

A Candidate's Guide to Early Childhood Education in New York City

By the Day Care Council of New York



About Us

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is a diverse membership organization dedicated to supporting early childhood education and family service providers across New York City. DCCNY seeks support for and assists in the development and operation of quality early childhood education and care services. We work closely with members to address operational challenges and maintain high standards of child development and social support.

Through comprehensive support and advocacy, DCCNY empowers its member organizations and New York City's early childhood education sector at-large by providing:

- Policy research and advocacy
- Labor relations and mediation services
- Quality improvement and business start-up supports
- Professional development and training for early childhood professionals
- Parent referral services for child care

DCCNY's member organizations operate more than 200 sites across the five boroughs, with most operating through contracts with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS).

Many also leverage additional funding sources, including federal Head Start contracts, child care assistance vouchers, and private funding.

At the heart of DCCNY's member organizations are their more than 4,000 dedicated professionals, the majority of whom are Black and Brown women, who are shaping the city's early childhood education landscape.



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Policy Inquiries

Tara N. Gardner:
tngardner@dcnyinc.org
Gregory Brender:
gbrender@dcnyinc.org
Shelby Lohr: slohr@dcnyinc.org

Program Access Support

New York City Child Care
Resource Center Consortium

- Website: nyccrr.org
- Phone: (888) 469-5999

The Day Care Council of New York is committed to developing solutions that support early childhood education in our city.

The Importance of Early Childhood Education in New York City

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a crucial role in preparing children for academic success and improving long-term learning outcomes. ECE programs come in various forms, including home-based providers and center-based programs offering 3-K and Pre-K slots. These educational and care options serve a dual purpose: enabling families/caregivers to participate in the workforce while providing children with a safe, nurturing environment that supports their social, intellectual, and emotional development.

The demand for child care and early childhood education is urgent. A staggering 80% of New York City families with children under five cannot afford child care.¹ The affordability crisis disproportionately impacts mothers, who risk losing up to 10% of their lifetime earnings per child due to unemployment caused by child care responsibilities. Moreover, 90% of caregivers report that child care challenges significantly disrupt their professional and personal time commitments.²

Despite the clear and pressing need for early childhood education, the workforce remains critically undervalued. Child care workers experience poverty at more than twice the rate of other New York workers,³ with over half earning annual incomes low enough to qualify for public benefits.⁴



80% of New York City families with children under five cannot afford child care.

90% of caregivers report that child care challenges significantly disrupt their professional and personal time commitments.



This systemic undervaluation reflects broader inequalities: 96% of New York's early childhood educators are women, and 56% identify as people of color.⁵

The child care affordability crisis often leaves families no choice but to move outside the city. In the last decade, New York City lost over 110,000 children under the age of five. There is an urgent need for comprehensive, accessible early childhood education solutions.



56% of New York's early childhood educators are women of color

110,000

children under the age of five have left NYC

How is ECE funded and managed in NYC

Early childhood education programs are offered in two primary settings: center-based classrooms and home-based programs where providers care for and educate small groups of children in their own homes.

Center-Based Programs

Center-based programs provide early childhood education in highly-structured classroom environments. These settings feature multiple specialized learning spaces designed to develop specific competencies. Typical classrooms might include distinct areas for storytelling, block building, scientific exploration, and other educational activities.

Key advantages of center-based programs include:

- Exposure to multiple teachers and caregivers
- Ability to serve larger groups of children
- Comprehensive learning environments with targeted educational zones
- Broader socialization opportunities for multi-year engagement

In New York City, center-based programs are rigorously regulated by the NYC Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (DOHMH) and NYC Public Schools (NYCPS), particularly when operating under city contracts.

Community-based organizations (CBOs), including DCCNY's member organizations, are the primary providers of 3-K and Pre-K programs. **Unlike public school programs, CBOs offer more comprehensive service options:**

- Extended Day/Extended Year programs
- Head Start programs
- Summer care options

These programs address the practical needs of working families by providing:

- Longer hours and months of care
- Alignment with families' work schedules
- Specialized focus on early childhood development



Center-Based Program Option: School Day / School Year Program

School Day/Year Programs (SDY) for 3- and 4-year-old children provide:

- 6 hours and 20 minutes of daily care
- 180 days of service per year
- No income or immigration status eligibility restrictions

Like NYCPS programs, these programs offer a shorter school day, which creates challenges for working families who may need to leave work early or seek additional child care arrangements. With School Day/School Year (SDY) programming, there is no guaranteed complimentary after-school or summer programming.

