

## Early Childhood and Primary Education

### Issues

- Staff compensation was identified as the area of greatest need by 50% of family child care providers, 60% of public school programs, and 70% of child care centers.
- Professional development was also cited as an area of need for 48% of child care centers and 60% of family child care providers, although not for public school programs. In general, family child care providers identified more areas of need, including comprehensive services (possibly because homes are serving a high proportion of at-risk children) and material resources.
- There is considerable evidence of variation in the patterns of early child care and education between rural and non-rural settings. These differences are at both the county and school district units of analysis with a consistent lag of services provided to the rural communities in comparison to the non-rural areas of NYS.
- According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the key components of a high-quality pre-K program are: 1) well educated teachers (minimum of a Child Development Associate credential); 2) small class/low teacher-child ratio, 3) research based curriculum aligned with K-12 standards, 4) engaged families, and 5) focus on the whole child (*i.e.*, health , nutrition).
- Studies indicate that there are really no clear standouts among the limited available pre-K curricula, suggesting that the quality of the implementation and environmental factors are more important than the actual curriculum selection.
- Kindergarten teachers report that about 20% of children entering kindergarten lack the social and emotional skills to be ready for school; for children from low-income families this is closer to 30%.
- Buffalo and Niagara Falls saw 468 students removed from the kindergarten classroom – for problem behaviors -- between the 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 school years, an average of 156 students a year, or about 5% of kindergarteners enrolled in these districts.
- Only 9% of the more than 11,000 child care/preschool centers in the US are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Curriculum models, regardless of their goals and the degree of flexibility in their implementation, are designed to promote uniformity across early childhood programs through the use of a prepared curriculum, consistent instructional techniques, and predictable child outcomes. Integrated curriculum models incorporate student assessments, students with special needs, and socio-emotional development.

- In light of uneven expectations for teachers' professional preparation and variability across the states in child care licensing standards, early childhood curriculum models can improve programmatic quality through the consistent implementation of well-articulated curriculum frameworks, thereby lifting the floor of program quality in early childhood education. Some experts, however, believe that by their design, curriculum models lower expectations for early childhood educators and diminish the professional responsibilities of early childhood teachers. To achieve consistency across sites, curriculum models operate by using predictable representations of teaching and learning, relying on fixed interpretations of the nature of children and teachers, and minimizing variation across sites. Teachers function less as reflective practitioners and more as technicians who implement others' educational ideas.
- Massachusetts and New York State pre-K program requirements fall short of benchmarks set by NIEER as follows:

| <b>NIEER Benchmark</b>   | <b>MA Meets Benchmark ?</b>  | <b>NY Meets Benchmark?</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Comprehensive learning standards   | YES  | YES   |
| BA for all teachers  | NO. BA for public programs, but no degree requirement for non-public       | NO. MA for public, but Associates degree or CDA (Child Development Associate) for nonpublic |
| Teachers should have specialized Pre-K training  | NO. Early childhood Pre-k-2nd for public; 3 academic credits for nonpublic | YES   |
| Assistant teachers should be CDA (Child Development Associate) or higher                 | NO. Public requires only high school diploma, no requirement for nonpublic | NO. Level 1 cert. for public, high school diploma for nonpublic                             |
| Teachers compete at least 15 hours/year in-service training                              | YES  | YES   |
| Maximum class size of 20   | YES  | YES   |
| Staff-child ratio 1:10 or better   | YES  | YES   |
| Screening /referrals to include vision, hearing health, and at least one support service | YES  | YES (also dental and developmental)   |
| At least 1 meal/day provided   | NO, varies by time of program day.   | NO, varies by time of program day.  |

- In New York State, there is a need to assure adequate staff training in state agencies that have significant contacts with persons with learning disabilities.
- IEP (Individualized Education Program) Diploma Criticism: The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State Board of Trustees recommends that name 'IEP Diploma' be discontinued and a multi-tiered approach to high school completion eliminating all references to the IEP and meeting the needs of all students must be implemented. Many students with learning disabilities, Aspergers, and mental health disorders have been misdirected to IEP Diplomas. They are unable to go to community colleges, to the armed forces, or be hired by

many employers. The IEP Diploma as currently designed is not a marketable diploma and is viewed as a certificate of attendance. At the same time, there is a group of students with and without disabilities that are not able to successfully meet the testing requirements for a Regents or Local Diploma. For them, alternative diploma tracks should be developed and available, including a Career-Tech High School Diploma that is at the same level as a Regents Diploma. The student's IEP should have a clear direction regarding post-secondary plans. This should be carefully considered when planning the student's curriculum, classes, and programs each year. It should include a group discussion, not only with the student's guidance counselor, special education teacher(s) and parent(s), but also most importantly, the student. Many students with learning disabilities could be successful in Regents and local diploma tracks if they received the appropriate early identification, early intervention programs, especially in the areas of reading and language arts; in addition, with appropriate accommodations and compensatory strategies being taught, many more students would be able to meet the testing requirements of the Regents or local diplomas.