, with respect to “quality” programs, NYS does not currently have a definition of quality that is universally applied across all ECCE settings.
- Many parent-friendly resources exist, yet the majority of families participating in the Needs Assessment reported not being aware of them.

Vulnerable Populations

- Quality ECCE programs remain inaccessible, especially for low-income families.
- Pathways to connect families to support services exist and are being expanded but could be further strengthened to better connect families to needed services throughout the State.
- Families may opt not to send their children to formal care settings for a variety of reasons, including hours of care being insufficient, lack of transportation, care being too expensive, children having special needs, or preferring care by a family member or neighbor.
- More Special Education and early intervention providers are needed throughout the State and additional efforts are needed to ensure that children in Special Education receive services in the least restrictive environment.
- When viewing Prekindergarten teacher shortages, there is a particular lack of bilingual Special Education Prekindergarten teachers throughout the State, and a shortage of Prekindergarten teachers with discipline of Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Visually Impaired in the State’s largest school districts: Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers.

Conclusion

It is evident that NYS has an expansive and complex ECCE system, with successful initiatives in areas of the state that comprehensively address the needs of young children and families to promote school readiness and lifelong success. However, the scale of the State’s ECCE system, cross-sector configuration, range of funding sources, and different regulatory and statutory authority are challenges that NYS must face and wholeheartedly tackle to build a more efficient and equitable high-quality ECCE system for all of the State’s young children and families.

The findings set forth from the NYSB5 Needs Assessment will be further reviewed by the CCF, the ECAC, and its partnering agencies as the new, coordinated Strategic Plan is developed for NYS and adopted by the ECAC.

Once the NYSB5/ECAC Strategic Plan is developed, NYS will be well-positioned to take the necessary next steps to build a stronger, more coordinated, comprehensive early childhood care and education system that will provide equitable access to high quality ECCE programs and services to promote the optimal development and lifelong success of all young New Yorkers.