



## An Early Childhood Workforce for the 21st Century: Professional Development is Key

*Children's early development profoundly influences their life trajectories. Researchers have long documented the positive outcomes of high-quality early childhood education, including readiness for school, greater academic achievement, higher rates of school completion, lower rates of incarceration, and higher incomes.<sup>1</sup> Labor economists point to the substantial economic benefits of investing in early care and education.<sup>2</sup> High quality, however, cannot be achieved without a first-rate workforce. The quality of early childhood settings, research confirms, is linked to the quality of their staffs.<sup>3</sup> As the city pursues a host of promising initiatives on behalf of children and their families, the professional development of all early childhood educators must be front and center.*



This brief examines the relationship of professional development to quality; the current status of professional development across the nation; and the landscape of professional development for New York City's early childhood educators. This portrait of NYC's workforce is based on a needs assessment of the early childhood workforce,

### WHAT WE KNOW

- High-quality early childhood programs, staffed by a well-trained, stable, and well-compensated workforce, produce better child outcomes, viable future citizens, and substantial returns on public investment.
- A large percentage of NYC's teachers report that they were "very poorly" or "somewhat poorly" prepared by their education for their work in the field.
- The experience of professional development in NYC varies across programs and positions, diverging significantly between community- and school-based centers.
- The workshop model still dominates NYC's professional development landscape, in spite of the recognition of the need for credit-based sequential training.
- Mentoring, an effective strategy for enhancing teacher and classroom quality, is more prevalent among New York City's school-based teachers.
- Quality control of trainers and training is minimal in NYC, with disparities between the Core Body of Knowledge and training priorities as well as inconsistency among courses and curricula.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct further research to examine pre-service preparation and support radical transformation of content and delivery.
- Establish universal access to high-quality, credit-based sequential training opportunities across all early childhood settings.
- Align in-service training content with the Core Body of Knowledge and NYS training priorities.
- Design and experiment with new paradigms of professional development that will clearly articulate pathways for progress and produce a world-class workforce.
- Encourage providers of professional development to apply for the state's new trainers' credential and join the statewide Trainers' Registry.
- Support state and local implementation of a professional development system that builds accountability and informs quality.

conducted by the NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI) in 2006, as well as a more recent study of center-based early childhood practitioners —including teachers, assistant teachers, and directors—conducted by PDI and the Cornell University Early Childhood Program<sup>4</sup> The brief also provides a series of recommendations for policymakers as they seek to address the needs of the city’s youngest residents and those who serve them.

### Professional Development and Quality

Research has long held that higher levels of formal education and specialized training in early education and child development produce higher quality in early childhood settings.<sup>5</sup> Studies have shown that children educated by teachers with a bachelor’s degree and specialized training in child development and early education are more sociable, exhibit more sophisticated use of language, and perform at higher levels on cognitive tasks than those cared for by less-qualified adults.<sup>6</sup> Other teacher characteristics, such as membership in professional associations, attitudes, and self-reported quality practices are potential predictors of early care and education quality.<sup>7</sup> In addition, administrative practices set the context for high-quality programs; directors’ formal education, specialized early childhood training, and experience and education in management are all linked to quality.<sup>8</sup>

