



January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2026

Strategic Plan

FOUR-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

DRAFT

The NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council 2023 – 2025 Strategic Plan

March 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The ECAC was established under Governor Patterson in response to a recommendation by the Children's Cabinet to work toward the development of comprehensive services for young children and their families and to comply with the Head Start Act that required each state to designate or establish a council to serve as the State Advisory Council on early childhood education and care for children birth to school entry. In 2016, the ECAC was codified under the New York State Council on Children and Families (NYS Social Services Law section 483g).

To ensure diversity in expertise, perspectives, and experience, the ECAC members represent state agencies, community-based non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, higher education, unions, and other critical entities across the state. All members are appointed by the Governor. The ECAC also seeks other perspectives through its Parent Advisory Council, work group participation, and annual community Town Hall conversations and listening sessions.

The ECAC's mission is to provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues. By monitoring and guiding the implementation of a range of strategies, the ECAC supports New York in building a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children. The work supports the vision and belief that every child in New York State should be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

This three-year strategic plan covers the period from January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2025. It builds upon the successes and learnings of previous strategic plans and responds to current environmental factors affecting early childhood care and education and services.

The plan outlines goals and recommendations for the next three years and concludes with a summary to monitor the plan's progress.

VISION

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) believes every child in New York State should be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family that is supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

MISSION

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) will provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues. By monitoring and guiding the implementation of a range of strategies, the ECAC supports New York in building a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children.

EQUITY STATEMENT

The Early Childhood Advisory Council holds a deep commitment to social justice and racial equity, as a process and a goal, as evidenced by our work across the state. We recognize that, in order to uphold our vision and mission to support young children's development, we must actively, critically, and continuously work to disrupt and dismantle systemic inequities due to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, legal status and family structure. It is our responsibility to address the inequities impacting the lives of children and families on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. In doing so we build systems that provide all young children and their families with equitable access to the services, resources, and experiences that they deserve in order to thrive.

CORE VALUES

Lead with Race: The ECAC leads with race in recognition that the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities are pervasive throughout society, government, systems, and institutions. Racial inequities, across all indicators for success inhibit families' and communities' ability to provide for their children's well-being and success.

Equity is Central: Equity is central to the work because groups of people are still marginalized based on identity and ability (e.g., based on gender, sexual orientation, ability, first language, economic class), obstructing the ability of families and communities to provide for the well-being and success of their children.

Holistic Approach: A holistic approach means developing the whole child – socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively – and elevates the importance of family and community assets and resources to positively impact a child's life.

Family-Centered: Family-centered early care and education services respect the family's central role as caregiver, advocate, and decision-maker for the child. A family-centered approach builds a foundation of collaboration between families and professionals and is predicated on the family's availability of basic needs such as health care and education choices.

Community-Centered (Nothing for Us Without Us): No policy or program should be developed or decided by the ECAC or any other representative without the full and direct participation of the families and communities affected.

We Are Stronger Together: Cross-agency collaborations and partnerships among families, organizations, and communities create opportunities to drive systemic change in early childhood care and education.

Data-Driven & Evidence-based: Early childhood data helps the ECAC understand young children's care, developmental, and health needs. It informs decisions and results in evidence-based programs and policy recommendations. Data also highlights gaps and disparities that must be addressed to lead with race and achieve equity.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The ECAC was established in 2009 to build and implement a comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system in New York State. The ECAC addresses human services, early care and education, social-emotional development, health care, and services for young children beginning in pregnancy.

This plan builds on the reported accomplishments and learnings of the ECAC 2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan, as well as the findings of the 2022 environmental scan, which included 44 survey responses, five key-informant interviews, and a planning retreat in August 2022.

Below is a summary of the findings and description of the evolving landscape of early childhood care and education.

Successes of the ECAC 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

The ECAC membership reviewed the accomplishments of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan responding to the following prompts:

- What about the current Strategic Plan worked?
- What was missing from the current Strategic Plan? What are opportunities for future work?
- How the future plan will be implemented? (*Roles, Responsibilities, Function & Logistics*)

Funding

- The plan was organized around the federal Preschool Development Birth through Five (B5) grant and corresponding plan. The conclusion of the B5 grant, in December of 2022, presents the ECAC with the challenge of identifying priorities that do not require special funding, while continuing to set the stage for priorities to be acted upon as funding becomes available.
- Going forward fiscal needs should be identified for all priorities.

