

Rethinking Child Care

An Integrated Plan

for Early Childhood Development in New York City

October 2005

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

High quality early learning programs can and do improve children's chances for later success in school and in life.

New York City's Administration for Children's Services' mission is to foster the healthy and positive development of children. The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has long recognized that early childhood development programs play a critical role in supporting young children's development, and evidence has shown that high quality early learning programs can lead to later success.¹ The Child Care and Head Start (CCHS) Division of ACS is committed to ensuring that New York City's low-income young children have positive early experiences. Over the next several years, the Division plans to better align its services and use its resources to provide a broad continuum of high quality child care options to meet the developmental needs of children and to support parents. ACS is committed to putting children and their developmental needs first in early childhood services and to supporting children within the real contexts and needs of their families and communities.

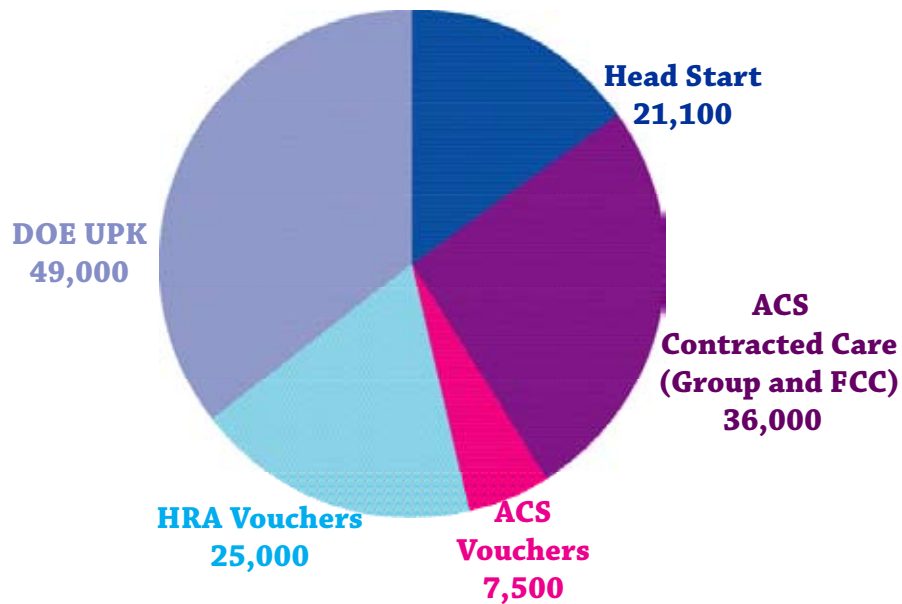
ACS does not uphold this commitment alone. In fact, publicly supported early care and education in New York City is comprised of a variety of child care and early education programs administered by three major City agencies: the Administration for Children's Services, the Human Resources Administration, and the Department of Education. In addition, the Department of Health licenses all child care centers, including private child care. In total, more than 135,000 young children attend some form of publicly supported early care and education. New York City has made a significant commitment to its youngest citizens; yet the delivery of early care and education services can be improved by clarifying priorities, streamlining administration, improving coordination, and enhancing quality.

ACS recognizes the need to examine its operations in order to provide more effective and efficient programs in concert with other city early care and education services. Therefore, the strategic planning process has established broad goals for improved services and realistic, actionable steps to achieve immediate and enduring change. This plan guides our work over the next several years and will hold the division accountable for accomplishing the changes outlined in the plan. Since ACS's core values of family and community-centered services have long been the basis of early childhood care in the city, this is a natural step for Children's Services' continuing reform efforts.

In response to current funding constraints and historical lack of coordination across the City for early care and education services, Rethinking Child Care aims to improve CCHS and the early care and education system in New York City. Several principles for an early care and education system guide this work:

- ❑ **Developmentally-focused:** Fostering children’s development is the primary goal in early childhood care and education.
- ❑ **Community-based and Family-focused:** Child Care and Head Start programs should respond to family and community needs and strengthen vital neighborhood institutions that deliver services to children and families and support families as young children’s most significant developmental influence.
- ❑ **Accessibility:** Child Care and Head Start should provide many front doors, easy access, and comprehensive information for families who are choosing early care and education.
- ❑ **Continuity:** Child Care and Head Start should promote the stability of care arrangements, with seamless and developmentally appropriate transitions in care.
- ❑ **Efficiency:** Child Care and Head Start services should be fully utilized.
- ❑ **Coherence:** Child Care and Head Start procedures for contracted and voucher systems should allow these systems to work together, integrated at the program level and administrative level, and with the HRA voucher system.
- ❑ **Quality and Accountability:** Child Care and Head Start should make programmatic decisions based on high quality data and performance measurement.

