



What the next mayor needs to know about early care and education in New York City

A report by



New York Early Childhood
Professional Development Institute





With the election of Zohran Mamdani as mayor, New York City has a historic opportunity to transform the early care and learning experience for thousands of families — building a truly unified, equitable, and high-quality system that could serve as a model for other large cities.

But this system cannot thrive without a **strong, supported, and fairly compensated early care and learning workforce**.

We know that meaningful progress toward a universal early care and education system will only be possible with a coherent structure and sustained investment in the people who make it work every day.



Supporting the workforce that supports New York's children

About the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute

The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at the City University of New York has worked to innovate, enhance, and provide accessible systems, initiatives, and services for New York City's early childhood workforce for more than two decades. The Institute's work operates in close partnership with NYC agencies, institutions of higher education, and thousands of early childhood programs and providers, serving as a hub for workforce data, professional development, and policy innovation.

The Institute manages many systems and initiatives that define and strengthen our city's early childhood workforce. Through the [Aspire Registry](#), New York State's [early childhood workforce registry](#), we maintain the most comprehensive data on the state's early childhood professionals, capturing verified information about their education, credentials, and professional development. Through [QUALITYstarsNY](#), the state's [Quality Rating and Improvement System](#), we support almost 2,000 early childhood programs across the state, with more than 650 programs in NYC alone, to attain and sustain high-quality learning environments. Our [Early Childhood Career Development Center](#) and [Leadership Initiative](#) provide one-on-one guidance to help early childhood professionals thrive at every stage of their careers. The Institute's [professional development team](#) of coaches provides high-quality services to educators across all settings. And for a decade and counting, our [NYC Early Childhood Research Network](#) has been at the forefront of innovative research to guide policy and practice.

Through all of these initiatives and more, we see firsthand the challenges and opportunities that early childhood educators face, and we know that [NYC's vision for universal, high-quality early care and learning depends on a workforce that is stable, supported, and valued as essential professionals](#). This perspective informs our recommendations and underscores the urgent need for collaborative, holistic investments in the people who make early care and education possible for thousands of New Yorkers.

Three keys to unlocking **real change**



Workforce Stability

The success of every early childhood program and policy depends on the strength and stability of the city's early childhood workforce.

A strong and stable early childhood workforce is not a luxury; it is the core infrastructure that determines whether universal child care succeeds. A commitment to compensation, preparation, and professional growth is the foundation of a system that truly serves children, families, and the city's future.



Program Quality

Nurturing and supportive learning environments for children are created by nurturing and supporting educators.

Universal access to child care means little without qualified professionals to provide it. The city's commitment to effective, equitable early learning environments depends on a sustained, strategic investment in early childhood professionals.



Systemwide Collaboration

Collaborative partnerships are essential to achieving a truly universal early care and education system in New York City.

To build a coherent, equitable system, the next administration must align governance, funding, and coordination across agencies so families and providers experience one effective system.

Key #1: The success of every early childhood program and policy depends on the strength and stability of the city's early childhood workforce.



A strong and stable early childhood workforce is not a luxury; it is the core infrastructure that determines whether universal child care succeeds. A commitment to compensation, preparation, and professional growth is the foundation of a system that truly serves children, families, and the city's future.

Investing in early care and education is about more than creating physical space for child care or expanding the number of available seats. It's about investing in the people who make learning and care possible. **Child care is not simply a matter of supervision; it is a professional, knowledge-based field that supports children during the most critical period of brain development.** The quality of these early experiences depends on the skill, stability, and support of the adults who guide them.

The “city that never sleeps” is powered by New Yorkers whose working hours, neighborhoods, and family structures are as varied as the city itself. To meet their needs, our early childhood workforce must be just as diverse: multilingual, multigenerational, and shaped by countless cultural perspectives. Families seeking child care prioritize providers they can trust and build relationships with — culturally competent providers who value and honor all languages, cultures, and identities.

NYC's educators and child care providers speak dozens of languages; more than half have earned at least a bachelor's degree; 61% are over the age of 35. Supports and services for the workforce must take these factors into account to be effective and accessible.

But low pay, lack of benefits, and limited opportunities for advancement drive high turnover, and the early care and learning profession as a whole struggles to attract and retain educators.

