2025 Child Care Advisory Board Report

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the New York City Council passed Local Law 102, creating the Child Care Advisory Board. Under the Adams Administration, the Child Care Advisory Board is chaired by the Office of Child Care and City agency partners such as the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), as well as external appointees by the Speaker of the City Council, the Comptroller, and the Public Advocate. The Board is required to submit an annual report to the Mayor and the Speaker of the City Council outlining the challenges facing the child care sector, recent progress toward expanding access to care, and a plan for projecting the financial and operational requirements for achieving universal access to child care and early education over the next five years.

The report focuses on child care needs for children under the age of five, as the Advisory Board defines "universal access to child care" as every child under the age of five having access to child care, irrespective of family income, caregiver's employment status, or child immigration status. While achieving universal early childhood education access remains challenging, the report finds that New York City is well on its way. This report also focuses on four areas New York City needs to address to ensure that the City's child care system has stable foundations to sustainably and equitably grow into a universal system. These four areas of growth are:

1. Recruiting and retaining a robust child care workforce
2. Leveraging existing and identifying new revenue sources
3. Increasing the supply of child care providers and maximizing existing capacity
4. Building a data-driven and coordinated system

The Advisory Board's initial projections are that in Year 1, universal child care costs would be up to $6.6 billion annually, and by Year 5 the annual cost would be $7.7 billion. A universal child care system would require significant increases to current State and Federal revenue sources and access to new State and/or Federal resources to expand access for children under the age of five, irrespective of family income, employment status, and child immigration status, especially for infants and toddlers. A universal child care system would also require significant investments in administrative support and infrastructure needs to ensure the City and relevant City agencies can support a universal system. These projections should be considered estimations and will continue to be refined by the Advisory Board. [1]

[1] The Advisory Board urges caution when interpreting the estimated enrollments and costs, as they are subject to change.

Introduction

Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential for New York City's children's healthy development, its families' economic stability, its businesses' stability, and the City's long-term prosperity. To ensure that this essential sector fulfills the needs of New Yorkers, the City has continuously worked on expanding and strengthening child care and early childhood education programs for New York City children, such as the 1994 establishment of Pre-K funding from New York State, 1999 launch of universal Pre-K for at-risk children, 2012 launch of *EarlyLearn,* 2014 launch of *Pre-K for All*, and 2021 launch of *3-K for All,* and the 2022-2025 expansion of low-income vouchers. Getting to the system that we have today required unprecedented investments, coordination, and political resolve, especially given the immense diversity and size of the City's child population. And we know that there is still more to do to make access to affordable, high-quality child care available to the more than 498,000 children under the age of five who call New York City home.[2]

With that in mind, the New York City Council created the Child Care Advisory Board through Local Law 102 of 2022, to study and report on the challenges facing the child care sector in New York City, track progress, and plan for the financial and operational requirements for achieving universal access to child care and early childhood education.

While the Board's first annual report[3] took on a broad overview of the child care sector to identify both challenges and opportunities, this second report deepens the conversation about universal child care for New York City: how we define it, why it is a good investment for the City, and how we can sustainably grow from our current system and infrastructure to a system of universal provision in the coming years.

The following report is structured in three different parts:

- The first part defines the universal child care system that New York City is working toward and establishes why it is both a goal worth pursuing and a sound investment.
- The second part of the report includes updated projections for the cost of providing high-quality care—care that includes trust, a supportive environment, rigorous instruction, strong family-community ties, collaborative teachers, and effective leadership. While these projections will continue to be refined in the future, the Advisory Board reports it is clear that New York City would require significant increases to current state and federal funding to cover and sustain the cost of universal child care and would need access to new funding sources to cover universal child care costs for infants and toddlers.
- The third part of the report dives deep into four areas of focus that we argue New York City needs to address in the short-term to ensure that the City's child care system has

[2] New York City Department of Planning. (2023). American Community Survey, 2019-2023: New York City, Sex and age. Retrieved from https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov.

[3] NYC Child Care Advisory Board. (2025). Child Care Advisory Board Report.

stable foundations to sustainably and equitably grow into a universal system. These four areas of growth are:

1. Recruiting and retaining a robust child care workforce
2. Leveraging existing and identifying new revenue sources
3. Increasing the supply of child care providers and maximizing existing capacity
4. Building a data-driven and coordinated system

For each focus area, the report identifies the challenges that it presents to universal expansion, and a set of opportunities to advance each focus area toward a universal child care system in the coming years.

The content of this report is the result of conversations with the Child Care Advisory Board as well as conversations and workshops with the Mayor's Office of Child Care and Early Childhood Education team, in addition to desk research, and studying and incorporating policy proposals made by research institutions. This report builds the case for *why* universal child care will benefit the City of New York and *how* the City can get there, providing elected officials, City agencies, and community-based organizations with a foundational report to kickstart policy discussions and implementation.

Recent Progress: Building the Foundation for Universal Child Care

While achieving universal child care will require sustained investment, strong leadership, and cross-sector partnership, New York City and State have already made unprecedented progress in expanding access, investing in the workforce, and building the infrastructure needed for scale. Together, these advances signal that universality is not a distant goal—it is an achievable next step.

In just the past two years, the City has made measurable strides toward a coordinated, equitable, and high-quality child care system.

- **Institutionalizing leadership.** The Mayor's Office of Child Care and Early Childhood Education—launched in February 2023—has unified strategy across agencies, driven innovation in family and provider supports, and elevated child care as a core City priority.
- **Making child care easier to navigate.** Launched MyCity—which transformed how families apply for child care assistance. Over 140,000 families applied for child care assistance since the launch in March 2023.
- **Expanding access for families with children under 3.** Committed $10 million to launch a universal child care pilot, serving infants and toddlers (ages 0–2) from low-income families, expanding the continuum of care from birth through Pre-K.

