

New York State's Bold Step to Ensure Access to Excellence in Early Childhood Education

A REPORT ON THE FIRST THREE YEARS FEBRUARY 2016

QUALITYstarsNY is a voluntary quality improvement and rating system for all types of regulated early childhood programs in New York State that serve children from birth through age five. QUALITYstarsNY uses research-based, culturally responsive program standards developed by New York's leading early education experts to support programs to provide children with high quality early learning experiences.

QUALITYstarsNY is a five-star rating and quality improvement system, with five stars representing the highest quality. Each participating program receives a rating determined by a points-based assessment process. Applicants receive points for meeting standards in four categories: Learning Environment, Family Engagement, Qualifications and Experience, and Management and Leadership.

QUALITYstarsNY developed the set of standards for three types of early childhood programs: centers, public schools, and family providers (also known as in-home providers). The standards were created to define and describe best practices in early childhood settings and to guide programs in meeting and exceeding these standards. Equally important, QUALITYstarsNY also provides quality improvement tools and supports to assist programs in addressing the needs identified in the assessment process.

The QUALITYstarsNY process was created in order to provide children with high quality learning experiences that promote positive child outcomes and to ensure that even the most disadvantaged young children have access to high-performing programs, a strategy known to mitigate the achievement gap. The results of an analysis of the progress programs have made in the first three years show that programs have made dramatic progress and have reached significantly higher levels of quality. This report presents the findings of that evaluation. Figure 1, on the following page, shows the results of quality star ratings conducted for 196 programs in 2013 and again in 2015.

Due to funding constraints, the programs currently enrolled in QUALITYstarsNY represent less than three percent of all early childhood programs in New York. To achieve the greatest impact, the QUALITYstarsNY program must grow in order to be able to

recruit new participants, including those with serious challenges to health and safety, further engage underserved regions, work with programs connected with pre-K expansion, and deepen its impact in current QUALITYstarsNY communities.

The NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council is the driving force behind QUALITYstarsNY. In the past year, New York State funding stabilized the project and allowed it to serve almost 200 more programs in 2015. Currently, State funds flow through the New York State Education Department. An increase in funds has been requested over the next five years in order to expand QUALITYstarsNY coverage to thousands more children, families, and providers across the state.

KEY FINDINGS

Quality Improvements

84% of programs increased the total number of points scored on quality standards

34% statewide improvement in Learning Environment scores

31% statewide improvement in Family Engagement scores

44% of all programs increased their star rating

65% increase in programs earning four and five stars

12% improvement in Qualifications and Experience scores

31% improvement in Management and Leadership scores

“ The improvements shown over the past three years against these measures are very significant. This initiative has very high standards, tackles some of the toughest measures of quality, and does so in high-need communities. That makes these results all the more impressive and highlights the potential for improving early childhood programs on a broader basis throughout the state. ”

—SHERRY M. CLEARY,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW YORK EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

QUALITYstarsNY

An Introduction

QUALITYstarsNY is New York State’s comprehensive quality rating and improvement system for all regulated early childhood programs—this includes child care in both centers and homes, pre-kindergarten in both schools and centers, and Head Start programs. Each participating program earns a star rating based on the number of points awarded in each of four categories.

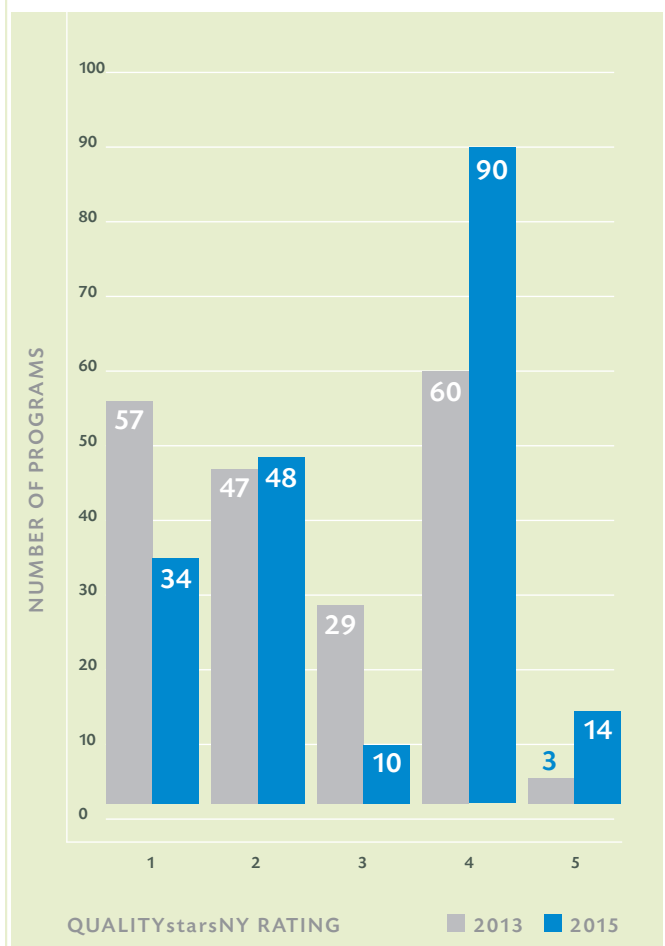
Through an extensive assessment completed by the programs and QUALITYstarsNY quality improvement specialists, programs document their ability to meet standards in four categories:

- Learning Environment
- Family Engagement
- Qualifications and Experience
- Management and Leadership

A focus on child health and well-being is integrated across the standards.

After the initial assessment process, where the basic standards of health and safety are verified, program staff work together with quality improvement specialists to create individualized plans. These plans define specific goals, action steps, and resources needed to improve quality and the program’s rating. Professional development and technical assistance are also individualized to maximize impact. Specialists both support program staff and monitor progress to ensure that every public dollar is invested wisely and produces results.

FIGURE 1: CHANGE IN STAR RATINGS, 2013-2015



Programs participating in QUALITYstarsNY have undergone two rating cycles. The first, in 2013, was a baseline rating and the second, in 2015, showed the progress made in areas identified for improvement. Programs showed significant improvement, described below, in each of the four categories. The scoring results shown in this report reflect changes in over 200 programs, those who have completed the second rating cycle, as well as those who are still undergoing the rating process. QUALITYstarsNY is a rich resource that provides a variety of ways to measure outcomes, including ratings, point scores, and nationally-normed assessment data.

Program Types

QUALITYstarsNY has developed quality standards for three types of early childhood programs. Standards for child care centers and public schools encompass nationally-recognized and research-backed principles and definitions of high quality early education experiences in a group setting. Two-thirds of the programs served by QUALITYstarsNY are group-based center programs or pre-K programs in public schools.

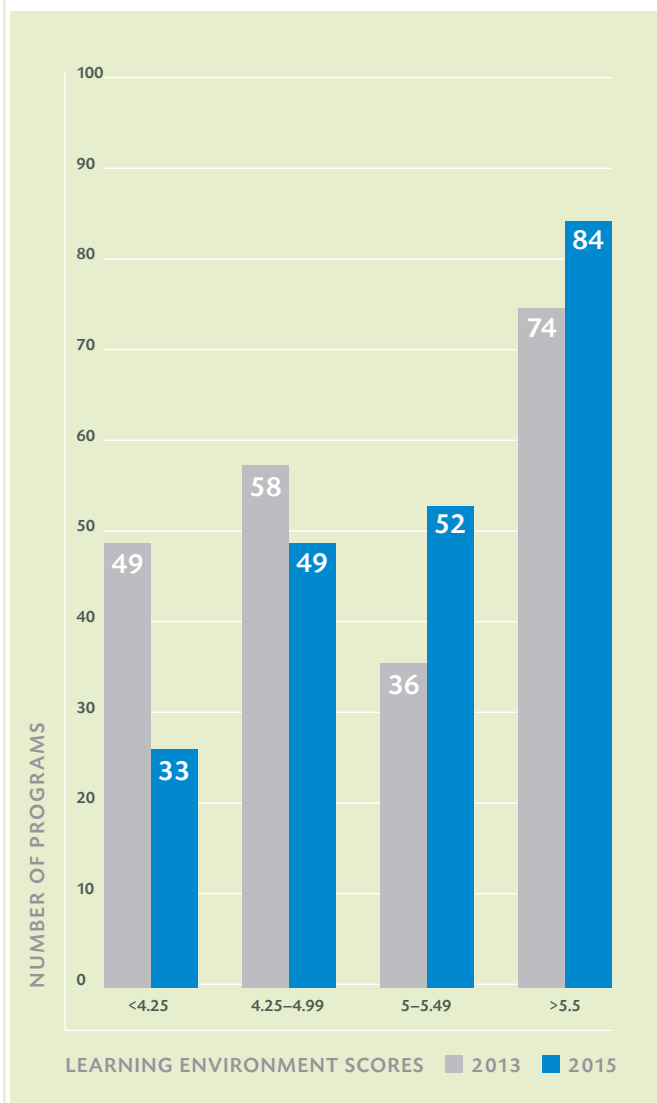
One of the unique features of QUALITYstarsNY is its inclusion of licensed family, or home-based, child care programs in the quality rating and improvement system. These types of programs are not always included in quality systems in other states. Across New York State, a significant portion of young children, often in low-income or at-risk families, are currently served in family home settings. Research shows that many family child care programs could benefit from the supports offered by QUALITYstarsNY. Including family child care in the system ensures that all children have access to excellence, regardless of the setting.