Voices FROM THE CITY

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Early childhood educators and child care providers are essential to the learning and development of our children. They provide the foundational intellectual, emotional and social development that is necessary for future success, and yet, workforce shortages threaten to undermine other gains.

Making Child Care More Affordable, Accessible and Equitable for New Yorkers, New York State Child Care Availability Task Force Report, 2024

Meet NYC's early childhood education workforce

The most robust source of data on NYC's early childhood workforce is the Institute's statewide Aspire Registry, which provides verified data on more than 70% of licensed child care centers in NYC. Child care in the city is generally regulated by setting or modality:

Center-based programs serve more than 140,000 children from ages 6 weeks to 5 years in classroom settings. About 8,250 lead teachers, 10,500 assistant teachers, and 3,350 directors and assistant directors work in child care centers, which are licensed by the **city's Department of Health**. An estimated 2,000 additional teachers work in 3K and pre-K programs in **NYC Public Schools**.

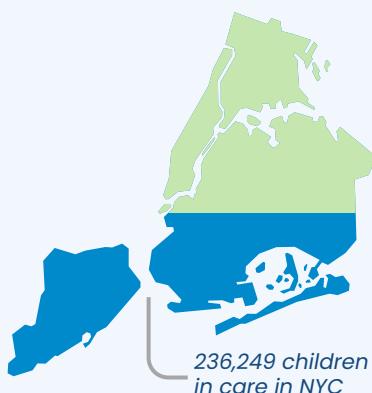
Home-based programs, also known as “family” or “group family” child care, operate out of providers' own homes and are regulated by the **state's Office of Children and Family Services**. There are at least 6,300 family and group family providers in NYC, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of whom are immigrants and 92% of whom are people of color. Home-based child care programs exist in every kind of residential setting where New Yorkers live, from single-family houses to basement apartments to public housing units operated by the NYC Housing Authority.

Thousands more New Yorkers also provide what's known as **“legally exempt” or “informal” child care** (sometimes called “family, friend, and neighbor” care), caring for a small number of children in their own homes. These providers receive payment from the **Administration for Children's Services** for those families who qualify for assistance.

Expanding universal child care to include infants and toddlers will require a large increase not only in the number of center classrooms, but also a vast increase in the number of home-based providers qualified to provide high-quality care to NYC's youngest learners.

There are an estimated **475,537** children under age 5 in NYC.

NYC's child care sector currently has the capacity to serve **less than half** of them.



Key #1

Recommendations to uplift and expand the workforce

- **Commit to equitable compensation and benefits for the early childhood workforce.** Explore pay parity initiatives to ensure salaries and benefits are commensurate with public school educators. The New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, in partnership with other early childhood education stakeholders, has developed a career ladder and salary analysis that would align compensation with public schools and incentivize quality.
- **Invest in multiple pathways into the profession.** Expand existing flexible, affordable, culturally responsive pathways for home-based providers, paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, career changers, and educators to gain credentials and degrees while continuing to work. Provide financial incentives (such as scholarships and tuition assistance) for educators seeking relevant degrees, certifications, and credentials. Ramp up apprenticeship programs, such as the Institute's pioneering NYC Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program, which integrates on-the-job learning with coursework leading to credentials. Invest in coaching and mentorship for new teachers to support retention and build quality from the start. Explore opportunities for high school students to gain work experience in early childhood education through career and technical education programs.
- **Support leadership development.** Build opportunities for experienced educators to become program directors, principals, mentors, coaches, and policymakers. More than 4,000 NYC early childhood professionals, for instance, participate in the Institute's Early Childhood Leadership Initiative to share their learning and grow in their roles as early childhood leaders.

According to a 2024 salary and benefits survey of NYC early care and learning providers conducted by New York Works for Children,

42%

of NYC early childhood educators reported receiving **no paid vacation time**.



1 in 4

relies on Medicaid or Medicare for health insurance.

Key #2: Nurturing and supportive learning environments for children are created by nurturing and supporting educators.



Universal access to child care means little without qualified professionals to provide it. The city's commitment to effective, equitable early learning environments depends on a sustained, strategic investment in early childhood professionals.

One-time grants or short-term funding initiatives cannot stabilize a workforce facing systemic inequities and chronic underpayment. Sustained, strategic investment in the early care and education workforce is a prerequisite for a successful, high-quality universal child care system.

