



**Testimony of Day Care Council of New York
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education,
Honorable Rita Joseph, Chair
At the Oversight Hearing on DOE Enrollment Policies**

January 25th, 2023

Presented By Gregory Brender, Chief Policy and Innovation Officer

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify. The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early childhood provider organizations in New York City. DCCNY supports its member organizations and New York City's early childhood field at-large through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, professional development and training for early childhood educators, directors and staff, and referral services for parents looking to find child care. DCCNY member organizations provide early care and education at over 200 sites in neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations have contracts with the New York City Department of Education. They offer both center-based child care programs and manage Family Child Care Networks which support providers caring for children in their homes. DCCNY member organizations also provide early childhood education through privately funded programs and the Federal Office of Head Start. DCCNY member organizations operate in all five boroughs and employ over 4,000 New Yorkers, most of whom are Black and brown women.

We believe that there is a meaningful opportunity to reform the Department of Education's enrollment procedures for early childhood education that leverages the connections that community-based child care providers have with the neighborhoods they served.

Under the Department of Education's Centralized Enrollment System which went into effect with the transition of early childhood contracts from the Administration for Children's Services to the Department of Education, parents have limited ability to ensure that their child ends up in the Pre-K, 3-K or child care program of their choosing. Parents select up to ten schools or community-based placements on paper or through MySchools.gov.

The application allows families to rank up to 10 programs of their choice, but the priority rankings of each program, the algorithm used to place families into programs, and knowledge of options remains unclear to many families. This often translates into families putting fewer choices on their applications and unknowingly putting themselves at a disadvantage by doing so. Additionally, families that do not fill out an application within the admission period, which often happens due to a lack of access to technology or lack of awareness around the admissions process, are severely penalized and lose access to the “right to choose” afforded to those families that applied within the admissions period.

Admission into an Extended Day/ Extended Year Child Care program requires meeting strict eligibility standards. This adds an additional layer of confusion and stress for families. When applying to a Child Care program for Pre-K, the application lists several questions that are aimed to help the algorithm determine who may or may not be eligible for child care. These questions include listing income, family size, and what if any government subsidies one might be receiving.

However, these questions are solely a preliminary line of questioning and are not the final decision on whether or not the family is eligible for the EDY program. When families receive an offer letter to a Child Care program, they are often surprised that additional information is required of them to determine their eligibility. Parents are often not prepared for the secondary steps required to complete the enrollment process.

Community-based organizations often devote a significant amount of time and effort to ensuring that families can access their programs which is not the same as accessing a school-based program. While a family receiving an offer to a Pre-K seat in a DOE public school center is only asked to provide a birth certificate and proof of New York City residency to enroll their child, a family in a Child Care program is faced with a more complex and time consuming process. This adds to the worry that parents enrolling in Child Care will become easily deterred because of the enrollment process and will opt to enroll their child in a public school program rather than a center-based program, hurting Child Care programs’ enrollment.

We have heard from many of our members that parents who wanted to be in their programs have only received offers from Pre- K or 3-K programs in public schools. At the same time, childcare providers are being penalized for under-enrollment by DOE when DOE itself controls enrollment.

Similarly, there have been significant wait times for families’ Child Care Assistance applications to be approved leaving vacant seats in child care centers and family child care homes and putting stressors on parents’ trying to access affordable child care. Moreover, many families, including many immigrant essential workers are weary of engaging with government agencies and feel safer with community-based organizations with whom they already have trusting relationships.

Over the summer of 2021, DOE briefly allowed providers to enroll families after the CBO

itself had done a complete eligibility check. This empowered CBOs to start serving eligible families immediately and helped them to leverage their community relationships. However, this policy ended with the start of the school year on September 10, 2021, and was not implemented in summer 2022.

Local community-based early childhood providers have strong connections to the neighborhoods they serve. The City should leverage these strong relationships to ensure that families are able to quickly access the childcare programs in which they want to enroll their children. This can be most effectively achieved by allowing community-based enrollment, wherein providers have the power to accept and enroll eligible families.

DCCNY urges DOE to take the following steps to improve enrollment procedures for early childhood education:

- Implement community-based enrollment so that providers can accept and enroll families who want to place their children in community-based childcare programs
- Suspend the DOE's pay-for-enrollment system which penalized providers for under-enrollment as long as DOE controls enrollment.

Finally, this Committee held an important hearing on October 19, 2022, which exposed many of the challenges that providers face due to late payments from the Department of Education. While there has been some progress, these issues persist for many providers as of today. Our recommendations for this ongoing issue follow:

- Pay ALL providers their contract value for FY22 immediately;
- Migrate invoicing and payment processes from DOE PreKids system to MOCS (Mayor's Office of Contract Services) Passport system, in line with other human services contracts which would simplify the process for providers;
- Pay FY23 invoices promptly assuring the ability for providers to bill for more than one month at time and that the lag between invoicing and reimbursement never exceeds 30 days; and
- Hold providers harmless from enrollment penalties, as long as DOE controls enrollment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.