Learning Environment

Research and practice have shown that the classroom and outdoor early childhood environment and what happens there daily are central to program quality. This includes not only the physical space, but also the quality of teacher-child interactions. Children with involved and responsive caregivers fare better on a wide variety of child development measures. A developmentally appropriate curriculum is also vital to program quality and positive child outcomes.

QUALITYstarsNY uses the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS) to assess many types of classroom interactions—between staff and children, staff and parents, among staff, and between children themselves. The ERS also examines children’s and teachers’ use of materials and the classroom environment. Using the ERS tools, programs receive scores from one to seven points, indicating “inadequate” to “excellent” quality.

FIGURE 2: CHANGE IN OVERALL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT SCORES, 2013-2015



Achievements: Learning Environment

Overall, QUALITYstarsNY programs increased the number of points scored in the Learning Environment standard by 34%. Figure 2 shows that the number of programs scoring “good” (5 or more points) in the Learning Environment category increased by 24%, from 110 programs to 136 programs. Other data show an equally impressive 21% increase in “good” or better scores in centers serving infants and toddlers. This is significant, considering how important the first three years of life are to a child’s development. This improvement was especially pronounced for family (in-home) providers, the number of which scoring “good” or better jumped by 163%.

Many of the improvements in Learning Environment indicators are made possible by QUALITYstarsNY. Programs received a variety of supports based on the needs identified in their quality improvement plans. These supports included resources for:

- Curriculum planning and implementation
- Furnishings and facilities
- Child observation and assessment
- Learning materials
- Professional development resources

“Thanks to support from QUALITYstarsNY, the children have more materials to play with than they otherwise would have—not just quantity, but better quality, too. I bought a plastic kitchen a while back and it lasted about a week. QUALITYstarsNY allowed me to purchase pretend kitchen furniture made of sturdy hardwood. The children play there all the time and they play with it in all kinds of different ways. Last week they took all the food out of it and turned it into a nursery for babies. Before that, one of the boys used it as a garage for his trucks...The kids had a great time.”