- **Baselining early childhood funding.** The City has underscored its commitment to prioritizing child care and early childhood education by baselining over $200 million, including:
    - $112 million for 3-K services;
    - $55 million to provide 700 more seats for three- and four-year-olds with special needs; and
    - $40 million for School-Day+ seats so more families can access care up to 10 hours per day.
- **Increased enrollment with low-income vouchers.** Starting in 2022 through May 2025, there was a 900% increase in low-income voucher usage and a 1300% increase within 17 priority community districts with the highest poverty and unemployment rates and inadequate child care.
- **Supporting children with special needs.** Investing $70 million for related services for three- and four year-old children with special needs.
- **Supporting working parents.** Committed $10 million to create on-site child care center at 1 Centre Street to serve municipal employees with affordable, year-round care beginning in September 2026.
- **Strengthening the workforce pipeline.** The Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) Workforce Development team strengthens New York City's early childhood education pipeline by recruiting, training, and supporting current and aspiring educators through partnerships, professional development, and career advancement programs. In collaboration with CUNY PDI, TRQ, and other partners, DECE provides free Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing, certification prep, and training opportunities that have supported hundreds of staff and recruited more than 2,000 potential teachers and nearly 1,000 early childhood program support candidates since 2024. Through partnerships with colleges, agencies, and nonprofits, DECE continues to expand access to degree programs, apprenticeships, and workforce initiatives that grow and sustain a qualified early childhood workforce citywide.
- **Improving regulation and operations.** Cut red tape by:
    - Streamlining background checks to accelerate hiring;
    - Updating staffing requirements to allow more flexibility for Education Directors and Group Teachers; and
    - Launching a new permitting portal aims to reduce processing times for new centers and home-based programs (planned early 2026).

New York State has complemented City efforts with major investments and policy changes that directly advance the goal of universality. These initiatives include:

- **Investing in facilities and access.** The State's $110 million *Child Care Construction Fund* announced in January 2025 tackles child care deserts by financing new facilities and repairs across high-need communities.
- **Retaining and rewarding the workforce.** Through the $500 million *Workforce Retention Grant* program in 2023-2024, over 150,000 workers received bonuses of up to $3,000 and programs gained resources for recruitment, sign-on, and referral incentives.
- **Expanding affordable higher education.** A new SUNY/CUNY community college program launching in Fall 2025, covers tuition, fees, books, and supplies for adults aged 25–55 pursuing associate degrees in high-demand fields such as education.
- **Looking ahead: Creating Substitute Pools** In 2025, Governor Hochul announced a new statewide "Substitute Pool" of qualified educators for child care settings licensed by New York State; this will include NYC licensed and registered home-based and school-age child care settings.

Part I: The Case for Universal Child Care

In its first annual report, the Advisory Board defined universal child care as a system in which every child from birth to age five who needs care can access it—regardless of family income, parent employment status, or immigration status. This second report builds on that definition, deepening our vision of what a universal child care system must deliver for all those it touches: families, providers, educators, employers, and City agencies. It also articulates why this goal is not only aspirational but essential—an investment in the well-being of children, the stability of families, and the long-term economic strength of New York City.

Vision for Universal

In a universal child care system:

- Every **child aged 0-5** who needs care has free access to a high-quality program that meets their physical, developmental, and linguistic needs.
- **Parents** have clear, accessible information in their language about their child care options and are able to enroll in a program they trust, at a time (*e.g.,* non-traditional hours) and location that meets their needs.
- **Child care educators and workers** have a supportive work environment, with equitable pay and benefits, that allows them to afford life in New York City. They have a clear way to enter the profession and a clear path for career growth that recognizes credentials and years of experience.
- **Child care providers** have the resources and support they need to start up and sustain their operations; their funding and income are stable, and providing compliance data to government agencies is a seamless experience.
- **New York City government** and all its agencies function together as a coordinated child care system. There is a clear governance structure, integrated data systems and processes, and protocols to plan for, invest in, implement, and solve any issues arising in the child care system.

The Case for Universality

We argue that there are three main reasons for New York City to invest in and implement universal child care:

Universality As An Equalizer

Universal child care would ensure that all 498,000 children under the age of five[4] can access the life-changing benefits of early childhood education. A thoughtful phase-in of universal child care will consider the varying needs of families across the City and particularly support families with the greatest barrier to access. As has been widely documented, quality educational programming

[4] New York City Department of Planning. (2023). American Community Survey, 2019-2023: New York City, Sex and age. Retrieved from https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov.

in early childhood has effects that last throughout a child's educational journey. Effects start to manifest during K-12 education, with increased reading and test scores, fewer students having to repeat a grade, and reduced participation in special education, compared to children who did not attend early childhood education.[5,6] Studies that have tracked the effects of early childhood education throughout a participant's life have also found it increased a person's likelihood of completing high school and having a higher income in adulthood.[7] In the long-term, when participants became parents themselves, these increased parental resources similarly boosted their children's outcomes.

Universality As Economic Stimulus

Currently, the high cost of child care is severely disrupting families' finances and the City's economy. In 2024, the average cost of child care for infants and toddlers in New York City ranged from $18,200 to $26,000, depending on whether they were cared for in a home- or center-based setting. These costs have surged by 79% and 43%, respectively, since 2019, far outpacing the 20% growth in inflation and the 13% increase in average hourly earnings over the same period.[8] These high costs, paired with the fact that not every child care seat is full-day, disrupt the work lives of nearly half of all working mothers, creating disruptions in their work and limiting participation in the labor force. Those disruptions in turn lead to 29% of mothers losing or having to change jobs, 34% declining a promotion or moving to part-time work, and 29% to stop looking for a job altogether. This is particularly common for lower-income families, where mothers who face disruptions are less likely to continue to be employed and to experience material hardship.[9]

According to data modeled by the New York City Comptroller's Office, universal provision of child care would save families about $420 per child per week or $1.9 billion annually, which could be available immediately as additional income for families. While universal provision will save money for families across income levels, it will most acutely affect middle-income families, who often exceed the limits for public assistance programs but still struggle to keep up with the rising cost of living in NYC. Middle-income families are leaving NYC at higher rates than low- and high-income earners: middle-income families represent 43% of all households but are 51% of all households that are leaving the City. Additionally, universal child care would substantially increase the labor participation of working mothers, bringing over 14,000 new mothers to the

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[5] Karoly, Lynn A., and James H. Bigelow. (2005). The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California.

[6] Barthik, Timothy J., et al. (2012). "Earnings benefits of Tulsa's pre-K program for different income groups" In Economics of Education Review 31:6, p. 1143-1161 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2012.07.016.

[7] García, Jose Luis, et.al. (2021). The Dynastic Benefits of Early Childhood Education. Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2021-77

[8] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2025). Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision.