QUALITYstarsNY, New York's Quality Rating and Improvement System for early childhood programs, exemplifies this long-term approach by making a three-year commitment to engaging in continuous quality improvement with participating programs. This ongoing, data-driven strategy — rather than a one-time infusion of funding — truly strengthens programs and the professionals who power them, with more than 80% of programs achieving rating improvements. QUALITYstarsNY has also partnered with the Institute's Career Development Center to administer the QUALITYstarsNY Academic Scholarship. Eligible early childhood professionals who work in participating QUALITYstarsNY programs not only receive tuition funding toward credit-bearing courses in early childhood leading to a degree, certification, or credential, they also receive individualized guidance from a qualified early childhood career advisor.

A recent pilot project that provided compensation initiatives to staff in QUALITYstarsNY programs shows initial promise in improved quality indicators and staffing stability. This could be replicated as part of a multi-prong compensation strategy.

Voices FROM THE CITY

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The ECE industry has always grappled with high staff turnover due to low wages. Many ECE workers have reported leaving the industry for higher wages in fast food and other far less-demanding industries...In 2021, the median wage of people with a high school diploma was \$18.50 per hour in the New York City metropolitan area, which was \$5 more per hour than for center-based ECE workers.

High Calling, Low Wages: Home-Based Early Care and Education Providers in NYC, Center for NYC Affairs, 2023

Key #2

Recommendations to support high-quality learning environments

- **Expand access to affordable, high-quality preparation and training.** Support high-quality professional preparation programs — especially in public colleges and universities — and workforce development programs to ensure that ongoing training is funded and aligned with practice.
- **Strengthen workforce data and accountability systems.** Leverage existing tools like the Aspire Registry to collect and analyze workforce data, track credentials, and guide strategic planning and investment. Integrate workforce data systems across agencies to reduce administrative burden and ensure equitable access to professional support.
- **Partner with the city's colleges and universities to leverage existing expertise.** NYC's colleges and universities play a vital role in preparing the next generation of the city's workforce. The City University of New York, for instance, is the nation's largest urban public university and enrolls more than 275,000 students across 25 campuses; CUNY has 13 colleges that provide early childhood education degree and certificate programs. The city can lead by creating partnerships and funding streams that encourage institutions to grow teacher preparation programs, align coursework with real-world practice, and support students already working in the profession.

72%

of early childhood centers licensed by the NYC Department of Health have organizational profiles in the Aspire Registry, which captures verified data about the early care and learning workforce.



15,000

students at the City University of New York are enrolled in educator preparation programs.

Key #3: Collaborative partnerships are essential to achieving a truly universal early care and education system in New York City.



To build a coherent, equitable system, the next administration must align governance, funding, and coordination across agencies so families and providers experience one effective system.

New York City's early care and learning landscape is large, diverse, and deeply fragmented. No single entity oversees the entirety of care and education for children from birth to age five. Multiple public agencies share responsibility for different components of the system, resulting in overlapping regulations, funding streams, and standards that providers, educators, and families must navigate daily.

Multiple coordinating agencies share oversight and capacity.

Oversight for early care and learning in NYC is divided among city and state agencies. Together, these systems amount to a total regulated capacity of roughly 233,750 seats, serving less than half of the city's 475,600 children under age five.

- The city's **Department of Health and Mental Hygiene** (DOHMH) licenses **center-based** programs, currently numbering about 2,262 centers with a combined capacity of 143,300 seats. About 83% of the children currently in child care in New York City attend center-based programs. The Department of Health also oversees **Early Intervention services** for infants and toddlers (ages 0-3) with developmental delays and disabilities.
- The **New York State Office of Children and Family Services** (OCFS) licenses **home-based** programs, which total about 6,305 family and group family providers, with a total capacity of 90,500.

Voices FROM THE CITY

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Bureaucracy in and of itself is not the problem. The problem is when bureaucratic challenges lead to negative effects on families and providers.

Investing in Families and Our Future: A policy roadmap to address NYC child care needs now,
5BORO Institute, 2024

These programs are overwhelmingly operated by women — most of them women of color and immigrants — working from their own homes.

Providers operate as small businesses, balancing educational responsibilities with the challenges of running sustainable enterprises in a city with high costs and complex compliance systems.