Flexible Options:

- Some community-based programs offer a private pay option for SDY children to remain for a full day alongside children attending their Extended Day/Year (EDY) programming
- Additional fees might be as high as \$200 per month

Program Types:

- NYC Public School (NYCPS) programs follow a School Day/School Year model with traditional school hours
- Community-based organizations provide both School Day/School Year and Extended Day Extended Year programs



Center-Based Program Option: Extended Day / Extended Year Program

Extended Day (EDY) programs are means-tested based on Federal and State guidelines. The Federal Child Care Development Block Grant, which partially funds these programs, requires that children served be either United States Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents. These programs provide critical support for working families by offering childcare during hours that extend beyond traditional school times, more closely aligning with work schedules.

- 8-10 hours of care each day
- 225 or 260 days annually, including summer months
- Co-pay that is determined by family income

Center-Based Program Option: Early Head Start & Head Start

Early Head Start and Head Start are free, federally-funded programs that help children under three and ages 3-5, respectively, to develop school readiness skills. Local nonprofits, community action agencies, and school districts operate Head Start programs across the United States.

Beyond educational services, Early Head Start & Head Start provides:

- Comprehensive wraparound services, including nutritious meals and health screenings (medical, dental, vision, and hearing)
- Mental health assessments and referrals

Programs actively encourage family participation through home visits and opportunities for caregivers to volunteer and support their child's learning. Families are eligible to enroll if their income is at or below the federal poverty level, currently \$32,150 for a family of four. Families living in temporary housing, receiving HRA Cash Assistance, or receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may also qualify.

Center-Based Program Option: Preschool Special Education

Preschool Special Education Programs address the needs of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). An IEP is designed to outline the specialized instruction, supports, and services that will help a student thrive in school.

Preschool special education services support children ages three to five who have disabilities or developmental delays. These services are provided free of charge to families. **They can help support various aspects of a child's development, including:**

- Learning skills
- Speech and language development
- Physical development
- Social-emotional skills
- Other critical developmental areas

Center-Based Program Option: School Day Plus

Since October 2024, the City Council has funded a pilot program, "School Day Plus," that converts traditional School Day/School Year seats to a model similar to Extended Day/Extended Year seats. This program operates in 77 child care centers. Unlike the previous model that relied on Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds—which came with income, work, and citizenship requirements—these new programs can enroll families without such income qualifications.

2024

marked the start of the "School Day Plus" pilot program

77

child care centers implemented the program



Family Child Care (FCC) Providers

- Serve children from birth to 13 years old
- Offer care during full school days, extended day programs, and after-school hours for school-age children
- Are the largest source of care for infants and toddlers
- Provide a diverse range of culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- Often operate within a home setting

Family Child Care Networks

Family Child Care Networks (FCCN) support child care providers who offer early childhood education and after-school care in home-based settings. **To ensure families can access high-quality programs tailored to their neighborhood's specific needs, networks provide:**

- Professional development
- Administrative support
- Quality monitoring
- Support accessing nutrition funding through the Federal Child and Adult Care Food Program

Child Care Vouchers: Through ACS - Administration for Children's Services

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) manages New York City's voucher program for families with low-incomes. As the agency responsible for the health and safety of New York City's children, ACS oversees critical programs, including preventive services, child welfare, and foster care.



ACS also transfers a portion of the State and Federal funding it receives to support Extended Day/Extended Year programs that operate with NYCPS contracts. ACS vouchers can be used in both center-based and home-based child care settings.

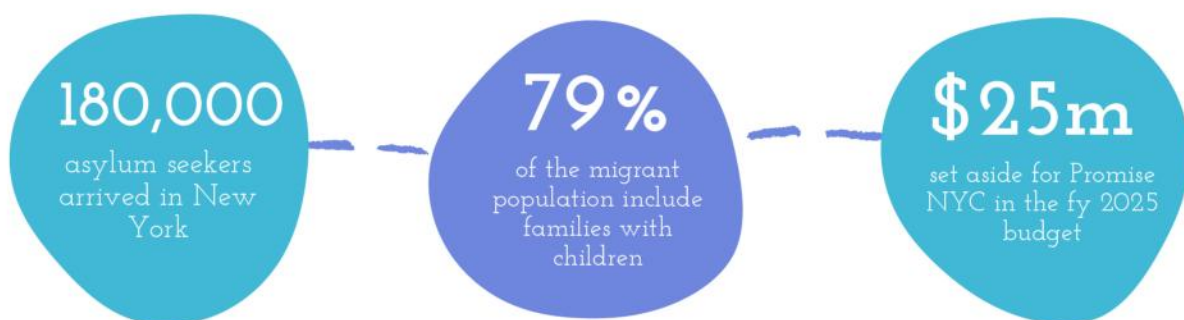
Child Care Vouchers: Through HRA

The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) provides child care vouchers for families receiving public assistance. Families with children aged 13 or younger who apply for public assistance must demonstrate that they have secured child care to participate in work or training activities.