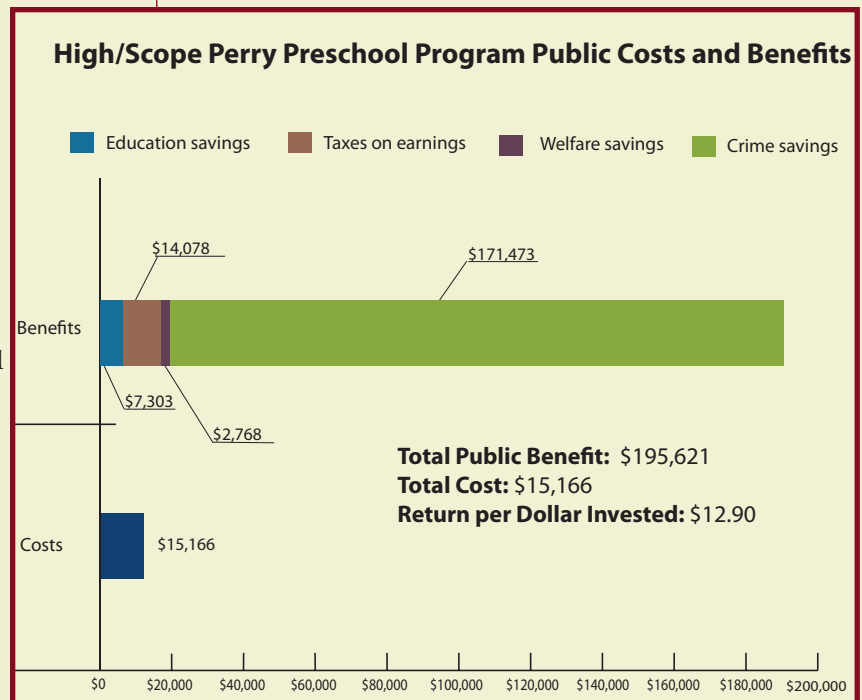
The requirements of NCLB, with its emphasis on standards and accountability, have radically altered classroom instructional practices in preschools and kindergartens, many in the field contend.<sup>9</sup> Standards are predicated on the science of learning. Early learning standards, which have been developed and are under development in many states, including New York, are setting the bar higher for expectations of early childhood educators, who will be increasingly responsible for children’s outcomes.<sup>10</sup> For all young children—including English Language Learners (ELL), those with special needs, and those in poverty—practice grounded in child development and child-centered pedagogy has been found to be most effective.<sup>11</sup> The shift from traditional child-centered curricula to more scripted, didactic approaches imposes new demands on teacher preparation programs and practitioners who have specialized and are certified in early childhood education (ECE).

the relationship between professional development and the quality of early childhood settings.<sup>12</sup> The field has rapidly converged on the idea that all pre-kindergarten (pre-K) teachers should hold a bachelor’s degree,<sup>13</sup> and specialize in early education and child development. Such “status variables,” while important, provide an incomplete picture of what is needed to produce a first-rate workforce. Further exploration of the content of teacher preparation and best practice in the classroom as well as processes that link the two—including mentoring and on-site technical assistance—is high on the current research agenda.<sup>14</sup> Also critical, some argue, is a more careful analysis of the actual interactions between children and teachers. Classroom observations are known to yield more direct feedback about the quality and effectiveness of professional development.<sup>15</sup>

### Professional Development Across The Nation

With the proliferation of school readiness initiatives, early childhood education and workforce development have ascended to the national agenda. Also driving the agenda is a growing, and ever more vocal, body of labor economists demonstrating the substantial returns on public investment in high-quality early childhood education, including lower costs for remedial education; increased rates of high school completion; enhanced ability to meet future labor force demands; lower rates of incarceration; and higher incomes. It has been estimated that every dollar invested in high-quality ECE will save taxpayers up to \$13 in future costs.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 1



To better illuminate the specific aspects of professional preparation that positively influence children’s outcomes, researchers are now delving more deeply into

\*Source: *Early Childhood Education for All: A Wise Investment* (Legal Momentum’s Family Initiative and the MIT Workplace Center, 2005)

In the past year and a half, Congress has generated a significant volume of early childhood legislation, including two bills that provide incentives to states to create professional development and career systems as well as another piece of legislation that requires states to submit teacher quality plans, and calls for peer reviews in grant evaluation and accountability for teacher preparation programs and grants to institutions to create Academies for Faculty Excellence.<sup>17</sup>

### *System-Building Initiatives*

As policymakers embrace early learning standards and new federal requirements are enacted, states are becoming increasingly involved in the issue of ECE workforce development. Many are designing the framework for comprehensive professional development systems, working on the components of infrastructure; core body of knowledge; access and outreach; qualifications, credentials, and pathways; and funding (See Figure 2). To date, at least 23 states—including New Jersey and Pennsylvania—have implemented some type of trainer and/or training approval process or a trainer registry.