- **NYC Public Schools** oversees more than 100,000 early education seats through a combination of NYCPS-operated Early Education Centers, Family Child Care Networks operated by community organizations, 650 district school programs, and more than 1,150 independently operated Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).
 - NYC Public Schools also has jurisdiction over the **Committee for Preschool Education** (CPSE), which manages preschool special education services for children ages 3-5.
 - There are more than 40 **Family Child Care Networks**, which are typically managed by community organizations and provide support and services to affiliated family child care programs, associated with and funded by NYC Public Schools.
- **The Administration for Children's Services (ACS)** administers child care vouchers to **subsidize the cost of child care** for eligible families, funded primarily through the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). About 100,000 NYC children — representing 60% of all children in New York State who receive child care assistance — receive vouchers.
- Several different **unions and professional organizations** represent NYC educators, child care providers, and leaders:
 - Teachers in NYC Public Schools are represented by the **United Federation of Teachers** and are governed by the UFT collective bargaining agreement and contract.

Voices

FROM THE CITY

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Centralizing the enrollment process within DOE was intended to facilitate access, but instead has prevented [providers] from enrolling families on site and creates competition between contracted programs in communities and programs operated directly by the DOE in school settings.

Contracted [providers] have lower utilization rates compared to school-based settings.

Contracted providers are reimbursed based on enrollment, yet providers must cover fixed cost and staffing regardless of enrollment levels. This systemic challenge creates fiscal instability for providers.

The Youngest New Yorkers: Building a Path Toward a Universal Early Care and Education System, Citizens Committee for Children of New York, 2023

- Principals and administrators in NYC Public Schools belong to the **Council of School Supervisors and Administrators** union.
- Educators at CBOs may be represented by **DC 37** Local 205, which has more than 6,000 members across 350 NYC child care centers.
- Head Start employees are represented by **DC 37** Local 95.
- Other CBO employees may have no union representation.
- Family providers may choose to join the **UFT Family Child Care Providers**, which serves about 12,000 members.
- The **Day Care Council** of New York is a membership organization of 100+ agencies, which between them operate more than 250 child care centers and family child care programs, both publicly and privately funded.

Different agencies lead to different experiences for NYC educators and families.

Although NYC made historic strides by introducing “universal” prekindergarten in 2015, pre-K programs in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and those in public schools still differ in several crucial ways that are important to program quality:

- **Hiring requirements:** NYC Public Schools requires lead teachers to be certified in early childhood education; CBOs may hire lead teachers who are not yet certified.
- **Salary and benefits:** Large pay disparities continue to exist between community-based organizations and NYCPS. The median annual salary for lead teachers in NYC is \$43,330, whereas the starting salary for NYC public school teachers is \$68,902.

Voices

FROM THE CITY

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A CBO director with a 25-year career will lose \$2,279,802 over the course of their career by working in a community-based organization instead of NYC Public Schools.

Why New York City Must Complete the Path to Parity for the Community-Based Early Childhood Education Workforce,
New York City Council Black, Latino and Asian Caucus and the Day Care Council of New York, 2023

A universal child care system must be prepared to support all children — including those with disabilities.

90% of a child's brain development occurs before the age of 3. For infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families, Early Intervention services — which provide speech, occupational, and physical therapy and other critical support — can be truly life-changing. Research also shows that investing in Early Intervention services will result in later savings in school and health care systems.

But New York's Early Intervention program faces chronic staffing shortages and long delays. New York State ranks 48th in the nation in on-time delivery of Early Intervention services. When children transition from EI (which is overseen by the NYC Department of Health) to preschool special education (which is managed by NYC Public Schools) at age 3, many families again struggle to access appropriate placements for their children.

A truly universal early care and learning system must ensure that every child can access high-quality care in inclusive environments. This requires coordinated leadership across agencies, shared data systems, and dedicated funding for training, special educators, and related service providers to make inclusion a reality.

Voices

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While there are plenty of speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists licensed in New York, fewer providers than ever are willing to work in the Early Intervention system due to the stagnant reimbursement rates and administrative challenges.

