



**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2018-19 Executive Budget Proposal:
Elementary and Secondary Education
January 31, 2018**

Submitted by:
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Thank you Chairwoman Helene. E. Weinstein and Chairwoman Catharine Young for the opportunity to testify before this joint legislative public hearing. My name is Helga Yuan Larsen, and I am the Director for QUALITYstarsNY. I am here to request that the \$5 million allotted to QUALITYstarsNY in Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget be increased by \$3 million as per the Board of Regents Early Childhood Blue Ribbon Committee, which recognizes QUALITYstarsNY's value to elementary and secondary education as a statewide quality assurance system that safeguards high quality early care and education for our youngest children. The allocation for QUALITYstarsNY comes through the State Education Department (SED), with whom we have a vital working relationship.

While we applaud Governor Cuomo's commitment to continue our state investment in Pre-K expansion, this growth must come hand-in-hand with a mechanism for accountability and a systematic effort to improve coordination and alignment between child care, Pre-K and K-12 systems. Having QUALITYstarsNY as New York State's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and education programs, the State has a pivotal opportunity to benefit from the field-tested approach to assess, improve and communicate about the effectiveness of children's learning experiences in Pre-K programs, Head Start programs, community-based child care centers and family child care homes. Every early childhood provider wants to do their best to foster an optimal learning environment for the children in their care. Yet this is incredibly challenging in a fragmented system governed by independent sectors, subjected to inefficiencies and compounded by an industry that continues to pay providers subpar wages. QUALITYstarsNY is committed to reforming the system and the industry to empower the early childhood workforce towards excellence. Our work lays the foundation for a high quality education system for all students, from birth onwards, in New York.

Building a coherent, aligned birth-through-third grade system is critical to sustaining the positive effects of Pre-K on children's academic and social development. Closing the achievement gap happens before kindergarten, and yet access to Pre-K in and of itself is not the answer. Children from underserved and impoverished communities flourish in early childhood programs with responsive caregivers in creative and stimulating learning environments. These children are often enrolled in community-based organizations and family child care homes because their families need the extended or non-traditional hours of care and value the continuity of care that nurtured their children since

infancy. These children benefit the most from the supports offered by QUALITYstarsNY to their teachers and family child care providers. QUALITYstarsNY ensures that these children enter kindergarten empowered to succeed in school and life.

Throughout the course of QUALITYstarsNY, we have provided scholarships to thousands of teachers and providers to build their competencies in curriculum and assessment, designing learning environments and engaging families as partners in their child's education. Many of these teachers and providers were able to obtain necessary credentials or a degree in early childhood education, which they would not have been able to afford given their below-market salaries and reimbursement rates. We have furnished classrooms and family child care homes with learning materials and playground equipment that promote healthy physical activity, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) learning, creative arts exploration, social-emotional skills, and language and literacy development. All of these investments by QUALITYstarsNY have established a targeted support system that guides programs through effective instructional practices and strong leadership and management in early childhood education.

Since its inception in 2012 under the governance of The New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), QUALITYstarsNY has expanded our reach to all ten economic regions statewide and now supports 740 early learning programs (see Appendix A & B). Unfortunately, while other states' QRIS have grown their participation rates to at least 60% of all eligible programs, New York continues to fall behind. The State can equip us to almost double our impact by supporting 1,400 programs and almost 52,000 children with an increase of \$3 million (see Appendix C). Every year in which New York allows our funding to remain flat is a missed opportunity for the State to champion quality education for tens of thousands of New York's students.

QUALITYstarsNY Performance & Metrics

Adding *quality* to child care and Pre-K seats by funding QUALITYstarsNY costs considerably less than 10% of the total state expenditure in education at the amount of only \$300 per child. Almost every state has leveraged the value of a QRIS to implement a systemic approach to quality improvement and accountability for early and school-age care and education programs to guarantee the State's education investments are being spent efficiently on effective programs. QUALITYstarsNY uses a five-star scale to rate programs on their ability to meet research-based performance standards around four categories: Learning Environment, Family Engagement, Qualifications and Experience, and Management and Leadership. Our standards represent a unifying framework to measure quality that surpasses compliance to licensing regulations. As a result, a QUALITYstarsNY participating program, whether it is a child care program, a Head Start program, a Pre-K classroom, or a family child care home, is making a commitment to excellence that enables New York's children to thrive.