Other states are creating practitioner registries and career ladder models.<sup>18</sup> And many are also developing targeted initiatives that link professional development and compensation. The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) Early Childhood Project, which was developed in North Carolina in 1990 and has now been adopted by 22 states, provides partial scholarships for higher education, and increased compensation, in the form of a one-time bonus or an ongoing pay raise, in exchange for a commitment to stay in the field for a specified amount of time.<sup>19</sup> While New York has not been in the vanguard of this work, the state has made significant progress, over the past two years, in planning and committing resources to system-building.

### *Challenges*

Despite this progress, the quality, content, and accessibility of professional development continue to be significant challenges for the field. Existing federal and state programs and policies have different requirements for professional development as well as diverse mechanisms and levels of support for training, educating, and supporting the early childhood workforce.<sup>20</sup> Geographic isolation and scarce fiscal and educational resources stymie efforts to train, recruit, and retain well-qualified teachers in many areas of the United States where they are most needed.<sup>21</sup> The qualifications and preparation of the workforce are equally diverse, with members at dramatically different points on the career ladder. Moreover, the existing paradigm for professional development, the “workshop

approach,” continues to dominate—in spite of ample evidence of its ineffectiveness. Long on awareness-building and quick training techniques, the workshop’s superficial content does little to foster theoretical understanding of child development and early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, much less support teachers in application of knowledge to practice.<sup>22</sup>

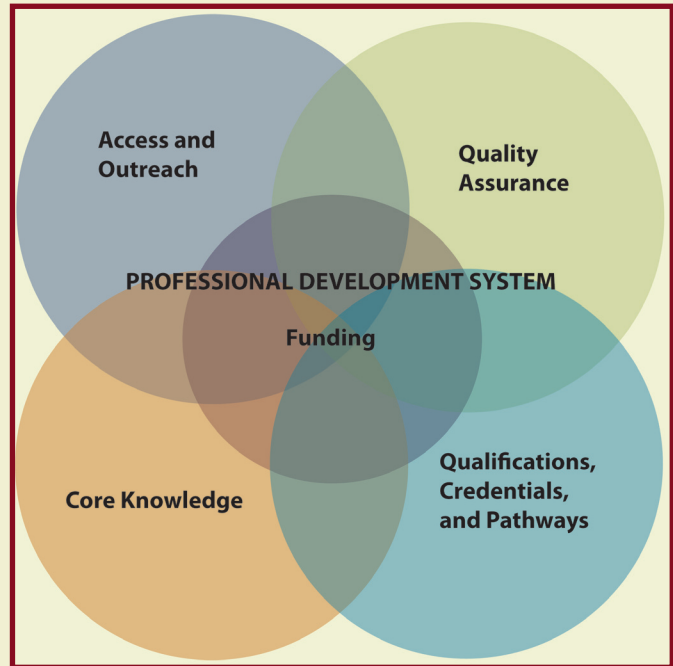


Figure 2

### *Teacher Training*

While the field struggles to meet emerging standards, and accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) demands higher levels and more rigorous content of formal education, the capacity for training new teachers remains low. Less than a third of colleges and universities that offer associate’s and bachelor’s degrees have ECE programs. Approximately 1,200 ECE programs—in two- and four-year institutions of higher education—educate the early childhood workforce.<sup>23</sup> Private and public community colleges serve almost half of all undergraduates in the United States, more than 50 percent of whom are students of color.<sup>24</sup> Nearly 40 percent of early childhood staff are educated at these institutions, which are more accessible and affordable than four-year colleges and universities.<sup>25</sup>

