

NYSAN Policy Brief

From Birth through Young Adulthood: A Blueprint for Collaboration between the Early Care and Education and Afterschool Systems in New York State

In order to ensure all aspects of children's well-being through young adulthood, New York State must build a system of support for the "whole child" in which all children and youth have full and equitable opportunities to be healthy, safe, engaged, and prepared from "cradle to career." The pillars of a system that provides multiple pathways to success for all children include not only an excellent public education system, but robust early care and education (ECE) programs and high-quality afterschool learning and development opportunities.

ECE and afterschool programs encompass different types of programs in various settings. All quality ECE - or early care and learning - programs share the goal of nurturing young children's development, growth, and learning. Afterschool is defined broadly to include summer, after- and before-school, and expanded day and year programs that promote the learning and healthy development of children and youth outside the traditional classroom.

Despite progress in expanding quality and availability of ECE and afterschool programs, New York still faces challenges in creating a true system of support that meets the diverse needs of children and families from birth through young adulthood. This policy brief outlines the benefits of ECE and afterschool programs, as well as the rationale and strategy for collaboration across systems.

Common Impacts and Benefits of ECE and Afterschool Programs

Academic benefits

Research shows that children who attend high-quality ECE programs are less likely to need special education services and less likely to be held back. In addition, children who attend high-quality early childhood programs are less likely to drop out of school and more likely to attain higher levels of education.¹ Similarly, high-quality afterschool programs have a proven track record of improving student achievement in school. Regular participation is linked to gains in standardized test scores and work habits, improvements in school attendance, and reductions in behavior problems. Some research suggests that students in high-quality afterschool programs are up to 20% less likely to drop out of school.² These programs have a particularly strong impact on low-income and low-performing youth.³

Social and emotional benefits

High-quality ECE and afterschool programs promote developmentally appropriate skill- and knowledge-building outside school and beyond academics. ECE programs provide early socialization that is critical to the cognitive and social-emotional development of young children. They are also a context for children to develop critical skills such as patience, responsibility, and discipline. Similarly, afterschool programs offer children and youth opportunities to develop key 21st century skills such as leadership and conflict resolution, and foster the principles of community engagement and citizenship.

Both early care and learning and afterschool programs create contexts where children develop caring relationships with adults and learn the principles of teamwork and creativity in settings outside their families and schools. ECE and afterschool programs provide children with activities and alternative ways of learning that facilitate development by building their confidence, motivation, and ability to interact with others in a variety of settings.

Economic development and support for working families

High-quality ECE and afterschool programs provide families with a developmentally-appropriate safe and supervised space for their children while they are at work. Parents who feel confident about their children's early childhood program are more productive employees, and the same is true for afterschool. In a New York City study, parents said that afterschool programs helped them balance work and family life: 60% said they missed less work than before because of the program and 54% said it allowed them to work more hours.⁴ The stress parents experience if they are worried about their children's care arrangements and/or afterschool experiences can have negative effects on job performance and productivity.⁵

Effective public investments

Studies show that every dollar invested returns up to \$17 for ECE and Pre-Kindergarten programs⁶ and up to \$12 for afterschool programs in reductions in social and public services.⁷ They are effective public investments because they reduce high school dropout rates, and support higher levels of student engagement, income in adulthood, and rates of home ownership. Given that lifetime earnings losses linked to dropping out of high school exceed \$250,000 and lost tax revenue over a high school dropout's lifetime approaches \$60,000, the impacts of ECE and afterschool participation are significant for both individuals and society.⁸

Why Link ECE and Afterschool in New York State?

Working together, the ECE and afterschool communities throughout New York State have the opportunity to strengthen policies, practices, and programs to create a more seamless, accessible, and effective system that paves a true pathway to success. Stakeholders and poli-

cymakers in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors across New York State should link the ECE and afterschool systems in order to:

Create a seamless system of support for the whole child, throughout childhood. Effectively linking early care and learning and afterschool efforts will expand access to, and quality of, the supports families need to ensure their child's safety and success over time.

Sustain positive child outcomes and maximize public investments. Collaboration will result in sustaining the gains that ECE programs provide to children, and allow afterschool programs to build upon the early care and learning foundation. A coordinated system of care is a wise investment of public dollars in communities that yield long-term benefits to families and cost-savings to taxpayers.