Other reflections of note included:

- The emphasis on equity was considered by the membership as critically important.
- Cross-systems collaboration was effective in bringing multiple areas of expertise together around issues.
- Expansion of regional Career Centers was successful and should continue to be a priority, and an overall continued focus on workforce development. Career Centers were established and operationalized in every region in the state.
- Success in matching strategic plan priorities with legislation and policy opportunities.
- Need to expand the communications plan and advocacy efforts.

Membership

- Establishment of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in 2021 was a success, but work needs to be done to achieve greater engagement.
- Include a representative from the Department of Health's Office of Health Insurance Programs (Medicaid) on the ECAC.
- Determine how to make sure all areas of the state are represented.
- Engage the business sector.
- More effective onboarding process for new members to the ECAC.

Strategic Plan Document Structure

- Yearly progress indicators worked well.

- The next plan should have fewer goals.
- Objectives should have greater clarity and specificity, including data and metrics.

Survey & Interview Reflections on the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

Survey respondents and interviewees thought the ECAC's mission remained relevant.

They expressed that the next strategic plan should be organized around fewer goals. Priority areas of the ECAC's current strategic plan identified as important to carry forward included: 1) service coordination and availability of services, 2) ECAC practices, 3) data systems and data-driven decisions, and 4) workforce issues. Workforce, service coordination and availability of services, and funding were the top three priority areas for the ECAC to advance to the Governor's office.

fewer goals

The Impact of COVID-19

When asked about the impact of the COVID pandemic, survey respondents and interviewees stated that the COVID pandemic most certainly had a detrimental impact on children birth to 5 years of age, as well as the early childhood sector as a whole.

The added stressors of the COVID pandemic revealed racial and other disparities and inequities embedded in the early childhood system.

**eliminate
inequities**

Furthermore, like other industries, the pandemic led to financial distress for many early childhood programs, further amplifying the need for importance of child care and early education as well as workforce gaps and inequities for low-income communities.

They also noted that COVID adversely affected the 2020 – 2022 strategic plan's implementation efforts. But respondents added that compared to other states, the ECAC had achieved some remarkable successes, including Pyramid Model Implementation expansion and early childhood Career Centers in all ten regions of the state.

A number of serious concerns that were created by COVID were identified that greatly impact early childhood policy, service delivery, and the workforce were considered critical to the ECAC's efforts going forward.

Policy Issues:

- Eliminate inequities and provide access to affordable high-quality early care and education for all families.
- Provide funding to support families' ability to pay the true cost of child care, providing fair compensation for the early education workforce, while ensuring the fiscal viability and sustainability of programs.

- Review health and safety practices that impact policies and procedures, provide for the health needs of all children, and the early childhood workforce.

Service Delivery Concerns:

- Address isolation, racial equity, and social cohesion. Advance program models informed by data to address disparities driven by race, poverty, and other factors
- Identify ways to better utilize technology and social media in the provision of early care and education services.
- Develop strategies to effectively respond to trauma affecting families and young children

data driven

Workforce Issues:

**strengthen,
support, and
grow the
workforce**

- Develop strategies to respond to secondary trauma, fatigue affecting the workforce
- Develop new strategies for strengthening, supporting, and growing the workforce with focus on alleviating the child care deserts, increasing partnerships, and providing competitive compensation and benefits.

RETREAT DISCUSSIONS

At the ECAC Strategic Planning retreat participants were asked to creatively envision and discuss the early childhood continuum of care they would like to create for New York State. The common threads that arose from this exercise envisioned an anti-racist, comprehensive, and holistic care continuum that supports the development of the whole child prenatally through age eight.

Programs are data-informed and evidenced based. The workforce is fairly compensated, highly skilled, has support for education, training, and advancement, and is valued.

All children have equitable opportunities for care and learning, that are culturally and linguistically sensitive, to ensure they are ready to succeed and thrive. Families are empowered to advocate for their children, themselves, and system improvements.

**anti-racist,
holistic, family
and community
centered**

Agencies and organizations are community- and family-centered. Each community has the resources and programs needed to provide families with the ability to choose, easily navigate, and access a system of quality care and education for their children. Alignment across agencies and organizations is an instrumental strategy to be employed for greater impact. Conversation also noted the political opportunity in the state to advance policy issues.

**alignment across
agencies &
organizations**

The **six focus areas** that emerged from the discovery process are:

- 1) Racial Equity
- 2) Family & Community Resources
- 3) Workforce Development
- 4) Reimagine Policy
- 5) The Function and Structure of the ECAC
- 6) Early Childhood Data

FOCUS AREAS & LEVERS FOR CHANGE

RACIAL EQUITY

“Racial equity is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.”¹

The ECAC knows it is impossible to achieve its mission and vision without working towards a more just and equitable society. Addressing the inequities impacting the lives of children and families on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels is a cornerstone of this plan and the work of the ECAC. In doing so, systems are built that provide all young children and their families with equitable access to the services, resources, and experiences needed to thrive.

NURTURING FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS

Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and healthy, well-resourced communities protect children and families against the effects of poverty and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They are fundamental to developing healthy brain architecture.

Young children experience the world through their relationships with parents and other caregivers. Children can thrive when they grow up in safe, stable, and nurturing families. Families can thrive when they live in safe, stable, and well-resourced communities. Community poverty and other inequities, both rural, suburban, and urban, are detrimental to New York’s children and their families.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A robust and skilled early childhood workforce, which includes all levels of educators, staff, administrators, and leaders, is fundamental to the well-being of young children and society.

Nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers are essential to young children having a strong developmental foundation that will foster their success in school and life, including their capacity to participate in their communities. Additionally, early care and education professionals are “the workforce behind the community’s workforce.” They enable parents and caregivers to work, attend school or engage in other job training opportunities.

However, the demand for child care, specialists, therapists, and other professionals who support young children and families frequently outweighs supply in many communities. Many factors contribute to this shortage, including a lack of qualified and supported early

¹ Glenn Harris, President, Race Forward and Publisher, Colorlines; <https://www.raceforward.org/about/what-is-racial-equity-key-concepts>

care and education professionals, including long hours and poor compensation.

REIMAGINING POLICY

Governance is a key strategy of systems change work.

The public sector is responsible as an initiator and organizer of the work. States are the prime host for major federal funding streams that support early childhood, healthcare, and education and lead in policy, funding, program design, and oversight. However, there is no single agency responsible for all the factors that impact early childhood health and development.

To achieve the ECAC goals, state and local cross-agency collaboration and coordination are needed that assures an efficient and accountable public structure.

LEVERS OF CHANGE

Successful implementation of the ECAC strategic plan engages change levers to bring about desired outcomes. The ECAC identified six key levers for change as critical for strengthening the system, removing barriers to access services, and facilitating stronger child outcomes.

Each lever cuts across the six focus areas and requires attention and planning for successful achievement of the plan's goals.

1. Equity
2. Data
3. Fiscal Policy and Funding
4. Policy
5. Infrastructure
6. Communications

Goals & Recommendations

GOAL 1: Racial Equity

Close the racial equity gap in early childhood care health and education.

Data Recommendations

- Acquire and use data disaggregated by race.

Fiscal & Funding Recommendations

- Ensure funding priorities are informed by high needs, historically underserved areas, and population diversity (racial, linguistic, ability, socioeconomic, etc.).

Policy Recommendations

- Ensure equitable choice across regions and communities to quality early childhood programs and services.
- Support a government review and reversal of racially-biased policies and practices.

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Develop a racially, ethnically, and culturally reflective and responsive workforce.
- Establish equitable program policies, practices, and structures (e.g., prohibit suspensions and expulsions, integrated settings).

ECAC Organizational Recommendations

- Develop an ECAC undoing racism plan and create a race equity review board to ensure all ECAC decisions consider racial equity.
- Support ECAC member commitments to address systemic racism in their agencies and organizations.

GOAL 2: Family & Community Resources

Ensure families and communities have the knowledge, skills, supports, and resources needed to create healthy and nurturing environments inside and outside the home for young children to thrive.

Fiscal & Funding Recommendations

- Expand successful ECAC initiatives (e.g., universal developmental screenings).
- Secure financial support and increase child care subsidies for families to enable families to access early care and education resources, services, and programs.

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Ensure family access and choice to a continuum of early care and education services, including services for children with developmental, health, mental health, and oral health care needs.
- Build community systems to help that families navigate and access early care, health care and education services and supports.
- Eliminate child care deserts and support the development of a continuum of quality early childhood care and education programs and services in all communities.

Partnership Recommendations

- Develop whole-child partnerships with the Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council and Child Care Availability Task Force.

Codification

- Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state, and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.

GOAL 3: Workforce

Foster a skilled, sustainable, and professionally compensated early childhood workforce

Equity Recommendations

- Target workforce recruitment, compensation equity, and development in underserved areas and communities.

Data Recommendations

- Promote data-driven policies, programs, and statewide use of the early childhood workforce registry.

Fiscal & Funding Recommendations

- Expand successful projects (e.g., Career Centers, Aspire Registry, Pyramid Model)
- Fully fund a comprehensive system of professional development with measures for quality assurance and stable funding to recruit, build, and support the workforce.

Policy Recommendations

- Create an early childhood education workforce compensation plan with compensation, retirement, and benefit standards (e.g., for early childhood teachers to be on parity with public school teachers with the same qualifications).
- Ensure all children in NYS have access to comprehensive services.

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Implement statewide career pathways that provide a road map for early childhood professionals.
- Identify and propose changes to address gaps and mitigate barriers to certification.
- Build workforce capacity in child care deserts.

Communication Recommendations

- Shape the public narrative of the impact and the value of ECE professionals.

Partnerships Recommendations

- Develop Career Center and workforce development partnerships with Regional Economic Development Councils and institutions of higher education for workforce development.

Codification:

- Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators in the state.
- Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two-year and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state toward supporting the development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which such institutions have in place articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students to spend time in a head start or pre-kindergarten programs.

GOAL 4: Policy

Reimagine government approaches to fostering a healthy early childhood for all people living across New York State.

Equity Recommendations

- Support a government review and reversal of racially biased policies and practices.

Fiscal Recommendations

- Collect data and utilize research to identify systems of services and programs that need funding to strengthen the overall early childhood system.

Policy Recommendations

- Review laws and regulations impacting early care and education to advise the governor and legislature on policy and legislative actions that will create an equitable early care and education system.
- Eliminate barriers, reduce administrative burdens, and simplify the child care assistance application process and platforms.
- Expand points of entry to early care and education, including services for children with developmental, healthcare, mental health, and oral health care needs, through community-based organizations and health services.
- Policy changes that are identified in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Planning Grant.

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Assess and improve accountability practices for agencies collecting and managing data relevant to early care and education.
- Strengthen transitions within early childhood (i.e., from Early Intervention (EI) to the Committee for Preschool Special Education (CPSE), from early childhood into kindergarten).

Communication Recommendations

- Amplify articulation of the value and public good served by early care and education programs, including services for children with developmental, healthcare, mental health, and oral health care needs.

Codification:

- Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services, including collaboration and coordination among state agencies responsible for administering such programs.
- Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards and undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.
- Develop and implement strategies to engage business and civic leaders and organizations in early learning planning and advocacy at the state and local level.

GOAL 5: ECAC Function and Structure

Strengthen NYS ECAC to drive change, lead, inform, and build a strong early childhood system

Equity Recommendations

- Form an Equity Review Board and establish an equity rubric.

Data Recommendations

- Establish performance indicators for the ECAC.

Fiscal & Funding Recommendations

- Secure funding for successful ECAC initiatives.

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Strengthen the engagement of the ECAC Parent Advisory Council (PAC).
- Extend ECAC membership invitations to fill gaps in expertise and diversity.

Communication Recommendations

- Develop communication plan to increase family and community engagement.
- Develop an onboarding and exit process for ECAC members.

Codification:

- Develop recommendations for increasing public-private investments in early childhood and strategies for maximizing resources.

GOAL 6: Early Childhood Data

Data is needed for system improvements, policy development, funding and best practices across New York State

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Identify areas where additional data is needed and implement systems to collect it.
- Create and use Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) to collect, integrate, maintain, store, and report information across programs and agencies.
- Identify universal early childhood indicators that measure well-being and ability to thrive and programmatic success.
- Collect and provide access to disaggregated data by race, geographic, gender etc. as standard practice.

Fiscal & Funding Recommendations

- Identify systems that need funding to accomplish data integration goals.

Codification:

- Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry, including an assessment of the availability of high-quality pre-kindergarten services for low-income children in the state.
- Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing federal, state, and local child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.

MONITORING PROGRESS

This 3-year strategic plan is realistically ambitious, especially with respect to expectations for the ECAC's provision of advice to the Governor on how to build a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that will ensure success for all young children.

The ECAC recognizes progress on all the priorities and strategies may not advance at the same rate. Monitoring progress regularly will indicate the extent to which the plan's goals are met and inform how to adapt and improve the plan accordingly. To do so, the ECAC will:

- Ensure that activities are being performed within the defined parameters.
- Ensure that activities are being developed in accordance with the values that guide the ECAC.
- Record and track all priorities and action plans created as part of meeting the Strategic Plan goals.
- Provide quarterly updates on the progress of the Strategic Plan's implementation, including barriers and adjustments needed.