



Alliance for Quality Education's
**EDUCATION
& CHILD CARE**
2026 PRIORITIES



EQUITY IN EDUCATION is built on interconnected pieces – child care, pre-K, K-12 public education, afterschool, and summer programs – all of which support children from birth through adolescence. These are not a set of individual line items, but pieces of a single system that require one holistic solution: invest in New York's children.

The path to equity must lift every community, beginning with those most often left behind: Black and Brown families, low-income families, rural communities, immigrant families, families with the youngest children. Decades of experience have shown us that otherwise, these communities will continue to be sidelined from programs and services, when they were the ones that needed them most of all, unless we prioritize them from the outset.

It's time to reject attempts to divide us: the poor from the middle class, upstate from downstate, rural communities from cities. We know that when we look out for those most vulnerable, everyone benefits.

New York needs a solution for our kids that works for all of us, and that means including all of us as we create our future together.

**These are our
2026 priorities >>>**

1

Tax the Ultra Wealthy and Corporations

New York's communities work hard to thrive, but years of protecting wealth and corporations have left essential services underfunded. Federal cuts to health care, nutritional assistance, and other vital programs now threaten to make life even harder for working families, deepening the very inequities we fight to address daily.

New York State must step up and fill the gaps the reckless actions of the federal government are creating. Lawmakers must begin by raising revenue fairly, making sure that millionaires, billionaires, and highly profitable corporations pay their share. The [Invest in Our New York campaign](#), of which AQE is a proud member, offers a range of revenue solutions to meet these needs, including taxing the ultra-wealthy, closing corporate loopholes, and reinvesting in universal child care, housing, and public education.

By choosing to stand with working families over the wealthiest New Yorkers, lawmakers can protect schools, health care, child care, and essential services from harmful cuts and federal disinvestment.

Child Care for All

\$3.65 billion

Universal Child Care means child care for ALL, in a system that values and compensates educators adequately so they can thrive.

Early care and education are a right, not a privilege. High-quality early childhood education creates long-term benefits for children, families, and communities. It is an essential part of our early education system, and critical to our state's economy. Yet early childhood educators earn poverty wages, and are too often forced to leave its workforce for better paying jobs. Parents can't afford to pay more and programs can't afford to charge less. This impacts both the quality of care and how many families can access it. This fall, New Mexico showed the nation what's possible by implementing universal, no-cost child care – proof that bold, statewide action can be done, and that New York's leaders have no excuse not to follow suit.

We must increase child care supply and quality throughout New York State.

Support the state's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

\$2.3 billion

Increase state funding for the CCAP to address growing enrollment and prevent service gaps, especially in counties facing funding crises. Currently, 27 counties statewide are facing shortfalls.

Workforce Compensation

\$1.2 billion

Create a permanent workforce compensation fund as the bill carried by Senator Brisport and Assemblymember Hevesi outlines (S.5533/A.492-A). Increase compensation for every member of the child care workforce so they can remain in this critical profession. This is an issue of racial, economic, gender, and immigrant justice, as most child care educators are women of color and immigrants, yet they are paid poverty wages despite their essential work.

Bridge to child care for all

\$150 million

Community eligibility model: In communities with a high percentage of low income families, the state should apply the community eligibility standards to access CCAP, in the same way that they replaced Free and Reduced priced lunch.

Capped fee model: Cap the copayments of families with income over the threshold to qualify for CCAP (which is 85% of the state median income) to \$20 per day or \$100 per week.

Update and Fully Fund the Foundation Aid Formula

**\$996.1 million increase
(Foundation Aid)**

**\$1.1 billion increase
(total state aid)**

The formula must reflect the regional cost of living and services, be revised to meet all students' needs, and allow for improvement while fully funding it.

The Foundation Aid formula has not been holistically revised to accurately capture the needs of students in the 21st Century. The 2024 Rockefeller report on a proposed formula update addressed each component of the formula separately, providing a menu of options for the Governor and Legislature. A critical piece of this update is the Regional Cost Index (RCI), which has not been comprehensively revised since 2007. While Westchester County's index was slightly increased in FY2025 (from 1.314 to 1.351), the RCI overall remains outdated and fails to reflect actual costs of living and wages, ultimately leaving many high-cost districts like New York City and Yonkers inequitably funded. Updating the RCI as recommended by the Board of Regents and Rockefeller report will be key to ensuring fairer and more accurate Foundation Aid funding.