—SHELLY DEUTSCH,
FAMILY CHILDCARE PROVIDER,
SHELLY'S DAYCARE, ROCHESTER

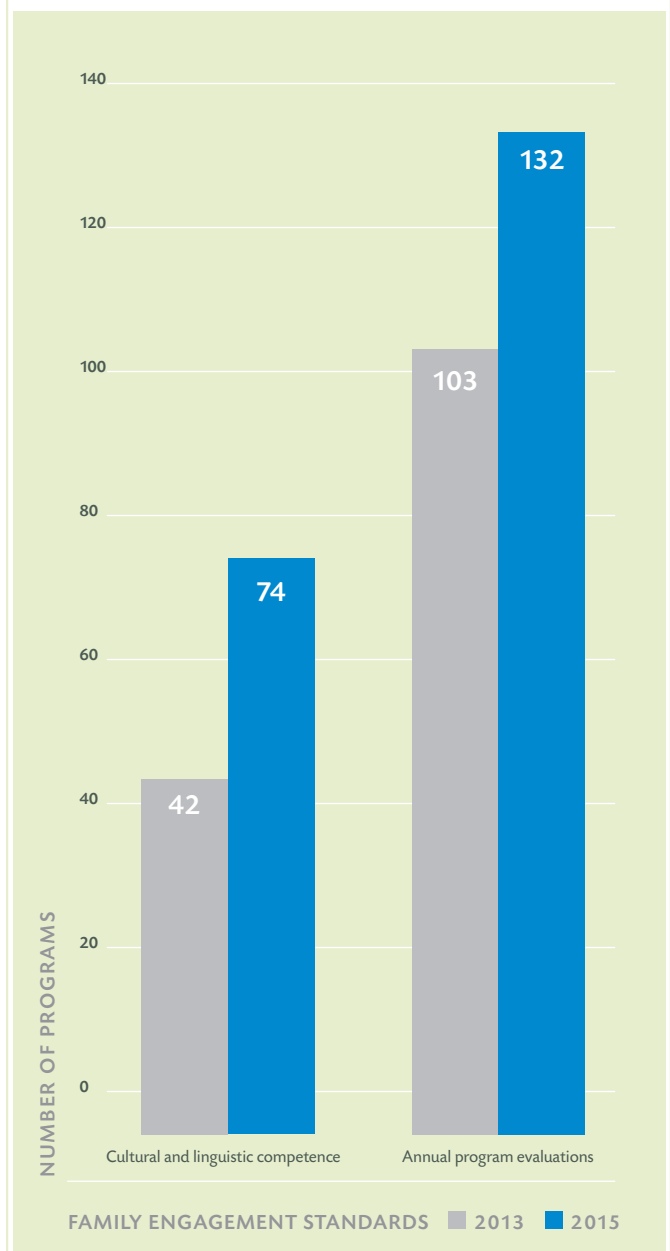
“Equipment made from hardwood is durable, making it a good investment. Providing children with the opportunity to pretend nurtures creativity, self-expression, and problem solving skills, which are all necessary for success in school and life.”

—ARIEL DAVIS,
PROJECT COORDINATOR,
QUALITYstarsNY

Family Engagement

Early childhood programs known for their excellence make families an integral part of the fabric of their program and see themselves as part of the child's extended family. These programs dedicate themselves to meeting the needs of both children and the people closest to them, especially siblings and parents. Fostering family engagement by honoring a family's culture, keeping communication open and respectful, and ensuring a hospitable atmosphere all contribute to a child's experience in early childhood education settings. Further, providing support to each child and family during transitions, life's challenges, and even traumatic events, makes a positive impact on children.

FIGURE 3: CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PROGRAMS MEETING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS, 2013-15



The value and importance of family is one of the distinguishing features of QUALITYstarsNY and sets it apart from other quality rating and improvement systems. The system focuses on a family's influence on the child and seeks to support and engage families in their child's early education and care. QUALITYstarsNY ensures that programs are responsive to the needs of families and their dreams for their children. To develop programs' ability to meet the needs of families, QUALITYstarsNY works with programs to provide a wide range of supports, including:

- Helping programs provide families with parent handbooks and information about financial support.
- Encouraging programs to host social gatherings for families, provide opportunities for families to volunteer, and seek feedback from families.
- Assisting programs in providing families with information about attachment and separation, and in creating policies that ease transitions into, within, and out of the program.
- Developing programs' capacity to respond appropriately to the many challenges a family might face and make referrals.

“ The emphasis that QUALITYstarsNY places on family engagement reinforces the reasons why we encourage our families to be as involved as possible with their child's education. Through regularly planned parent events at school, we have seen an increase in family involvement, which in turn has shown an increase in child outcomes, both academically and behaviorally. ”

—KRISTEN GRUBER,
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, HOLY CROSS
HEAD START, BUFFALO

Achievements: Family Engagement

Overall, QUALITYstarsNY programs increased the number of points scored in the Family Engagement category by 32%. Figure 3 shows the progress made on two of the approximately 20 standards in the Family Engagement category. The figure demonstrates that from 2013 to 2015, there was a 76% increase in the number of programs that met the requirements of the cultural and linguistic standard and a 28% increase in the number of programs that met the requirements for the annual program evaluation standard.

Qualifications and Experience

The education level and professional development that teachers and directors bring to a program greatly influence program quality and child outcomes. Ongoing professional training is needed to incorporate the latest scientific research and policy developments into classroom practice. The more education and tools that teachers and directors have, the more strategies they can employ when working with children and managing, growing, and improving a program to respond to the needs of all children and families.