More than simply a rating process, QUALITYstarsNY provides ongoing, individualized technical assistance to administrators, teachers and family child care providers, including the assignment of a Quality Improvement Specialist to coach them through their quality improvement plans. Goals are established collaboratively and progress is monitored to guide programs through their continuous quality improvement efforts with the intentions that 1- and 2-star programs will rise to become 4- and 5-star programs, while 4- and 5-star programs will sustain their high level of functioning.

During FY17 QUALITYstarsNY launched a new initiative, Start with Stars, designed to provide intensive technical assistance and resources to programs who are either experiencing regulatory or foundational challenges, are under new leadership, or are operating a new program model. After a six-month period of demonstrated progress on their quality improvement plans, programs transition into QUALITYstarsNY on a more solid footing to engage the ratings process.

Results show QUALITYstarsNY works. We released a report in February 2016 that analyzed the results of participating programs from 2013 to 2015.¹ An astounding 84% of participating programs increased their points scored on the quality standards. Even more significantly, the positive impacts of our targeted supports for early childhood providers continue to be sustained as our participation numbers grow (see Appendix D).

Currently, of the 233 programs that have been re-rated since 2013

- 54% of all programs increased their star rating
- the number of 4- and 5-star programs increased by 80%
- 31% of the programs that were initially rated as 1- and 2-stars raised their level of quality to 4-stars within three years
- all of the 4- and 5-star programs sustained their star rating

One of the unique features of QUALITYstarsNY is its inclusion of licensed family child care providers, who are not always included in the QRIS in other states. Across New York State, a significant portion of young children, often infants and toddlers from low-income families who live in minority or rural neighborhoods, are served in home-based settings. Of these providers that have been re-rated, 64% of them increased their star rating. The ongoing professional development and resources offered to family child care providers has been a hallmark of QUALITYstarsNY as an intervention for the most marginalized in the industry.

FY2019 Budget Ask

QUALITYstarsNY is asking the State to increase the Governor's Executive Budget allocation to QUALITYstarsNY from \$5 million to \$8 million. With an increase of \$3 million to expand QUALITYstarsNY, the State will ensure better independent oversight of the \$3.2 billion annual investment in early learning. Although the increase doesn't narrow the gulf that divides investments made for children birth-through-five vs. K-12, it does strengthen New York's current early care and education system to be cost effective, thereby protecting our public dollars while guaranteeing better educational and lifetime outcomes for our students by valuing their learning experiences during the optimal period for brain development.

To supplement the state investment, as well as to address immediate needs in poorly resourced communities, QUALITYstarsNY has proactively secured partnerships with private foundations to expand

¹ QUALITYstarsNY. (2016, February). *New York State's Bold Step to Ensure Access to Excellence in Early Childhood Education: A Report on the First Three Years*. Retrieved January 28, 2018 from <http://www.qualitystarsny.org/pdf/QUALITYstarsNY%20report%2020160217.pdf>

existing services to those localities. For FY2015 through FY2017, we received \$210,000 through the United Way of Troy to raise the level of quality in early learning programs in Rensselaer County. We invested approximately \$25,000 in professional development opportunities for early childhood providers of which \$7,500 went towards college coursework in early childhood education and \$5,400 went towards ongoing coursework for providers to earn the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. For FY2018 we received \$150,000 from the Staten Island Foundation to increase our presence on the north shore of Staten Island. This would enable us to rate and support 20 early learning programs through their quality improvement efforts. These private grants, however, are non-continuing and usually expire after one or two years. If New York wants these early learning programs to continue their commitment to quality improvement, the State to increase its financial commitment and absorb these costs to sustain the positive impacts made for these communities. Furthermore, our hope is that when philanthropic foundations are assured that their contributions will be honored by the State, they will be encouraged to continue their investments in collective impact initiatives.

Economic Impact and Savings

Every dollar spent on *quality* early care and education returns dividends on the state investment, generating a higher return than the amount spent. Studies have shown a return from investment between 7% and 10% per year for the lifetime of the child, with \$7 earned for every \$1 spent as a result of higher graduation rates and lifetime earnings, lower rates of incarceration, and total educational savings.²

To remain competitive in a global economy, New York must strengthen its investment in quality early education services, particularly for our most vulnerable children and families in underserved communities. QUALITYstarsNY prioritizes enrollment for programs in the highest need communities and school districts who often serve children with special needs, are exposed to toxic stress, and who are English language learners. By raising the quality of early learning programs, QUALITYstarsNY is able to produce immediate returns through reductions in special education services and grade retention. In the long run, children who receive high quality early education from 4- and 5-star programs become productive and competent contributors to our workforce and spur on prosperous communities across our State. Additionally, when parents trust the care their child is receiving from a QUALITYstarsNY provider, they can succeed in the workforce, creating additional tax payers and boosting local industries and economies.