Recent studies of teacher preparation programs have highlighted the significant challenges faced by two- and four-year institutions in bringing the ECE workforce up to speed. Most programs, guided by state licensure and certification standards, prepare students to work with children of a wide range of ages—from infants through elementary school students—sacrificing in-depth coverage for breadth.<sup>26</sup> Course content and practicum



requirements vary considerably across institutions. Associate's programs, for example, are more likely than bachelor's programs to require one course or more in infant/toddler care and program administration. Bachelor's programs, on the other hand, are more likely to focus practicum requirements on key content areas, such as cultural and linguistic diversity and children with disabilities.<sup>27</sup> In addition, current ECE programs scarcely meet the need for training in management and leadership. A quarter of bachelor's and master's programs do not require coursework in administration, and 40 percent offer no courses in adult learning and development, in spite of the fact that many ECE teachers supervise others from their first day of employment.

Academic policies and practices that limit transfer and articulation of credits are also barriers to moving students smoothly and efficiently through teacher preparation programs, as are the students' personal and professional responsibilities. Nearly 40 percent of students in associate's ECE programs and almost 50 percent in CDA or other certificate programs work full-time. Unsurprisingly, work and family conflicts constitute a major obstacle to retention.<sup>28</sup>

### **Professional Development in New York City**

*The findings of PDI's needs assessment of New York City's early childhood workforce, conducted in 2006, as well as our more recent workforce study, parallel many of the national trends and challenges, including diverse education and training requirements; minimal quality control of trainers and training; gaps in the supply of accessible training; and the overall lack of cohesion of professional development options.<sup>29</sup>*

### **Requirements**

Education and training requirements vary, depending on the regulatory agency involved in the program's operation. All licensed community-based centers are subject to the regulations of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Those centers funded by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) are subject to their requirements as well. Community- and school-based universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) programs have additional educational requirements, stipulated by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and New York City's Department of Education (DOE).

The DOHMH requires preschool teachers to be permanently certified. Individuals may be hired with an associate's degree but must be enrolled in a study plan leading to teacher certification. Infant/toddler teachers, as of September, 2008, are required to have an associate's degree in early childhood education, or a CDA or GED and experience in the field as well as a study plan leading to an associate's degree in early childhood

education within seven years. UPK teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood or a related field. As of September, 2004, all UPK teachers in New York State and New York City are required to have NYS Teacher Certification. Teachers in NYC's community-based UPK programs must have a bachelor's degree in early childhood or a related field and a study plan to obtain certification within three years. All teachers pursuing certification are required to take the Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (LAST), the Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (AST-W), and the Content Specialty Test (CST).

Under current DOHMH regulations, assistant teachers must have at least a high school diploma, a CDA, or 60 college credits. In community-based UPK programs, those with a high school diploma are required to have college credit hours after three or more years of employment. Their counterparts working in the schools must have a minimum of a high school diploma or GED and are required to take the NYS Assessment of Teaching Assistant Skills (NYSATAS) exam.

The educational and licensing requirements of early childhood directors also vary, depending on the regulatory agency responsible for oversight. Directors in child care centers with more than 40 children, for example, are required to have a NYS Teaching Certificate in early childhood education. Directors in infant programs are required to have two years of group teaching experience and a bachelor's degree with a NYS Teaching Certificate in early childhood or a master's degree. Early Head Start or Head Start programs require that directors have a permanent NYS Teaching Certificate. UPK standards require that directors in community-based programs have a valid NYS Teaching Certificate in early childhood. School-based UPK programs are licensed by the State Education Department and are overseen by school principals that have master's degrees in educational leadership or a related field, a NYS School Administrator's Credential, and a minimum of two years of school-based approved experience in an administrative position—but lack critical expertise in early childhood.