Develop a unified message. Creating a pathway of support from "cradle to career" requires the experiences and expertise of both ECE and afterschool stakeholders. Collaboration will provide the public and policymakers with the necessary information and tools to support high-quality ECE and afterschool opportunities and make good decisions for children, families, and communities.

Expand, promote, and invest in what works. Existing systems can serve as models in coordinating programs and services. ECE systems-building efforts with demonstrated success in Rochester, NY served as a model for afterschool efforts in the region, focusing on evaluation, quality, and advocacy. Linking the two systems will help identify and share such examples of strategic thinking and collaborative practice statewide.

Improve quality of staffing and programs.

Collaboration across the ECE and afterschool communities can improve the quality of programs and workforce development activities through joint training and improved communications. Professionals in the early care and/or afterschool workforce should receive coordinated or aligned information about funding, training, policy development, and quality initiatives.

Align existing infrastructure. Aligning quality improvement efforts from the ECE system – such as the QUALITYstarsNY quality rating improvement sys-

tem – with the New York State Afterschool Network’s program quality framework and Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool will improve the overall quality of services and clarify expectations for families, programs, and policymakers.

Develop closer links with the public education system.

Statewide early care and learning and afterschool efforts both seek closer integration with the public education system and share common interests in doing so. For example, Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), which now serves 106,000, or 42%, of eligible four-year olds in New York State, affects both ECE and afterschool systems as it is a transition point from early learning to school-age programs and services.

Promote access and reduce barriers to access.

Demand for early learning and afterschool opportunities still far exceeds the supply. The ECE and afterschool systems can collaborate to reform regulations and promote policies that will enable programs to operate more effectively and/or expand services, as well as create conditions to expand public investments in services for children and youth. Examples include increasing child care subsidy reimbursement rates and setting income eligibility limits at or above 200% of the federal poverty level.⁹

Strategies for Advancing a Joint ECE - Afterschool Systems-Building Agenda

1. Create a comprehensive and coordinated message in communications and educational materials.

For policymakers, a coordinated message will provide better information to inform smart investments in ECE and afterschool that serve more children and promote quality. Clear information will allow parents to manage the transitions across early childhood, school-day, and summer and afterschool programs more easily, and will help them access quality programs that yield the greatest benefits for their children. Finally, providers will be able to help families make smooth transitions from early care to school-age programming, and highlight quality across systems of support for their clients and staff.

2. Share training and professional development opportunities.

Early learning and afterschool programs face challenges

in recruiting, retaining, and developing a high-quality workforce. Shared professional development - and incentives to encourage participation - will increase the quality and stability of the workforce. The ECE and afterschool systems can work together to expand incentives such as the Educational Incentive Program (EIP), create partnerships with colleges and universities, and provide other technical assistance to improve supports to agencies and providers who serve early learners and afterschool participants.

3. Advocate for increased funding and efficient administration.

States have great flexibility to shape the administration of public programs to benefit families, including setting eligibility criteria, establishing provider reimbursement rates, calculating co-payments, developing contracts for care, and providing family-friendly processes to ensure maximum access. For example, integrating funds dedicated to 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) and those from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) can assist public agencies in creating coordinated, efficient, and fully-funded programs across the age spectrum.¹⁰

4. Focus on quality as the anchor.

The ECE and afterschool systems can use quality as a lens through which to align its work with the other. Each system in New York State has separate voluntary quality assurance initiatives in place or in development. For example, NYSAN and member organizations like AfterSchool Works! New York have begun reviewing the QUALITYstarsNY standards and design, to see how it aligns with other school-age standards and tools currently in use throughout the state.

Policy Recommendations

1. Connect the strong, yet fragmented, child-serving initiatives in New York State.

There is a diverse and robust, yet fragmented, child services system in New York State. Local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, public agencies, and statewide coalitions are among the venues that relate to both ECE and afterschool systems. In addition, the Council on Children and Families staffs a number of initiatives ranging from the New York State Touchstones framework to the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet. The newly created Early Childhood Advisory

Council (ECAC) reports directly to the Cabinet and is addressing a wide range of ECE issues, including quality, workforce development, and capacity building. Making strong connections across entities and initiatives that already exist will maximize resources and create necessary relationships to sustain a coordinated child-serving system.

