



Transition Plan: Universal Child Care in New York City

Purpose

To provide a roadmap to Mayor Mamdani in support of his goal to make NYC more affordable, starting with establishing universal child care for all families (in NYC) focused on Day One of the Mamdani administration, the First 100 Days, and year one. Our full plan for achieving universal child care in NYC and New York State is found in the Empire State Campaign for Child Care's [New York State Child Care for All](#) report.

Overview

Day 1. Provide child care assistance for the more than 10,000 NYC kids on the voucher (or CCAP) waiting lists. (Vouchers are the principal public program currently available to low-income families that provides assistance for full-day, year-round child care). This should be covered initially by city funds as stakeholders and city leaders advocate with the State to fully fund the program to cover all families who apply. NYC low-income families need access to child care assistance while we are building toward universal child care in NYC and across the state. As communities with universal child care expand, the child care assistance program can be scaled down.

Subsequently, in the context of the 2026-2027 NYS Budget, work with state leaders to (1) secure adequate and ongoing investment to sustain and strengthen the voucher/CCAP program statewide to ensure all eligible low-income families can access CCAP while the state is building toward universal child care; (2) create a state-funded child care workforce compensation fund; and (3) begin to transition away from child care assistance to a truly universal system using two universal bridge project models—a free, community eligibility model rolled out beginning in several communities with high rates of children in low-income households; and a capped-fee model, located in working communities with a high rate of families with income just over the child care assistance income limit.

I. Transition Objectives (First 100 Days)

- 1. Work with agencies to identify funding to immediately clear the waiting list of eligible families seeking access to the Child Care Assistance Program.** NYC can use its own funding to clear the waiting list—currently approximately 10,000 children—to provide critical support to families and to stabilize placements with providers.



2. Baseline funding for important early childhood education programs and initiatives that are currently funded with city dollars set to expire in June 2026 so that families and providers will have assurance that they can continue to rely on these needed programs next year and beyond:

- \$70M for legally required preschool special education evaluations and services (NYCPS)
- \$25M for Promise NYC for child care for low-income children ineligible for other child care programs (ACS)
- \$10M for new seats for infants and toddlers in high-need communities expected to begin serving children in January (NYCPS)
- \$5M for early childhood education outreach (NYCPS)

3. Ensure adequate funding to enable all children with disabilities to access the ECE seats and services they need.

4. Conduct a Citywide Child Care Landscape Assessment

In order to make effective decisions about the funding needed to achieve universal care and the ways in which to target that funding over time to build system capacity and access for families, the City needs a comprehensive assessment of current supply and demand, specifically the assessment should:

- Map existing providers by program type, capacity by age, costs, and location quality rating.
- Identify underenrolled programs by location and type. This will facilitate making slots available to the thousands of children currently on waiting lists.
- Survey existing providers to understand current facilities needs, interest in expansion and barriers to expansion.
- Identify communities that would meet the initial criteria to qualify for Community Eligibility coverage under the New York State Child Care for All framework.
- Detail the number of families and children potentially in need of child care assistance, including by age, and by income level where possible. Data on demand should be disaggregated by neighborhood.
- Identify child care deserts and gaps in infant/toddler care.
- Assess gaps for children with disabilities and develop a plan to fully meet the legal mandates of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and ensure they can receive needed support in child care programs.
- Assess gaps for immigrant children and families and for children and families living in shelters.



- Assess the impact of the loss of NYCPS’s federal Head Start grant and determine the funding needed to serve the communities in which NYCPS Head Start programs are located.
- Survey capacity within accessible institutions, including community colleges and institutes of higher learning, to recruit and train new child care staff.
- Identify potential pipelines to expand the child care sector workforce.
- Map city-owned and other publicly-accessible facilities as well as existing community and retail spaces in multi-family housing that could potentially be converted to use for child care programs.