Requirements for ongoing education and training—like those for pre-service preparation—remain far from uniform across settings and positions. Currently, preschool teachers with professional certification in community-based centers as well as UPK teachers in school-based programs are required to complete 175 hours of continuing education every five years to maintain their credentials. Recent revisions to the Health Code of the DOHMH's Bureau of Day Care now require that all early childhood staff—including assistant teachers, teacher aides, and staff in infant/toddler

rooms—undergo 15 hours of training every two years.

### Sources of Professional Development

Professional development for New York City’s ECE practitioners takes place under a number of different auspices. Primary sources of education and training include the 30 public and private colleges and universities in the New York metropolitan area that offer associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s programs in early childhood education; ACS, which manages most of the city’s Head Start programs and other child care programs for low-income families; the Bureau of Day Care within DOHMH, which regulates public and private child care services; the DOE, which coordinates pre-kindergarten services, including school- and community-based UPK programs; the city’s five child care resource and referral agencies; and cultural and community-based organizations.

Head Start programs are permitted to suspend operations for up to nine days annually for staff training, while non-Head start programs that receive government subsidies through ACS may provide up to three days of training. Historically, non-Head Start ACS-subsidized programs have not taken advantage of the full three-day option. Data documenting requests for training in 2004-5 show that of the 248 centers that made such requests, half did not propose to close their centers for the full three days, and 24 percent requested only one day’s closure. Most striking, nearly 40 percent of the total number of ACS non-Head Start programs requested no training days. While ACS has seen a gradual upswing in requests for days, this lack of commitment to professional development is disturbing. UPK programs require their teachers to have four days of training, although a program may designate more than four days, providing they are not part of the school calendar.<sup>30</sup>

### Quality Control

Historically, New York’s quality control of trainers and training has been minimal. New York is conspicuously absent from the map of states—25 and growing—that have developed active trainer registry systems.<sup>31</sup> Disparities exist between the training priorities designated by the state Office of Children and Families Services (OCFS) and the content of the Core Body of Knowledge. Consistency is lacking among courses and curricula on the same topic, and most practitioners engaged in training that meets the 15- to 30-hour mandate do not ascend a professional career ladder. Moreover, with the exception of individuals who provide NYS Mandated Medication Administration Training (MAT), NYS Mandated Health & Safety Training, and professional development for school-based UPK staff, trainers are not required to submit

any documentation of their background, experience, or course content to the state.

Figure 3

Workshops Attended by Teachers and Assistant Teachers		
	School-Based	Community-Based
<b>Teaching Practices</b>		
Creative Arts	77%	35%
Language/Literacy	65%	38%
Curriculum Development	58%	33%
Assessment/Observational Skills	48%	32%
Developmentally Appropriate Practice	44%	21%
Behavior Management/Discipline	37%	32%
<b>Children and Families</b>		
Child Development	35%	21%
English Language Learners	22%	6%
Infants & Toddlers	7%	14%
Special Needs/ Special Education	19%	22%
Working with Families	23%	14%
<b>Children at Risk</b>		
Abuse/Maltreatment	27%	39%
Community Violence	28%	14%
<b>Certification/Credentials</b>		
Certification Test Preparation	21%	10%
CDA (Child Development Associate)	4%	8%
<b>Requirements</b>		
Mandated Reporting	35%	22%
CPR	18%	50%
Health and Safety	10%	16%
<b>Other Workshops</b>	7%	6%

\*Source: *Learning about the Workforce* (New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, 2007)