[9] Cha, Eunho, et.al. (2024). Child Care-Related Work Disruption in the Early Childhood Poverty Tracker.

labor force and $900 million in income to these families.[10] Studies have also shown that labor participation increases not just among women who are already mothers, but also among other family caregivers who currently support parents and women who anticipate needing child care in the future.[11]

Access to child care and its reliability doesn't just affect families—New York City businesses lose $503 million annually due to absences related to insufficient child care, and an additional $384 million every year due to turnover-related costs to replace workers who left their job due to insufficient child care.[12]

Universality As An Investment

Government policies that invest directly in children have historically had the highest Marginal Value of Public Funds (MVPF).[13] Particularly, early childhood education programs starting from birth and continuing until age five have a higher annual internal rate of return (13%) than programs focused exclusively on preschool (7-10%).[14]

Studies show that each dollar spent in early childhood education in the U.S. generates between $3 and upwards of $20 in aggregate earnings for families, and between $0.60 and over $4.00 in tax revenue. This suggests that these programs could be self-sustaining at the scale of the City economy.[15] Long-term effects of early childhood education, like reduced arrests and higher income compared to non-participants, also translate to reduced tax expenditures from means-tested programs ($5,900) and reduced cost to the criminal justice system ($19,200) over each participant's lifetime.

Universality As Family Well-Being and Empowerment

Universal child care presents an opportunity to lift a heavy burden off families. It provides reliable, high-quality care that relieves the constant mental and emotional stress of balancing work and/or school and parenting—and when it's easy to access, it also reduces the administrative and financial strain families face in finding care and managing logistics, applications, and costs, creating space for parents to excel at their jobs and engage more deeply with their children.

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[10] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2025). *Ibid.*

[11] Jackson, Kirabo, et al. (2025). Universal Pre-K as Economic Stimulus: Evidence from Nine States and Large Cities in the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 33767

[12] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2025). *Ibid.*

[13] Hendren, Nathaniell and Ben Sprung-Keyser. (2020). "A Unified Welfare Analysis of Government Policies" In The Quarterly Journal of Economics 135: p.1209-1318 https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaa006.

[14] García, Jorge Luis, et al. (2017). Quantifying the life-cycle benefits of a prototypical early childhood program. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 23479.

[15] Jackson, Kirabo, et al. (2025). *Ibid.*

As one example: financial concerns are substantial among parents. In 2023, 66% of parents reported that they felt consumed by worries regarding money, compared to just 39% of other adults.[16] Financial and other stressors among parents are known to disproportionately burden parents and caregivers with fewer resources or who are otherwise marginalized economically, socially, politically, or culturally.[17] While the financial impact of child care more directly impacts low- and middle-income households, universal child care would generate significant economic benefits across all income levels.

Research confirms that reliable child care enhances parents' mental health, reduces stress, and builds stronger family resilience, empowering them to provide better home environments and enriching their children's development.[18] By supporting parents' well-being, universal child care strengthens families, communities, and the entire City.

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[16] American Psychological Association (2023). Infographic: Stress of parents compared to other adults.

[17] Nomaguchi, K., & Milkie, M. A. (2020). Parenthood and Well-Being: A Decade in Review. Journal of marriage and the family, 82(1), 198–223.

[18] United States Surgeon General. (2024). Parents Under Pressure: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Mental Health & Well-Being of Parents. From the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

Part II: Plan for Financial and Operational Projections for Expanded Access to Child Care

While the City has made significant progress on challenges to expanding access to child care for families and supporting providers over the past three and a half years, there are still significant financial gaps and barriers to universal child care in New York City. Local Law 102 of 2022 required the Advisory Board to provide:

1. The projected annual costs for the next five years associated with implementing universal child care; and
2. The recommended costs associated with expanding child care subsidies to families in the City whose income equals up to 300% and 400% of the federal poverty guidelines.

A universal child care system would require significant increases to current State and Federal revenue sources and access to new State and/or Federal resources to expand access to children under the age of five, irrespective of family income, employment status, and child immigration status, especially for infants and toddlers. These projections should be considered estimations and will continue to be refined by the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board urges caution when interpreting the estimated enrollments and costs, as they are subject to change.

1. The projected enrollments and annual costs for implementing universal child care over the next five years

Fiscal Year	**Estimated Children Enrolled**	**Estimated Total Annual Cost USD**
Year 1	191,000	$6,610,000,000
Year 2	197,000	$7,010,000,000
Year 3	203,000	$6,830,000,000
Year 4	209,000	$7,240,000,000
Year 5	215,000	$7,700,000,000
Estimated 5-Year Total	**1,015,000**	**$35,390,000,000**

The projections include the following assumptions and caveats with the acknowledgement that these will continue to be refined by the Advisory Board:

- The Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) produced universal childcare cost estimates for Year 1 and 5-year projections. The child care market for younger children is not yet well understood. Before implementing a universal childcare program, a comprehensive study of the market may be appropriate.

- Year 1 represents the first year of program implementation rather than a specific calendar year.
- The Year 1 enrollment number represents the baseline estimate. The Advisory Board assumes families will choose to enroll preschool age children (*i.e.,* ages three years and four years) in non-parental care giving settings at a higher rate than children under the age of three. That is because the Advisory Board assumes that, although there is a need for more infant and toddler care overall, a significant number of families with infants and toddlers will choose to keep them in their own care (*e.g.,* family preference, availability of paid parental leave policies, and availability and affordability of infant and toddler formal child care settings).
- Child care enrollment estimates were calculated using a cascading methodology which started with the number of enrolled kindergarteners[19]. The baseline projections assume that the number of 3- and 4-year-olds will reflect the number of children currently enrolled in NYCPS Pre-K and 3-K programs[20].
- The baseline projections estimate the number of 2-year-olds enrolled in childcare will reflect 75% of enrolled 3-year-olds, and the number of 1-year-olds will reflect 75% of enrolled 2-year-olds.
- Baseline projections for enrolled infants were divided into two groups. 60% of 1-year olds would enroll in childcare at 6-12 months, but a smaller proportion of 1-year olds (20%) would enroll at only 0-6 months.
- The distributions of child care settings per age group were calculated based on ACS & HRA low-income child care voucher utilization by care type and age group with a modification for 3- and 4-year olds[21]. This distribution of care type utilization may not be representative of utilization for the broader NYC population under a universal child care system.
- The projections assume yearly growth for each age group: 1% for 4-year olds, 3% for 3-year olds, 5% for 2- and 1-year olds, 4% for infants 6-12 months, and 2% for infants 0-6 months. It is particularly difficult to project the enrollment of infants and toddlers in a universal child care system because the City currently only provides care for infants and toddlers if they qualify through the Child Care Block Grant and Early Head Start.
- A universal child care system should include access to high quality care. The cost estimations follow the high-end cost of child care detailed in the Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies' *Understanding the true cost of child care in New York State* 2023 report. Additionally, high cost projections were adjusted to account for increases to the New York State Market Rate between 2022 (time when the Prenatal to Five Fiscal survey was