5. Create a Mayoral Universal Child Care Implementation Task Force

- Members: Early childhood experts, providers and educators, parent representatives, labor leaders, business leaders, stakeholders with experience working with families of children with disabilities and other children who may need additional support to access and participate in child care, and other key constituencies and stakeholders, including but not limited to members of the Empire State Campaign for Child Care who are NYC based.
- The Task Force’s Mandate:
 - Identify ways to streamline application and eligibility determinations in the existing system to ensure easy access to the Child Care Assistance Program
 - Establish priorities for the expansion of assistance, based on the New York State Child Care for All framework
 - Work together with state counterparts to prepare New York City and New York State’s child care system infrastructure to rollout universal child care.

6. Develop a Funding Strategy

Based on the comprehensive assessment outlined above, the Administration should develop a cost estimate to achieve universal child care and a funding plan that:

- Identifies existing city, state, federal resources (e.g., CCDBG, local budget).
- Assesses potential dedicated revenue sources (e.g., small payroll tax, employer partnerships, real estate linkage fees) that can be instituted at the local level. Identify who is the decision maker for the creation of the revenue sources.
- Outlines a phase in process to scale up the funding and provision of child care to families.



7. Engage Stakeholders and the Public

- Host listening sessions with parents, providers, and employers to identify stakeholder needs and opportunities to address existing barriers to care.
- Launch a communications campaign framing child care as public good that fosters physical and mental wellness and economic infrastructure.
- Organize child care supporters from all communities to advocate with the state for the funding and other resources needed to truly reach universal child care.

8. Integrate Child Care into Housing, Economic and Workforce Plans

- Make universal child care a pillar of the city's housing, economic development and workforce participation strategy.

II. Medium-Term Actions (First Year)

- 1. Ensure that the Division of Early Education within the Department of Education** coordinates early care and education across agencies including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Administration of Children's Services and the Human Resources Administration within the City of New York.
- 2. Implements Bridge to Universal Community Eligibility projects** in several high-need neighborhoods as determined by community eligibility criteria.
- 3. Implement Workforce Support Measures to stabilize the existing system and attract recruits into the child care workforce.** There is no route to universal child care without a well-compensated, well-supported workforce.
 - Secure state funded wage supplements to boost compensation through a permanent workforce fund.
 - Establish partnerships with community-based institutions across the city to administer training and credentialing programs, made available in top languages to support multi-lingual/multi-cultural programming.
 - Formulate a wage and career lattice that recognizes education and experience with enhanced compensation. Make comprehensive benefits more affordable by providing access to city-backed options. The City should look to use its investment in universal child care as a tool to improve wages and labor standards across the sector, setting benchmarks that will compel private, for profit providers to compete for child care workers.



4. **Create a Publicly-Accessible Data Dashboard** to track progress on access, affordability, and workforce outcomes to promote awareness and generate public support for continued investments.
5. **Establish a child care facilities fund** (for example at 10-15% of the subsidy level) that supports capital and infrastructure needs of child care providers.

III. Long-Term Goals (Years 2–4)

1. **Implement phased plans to get to universal access** based on priorities established by the Task Force.
2. **Expand public funding streams at the state and local levels** as needed to ensure sustainable investment.

Vision and Guiding Principles – New York State Child Care for All

Vision: The Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s definition of Universal Child Care is free child care for all New York children—statewide, treated as a public good, rather than a private family burden. Every family, regardless of income, immigration or housing status, or zip code—inclusive of families of children with disabilities—can access high-quality, free child care for all children under age 13, in the setting of their choice—school, center, or home-based care. Universal child care is free from intrusive applications, work reporting or immigration status requirements, or long processing times, every child care educator earns a thriving wage, and the per child rate paid programs reflects the true cost of care.