Early Childhood Care and Education Services in New York City – A Snapshot



Six strategic goals will help Child Care and Head Start to fulfill its mission and better serve young children and families with high quality early childhood development services.

Goal 1. Resources and Community Needs: Analyze and respond to communities’ early care and education needs by reallocating services and by using a strategic combination of contracted care and vouchers to achieve full utilization of resources.

Public resources for young children’s developmental care are scarce. In fact, per-child spending for children in the early years is roughly only a tenth of the per-pupil spending for children in K-12 education; \$1,300 compared to approximately \$11,900.² A great many families with young children need support to meet the dual demands of both nurturing and providing for their children. To provide some of this much needed assistance to families, a complex web of services aims to ensure that many of New York City’s young children have early care and education experiences. Rethinking Child Care’s most pressing goal is to establish a mix of services that promotes full utilization of resources, makes contracted care and vouchers efficient and complementary, and responds to changes in communities. Most importantly, the achievement of this goal will serve more of New York City’s children and their families. To improve the utilization of services, CCHS has set the following two objectives:

- ☑ **Objective I – Shifting Services:** Expand services in areas with greatest unmet needs and target underserved age groups.
- ☑ **Objective II – Maximize Resources:** Modify contracts to reflect enrollment and enable programs to enroll voucher and private-pay families.

Goal 2. Community-Based Enrollment: Improve eligibility determination, enrollment, and recertification processes to better support the needs of young children and their families.

Families face significant obstacles in finding appropriate and stable care arrangements for their children, and accessing the subsidies they need for securing this care. Complex enrollment and eligibility procedures discourage some families from applying for early care and education programs. Because working parents do not always have the time, resources, or access to information to locate high quality care, they often make child care arrangements they find far from ideal.

We have heard a great many parents’ stories of making desperate care arrangements, leaving their children in settings of poor quality, or even potentially harmful situations.³ CCHS must ensure that the process of applying for early care and education services is as easy as possible and aids, rather than hinders families’ efforts to meet their children’s needs. To better facilitate parents’ child care choices, CCHS has identified the following three objectives related to enrollment and eligibility:

- ☑ **Objective I – Enrollment Access:** Ease access to early childhood services with simplified forms, streamlined eligibility, and community-based enrollment.
- ☑ **Objective II – Continuity of Care:** Enable families to choose and maintain stable care arrangements and make developmentally appropriate transitions in care smooth for young children.
- ☑ **Objective III – Parent Information:** Provide parents with consistent and comprehensive information about enrollment and eligibility for all early childhood programs.

Goal 3. **Quality and Accountability:** Improve and monitor the quality of early care and education services and devote more resources to quality enhancement.

Young children thrive when they have responsive, nurturing, and stable care relationships. Despite broad recognition of the importance of high quality care for young children, children throughout New York City attend some programs of questionable quality. With streamlined eligibility, Children’s Services may shift resources from eligibility determination to enhancing quality. Rethinking Child Care improves program quality by identifying features of high quality programs, measuring program quality more rigorously and consistently, and using these measures to supply necessary support to care providers. Because New York City has diverse early care and education services, Rethinking Child Care identifies specific quality enhancement initiatives for providers in both center-based and home-based settings. An effective early care and education system that favors technical assistance and results-based incentives beyond enforcement of basic requirements will be better able to achieve considerable quality enhancement.

This element of the plan also seeks to support parents as their children’s most important teacher. Working parents may have little time and resources to devote to a search for child care, and information about the quality of child care programs is not easily accessible. To help parents make informed decisions about the nature of their children’s care arrangements and choose the best care options available, CCHS seeks to develop a unified performance measurement system will help parents know more about the quality of their children’s care.