[19] https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2024&instid=7889678368

[20] https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/assets/ibo/downloads/pdf/education/2025/2025-may-utilization-up-capacity-down-a-look-at-3k-and-prek-trends-in-nyc.pdf

[21] https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2025/hra.pdf

conducted) and 2024 (when OCFS report was published). Center-based costs were increased by 22% and family based by 16% as described in the NYC Comptroller report *Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision.*

- The projections also include a yearly 3% inflation factor in years 2 through 5 (although child care costs have increased more rapidly than this in recent years per the NYC Comptroller).
- These projections do not assume any adjustments to labor/time & leave policies for parents, do not account for NYC's existing licensed child care professional capacity, nor do these calculations account for the amount the City currently spends on child care.
- To be able to serve as many as 215,000 children, the City would require significant investments in its resources and staffing capacity. To that end, the projections include a best-guess estimate of a 8% administrative yearly add-on for City agencies to have the resources, technology, and staff to support a universal child care system. For the first two years, the projections include an infrastructure cost of 10%.

These projections do not account for any costs associated with the following:

- Standing up and sustaining a comprehensive workforce pipeline for child care providers; and
- Creating designated special education seats.

2. The recommended costs associated with expanding child care subsidies to families in the City whose income equals up to 300% and 400% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Table 2: Families & Children in New York City at or under 85% State Median Income (SMI)	
Age Group	**Number of Children**
Ages 0 – 1	106,183
2 Year Olds	59,845
3 Year Olds	63,004
4 Year Olds	66,198
Ages 0 – 4	**295,230**

As of October 2023, New York's child care subsidy income eligibility is set to 85% of the State Median Income (SMI), the highest level permitted by federal rules. This threshold captures nearly all families with young children whose household income falls below 400% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Based on this broad eligibility, the Advisory Board estimates that providing subsidies for all eligible children under the age of five at the 85% SMI standard would cost approximately $8.7 billion based on the average cost for each age in the Year 1 baseline.

Part III: How to Get to Universal Child Care

Achieving universal child care will require more than expanding access—it demands strengthening the foundation that supports the entire system. Last year's Child Care Advisory Board report highlighted major advances in increasing family awareness, streamlining applications, and beginning to close equity gaps in access. This year, we turn our attention to the system itself: the infrastructure, policies, and operations that must be stabilized and expanded to make universality achievable.

Our goal is to understand which investments and reforms are essential to sustain growth. Without a strong infrastructure—enough educators, adequate funding, sufficient facilities, and reliable data—efforts to expand access risk being unsustainable or deepening existing inequities. This report argues that New York City's next phase of progress depends on building the capacity of the system to grow, not just opening more seats.

Drawing on the challenges and opportunities identified in last year's report, the Advisory Board has focused on four core areas of system infrastructure and operations that must be strengthened to support universal expansion:

1. Recruiting and retaining a robust child care workforce
2. Leveraging existing and identifying new revenue sources
3. Increasing the supply of child care providers and maximizing existing capacity
4. Building a data-driven and coordinated system

In the pages that follow, we explore each focus area in depth—examining the key challenges and identifying opportunities to move each area closer to universality. Taken together, these areas outline a practical roadmap for transformation. Achieving a universal child care system will require an all-of-government approach, coordinated leadership from the Mayor's Office and City agencies, and close partnership with providers, employers, community networks, and the State of New York.

Focus Area 1: Recruiting and Retaining a Robust Child Care Workforce

Universal child care begins and ends with people. The quality, stability, and reach of New York City's child care system rests on the educators and caregivers who make it work every day. Ask any parent and they will confirm: the strength of a program—and the trust families place in it—depends on the individuals providing care above all else.

These educators form the backbone of the system, ensuring children's safety, nurturing their development, and laying the foundation for lifelong learning. Facilities, funding, and policy matter—but without a skilled and supported workforce, there is no system to build upon. Due to the educator shortage, many licensed programs contain empty classrooms, limiting child enrollment and access to early education. Currently, New York City has about 32,900 child care educators and directors[22], and to support a universal child care system, the City will need a total of about 70,000 child care educators and additional educators for special education services—almost double the current amount. Investing in these professionals is therefore not only a matter of fairness; it is the essential precondition for achieving universal child care.

New York City's child care workforce spans diverse settings and governance structures: teachers in public 3-K and Pre-K programs run by NYC Public Schools, educators in community-based organizations under City contract, and thousands of independent center-, school-, and home-based providers—some of which serve children with child care subsidies. This diversity brings richness but also complexity. City-regulated centers and State-licensed home-based programs operate under different health and safety rules and staffing qualifications, which in turn shape workers' experiences and opportunities. Effective workforce development and training policy must ensure equitable opportunities for teachers across child care settings.

The Advisory Board's first report documented persistent challenges—low wages, high turnover, and barriers to attracting and retaining qualified staff. It called for expanding the talent pipeline, improving retention, and cultivating leadership through paid apprenticeships, scholarships, and partnerships with higher education. It also emphasized the need for competitive wages, flexible funding, and stronger professional development—particularly in supporting children with special needs and Emergent Multilingual Leaners—to strengthen quality and sustainability across all programs.

Building on that foundation, this report advances the case for a comprehensive workforce strategy: one that treats child care educators as essential professionals, aligns City and State systems, and creates clear pathways for career growth and economic stability.

Current Challenges

Low Compensation & Lack of Benefits

Despite being the foundation of the child care system, early educators remain among the lowest-paid workers in New York City. Most earn wages that barely cover basic living costs, and many—especially home-based providers—effectively make less than minimum wage once expenses are factored in.[23] The result is predictable: high turnover, staffing shortages, and

[22] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2025). Child Care Affordability and the Benefits of Universal Provision.

[23] Melodia, Lauren. (2023). High Calling, Low Wages. The New School Center for New York City Affairs.

reduced program capacity. This further leads to a growing disinterest in entering the child care field altogether.