QUALITYstarsNY works with programs to help those in teaching and leadership positions gain the education and training needed to run successful, high quality classrooms and programs. QUALITYstarsNY support includes helping staff obtain appropriate credentials, college credits, and degrees from accredited colleges or universities, as well as teacher, director, and trainer certifications. The quality improvement specialist connects programs to resources, including tuition for credit-bearing coursework and professional development, and financial support to attend conferences and workshops.

Achievements: Qualifications and Experience

Overall, QUALITYstarsNY programs increased the number of points scored in the Qualifications and Experience category by 12%. This is significant because getting an educational degree can often extend past the three years reported on here. This finding, in particular, demonstrates that programs acknowledge that long-term investment in staff qualifications and experience adds significant value to program quality.

QUALITYstarsNY has invested \$1.5 million in early childhood program staff development over three years. In addition to college tuition, specialists connected program staff to professional development opportunities delivered by verified and credentialed trainers. These trainers were able to adapt and tailor trainings to meet the specific needs identified in programs' quality improvement plans. Table 1 shows the types of educational achievements made by staff participating in QUALITYstarsNY participating programs.

TABLE 1: EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS, 2013-2015

TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT	NUMBER OF STAFF
Higher Education (took college coursework toward college degree)	262
New York State Teaching Certificates	224
Child Development Associate Credential	195
Other Credentials and Certifications	20

Management and Leadership

The leadership of any early childhood program is foundational to its excellence. QUALITYstarsNY dedicates one entire category of the rating system to this critical indicator. An effective director articulates a program philosophy and drives the distinguishing strategies that guide staff to operate a program that puts children and their families first.

QUALITYstarsNY works with program directors to connect them with recommended tools to assess their current leadership and business practices, including managing finances and human resources. Specialists assist in examining their accounting records, encourage them to provide paid sick leave and holidays for full time staff, as well as provide professional development days, paid planning time, and health insurance.

“QUALITYstarsNY has offered me the opportunity to grow as a professional by allowing me to participate in trainings and courses in child development (CDA ,CPR and First Aid, Creative Curriculum Infant, Toddlers, and Twos)... Thank you for the technical support that each person provided every time they visited my [child care site.] This has helped us to improve every day. ”

–MIRIAM MORGADO,
FAMILY CHILDCARE PROVIDER,
AMOR Y PAZ, INC.,
NEW ROCHELLE

Achievements: Management and Leadership

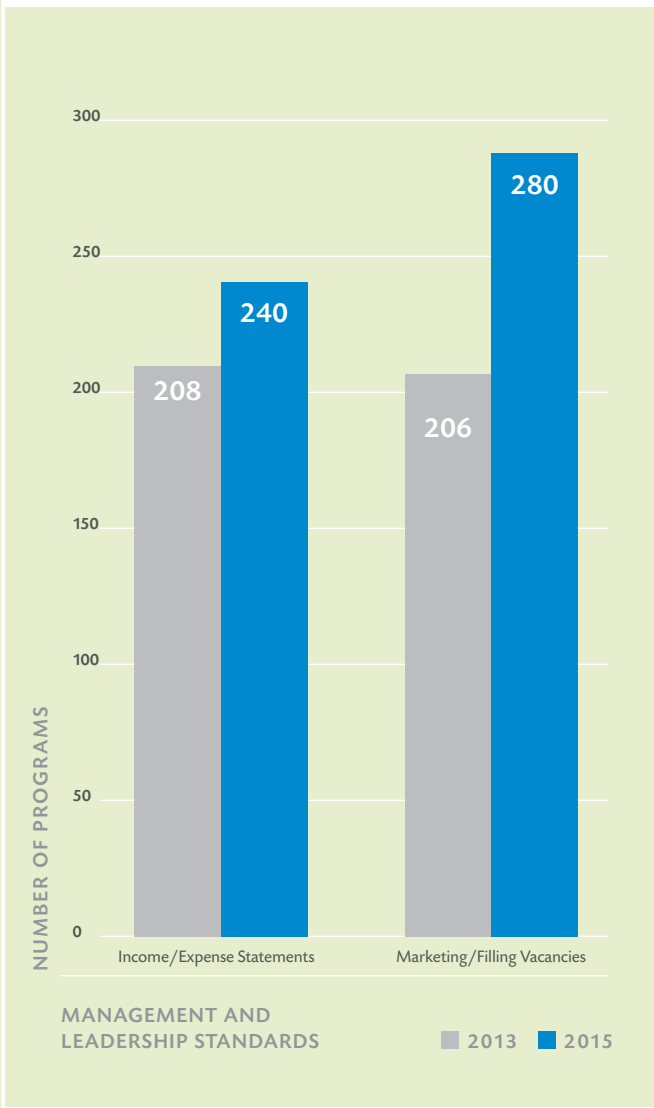
Overall, QUALITYstarsNY programs increased the number of points scored in the Management and Leadership category by 31%.