2. Expand and coordinate funding opportunities for ECE and afterschool programs.

It is possible to maximize funding through collaboration across agencies such as New York State Education Department (NYSED) and New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). NYSED oversees Pre-K and 21st CCLC, whereas NYS OCFS administers the CCDF and the Advantage After School Program.¹¹ These agencies can consider coordinating data collection, staff development, or streamlining regulations that govern how providers operate. Agencies might consider ways in which funding from 21st CCLC and CCDF can be better integrated, as some states have done.¹² Organizations such as the Harlem Children's Zone and The Children's Aid Society have demonstrated success in serving youth from birth through adolescence. Public agencies can help replicate promising practices by creating or reallocating funding streams to support programs that address the development of children and youth over time.

3. Adopt quality standards, policies, and regulations that advance a seamless continuum of care.

Public agencies and policy mandates should widely adopt and promote the quality assurance efforts and best practice knowledge that the ECE and afterschool systems promote in New York. Doing so will drive quality improvement, provide information to families, and provide evidence of the value of these public investments. These concepts can be used in legislation, policy statements, requests for proposals, and regulatory guidance. In particular, regulations should be based on the range of program options available to families; ensure child health, safety, and quality; and provide programs and providers with clear direction in providing their services.

4. Clarify and/or coordinate child care subsidy administration at all levels.

The CCDF is a resource for ECE and afterschool pro-

grams. In New York State, only 44% of eligible children receive CCDF subsidies and thousands fewer children receive subsidies today than in 2003-04. Because 45% of subsidies go to school-age care, and the remaining 55% go to early care, effective administration of this funding stream helps ECE and afterschool stakeholders.¹³ Local supports and information for families navigating the subsidy system will ease the burden on them in trying to access these funds.

5. Design a system of compensation, incentives, and professional development to retain staff.

New York needs to create and/or expand incentive programs and other options for promoting stability, improving compensation, and raising quality in the early care and afterschool workforce. Retention and professional development (including credential programs and access to higher education), require incentives and supports - such as loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, and release time - that enable teachers and caregivers to move up the professional career lattice.¹⁴

6. Expand the use of research, specifically related to brain development, in informing policy decisions.

The important body of brain research can inform decision-making at the policy level, and inform practice at the program level. This research sheds light on the critical developmental stages of children and youth. It should inform decision-making at the agency level around funding priorities, program design, and professional development supports. Effective use of this research at the program level will help ensure high-quality, developmentally appropriate programming.¹⁵

Program Recommendations

1. Co-sponsor professional development opportunities, especially focused on quality assurance.

ECE and afterschool professionals require many common professional skills and competencies. Staff in state-licensed programs must meet specific training requirements, many of which are in regulations that govern ECE as well as those for school-age programs. This offers programs the opportunity to share professional development (trainings, coaching, and peer-learning) and resources. Doing so will align the practices of early care and afterschool programs while also using professional development funds more efficiently.

2. Co-locate ECE and afterschool programs.

Agencies and organizations can improve the coordination of staffing, share information, and maximize administrative and management resources through co-location of early learning and school-age care programs. Community schools, such as those operated in partnership between the New York City Department of Education and The Children's Aid Society, are promising examples of where this approach is taking hold. Co-location can help programs more effectively serve families with children ranging in age across early care and school-age.

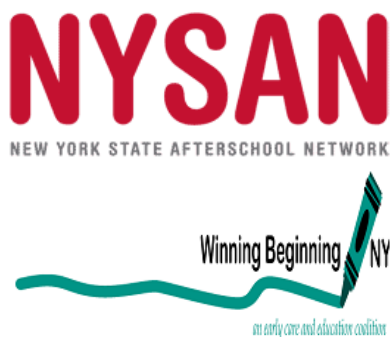
3. Provide joint family outreach and education initiatives.

Early care and afterschool programs that jointly offer family outreach and education opportunities recognize both financial and time savings. Family outreach and

education are critical functions of many programs providing children's services, and are mandated by some public funding streams, like 21st CCLC. In addition, such a practice will allow programs to share partnerships with community-based services, such as adult education programs and local social service agencies.

4. Share administrative resources.

Programs can improve the coordination, value, and impact of human resources and recognize other efficiencies if they jointly seek and secure administrative support. Communities often have limited local human resources, including grant writers, evaluators, and technical assistance specialists. This will allow programs to free time and money for program expenses while simultaneously strengthening the links between early care and learning and afterschool programs.



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Endnotes

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