Pay disparities between educators in community-based organizations (CBOs) and those in district-run programs deepen the inequities. Teachers performing the same work, often for longer hours and with equal or greater credentials, earn thousands less when they are employed by a CBO rather than NYC Public Schools, a pay scale that is dictated by labor agreements. This uneven compensation structure drains experienced teachers from the community-based network and undermines continuity of care.[24] Moreover, because these labor agreements only include unionized CBO staff and New York City Public School (NYCPS) staff, non-unionized child care educators are not included in these negotiations and are thus even more significantly impacted by the pay disparities.

For independent providers accepting child care vouchers, the challenge is compounded by a State reimbursement system tied to daily attendance. Because providers' major expenses—rent, utilities, and staffing—are fixed, even short-term absences can erode already slim margins, forcing some programs to operate at a loss.[25]

Lack of Pathways for Professional Growth

Pathways for career advancement remain constrained by multiple factors. Low wages limit individuals' ability to pursue higher degrees, pay for professional training, or afford to pay for books, and exam fees. In addition, the scheduling and availability of courses often do not accommodate non-traditional students, including those already employed in classroom settings. Finally, overall mobility is restricted, particularly when higher compensation is not guaranteed upon completion of an advanced degree or credential—this is particularly true for family child care providers.[26]

Existing compensation models also do not recognize educators who lack formal degrees or certifications but have years of experience.[27] This proves especially true for educators who are not yet certified but working toward a credential (also known as on a "study plan") and not only face the financial, scheduling, and workload management barriers, but also need to navigate the complex certification and portfolio requirements and may need extra support to successfully pass exams. Fewer than one-third of participants in some credentialing programs finish on time.[28]

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[24] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2024). Review of Salaries Paid to Certified Early Childhood Teachers Hired by Community Based Organizations.

[25] New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. (2024). Review of Salaries Paid to Certified Early Childhood Teachers Hired by Community Based Organizations.

[26] Day Care Council. (2021). Supporting-New-York-City_s-Unsung-Heroes-2021-final.pdf.

[27] Shaeffing, Annie and Joseph Kannegaard. (2024). Parity Compensation for New York's Early Childhood Educators. New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute.

[28] Daphna Bassok, Laura Bellows, Anna J. Markowitz, and Kate Miller-Bainsht Brookings Institution. (2023). Building a professional early childhood workforce requires a "compensation-first" approach.

Early childhood program leaders face limited access to training and coaching opportunities that are specifically tailored to the responsibilities of leading an early childhood program. Many are classroom teachers promoted into leadership roles without adequate training on human resources and fiscal management, health and safety compliance requirements, and curriculum implementation.[29] Without training and coaching, this can lead to higher stress and turnover and ultimately impact the quality of the program for children.

Information about available scholarships, grants, and trainings is fragmented between schools of higher education, making it difficult for current educators to know what is available.[30] Early childhood educators seeking advancement must navigate a complex web of eligibility criteria and application deadlines for financial help. This fragmentation can lead to underutilization of resources and further limit the pursuit of career advancement.

Owners of small child care businesses face a different challenge: they are expected to serve as caregivers, administrators, and HR managers without access to the business training needed to operate successfully. These gaps limit the stability of programs and perpetuate turnover across the sector.

Demanding Conditions and Administrative Burdens

Child care is emotionally and physically demanding work, often extending well beyond a standard workday. Providers juggle caregiving, compliance, and paperwork—sometimes even serving as informal caseworkers to help families navigate subsidy systems. This level of strain leaves little time for professional development or rest, driving burnout and discouraging new entrants to the field.

Recommendations

A universal child care system will only succeed if New York City builds and sustains a high-quality, well-compensated workforce. The City must transform early childhood education into a stable and attractive profession—one that offers clear career ladders, competitive pay, and accessible pathways into and through the field.

Recruitment

- **Launch an ECE Workforce Taskforce to create a unified career and education pipeline in 2026.**
  Partner with CUNY, city agencies, community colleges, high schools, philanthropies, and unions to create seamless pathways that include paid apprenticeships, accelerated training programs[31], stackable credentials, and credit for on-the-job experience for home- and

[29]McCormick Institute for Early Childhood (2023). We Can't Afford to Lose Leaders: Professional Development to Increase Administrator Retention During the First Few Years.

[30] Day Care Council of New York (2019). Leave No Teacher Behind.

[31]The 74. (2025). North Carolina Child Care Academies Provide Fast Track for Educators.

center-based providers. NYC should look to models with NYCPS high schools to give credits to students. Given the dependency on NYC having a robust, sustainable workforce to achieve universality, the City should launch a new ECE workforce taskforce in early 2026 that includes a diverse and intentional representation of members, including home- and center-based providers.

- **Review the NYC Health Code mandates.**

  The New York City Health Code sets health and safety requirements for child care centers, including qualification mandates for child care professionals. The NYC Health Department should review these qualifications to ensure they reflect best practices, current conditions in the industry, and continue to promote safe, high-quality early childhood education.
- **Continue to reduce processing times for background checks.**

  To accelerate hiring, the City will continue to provide sufficient resources to the Health Department to enable timely background checks.
- **Build advocacy agenda to recruit more teachers for the 2026 State legislative session.**

  To address the child care workforce shortage, build an advocacy agenda to the State that follows the model of other hard-to-hire professions, such as student loan forgiveness, and identify other ways to reduce cost-burdens for educators that are available to other high-demand occupations.

<u>Retention & Leadership</u>

- **Establish an equitable pay and compensation structure across all types of care providers by 2028.**
  a. Align compensation and benefits for early educators in community-based, contracted, and public settings, closing pay gaps with NYCPS school based-programs by 2028.
  b. Advocate to New York State to increase reimbursement rates for subsidy-accepting providers for the next market rate release.
  c. Recognize years of experience:
     i. Develop systems that link educators’ pay to years of experience while also streamlining processes for educators to earn credentials or advanced degrees.
     ii. Create pathways that recognize and validate the skills and experience of non-credentialed or non-certified educators, allowing demonstrated experience to serve as a measure of quality.
- **Convene higher education institutions to streamline certification and other credentials for educators on study plans.**

  Partner with CUNY, SUNY, and other higher education institutions to identify sticking points and opportunities to make it easier for teachers on study plans to get credentialed, meet their higher education goals, and complete their degrees, including creating accelerated pathways. This work can be embedded within the above-mentioned ECE Workforce Taskforce.

- **Invest in leadership and retention, and pay providers for taking credit-bearing trainings and professional learning courses.**
  Create a citywide mentorship and leadership program for teachers and directors, modeled on Washington State's Imagine Institute,[32] to strengthen professional identity and succession planning and compensate teachers for their time in training.[33] NYC should work with philanthropic funders to pilot these ideas and evaluate equitable impact to quality and job satisfaction.