Many programs have adopted supervisory and management tools for more effective personnel assessment and to monitor the progress toward goals. Providers have explored business practices in depth, focusing on better budgeting and accounting, as well as liability insurance usage, through a combination of trainings and consultations.

Figure 4 shows the improvement in scores on two standards in the Management and Leadership category: 1) program generation of income and expense statements, and 2) program marketing and efforts to fill child care slots and vacancies. The number of programs meeting the standard increased by 36% for the marketing standard. This is especially important, as those child care slots are often set aside to serve low-income, at-risk children.

In addition, QUALITYstarsNY staff have convened learning communities attended by early childhood program directors and administrators and QUALITYstarsNY quality improvement specialists. At the learning community meetings, providers meet, share knowledge and experience, and learn from experts in the field about business practices, board development, and strategic planning.

FIGURE 4: CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PROGRAMS MEETING MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP STANDARDS, 2013-15



“ Perhaps the most important part of this process so far has been the collaboration with directors from other Early Childhood programs throughout the city. Each of us has a different perspective due to the [diverse] populations we serve. However, we share the same concerns... every director works long hours and has little contact with other professionals. I look forward to our monthly meetings. The opportunity for us to share ideas and do creative problem solving together helps us all. ”

—BARBARA STONE REDEN, MEd
 DIRECTOR OF EARLY
 CHILDHOOD SERVICES,
 JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER
 OF GREATER BUFFALO

Moving Forward

QUALITYstarsNY works with educational programs serving children ages birth through five. What began as a field test in 2010 has grown to serve over 500 programs and 25,000 children due to a \$3 million allocation in the State’s last budget. Additional resources provide essential support to the program as well. However, with 4,282 center-based programs and 13,759 home-based programs providing care for 468,000 children across the state, more resources are needed to add sites and ensure that young children have access to excellent early education in every setting.

Bringing QUALITYstarsNY to scale with a goal of serving 80% of center-based and school-based programs and 25% of family in-home programs in every region in New York is projected to take five more years and will require a larger commitment from the State budget. Reaching this five-year goal, which

would serve 234,000 children, requires a greater allotment of public funding. **The time to invest in QUALITYstarsNY is now.**

The science tells us that the most precious time in a child’s development is the early years, from birth through age five. We see the promise of high quality early childhood education for New York now and in the future. Every parent should have the peace of mind that while they are working, their child is interacting with well-educated and experienced teachers in nurturing and stimulating settings as they prepare for lifelong learning and success. New York’s Early Childhood Advisory Council envisions a day when all children have access to four- and five-star programs. QUALITYstarsNY has the potential to reach its goal of serving thousands of children, families, and providers across the state. New York State has an opportunity to fully implement QUALITYstarsNY, thereby maximizing the number of children with access to early childhood education known for its excellence.

About the Institute

The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute is a nonprofit interdisciplinary catalyst advancing access to excellence in early childhood. It is a public-private partnership within the City University of New York that focuses on improving opportunity for all children from birth through age eight. The Institute builds systems to promote best practices, raise standards, and measure effectiveness; it promotes data-driven solutions and accountability; it communicates research results and recommendations to affect lasting change.

New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute

The City University of New York

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New York
Early Childhood
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About the ECAC

The ECAC is comprised of experts in education, health care, child welfare, family support, and mental health. Members represent state agencies, advocacy groups, foundations, higher education, unions and other key organizations concerned with the wellbeing of young children and their families, as appointed by the Governor. This ensures that a diversity of perspectives and experiences inform our work. The New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) was formed to provide counsel to the Governor on issues related to young children and their families.

New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council

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QUALITYstarsNY.org