Any changes to the formula must ensure all districts do not experience funding cuts or receive less funding than current law prescribes, especially in light of harmful federal funding cuts. For example, in FY2025, the change in the way poverty was measured underestimated the number of students in poverty in New York city, a change that resulted in reduced foundation aid for the district. The NYS Board of Regents recommends that the weight on English Language Learners is adjusted upwards to 0.6 within the Foundation Aid formula to better meet the needs of students. In addition, they recommend adding a 0.12 weight for supporting districts serving students experiencing homelessness, as well as a minimum year over year increase of 2% depending on the district's student need. AQE is in full support of the recommendations that the Board of Regents made in their State Aid proposal for 2026-27, as revising the formula and ensuring adequate funding is crucial for FY2027.

4

Reimagine Pre-K Funding While Keeping the Momentum

New York State has made significant strides in expanding full-day pre-K to all four-years-olds and, in some communities, for three-year-olds. The NYS Board of Regents recommends that an additional \$20 million is made available to school districts based on need, to address some of the challenges that remain in the system and continue momentum. Districts must patch together funding from state, federal, and local sources each year just to maintain programs. Many of the districts that led the way in offering pre-K, notably many in high-poverty areas, have not seen meaningful increases in their state pre-K rates in decades.

Longstanding funding gaps have also weakened community partnerships that are central to how New York delivers pre-K. Districts are required to set aside part of their funding to partner with local community-based early education programs, which help reach more families and offer learning and care that families need. Yet these community-based programs often receive less per child than public school based programs, making it difficult to pay teachers adequately and sustain quality across settings.

New York must fix these structural flaws to ensure stable and equitable access to pre-K statewide. The state can meet this need in two essential ways. First, by tying pre-K funding to each district's K-12 Foundation Aid rate, so that funding automatically keeps pace with costs and inflation in high- and average-needs districts.

And second, by raising the minimum per-pupil amount and establishing a mandatory minimum local contribution for wealthier, low-needs districts, with regular reviews to adjust for inflation over time. Together, these changes would replace a patchwork system with one that is more predictable, equitable, and better aligned with the state's broader K-12 funding framework.

Research consistently shows that Pre-K, along with early care and learning programs, yields some of the highest returns of any public investment – addressing inequality, supporting working families' ability to work, and setting children on a path to long-term well-being. For every dollar invested in high-quality early education, the return is between \$3 and \$7 in long-term savings and benefits through stronger academic outcomes and reduced spending on special education, remediation, and incarceration – costs that the state currently bears at high levels but that are significantly reduced when children have access to quality, full-day pre-K.

We support the 2026 executive proposal for pre-K.

5

Pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Bill (A118/S134) \$50 million

Schools must use proven alternatives to suspension that correct misbehavior and keep students in the classroom. The state must invest in training for educators and school personnel, and ensure full Foundation Aid funding is in place to support the behavioral, emotional, and academic needs of all students.

6

Support Sustainable Community Schools

\$100 million

A positive school climate begins with investments in strategies that work. Community schools are a proven-to-work strategy that helps foster positive school climate and student success. Many school districts are implementing this strategy to bring resources and services to schools that address students' needs. The state must ensure that community schools have a dedicated funding stream in the form of categorical aid so school districts can implement and maintain community schools effectively.

7

Make NYC Governance More Democratic and Inclusive

An integral part of our work on equity is elevating the voices of parents and ensuring meaningful engagement in the education process, including school governance. AQE supports a clear and planned phase-out of Mayoral Control. Since Mayoral Control was enacted in New York City, every Mayor's leadership style has continuously shut out the voices of parents, students, teachers, and taxpayers, while causing shifts in the direction of the Department of Education so frequent that policy initiatives don't last long enough to be fully implemented or properly evaluated.

8

End Jim Crow Education in East Ramapo

The state must empower public school families, repair crumbling infrastructure, hire bilingual educators, ensure access to quality classroom instruction and materials, and end the systemic racism embedded in its school governance and finances.

These priorities reflect AQE's bold vision for a fully funded, more equitable system of child care and education that values children, uplifts educators, and ensures every family across New York State has what they need to thrive.

We will continue to advocate for an inclusive process that intentionally generates new ideas for a reimagined school governance system for NYC. In the meantime, we recommend a one-year extension of mayoral control with two critical amendments. Reducing the number of mayoral appointees and repealing 2590-B.a.1.D to allow members of the Panel for Educational Policy to choose the Chair. These changes would create a more balanced governance structure during the transition period, while the broader redesign is underway.

Lastly, the NYC school governance issue does not belong in the budget process. We urge you to decouple the renewal process from the state budget and prevent it from being used as a bargaining chip.