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Quality Assessment and Control of Early Childhood Education

Access to quality early childhood education is a public problem that affects families in both the Capital Region and throughout the state of New York. In addressing this public problem through policy change to make quality early learning programs more accessible to all demographics in the Capital Region, the hope is that future achievement gaps will be significantly lessened.

Scope of the Problem

Many may be quick to say that access to affordable childcare is the biggest issue facing the Capital Region in regards to early childhood education; but in reality, after speaking with the Early Care & Learning Council's director of policy, Jessica Shapiro, it is clear that the problem goes further than merely providing inexpensive childcare services for lower-income areas. The true public problem that we must work to address throughout the state of New York has to do with accessibility of inexpensive *quality* childcare options that focus on effective early learning development (Shapiro 2016). To elaborate, the problem surrounding early childhood education is a two-fold one in which quality programs must be expanded throughout the state, while these programs must simultaneously be made affordable for all demographics.

When discussed in this brief, early learning development refers to children ages 0-3. As stated, the main issues that many of our community partners identify as most prominent in the Capital Region when discussing early childhood education is access to and affordability of quality programs. According to The Early Care & Learning Council, a statewide non-profit organization interested in issues surrounding early care and education, “75% of brain growth and 85% of intellect, personality and social

skills [are] develop[ed] before age five” (Early 2013). Moreover, through their Race to 10,000 campaign and program, Trinity Alliance, a Capital Region non-profit organization, has found that, “Many children who live in urban communities start school with a command of only 900 words, versus their middle income counterparts who start school with more than 10,000 words.” It is this disparity in early childhood education that leads to inequality among these disadvantaged groups (Race 2012). For these reasons, the assessment and the control of quality early learning development within childcare centers are prominent issues facing the capital region in terms of early childhood education, and are the public problems that should be addressed through policy action.



Past Policy

In 2010, the New York State legislature passed bill number A08827A, which relates to the enforcement of child care safety and standard; but the content of this bill relates mainly to defining

different classes of childcare providers and establishing safety standards within these classes (NY Assembly 2009). The New York State then passed bill number A07591C in 2012, which relates to early childhood education in daycare centers (NY Assembly 2011). This bill gives the responsibility of reviewing early childhood education standards for all children ages 0-5 “including daycare centers” to the Department of Education, the Office of Child and Family Services, and the Department of Health (2011). Surprisingly, the bill only requires each of these departments to submit one report on the state of early childhood education in New York, and did not require any of these departments to take any further action after this report was submitted to the state.

Federally, the Obama administration has moved to advance the development of quality child care with the signing of the Childcare Developmental Block Grant in 2014. This grant provides assistance to low-income families who need help providing their children with quality childcare, which is a push towards improving access to quality early childhood education nationally (CCDF 2016). This act is a reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Fund Act which was enacted in 1996, and provides funding to states through to help subsidize childcare for low-income families, while also assessing and improving the quality of childcare.

Current Policy

The most significant recent policy change in early childhood legislation is the institution and funding of QUALITYstarsNY throughout the state in 2012. The program was initially piloted in 2010 using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act federal funds, and received a more

extensive investment of \$4 million through the NYS Department of Education in 2012 (Shapiro 2012). More recently, QUALITYstarsNY received a line item in the 2015 budget, which ensures funding for the program in upcoming years (Shapiro 2016). QUALITYstarsNY is a five star statewide childcare

rating system that strives to provide accurate information to parents regarding price and quality of childcare providers while simultaneously promoting quality improvement (Quality 2015). In brief, childcare providers receive a rating based on a five star scale, which is determined through both self-assessment and direct observation. The funding of this program is critical in assessing early childhood education because it provides the state a means to monitor and assess the quality of childcare providers throughout the state.



It is also important that home visiting be mentioned when discussing policy concerning early childhood education. Many families are either unable to or do not choose to send their children to an early learning development center. In these cases, it is essential that the state ensure that such children are raised in a comfortable learning environment. In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the Healthy Families New York home visiting program, having three program sites in the capital region, will receive \$23.2 million in funding to provide “home-based service to expectant families and new parents, beginning prenatally or shortly after the birth of the child” (Healthy 2015). Other home visiting programs that receive state funding are as follows: Nurse-Family Partnership, The Parent-Child Home Program, Parents as Teachers, and Early Head Start (Schuyler 2015). Among other things, these programs serve to ensure that expecting parents receive important information regarding early learning development, which is important as to address children that are not placed in a early childhood education center.