Focus Area 2: Leveraging Existing and Identifying New Revenue Sources

Expanding access to high-quality child care for every family who needs it will only be possible with a funding system that is both stable and flexible. Universal child care is a bold goal—but without sustainable, unrestricted funding, expansion efforts risk faltering under the weight of fragmented programs and short-term revenue streams.

Today, New York City's child care funding is divided among multiple sources—federal, state, and local—each tied to specific eligibility criteria and limited uses. Funding levels often depend on a child's age, a family's income, or the hours of care provided. For example, families with infants and toddlers can only access means-tested seats, while most of the City's 3-K and Pre-K programs operate on a school-year schedule of six hours and twenty minutes a day, leaving parents to patch together costly after-care and summer care. These constraints make it nearly impossible for working families to access the full-day, year-round care they need—and prevent the City from treating child care as the public good it is.

The system is further fragmented between publicly contracted programs and the private market, which the City also subsidizes through vouchers. These silos make it difficult to distribute resources equitably or respond dynamically to neighborhood-level demand. A sustainable financing strategy for universality must therefore do three things: maximize existing public dollars, secure new flexible revenue streams, and create mechanisms to protect and grow funding over time.

To this end, New York State's 2025 budget included inadequate funding to maintain ACS' expanded caseload of children using low-income vouchers. New York City opted to provide continuity of care for most low-income voucher users and began a waitlist in May 2025. As a result of the insufficient funding from New York State, the City added $300 million of funding to help maintain continuity of care in the City Fiscal Year 2026 Adopt Budget. New York City

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[32] The Imagine Institute. (2025). https://imaginewa.org/.
[33] The Imagine Institute. (2025). Family Child Care Providers Training.

needs $500 million from New York State for Federal Fiscal Year 2026, and an additional $1.3 billion for Federal Fiscal Year 2027 to maintain the low-income voucher caseload.

The Advisory Board's first report highlighted progress made by the City and State to expand eligibility for child care assistance and modeled the cost of universal implementation—reaching more than one million children at an estimated $7.9 billion in the first year and $54.5 billion over five years. Building on that work, this report underscores the need for an integrated and diversified funding approach—one that draws from federal and state sources while also pursuing new tools such as public-private partnerships, dedicated child care trust funds, employer contributions, and tax incentives.

Achieving universal child care will require treating funding as infrastructure: planned, protected, and built to last.

Current Challenges

<u>Fragmented and Unstable Funding</u>
New York City's child care system is financed through a complicated web of Federal, State, and City funding streams—each with distinct eligibility rules, reimbursement rates, and reporting requirements. While this structure allows multiple entry points for families, it also fragments accountability and limits flexibility. Programs must navigate differing rules for who qualifies, how funds can be spent, and what hours or ages can be served—making it nearly impossible to design a seamless system of care.

This patchwork also makes the system vulnerable to fiscal shocks. When Federal or State funds fluctuate, the City must scramble to fill gaps to avoid disrupting care for thousands of families. In 2025, New York State allocated insufficient Child Care Block Grant funding to meet New York City's needs. As a result, the City stopped issuing new low-income vouchers to eligible families and established a waitlist for eligible applicants. To ensure continuity of care for 75,000 already enrolled children, the City chose to recertify eligible families for care. To sustain these existing low-income child care voucher enrollments and continue recertifications, New York City requires $1.8 billion in additional funding from New York State across Federal Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027. Similarly, the federal government's decision not to renew NYCPS's Head Start grant required the City to step in to sustain over $71 million of services until June 30, 2026. These recurring crises underscore the need for a long-term, locally-controlled funding mechanism that can guarantee continuity of care.

<u>Limited Employer And Private Sector Participation</u>
The private sector bears real costs from the City's limited child care capacity. Inadequate access to reliable care costs New York City businesses an estimated $1.18 billion annually in absenteeism and turnover and reduces citywide economic output by $23 billion. Yet despite these losses, employer engagement in child care solutions remains minimal.

Few businesses take advantage of existing incentives such as the City's Child Care Business Tax Credit—no employers applied in 2023 or 2024—suggesting that current tools are either too complex or poorly aligned with employer needs. More fundamentally, the business community has not been fully integrated into policymaking or funding design. Unlocking their participation will be essential to achieving universal access and ensuring that child care is recognized as core economic infrastructure, not a social service on the margins.

Lack of Capacity to Innovate and Pursue New Funding
The heavy regulatory and compliance burdens tied to State and Federal funding restrict the City's ability to innovate or plan strategically. Agencies spend significant time managing reimbursement and reporting requirements, leaving limited capacity to design new funding models or pilot creative approaches. This creates a vicious cycle: without the freedom to test new models, the City remains dependent on the very funding streams that constrain its options, instead of designing flexible, locally tailored solutions.

To move toward universality, New York will need both greater local fiscal authority and dedicated resources for system design, partnership-building, and innovation—so that the City can plan for growth rather than react to shortfalls. Breaking this cycle will require both greater local fiscal authority and dedicated resources for innovation—so that New York can plan, pilot, and scale new approaches to child care delivery rather than continually react to budget shortfalls.

Recommendations
Expanding to universal care will require predictable, diversified funding that grows with need. New York City should pair traditional public funding with innovative financing tools to ensure affordability, stability, and shared responsibility.

- **Explore how New York city could create a sustainable child care funding model.** Explore creating a dedicated, multi-source trust fund, endowment, or social bond disbursement. The trust fund, for example, could be capitalized through City, State, and philanthropic contributions, with options for employer participation—to provide sustained financing for expansion, workforce pay, and innovation grants.
- **Develop public-private partnership through the creation of a child care focused business coalition.**
  Drawing from the EPIC strategic framework,[34] establish a business coalition to mobilize employers, government, and philanthropy around creative child care solutions, which could include creating a dedicated team to support employers who want to explore providing child care benefits to employees; piloting shared-cost models like Michigan's Tri-Share, where employers, government, and families each cover a third of tuition; or partnering with major employers to co-develop on-site or near-site child care hubs.

[34] Executive Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC). https://www.epicimpact.org/.