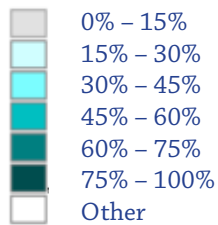
- ❑ **Objective I – Performance**
Measurement: Establish a set of quality standards and a performance measurement tool to evaluate all publicly-funded contracted child care programs.
- ❑ **Objective II – Technical Assistance:**
Establish mechanisms to help programs raise quality.
- ❑ **Objective III – Home-based Child Care:** Focus on improving the quality and oversight of home-based providers.

The quality of children’s early relationships and environments has a substantial impact on their wellbeing, particularly during the early years when development occurs at a remarkable pace.

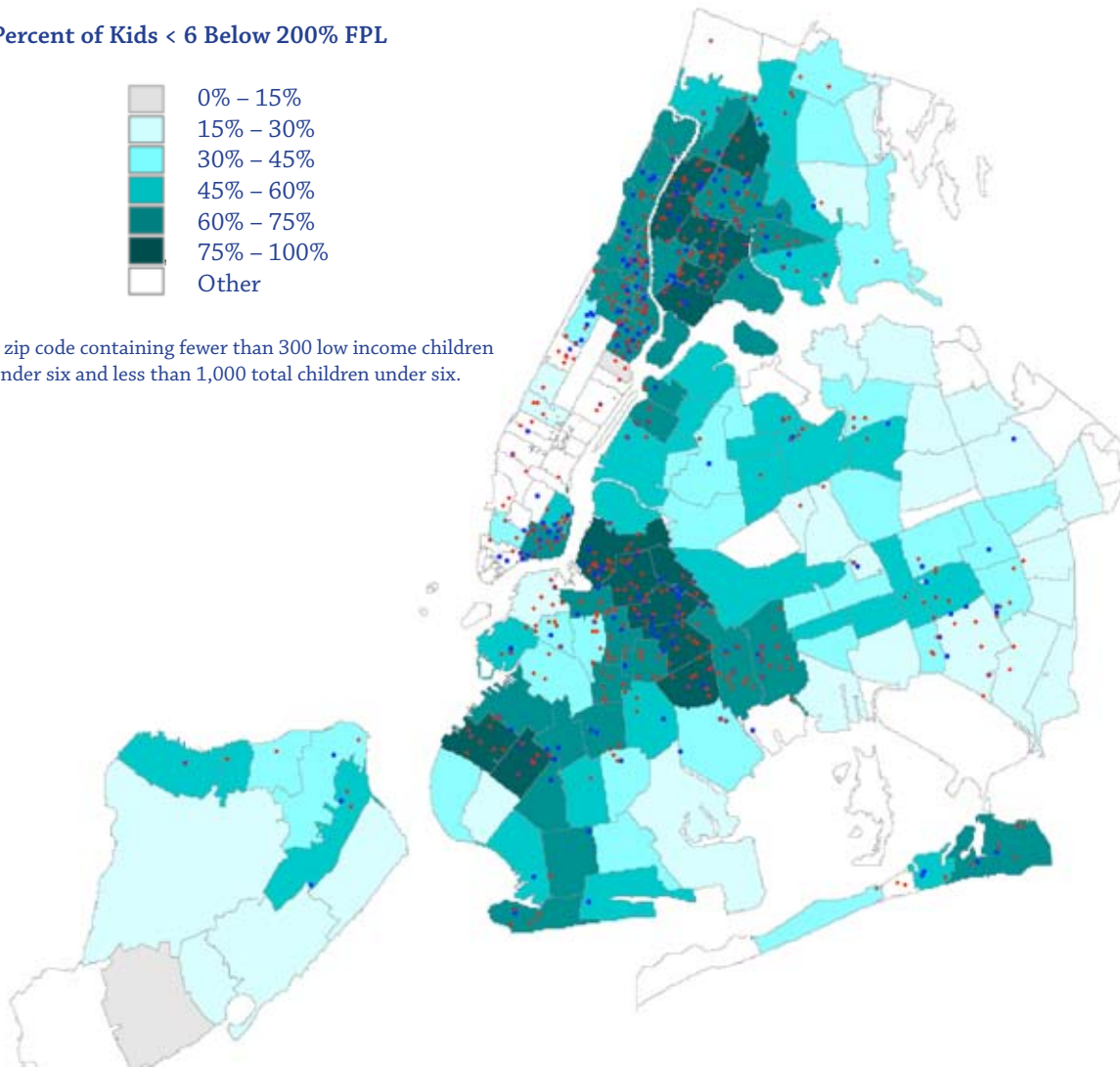
The Needs of Young Children in New York City

- ◆ ACS CC, September 2005
- ACS HS, September 2005

Percent of Kids < 6 Below 200% FPL



*Any zip code containing fewer than 300 low income children under six and less than 1,000 total children under six.



- ☑ 652,000 children under age 6.
- ☑ 188,000 (29 percent) live in poverty.
- ☑ 275,000 (42 percent) are low income and potentially qualify for ACS Child Care.
- ☑ Low income children are more concentrated in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

Goal 4. **Information Systems:** Develop a unified, user-friendly, reliable, and comprehensive information system for early childhood programs.

The achievement of many goals of Rethinking Child Care depends upon the realization of a new management information system. CCHS relies on program and community information to identify needs, allocate funding, and ensure children and families are receiving the support they need. However, “more often than not, early childhood policies are developed without the support of sound data.”⁴ Indeed, effective governance of early care and education services across many of the goal areas in this plan depends on much better and more accessible information systems.

Numerous problems arise from the fragmented way in which data on Child Care and Head Start services are currently collected and maintained. Specifically, current management information systems: (a) employ data that are not always reliable; (b) are obsolete and difficult to change and manipulate; and (c) are neither connected nor coordinated within CCHS and across City agencies.

- ❑ **Objective I – Current Information System:** Improve the reliability, coordination, and use of current data systems where possible.
- ❑ **Objective II – New Information Systems:** Develop a new information system that is reliable, allows for coordination across agencies.

Goal 5. **Facility Expansion and Management:** Focus resources on facility development and enhancement.

ACS plays a central role in helping programs meet their facilities’ needs. ACS recognizes the importance of facilities and this plan identifies opportunities to expand and enhance the child care facilities of its provider network.* Because programs generate thin profit margins, they often struggle to maintain basic programmatic services. As much child care funding as possible must necessarily go toward program operating costs, such as classroom personnel and supplies, rather than capital investment and real estate. However, investments in services instead of structure may compromise the quality of early care and education children receive.

Yet improving facilities in New York City is not an easy task. The very high-priced and unpredictable real estate market in New York City aggravates the challenge of developing new early care and education facilities. ACS has made a commitment to facilities by applying for long-term leases on behalf of programs. While this arrangement represents a significant investment in programs, it limits ACS’s ability to adapt to changing community needs. This plan seeks to shift over time more responsibility toward programs to maintain their own leases, and in future facilities development seeks to replace ACS’s practice of leasing and maintaining child care facilities with a model of collaboration between the public and private sectors. In addition to changing ACS’s facilities model, Rethinking Child Care outlines strategies to support the development of new facilities to serve unmet needs by age and location. Child care facilities are a key feature of urban development. By improving facilities, ACS is improving the quality of care available for New York City’s youngest children.

- ❑ **Objective I – Efficiency of Facilities:** Improve the management of facilities to more easily respond to programs and communities’ needs.
- ❑ **Objective II – New Facilities:** Facilitate the development and enhancement of quality child care centers throughout New York City.

*This element of Rethinking Child Care draws upon Building Blocks for Child Care: A Facilities Plan for the 21st Century (2003), developed by ACS and the ACS Advisory Board Child Care and Head Start Subcommittee.

Goal 6. **Early Care and Education Integration and Coordination:** Bring together different early childhood care services to offer higher quality care options that better meet the varying care needs of families by integrating Child Care and Head Start Division internally, and within the broader spectrum of City government’s children services.