Currently, parents with HRA-issued vouchers are unable to use NYCPS-contracted programs.

Child Care Vouchers: Through Promise NYC

New York City launched the Promise NYC program in January 2023. Promise NYC is designed to provide early childhood education opportunities for the city's undocumented population, offering child care vouchers at select community-based providers across all five boroughs. The program is an important step to serve the increasing migrant population; over 180,000 asylum seekers arrived in New York City over the last two years, and families with children comprised 79% of this population.



Despite continued demand, this program is not baselined in the city budget.

- The first iteration of Promise NYC served 600 children across the city.
- The city set aside \$16 million for Promise NYC in the FY 2024 budget and \$25 million in FY 2025.

Finding Child Care: Child Care Resource Center (CCRC)

Funded by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), Child Care Resource Centers (aka Child Care Resource and Referral Programs), provide services to families and early childhood education providers in every county in the state.



Contact the New York City Child Care Resource Center Consortium at nycerr.org or by calling (888) 469-5999.

Families looking for child care in New York City can explore child care options through the New York City Child Care Resource Center Consortium.

Representatives will ask about the type of care being sought, children's ages, hours of care needed, and other specific requirements, such as any special needs the child might have. Based on that information, they will provide a list of providers that most closely match identified needs and preferences.

The NYC CCRC consortium is operated by the Day Care Council of New York, the Chinese-American Planning Council, the Committee for Hispanic Children and families, and the Child Development Support Corporation.

The New York City Child Care Resource Center Consortium serves experienced child care providers and those looking to start a child care program. The Consortium offers training on topics including health and safety and business practices. Providers also received individual consultation on improving their classroom environment and enhancing program quality.

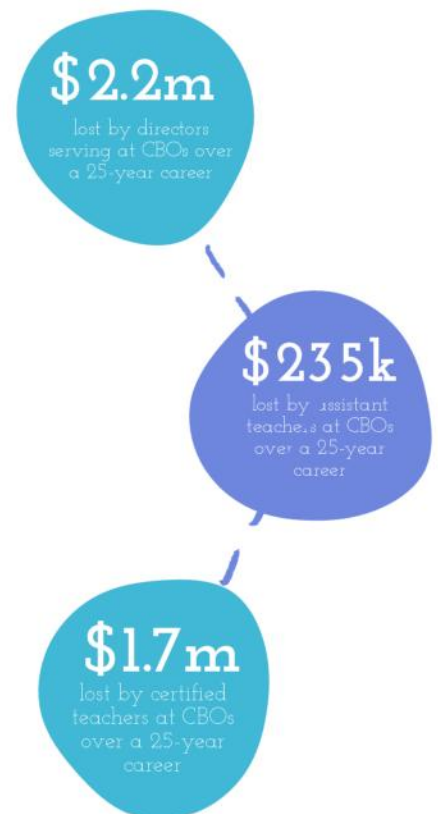
How You Can Improve Early Childhood Education When You Take Office

While ECE makes a tremendous difference for caregivers and children alike, the fight for stable funding continues and this is a crucial time. Our recommendations are built from the on-the-ground experiences of Day Care Council of New York member organizations.

Achieve Salary Parity for the Early Childhood Education Workforce

The early childhood education workforce remains drastically underpaid when compared to similarly-credentialed counterparts in public schools. In our November 2023 report with the New York City Council Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus, we found that directors at community-based organizations (CBOs) lose more than **\$2.2 million** over the course of a 25-year career by remaining at a CBO instead of moving to a public school. Similarly, **certified teachers face a loss of \$1.7 million**, while assistant teachers sacrifice over **\$235,000** during that same period.

To ensure the long-term sustainability and equity of community-based early childhood education programs, **the city must achieve full salary parity between public school educators and those working in CBOs.**



Improve the Contracting Process So That Community-Based Early Childhood Education Providers are Paid Fully and On Time

Although the City has made progress in issuing payments to providers, significant delays persist, jeopardizing child care providers' ability to operate their businesses and pay staff on time. In 2023, a DCCNY survey of 159 centers and Family Child Care Networks operating under FY 2022 contracts with New York City Public Schools revealed that 64% of community-based early childhood providers remained unpaid for services rendered in previous months. Among the centers that had to bridge payment gaps, 25% obtained business loans and 26% resorted to personal loans. Additionally, 41% of respondents reported missing payroll or delaying vendor payments due to delayed reimbursements from New York City Public Schools.

To stabilize the sector, the City must increase contract advances to at least 75% of the total contract value. Furthermore, the systems used for enrollment data collection and for invoicing and payments must be separated to ensure more efficient and accurate processing.



of CBO providers remained unpaid for services rendered



of providers missed payroll or delayed vendor payments due to delayed reimbursements

25%

of providers who took out loans took out business loans

26%

of providers who took loans had to rely on personal loans



Enrollment Recommendations

To increase enrollment, the City should implement streamlined procedures for enrolling families in the early childhood education program of their choice. Additionally, we recommend expanding the range of eligible programs to include the proposed 2-Care program, which will increase offerings for toddlers.

Implement Presumptive Eligibility

To improve the early childhood system for families, it is essential to make child care more accessible. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is by implementing presumptive eligibility. In December 2024, Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature passed a law allowing all counties across the state, including New York City, to adopt a presumptive eligibility standard for child care assistance.

Under presumptive eligibility, families who meet basic income qualifications for child care assistance can enroll their children in a child care program immediately while their application is processed. **This approach enables faster access to care for families while imposing little to no additional cost on the City or State.**

DCCNY strongly supports presumptive eligibility because it reduces administrative burdens for providers, families, and City agencies alike. Although now permitted by law, the policy remains optional and must be actively adopted by counties, including New York City.



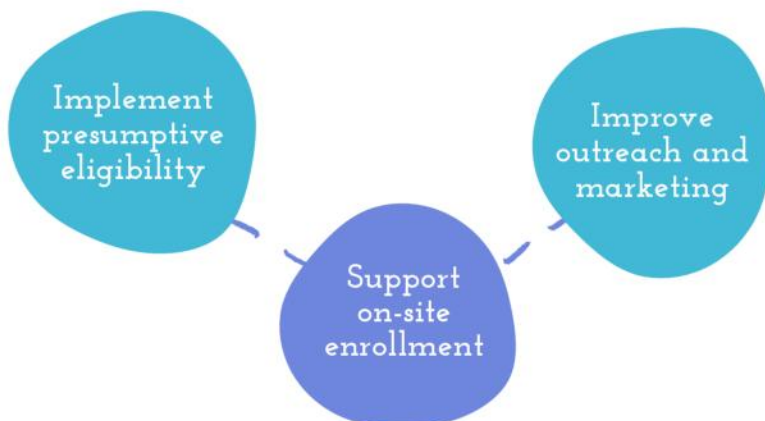
Support On-Site Enrollment

Admission into an Extended Day/Extended Year (EDY) program requires families to meet strict eligibility criteria, which can add confusion and stress to an already complex process. When applying to a Pre-K program, families are asked a series of preliminary questions - including household income, family size, and any government subsidies they may receive. These preliminary questions are designed to help the system estimate potential eligibility for child care assistance.⁶

However, these questions are only an initial screening tool and do not determine final eligibility for the EDY program. CBOs fill a crucial gap, supporting families through this process by helping them navigate the more complex aspects of the application and eligibility determination.

Improve Outreach and Marketing

Many families do not know what early childhood education options are available or find the process of matching with a provider and enrolling their child daunting. In order to make access to early childhood education inclusive of all New York families, the City must expand its investment in outreach efforts. When parents face challenges navigating enrollment, child care slots remain unfilled and families cannot access care. Marketing and outreach efforts must meet families where they are at by engaging in a robust, linguistically- and culturally-appropriate multi-media community engagement and enrollment effort to fill open, budgeted seats.



Conclusion

You are running for office at a turning point for New York City's early childhood education system. There is broad and widespread support throughout the City for bold investments in early childhood education. Yet providers are struggling to keep their doors open and the system faces draconian cuts.

DCCNY is eager to work with you and your colleagues to ensure that New York City becomes a place where all families regardless of income, race or neighborhood can access high-quality, affordable early childhood education programs and where the early childhood education workforce receives the just and equitable compensation that they deserve.

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The Day Care Council of New York

1430 Broadway, Suite 404 New York, New
York 10018 | 212-206-7818 | info@dcenyinc.org
www.dccnyinc.org