- **Explore leveraging Federal and State funds creatively.**
  Coordinate with NYS to maximize use of Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) resources, explore Medicaid alignment for family supports, and work with advocates to identify other revenue sources to offset the City Tax Levy burden on New York City. Advocate to the State to allow New York City to use Pre-K funds for 3-K, now that universal Pre-K has been reached.
- **Mobilize philanthropy and social-impact capital.**
  Engage foundations and impact investors to seed quality-improvement pilots, technology modernization, and workforce initiatives that can transition to public funding once proven effective.
- **Advocate to the State and Federal governments to make it easier for income-eligible families to access child care.**
  The robust and stringent State and Federal requirements for means-tested seats increases the administrative burden on City agencies to process applications, leading to a loss of care for families and lack of family stability (*e.g.,* due to delays from eligibility determinations, loss of job opportunities, loss of schooling opportunities, and delayed social services and benefits).
- **Advocate to the State for a $1.2 billion Workforce Fund.**
  To support the child care workforce across the State, advocate to the State to create a permanent State fund to increase child care worker compensation for all members of the child care workforce.

Focus Area 3: Increasing The Supply of Child Care Providers and Maximizing Existing Capacity

Achieving universal child care requires treating supply as infrastructure. A system cannot be truly universal if there are not enough classrooms, facilities, and licensed seats to serve every family that needs care. Expanding supply is therefore not just an operational task—it is a foundational investment in the City's economic and social fabric. As mentioned earlier, maximizing and expanding child care capacity requires a stable, growing workforce.

Today, too many potential providers are constrained by high start-up costs, complex permitting and licensing processes, and razor-thin operating margins.[35] Without a deliberate strategy to help new facilities open, stabilize existing ones, and reduce the cost of doing business, New York City risks falling short of the capacity needed to make universality real. Providers operating at or below cost are forced to limit enrollment, compromise on quality, or close altogether—eroding both access and trust.

[35] 5Boro Institute. (2024). Investing In Families And Our Future: A roadmap to address NYC child care needs.

The Advisory Board's earlier work highlighted this fragility, calling attention to the unsustainable business model facing many providers and the City's efforts to improve it—streamlining reimbursement processes, raising rates, and offering tax incentives for new centers. Building on that foundation, New York City must now take the next step: a coordinated, citywide strategy to unlock space, capital, and technical support for providers, ensuring that every neighborhood has the facilities and infrastructure required for universal access.

Current Challenges

Start-Up Barriers
To increase the supply of licensed family child care and center-based care, the City will need more viable space to accommodate a universal child care system. High real estate costs are a major barrier for providers to open new centers and an ongoing strain on their operating costs. For home-based providers specifically, high rent and utilities can be a unique challenge for their business model, given that 80% of them are renters.[36] Home-based providers are often severely rent-burdened, well above the levels of other New Yorkers, and cannot afford their rent with their existing reported business income and without the support of other members of their household.[37] These home-based and smaller providers are the most affected by start-up barriers.

Additionally, the capital required to open, retrofit, and/or renovate a child care site can be a significant cost burden, and providers lack access to low interest loan programs. When these are available, the ability to repay can be a challenge given providers' thin profit margins. Lastly, publicly funded child care is limited to vouchers through Administration for Children's Services (ACS)/Human Resources Association (HRA), which have limited funding or contracts issued by the DOE. Newly opened programs can have a hard time tapping into public dollars to offset the cost of care in their early days, given contracting timelines and the limited amount of vouchers available to families.

Administrative Burdens
Licensing, permitting, and background checks are complex processes involving several agencies. Any delays in this process prevent providers from opening or force providers to open at reduced capacity.[38] Moreover, because multiple agencies are involved, providers aren't always clear on which City agency governs which part of the process to get their permit.

Payment and Reimbursement
Reimbursement rates for subsidized care often do not cover the true cost of care. In New York City, Child Care Development Block Grants only reimburse 59% of the cost of care to center-

[36] 5Boro Institute. (2024). Investing In Families And Our Future: A roadmap to address NYC child care needs.
[37] Melodia, Lauren. (2023). *Ibid*.
[38] 5Boro Institute. (2024). *Ibid*.

based providers.[39] This forces providers to rely on other funding streams, operate at a deficit, or reduce expenses that might be contributing to the quality of their program.[40]
Additionally, the complex invoicing process for reimbursement means that providers have to go through multiple layers of review, which can cause delays that increase the administrative burden for providers, limit their ability to get paid, and affect their cashflow and operating expenses.[41]
Lastly, before Universal Pre-K, private providers' business models relied on caring for children of different ages. Because infant and toddler care is more expensive than care for older children, programs that served both infants and older children were able to offset these increased costs by also serving preschoolers. Universal Pre-K has meant shifts to providers' business models to account for higher staffing requirements and costs.[42] [43]

Recommendations
Even with strong demand and funding, families cannot access care without sufficient providers and space. The City must treat child care as critical infrastructure—embedding it in zoning, development, and small-business policies—to grow supply equitably across neighborhoods.

- **Designate "Child Care Priority Zones."**
  Use data on family demand, housing growth, and workforce gaps to target high-need areas for start-up grants, expedited permitting, and technical assistance.
- **Maximizing what we have: survey of empty classrooms and underenrolled providers to target investments.**
  NYC could partner with organizations like the Day Care Council, ECE on the Move, CUNY, *etc.*, to survey providers who have empty but viable spaces and/or for NYCS contracted programs who are interested in changing current seat configurations to meet community demand so the City can strategically target those places to create more universal seats—keeping in mind that the ability to turn on classrooms or enroll more children depends on meeting staffing requirements in the NYC Health Code or OCFS regulations.
- **Establish a cross-agency taskforce to unlock existing spaces for child care in early 2026.**
  Create an interagency initiative to repurpose underused City-owned properties, ground-floor commercial spaces, and community facilities for affordable child care. Strategically invest in capital renovations of existing child care centers, including in NYCHA facilities.

[39] First Five Years Fund. (2024). Child Care and Development Block Grant in New York.
[40] 5Boro Institute. (2024). *Ibid.*
[41] Alliance for Quality Education and Office of Senator Jabari Brisport. (2021). The Child Care Crisis in New York State.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] Center for American Progress. (2020). Costly and Unavailable: America Lacks Sufficient Child Care Supply for Infants and Toddlers.