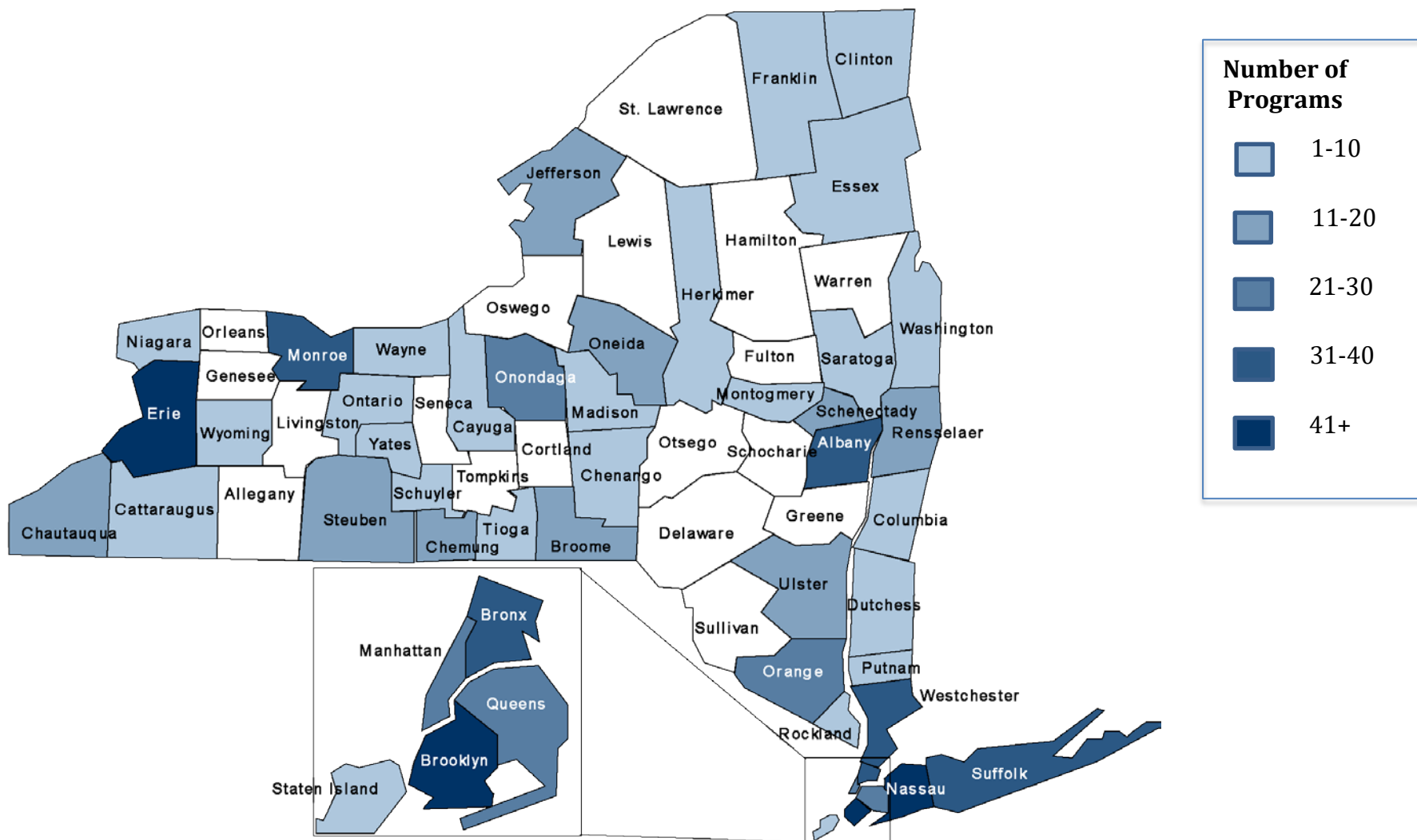
QUALITYstarsNY as a Systems-Building Lever

QUALITYstarsNY is positively impacting children's educational outcomes when it matters most. In 2017 as a result of a \$2 million budget increase, we added almost 200 programs (a 33% increase in participation), which enabled us to serve 8,141 more children. QUALITYstarsNY is now in 44 of the 62 counties statewide, serving 46,632 children, and the demand by programs and families continues to grow. What is more, early childhood providers are demonstrating their commitment to excellence because they fully recognize what is at stake for the children in their care. QUALITYstarsNY is the State's

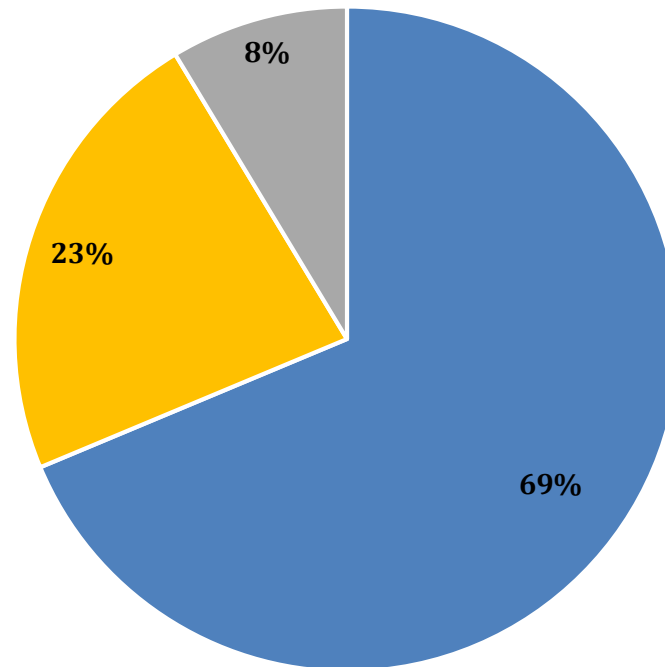
² Heckman, J.J. (2013, July). *Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy*. Retrieved January 28, 2018 from https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2013/07/F_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Generic_052714-3-1.pdf

best chance at leveling the playing field and mitigating the challenges these providers experience in the early care and education system to ensure that every child thrives from quality teaching and learning, securing their trajectory for success in K-12. Investing in QUALITYstarsNY is investing in a sure strategy that better leverages primary and secondary education. New York State can position itself as a national leader by establishing a high quality education system, from birth onwards, that raises all early learning programs to 4- and 5-star levels for the tens of thousands of our youngest learners.

Appendix A: QUALITYstarsNY Program Density (n=740 as of 12/31/2017)



Appendix B: QUALITYstarsNY Participation
(n=706 as of 12/31/2017)



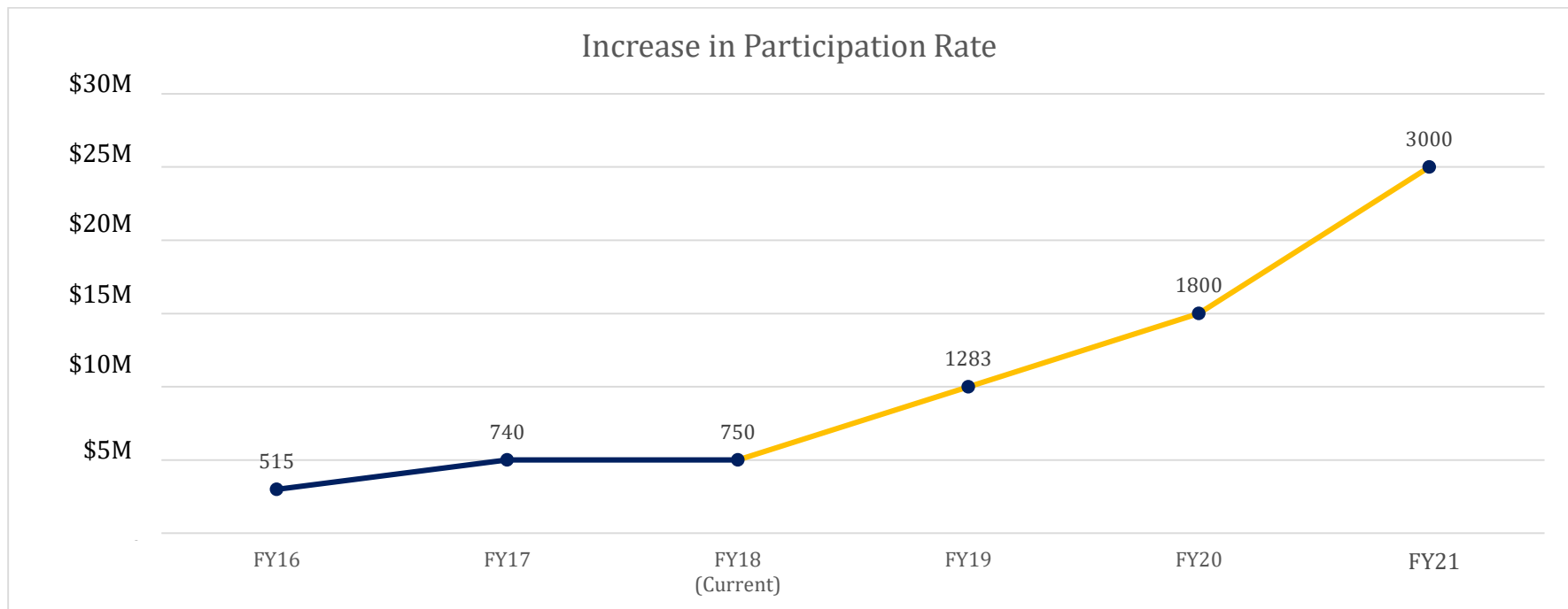
■ Center-Based Programs* ■ Family Child Care Homes ■ Pre-K in Public Schools