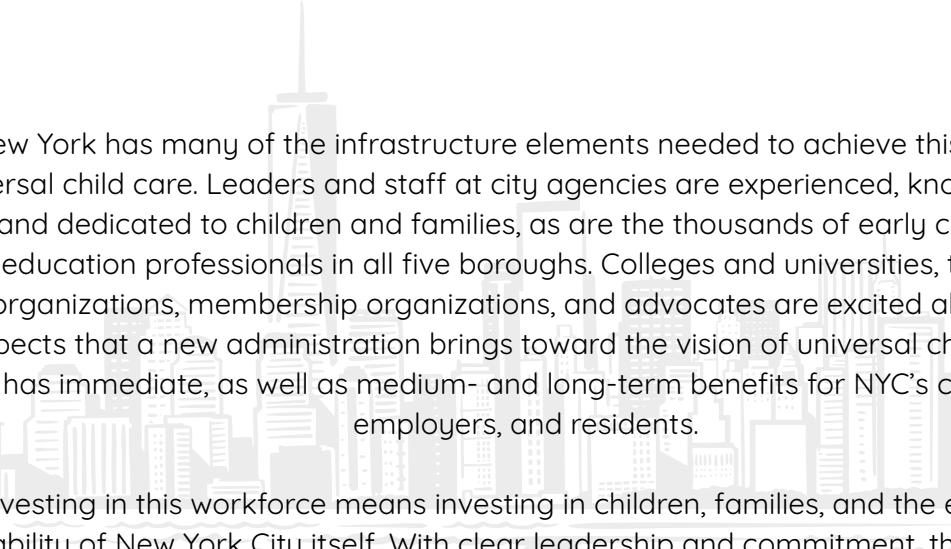
**Reimagine the Future:
The Need to Reform
Early Intervention in
New York State,
The Children's Agenda,
2025**

Key #3

Recommendations to align funding and coordination

- Establish a coordinated governance structure for early care and education across city agencies to align policies, data, and funding.
- Support and invest in cross-agency collaboration to build a unified citywide approach to early care and education. The NYC Early Childhood Research Network, for example, regularly brings together representatives from NYC Public Schools, the Bureau of Early Intervention and Bureau of Child Care at the NYC Department of Health, the Administration for Children's Services, the Mayor's Office of Child Care, and area colleges and universities to support a systemwide vision for research-informed practices.
- Consider creating a New York City Early Childhood Advisory Council modeled after the successful statewide ECAC convened by Gov. Kathy Hochul. Comprised of New York State experts in early care and education, health care, child welfare, mental health, business, and community engagement, members of the state ECAC represent state agencies, community-based nonprofit organizations, foundations, higher education institutions, unions, and other key entities. An NYC Early Childhood Advisory Council could:
 - advise the mayor's office on early childhood policy, funding, and interagency coordination.
 - ensure that stakeholders vital to the success of the administration's agenda are welcomed into the process and their voices are represented.
 - support continuity across administrations, so the city's early childhood strategy remains focused and consistent beyond political cycles.
- Work with state agencies, especially the NYS Department of Health, to address gaps in Early Intervention services. Share NYC outcomes to drive further research and identify initiatives to expand the workforce.





New York has many of the infrastructure elements needed to achieve this vision of universal child care. Leaders and staff at city agencies are experienced, knowledgeable, and dedicated to children and families, as are the thousands of early care and education professionals in all five boroughs. Colleges and universities, training organizations, membership organizations, and advocates are excited about the prospects that a new administration brings toward the vision of universal child care that has immediate, as well as medium- and long-term benefits for NYC's children, employers, and residents.

Investing in this workforce means investing in children, families, and the economic stability of New York City itself. With clear leadership and commitment, the city can deliver on the promise of high-quality early care and education for all.

Recommended Reading

Building the New York State Early Intervention Workforce: IHE's Requirements of Interdisciplinary Personnel Development and Preparation

NYC Early Childhood Research Network/Brooklyn College/New York Institute of Technology, 2024

Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision

NYC Comptroller, 2025

High Calling, Low Wages: Home-Based Early Care and Education Providers in New York City

Center for New York City Affairs, 2023

Investing in Families and Our Future: A policy roadmap to address NYC child care needs now

5BORO Institute, 2024

Making Child Care More Affordable, Accessible and Equitable for New Yorkers

Child Care Availability Task Force, Office of Children and Family Services, 2024

Parity Compensation for New York's Early Childhood Educators: Recognition and Respect for a Vital Profession

New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, 2024

Supporting New York City's Unsung Heroes: How the Next Mayor Can Prime the Early Childhood Workforce for Success

Day Care Council of New York, 2021

The Youngest New Yorkers: Building a Path Toward a Universal Early Care and Education System

Citizens Committee for Children of New York, 2023



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