- **Support child care entrepreneurship.**
  Expand NYCHA's REES Childcare Business Pathways and launch a City-funded start-up grant for new and home-based providers. These grants could be administered by a third-party with experience distributing grants and providing technical assistance to ensure licensure and/or sustainability of operations. New York City can partner with philanthropies to fund an evaluation of grant impact on provider's operational sustainability to inform further scaling.
- **Reduce operational costs through shared infrastructure.**
  Develop a "Shared Services Network" that centralizes HR, bookkeeping, and compliance support for small providers, modeled on successful systems in Washington, Colorado, and Iowa.
- **Create contracts with child care providers that include funding to account for fixed costs and inflation adjustments.**
  Contracts with child care providers should embed funding for fixed costs, such as furniture, educational materials, and renovations, to support new and existing providers in start-up and upkeep costs. Within reason, the City should explore how contracts should be adjusted for inflation.
- **Reduce administrative burdens through partnerships and trainings with business support organizations.**
  To free educators' time for teaching and family engagement, connect child care providers with operation and management partner organizations; develop administrative and business trainings, resources, and office hours, especially for family child care providers; and explore piloting low-cost child care management software and business supports for small providers. New York City could partner with philanthropies to pilot before bringing to scale.
- **Require new developments to plan for child care.**
  Embed child care considerations into ULURP, zoning, and incentive programs so that developers integrate centers into mixed-use and affordable housing projects. The interagency taskforce should ensure the Department of City Planning's methodology for evaluating the needs of child care slots for new developments. The results of the evaluation would inform where the City invests public dollars for child care.
- **Partnerships with affordable housing developers.**
  New York City should convene affordable housing developers to solicit input on how the City can develop incentives and remove barriers to incorporating child care centers within developments. To advance this goal, the City should establish a pilot initiative, implemented in collaboration with experienced third-party partners, to:
    - Identify existing affordable housing developments with potential for child care integration.
    - Develop standardized screening criteria for prospective child care operators and select qualified providers to deliver child care services within identified sites.

- Design a scalable implementation framework to guide future expansion efforts.
- Evaluate the pilot's outcomes, including its impact on provider operating costs and program sustainability.

Focus Area 4: Building a Data-Driven and Coordinated System

Universal child care cannot be achieved without a clear picture of where we stand and where we need to go. Building a system that serves every family requires understanding demand, mapping supply, and forecasting future needs with precision. Without comprehensive data and coordinated planning, investments risk being fragmented—leaving some neighborhoods with too many empty seats and others with none.

The Advisory Board has previously identified this challenge: with over 20,000 vacancies of 3-K and Pre-K seats unfilled,[44] many families still cannot find care that matches their needs for location, schedule, or cost. In addition, over 4,000 seats for infants and toddlers in NYCPS' early childhood system are empty[45]—all seats require a family to be income-eligible. This mismatch reflects a broader systems gap: New York City has never conducted a unified assessment of child care supply that is inclusive of private care providers with demographics of families with children under five-years-old (*i.e.,* census, birth data, housing status, and migration patterns within New York City). This assessment could be used to inform where to make investments in child care. In addition, because New York City has only ever had means-tested child care for children under three years of age, there is limited data on how many families with younger children would enroll them in formal child care settings. Rolling out universal infant and toddler seats should be carefully planned using data, and the City's ability to plan for universality depends on closing this gap.

Current Challenges

<u>Integration of Existing Data</u>
Child care data in New York City is dispersed across multiple agencies and technology systems, each tied to its own funding stream and compliance requirements. Sharing data between agencies requires lengthy legal agreements and is often limited by privacy rules. As a result, critical information—such as provider capacity, enrollment trends, and family demand—remains siloed. Broader data, like housing development plans and demographic projections, are rarely integrated into child care planning, even though they are routinely used for school planning.

<u>Absence of a Citywide Landscape Analysis</u>
While individual agencies produce their own forecasts and enrollment reports, there is no centralized, citywide approach to analyzing child care supply and demand nor analyzing

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[44] Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. (2025). MMR.
[45] Melissa Aviles-Ramos, Chancellor. Department of Education MMR.

compliance and quality of operating programs. The City lacks a shared dataset or framework that shows where families live and work, where providers are located, and where new investments are most needed. This limits the ability to plan expansions, target resources equitably, or respond to demographic change. Additionally, the City lacks a universal standard of compliance and quality of operating programs; there is limited understanding of the quality of programs across the City, and providers do not have a clear quality goal to achieve.

<u>City Agency Capacity and Resource Limitations</u>
Vacancies and resource shortages across City agencies further weaken system performance. Staffing gaps delay family voucher enrollment, provider background checks, and new facility approvals—core functions that directly affect access. Outdated digital infrastructure compounds these challenges, making it difficult to track real-time data, manage contracts efficiently, or share information across agencies. Inconsistent and variable state funding has made it difficult to sustain and improve the current system, such as New York State inadequately funding the City to be able to maintain the thousands of children enrolled in care now through a low-income voucher.

To move from fragmented administration to a truly universal system, New York City must establish an integrated data and planning infrastructure—one that links child care capacity, demographic trends, and family demand in real time. With coordinated data, modern technology, and a fully resourced workforce, the City can finally plan for universality rather than react to its constraints.

Recommendations
Universal child care is not a single program—it is a citywide system that must be coordinated, data-driven, and accountable. New York City needs a governance and planning structure capable of aligning policy, funding, facilities, and family experience across agencies.

- **Create a citywide forecast analysis.**
  The Mayor's Office of Child Care should collaborate with the Mayor's Offices of Operations and Economic Opportunity, as well as City agencies including ACS, DOHMH, NYCPS, Department of City Planning (DCP), Human Resources Association (HRA), Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), and Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), to develop the City's first comprehensive, citywide forecast of child care demand. Using population and census data, this forecast would inform future early childhood education procurements and support the development of flexible procurement strategies to ensure child care seats are available where families need them most. This work should begin immediately and be completed by June 2026 to inform NYCPS future RFPs for early childhood services.
- **Modernize digital systems and family access.**
  Build a platform—informed by diverse parent and provider voices and tested by end

users—that integrates existing systems, where families can find, compare, and apply for all child care options across the city—public, private, and subsidized.

Conclusion

Over the past three years, the City has made progress toward expanding access to high-quality and affordable child care; however, there are still significant challenges facing the City's child care sector that create barriers to universal access to child care and early childhood education. This report seeks to provide thoughtful analysis, recommendations, and financial and operational projections to help the City explore expanding access to child care, including reaching the goal of access to universal child care for the over 498,000 children under five years old across New York City.[46]

[46] New York City Department of Planning. (2023). American Community Survey, 2019-2023: New York City, Sex and age. Retrieved from https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov.