

Delivered to: New York City Council Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education

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Oversight: The path to universal child care

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the new Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education. We applaud the City Council's leadership in convening the first-ever Subcommittee on Early Childhood Education and its focus on ensuring universal child care is both ambitious and operationally sound.

New York already has strong systemwide initiatives to support quality, accountability, and workforce development, including these initiatives at the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at the City University of New York:

- QUALITYstarsNY, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System for early childhood programs, which supports 2,000 programs across the state and nearly 700 in NYC
- The Aspire Registry, which provides a comprehensive, statewide picture of the early childhood workforce, supporting career pathways and workforce planning
- Our Career Development Center, which provides individualized academic planning and career guidance to early childhood professionals at no cost; since its founding, the Career Center has supported more than 15,000 clients
 - The Career Center's Early Childhood Leadership Initiative supports directors, administrators, family child care providers and other early childhood leaders with leadership-focused professional development and networking
 - The Early Childhood Education Employment Network offers hiring and employment support to early childhood programs

To realize its vision of universal child care, New York City must not only expand seats, but strengthen both the early childhood workforce that makes care possible and the data systems that allow the public and policymakers to understand progress and gaps in real time.

Educator compensation: the foundation of a sustainable child care system

Any expansion of child care and early learning depends on a stable, skilled, and adequately compensated workforce. Compensation is not a peripheral workforce issue; it is one of the foundational pillars on which quality, access, and sustainability rest.

Early childhood educators are responsible for children’s learning, development, health, and safety during the most critical years of brain development. Yet, these professionals are among the lowest-paid workers, often earning wages that do not reflect their training, experience, or responsibility. Many educators qualify for public assistance themselves, and too many leave the field entirely due to financial instability — even when they are deeply committed to the work.

As New York City expands access to child care — including through 2Care, 3K, and pre-K — failure to address compensation will undermine these investments. New classrooms and new seats cannot operate without qualified educators. Programs cannot retain staff, build continuity for children, or maintain quality when wages remain stagnant. Expansion without compensation is not sustainable.

Competitive compensation directly supports:

- Workforce retention, reducing turnover that disrupts children’s learning and creates a knowledge and experience vacuum in early learning environments
- Quality improvement, as experienced educators remain in the profession and continue to build their practice
- Equity, particularly for a workforce that is predominantly women and disproportionately women of color
- System stability, ensuring that public investments result in reliable, high-quality services for families

When early childhood educators are compensated fairly, programs are stronger, children experience more consistent care, and families can rely on the system to meet their needs.

New York has an opportunity to develop a comprehensive workforce approach that includes a concrete career ladder, a transparent salary scale, and a salary supplement program to retain early care and learning professionals and recruit new providers — all of which are already in development through the state’s Child Care Workforce Collaborative, which includes representatives from the governor’s Child Care Availability Task Force, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, the New York Association for the Education of Young Children, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the Early Care and Learning Council, The Center for NYC Affairs at the New School, and the Day Care Council of New York. Leveraging these existing systems and stakeholders will give New York the smoothest path toward implementation of high-quality universal care.

New York City has already demonstrated its commitment to universal child care. Now the city must be equally serious about paying the workforce that makes those systems function. Investments in compensation are investments in quality, in children’s outcomes, and in the long-term success of the state’s early childhood system.

Data is essential for workforce planning

Council members are right to emphasize the need for reliable operational data, including workforce information, seat availability, and staffing trends. The Aspire Registry is a strong foundation for this work in New York City: It already captures verified information about educators' certificates, credentials, and degrees; employment status; and professional development engagement for nearly three-quarters of licensed NYC child care programs. Aspire is also well positioned to reduce the administrative burden on programs and educators. In 2024, the governor's Child Care Availability Task Force recommended encouraging educators in all licensed programs and settings to enroll in the Aspire Registry, noting: "Aspire data compiles workforce data across licensing agencies and funding sources, so thereby has the potential to offer the most complete and comprehensive data set about the workforce in New York."

We strongly encourage the Council and the mayor's office to ensure that Aspire Registry data is fully leveraged to support the implementation of universal child care.

Conclusion

New York City stands at a pivotal moment, and universal child care must be well-planned, well-staffed, and well-supported. We look forward to supporting the city's work as it continues along the pathway to universal child care.