The fragmented nature of the early care and education system in New York City inhibits efforts to support children and families with access to appropriate care. New York City’s families in need of subsidized child care have a variety of options – all with different enrollment processes, eligibility criteria, hours, levels of family support services, and administrative auspices. Currently, these differences tend to create confusion for families seeking services, cause mismatches in services to needs, and create discontinuities in care. This goal of Rethinking Child Care aims to streamline the differences between early care and education programs to help parents find appropriate child care, reduce redundant administrative procedures for programs, and use ACS’s resources more efficiently.

Certainly, integration and coordination of early care and education services is one of the most challenging, but likely most rewarding of these efforts. Integration and coordination also undergirds much of the strategic plan. Indeed, each of the aforementioned goals includes efforts to better integrate and coordinate policies, programs, and practices to better serve children and families. Integration will utilize Children’s Services expertise to provide services that draw upon the most effective elements of its services. By maximizing resources, CCHS will provide more comprehensive high quality early care and education services.

- ☑ **Objective I – Child Care and Head Start:** Integrate Child Care and Head Start functions as fully as possible.
- ☑ **Objective II – Integration within ACS:** Better integrate CCHS into the work of ACS as a whole and especially around family support and neighborhood-based services.
- ☑ **Objective III – Intra-agency Coordination:** Integrate Child Care and Head Start services into the broader fabric of early care and education services to move toward a unified early care and education system in New York City.

Better coordination and collaboration is necessary for a comprehensive early care and education system.

Endnotes

1 An NICHD study examined the relationship between care quality and cognitive development across a range of child care types and among children from different family backgrounds. It found that children experiencing higher quality care scored higher on cognitive and language tests and assessments at several points in the early years of child development, and that these were true across a range of families varying by ethnicity, income, and home contexts. National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2000. From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Longitudinal studies of children who have participated in enriched center-based developmental care had higher levels of academic success – higher achievement test scores and grades; less need for special education; less grade retention; higher high school completion rates, and more likely to go on to attend a four-year college. Furthermore, years late program participants have higher earnings as adults, and are found to be less engaged in criminal activity or in receiving welfare supports.

Schweinhart, Lawrence J., Helen Barnes, and David Weikart. 1993. Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age twenty-seven, Ypsilanti,

MI: The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation; Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Roberston, and Emily A. Mann. 2001. “Long-term effects of early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest: A fifteen year follow-up of low-income children in public schools.” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(1): 2378-80.

2 This figure includes all forms of publicly-subsidized child care and only an estimate for licensed center-based early childhood care programs, and does not include any estimate for those in other forms of private care, i.e. all home-based care with paid caregivers (e.g., nannies) and those who are in private school pre-K. According to one source, approximately 5 percent of children in NYC are cared for by nannies.

3 Chaudry, Ajay. 2004. *Putting Children First: How Low-Wage Working Mothers Manage Child Care*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

4 Choi, Soo-Hyang. 2002. *Planning for Access: Develop a Data System First*. UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris (2) Retrieved on 8/10/2005 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001373/137376e.pdf>.

NEXT STEPS - LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Division of Child Care and Head Start has embarked on an ambitious and viable process to improve early care and education programs throughout the city. This plan has already guided efforts to improve management functions and ease the child care access for parents and programs. The positive outcomes for the city and for families are numerous: the City and ACS will incur savings and eliminate inefficiencies throughout the system to reinvest in children; providers will have fewer administrative burdens and receive greater support to improve their programs; and most important, families will have greater access to higher quality early care and education services.

Fortunately, the Division of Child Care and Head Start is not alone. CCHS relies on a vital network of strong community-based organizations and local provider networks to provide the care and developmental services for children. Thus, the cooperation and guidance from these organizations are critical as the plan unfolds. Working in collaboration with the community, ACS will strengthen Child Care and Head Start by eliminating duplicative administrative structures, moving the front door for all child care services to neighborhoods, and better integrating child care options to offer families a seamless continuum of quality services. This community-based system will continue to include center-based services, family child care networks, and access to informal care. It is our hope that the early childhood community supports and helps us improve this plan to make meaningful improvements to how we serve New York City's families with young children. As ACS implements the strategies and reaches the goals detailed in the full report, ACS will fulfill its commitment to providing quality early care and education programs for the children who most need them.