While assessing and controlling the quality of early childhood education is necessary, this policy priority runs hand in hand with the state’s ability to make quality early childhood education accessible and affordable for lower income families. Currently in New York State, any family with an income lower than 200% of the federal poverty line is eligible



for childcare assistance. Moreover, New York State invested \$916 million in childcare subsidies in the 2013-2014 fiscal year. Of that funding, \$161 million was seen through state funded subsidies, while the rest was pass-through federal funding (Legislative 2014). Of these funds, \$270 million are allocated to local districts, which poses a major issue for those in need of assistance, as districts are then able to set eligibility requirements, which in many counties results in a less access to child care subsidies for low income households (Empire 2015).

Policy Options or Model Programs

Charter Colleges of Early Education

The Brookings Institute suggests establishing such charter colleges of early education to establish clear expectations of knowledge and skills that a child care provider must master to provide substantive early learning services for children ages 0-3. In making this policy change, New York can eventually require that all daycare providers hire professionals who have a degree in early learning development, just as public school teachers are required to have to have bachelors degrees and state teaching certificates (Carey 2011).

Require Biannual Assessment

By extending bill number A07591C which was passed in 2012, the State Assembly would require the Department of Education, the Office of Child and Family Services, and the Department of Health to produce biannual reports on the state of early childhood education in New York. This policy option is feasible and would help identify problems within early childhood education networks.

Key Organizations

Early childhood education affects all people in New York State because the quality of these centers and programs directly influence the cognitive development of future generations. For this reason, there are many different organizations interested in quality early childhood education both locally and Statewide.

- **Early Childhood Advisory Council:** Established in 2009 to provide council to the government in addressing issues surrounding early learning development in New York State, the ECAC is the comprised of experts in different childhood development fields which represent a diverse group of organizations interested in supporting early childhood development.
- **Capital District Child Care Coordinating Council:** As an agency through the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the council is the agency responsible for providing information and services to both parents and childcare providers interested in finding and providing quality early childhood education.
- **Early Care & Learning Council:** Statewide, not-for-profit, membership organization interested in providing equal access to quality early care and education throughout the State of New York
- **Winning Beginning:** Statewide coalition which promotes high-quality, affordable and accessible early care and learning service for all New York families, comprised of a diverse membership.

Requirement of Home Visiting Services

The state may consider requiring all parents to utilize certain educational services that Healthy Families New York offers before bearing a child. Funding to this program may need to be increased in order for this policy to be implemented, but it will ensure that parents have a basic knowledge of proper early learning development practices that foster healthy cognitive development.

Universal Childcare

In 2014, while New York State acknowledged that families with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty line need assistance with childcare, more than half of eligible infants went unserved on the year (Legislative 2014). Being that 75% of a child's cognitive ability is developed before the age of five, it is essential that we make the expansion of access to quality early child education an educational priority.

Child Care Expense Tax Credits

In 2008, Louisiana implemented a School Readiness Tax Credit which encourages the utilization of higher quality child care providers. To do this, the state offers a higher percentage of a set childcare tax credit to parents who use providers that are ranked higher on the states Quality Assessment System. This legislation supports tax payers with young children, encourages the use of high quality early learning programs, and encourages providers to use the establish Quality Assessment System (Louisiana 2016)

Child Care Provider Tax Credits

The Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credit also offers tax credits to child care directors and staff members based on the quality ranking of their child care establishment. This legislation encourages child care centers to improve the quality of early learning, while also providing a tax break to providers of child care (Louisiana 2016). It is important to encouraged trained and skilled professionals into early childhood education, and this tax break incentivizes this decision.

Glossary of Terms

Childcare: The action of looking after a young child. Childcare is provided by parental figures, but may also be provided through private childcare services.

Early Childhood Education: Early learning development programs and services aimed to educate children ages 0-3 with proper social and cognitive skills.

Home Visiting Program: Evidence-based home visiting program that offers educational services to expecting parents and new families.

QUALITYstarsNY: Five star rating service for childcare providers in the capital region aimed to educate those in search of quality early childhood education and improve the standard of early childhood education.

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Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

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