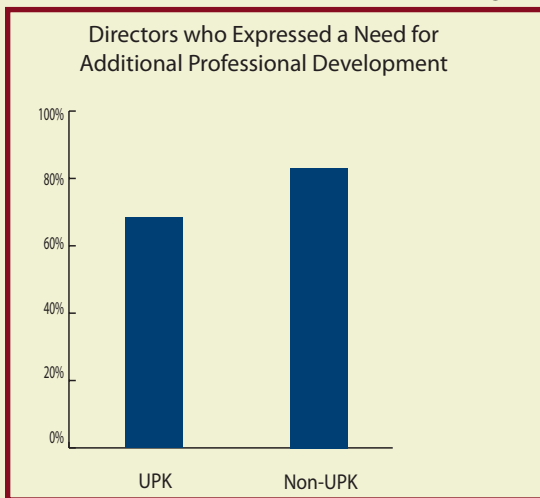
### ECE Educators’ Experience

In spite of recognition of the need for credit-bearing, sequential training, the workshop model still dominates New York City’s professional development landscape. There is no rhyme or reason to professional development. Who takes what, and why, remains undefined, and often professional development has little relevance to what goes on in the classroom. Teachers attend required trainings, but they rarely go beyond those offerings, compromising their own growth and development as well as that of the children and families they serve. New York City still lacks a coordinated system that effectively assesses professional development needs, tracks the trainers, and evaluates the effectiveness of the training.

As is the case with requirements and quality control, the experience of professional development varies across programs and positions, and diverges significantly between community- and school-based centers. PDI's workforce study found that most of the teachers and assistant teachers in community-based programs, and practically all of their counterparts in school-based programs claim to have attended a professional development workshop in the previous year. However, the focus of their professional development differs. School-based teachers and assistant teachers are more likely to attend workshops on creative arts, language/literacy, and curriculum development, while their community-based colleagues are more likely to attend workshops on CPR, abuse/maltreatment, and development (See Figure 3).

In addition, while mentoring is more prevalent among school-based teachers, more community-based teachers reported that they had acted as mentors themselves, and more than half expressed interest in being mentored. Mentoring is increasingly regarded as an effective strategy for easing the transition from pre- to in-service teaching, improving retention, and ultimately, overall teacher quality.<sup>32</sup> Research confirms that to enhance their knowledge and skills, teachers need ongoing opportunities to put their ideas into action under the guidance of well-qualified mentors.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 4



\*Source: *Learning about the Workforce* (New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, 2007)

Despite the education community's embrace of mentoring, however, little agreement exists about the definition of the purposes of mentoring, and what constitutes a "well-qualified" mentor. Further study of what mentors should know, how they support teachers, and the effects of their work on classroom practice would help set the direction for future initiatives.<sup>34</sup>

A larger proportion of community-based teachers (68 percent) and assistant teachers (75 percent) indicated a need for additional professional development than their counterparts in schools (54 percent of teachers; 70 percent of assistant teachers). The most frequently cited training needs for community-based educators were behavior management, curriculum development, learning differences/special education, and assessment/observation. Interestingly, school-based educators did not include curriculum development among their training needs, which may be attributable to their higher levels of education and certification.

Noteworthy, too, was the low level of priority given to ELL workshops, attended by 22 percent of school-based and only six percent of community-based teachers and assistant teachers. Nearly 90 percent of community-based teachers serve at least one English Language Learner, approximately ten percent more than their colleagues in school-based settings. Just about 80 percent of community-based teachers and 68 percent of those who are school-based reported Spanish as the first language spoken by their children. Other languages include Chinese, Korean, Urdu, Russian, Bengali, and Haitian.

Like those whom they supervise, most directors (92 percent) report having attended at least one professional development workshop during the previous year, and just about three quarters indicate a need for additional professional development (See Figure 4). Among the most common professional development workshops attended by directors are those on staff development, staff management, and child abuse/mandated reporting.