Rollout principles:

- **Equity is at the core.** Low-income families are prioritized during the rollout to universal child care by sustaining and strengthening the CCAP program to ensure all eligible working families not residing in communities covered by a bridge project can access CCAP while the state is building toward universal child care. As the communities with universal child care increase, the CCAP program can be scaled down.
- **New York City and State must raise child care worker wages immediately to build capacity by recruiting and retaining early childhood educators.** There is no path to universal child care that does not start with raising compensation for the child care workforce.
- **Middle-income families are protected from rate hikes, benefits cliffs, and shifting supply as we scale up to universal child care** in two ways: (1) creating a



state-funded child care workforce compensation fund allows for workforce wages to be increased without raising tuition for middle class families not yet able to access universal care; and (2) the capped-fee projects are targeted to serve families just over the CCAP eligibility limit, addressing one of the sharpest benefits cliffs facing families who make just over the CCAP income limit.

- **From day one, the universal bridge projects are free from stigmatizing and burdensome income-verification, immigration or activities tests,** an approach that would be first-in-the-nation.
- **New York State Child Care for All includes afterschool care, summer care, and evening and weekend care for children 0 to 13, and inclusive of children with disabilities, and regardless of immigration status.** Families' need for child care extends beyond weekdays 9 to 5, and long after a child enters pre-K or Kindergarten.
- **The bridge projects are structured to ensure that infant and toddler seats are preserved.** Rates to care for babies and toddlers are the highest because caring for very young children (appropriately) requires the most hands-on attention; as a result, these are already the hardest seats to find. Any rollout plan must be sure not to incentivize programs to switch scarce infant and toddler seats to care for older children.
- **This plan is flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of New York State's current systems of care and early childhood education.** This plan can be coordinated with pre-K and 3-K, New York City's contract-child care, and other models.
- **This plan recognizes that child care in NYS is primarily funded by state and federal funds.** New York State and federal funds are the primary funding source for child care, pre-K and afterschool programs in most communities; even in New York City, state and federal funds cover a large portion of funding. For example, in FFY 25, NYC received [\\$1.1B in state and federal child care assistance funds](#) to support NYC child care vouchers (out of a state total of about \$2.2B); in [September 2025](#), NYC provided 113,263 children child care vouchers out of a statewide total of 168,671.
- **All types of care are supported in the rollout of New York State Child Care for All** to ensure families have the freedom to choose the care setting that best meets their needs, and recognizing that all modalities of care (home, center, and school-based) will be needed to successfully achieve statewide universal child care.
- **The rollout is structured to maximize federal funding while building to universal child care.** New York State receives \$638 million in Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grants received from the federal government, and is [obligated](#) to spend more than \$221 million of state dollars on the Child Care Assistance Program



to draw down those federal funds. In recent years, New York has also directed as much as [\\$483 million](#) (in 2025) in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Funds (TANF) funds to CCAP. All of these funds must follow federal means testing and other eligibility rules. Under this rollout plan, New York can shift some of the additional [\\$1.2 billion in state dollars](#) it currently invests in CCAP to fund the bridge projects, and add significant new funds, which will be needed to achieve universal.

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| Advocates for Children of New York | Lebanon Cares Development Corporation |
| Alliance for Quality Education | Malikah |
| Aunties & Friends for Liberation | Masa |
| BAC (Broadway Advocacy Coalition) | Moms United for Black Lives NYC |
| Bangladeshi Americans for Political Progress (BAPP) | MomsRising |
| Black Lives Matter at NYC Schools | MORE- Movement of Rank and File Educators-UFT |
| Child Care Resource Network | Muslim Community Network |
| Children's Aid | New Settlement |
| Chinese-American Planning Council | New Settlement Parent Action Committee |
| Citizens' Committee for Children of New York | New York Communities for Change |
| Class Size Matters | New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools |
| Coalition For Asian American Children and Families | Parents Supporting Parents NY |
| Coalition for Educational Justice | People's Early Childhood Ed NYC |
| Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF) | Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy |
| Community Education Council 4 East Harlem | The Action Lab |
| D75 Legislative Committee | The Circle Keepers |
| Designed To Conquer | The Innovative Daycare Corp |
| Ece On the Move | The People's Forum |
| Education Council Consortium | Trans formative Schools |
| EduColor | VIH EVENTS |
| Empire State Campaign for Child Care | Wiggle Room |