*Includes child care, Head Start & Pre-K programs

NOTE: This chart does not include the 34 Start with Stars programs.



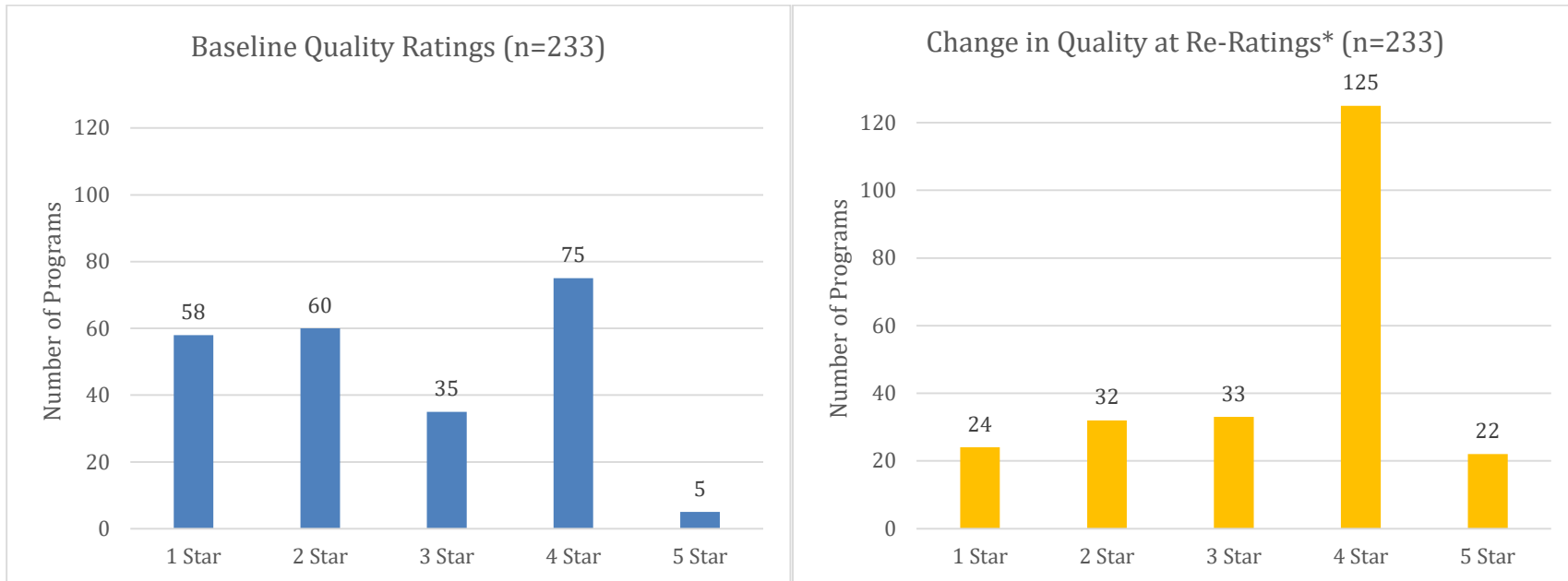
Appendix C: Projected QUALITYstarsNY Participation with Requested Budget Increases



*Budget estimations are based on state contributions and does not include additional federal and private funds.



Appendix D: QUALITYstarsNY Ratings of Participating Programs



*QUALITYstarsNY re-rates programs every three years.