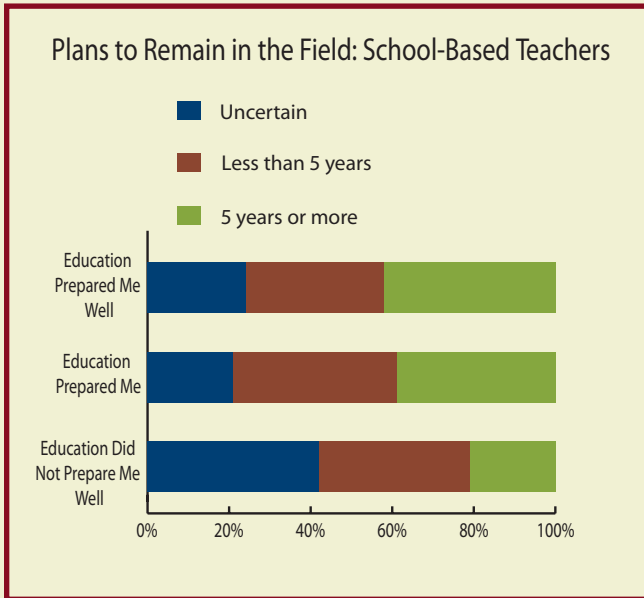
Additional training needs were reported in the areas of staff development and management and using assessments to document learning. Strikingly, a comparison of directors providing contracted services for New York City school districts with those who are not providing such services revealed that non-UPK directors were more likely to report needing additional professional development.

PDI's study also looked at a number of factors that predict teacher plans to remain in the field, including levels of compensation, job satisfaction and certification, and perceptions of how well their education had prepared them to work in the field. In school-based programs, teacher plans were linked with the perception of how well their education had prepared them for work in the field. Those with positive views of their educational preparation were more likely to plan to remain in the field for five or more years, and less likely to be uncertain about their future in the field. However,



a substantial percentage of teachers reported that they were “very poorly” and “somewhat poorly” prepared (See Figure 5). As faculty in institutions of higher education continue to develop ECE programs to meet the needs of the next generation of teachers, such data must be part of their deliberations.

Figure 5



\*Source: *Learning about the Workforce* (New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, 2007)

### Toward a Comprehensive System of Professional Development

How does New York City’s professional development measure up? Diverse requirements for pre-service and ongoing training and education still prevail across regulatory agencies. In spite of the need for credit-bearing, sequential training, the workshop model dominates. Disparities exist between training priorities and the content of the Core Body of Knowledge. Virtually anyone can train, and does, and consistency is lacking among courses and curricula on the same topic. Many teachers report the need for additional professional development, yet inequities persist in access, choice, and level of quality across settings. A comprehensive, systemic approach to professional development is an urgent priority.

Work is now in progress, both locally and at the state level, on many of the components of a comprehensive system of professional development. A Trainers’ Registry has been established. The New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYS AEYC), in collaboration with PDI, has designed a trainers’ credential, which is being piloted this fall. The design and planning for other system components are underway, along with a Quality Rating Improvement System (QUALITYstarsNY), a staple in a growing number of states. Nearly a hundred of the

city’s ECE programs have been accredited by NAEYC as part of the Quality New York initiative.<sup>35</sup> ACS and DOE are working together on issues of quality and equity in professional development for early childhood educators across settings.

All of these efforts represent critical steps in the right direction. However, the agenda is full, and much work remains. Further research must be conducted to examine pre-service preparation and support radical transformation of content and delivery. The city must intensify its efforts to establish universal access to training opportunities, and the content of that training must be aligned with the early childhood knowledge base and training priorities. Both the city and state must continue to provide strategic support for the design and implementation of comprehensive system components. Providers of professional development must be encouraged to become credentialed, registered participants in this system, bringing much-needed transparency and accountability to their work. New York City’s policies must support this work. A strong, well-prepared early childhood workforce is a smart investment for our children’s and the city’s future.

### ENDNOTES

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## New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute

*Developing Adults Working with Developing Children*

*The New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute is a public/private partnership that brings together a range of city agencies, a consortium of private funders, and the nation's largest urban university to build a comprehensive system of professional development for individuals who work with young children in New York City.*

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For the full studies, *Learning About the Learners* and *Learning About the Workforce*, go to [www.earlychildhoodnyc.org](http://www.earlychildhoodnyc.org)