



NEW YORK SPEAKS

LISTENING TO FAMILIES ON EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE ACROSS NEW YORK STATE

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PUBLIC POLICY AND EDUCATION FUND OF NEW YORK

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The Alliance for Quality Education is a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high-quality public school education to all students regardless of zip code. Combining its legislative and policy expertise with grassroots organizing, AQE advances proven-to-work strategies that lead to student success and echoes a powerful public demand for a high-quality public school education for all of New York's students.

The Public Policy Education Fund was founded in 1986 to address critical social, economic, racial and environmental issues facing low and moderate income New York State residents. Our areas of work have included health care, education, after-school programs, voter participation, economic development and consumer issues. PPEF uses many tools in its work, including grassroots organizing, research and policy development, public education on a wide range of policy issues, and community outreach.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	6
PROCESS	7
<i>How to read terms in this report</i>	
GEOGRAPHIC REACH	8
WHO WE HEARD FROM	9
KEY THEMES AND CHALLENGES	10
ANALYSIS/TAKEAWAYS	14
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	15
<i>Recommendations Summary</i>	
WHAT COMES NEXT	19
RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING	20
THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	21

NEW YORK SPEAKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York is at a moment marked by both deep strain and possibility. As cost of living escalates, public attention has sharpened on affordability, and in particular the services and programs that make it possible for people to work, care for their families, and plan beyond the next crisis. Unprecedented housing insecurity is reshaping daily life for students, families, and educators alike, disrupting learning, destabilizing care arrangements, and forcing impossible choices for New Yorkers between the necessities of rent, food, and child care. The long shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to shape children's well-being and families' daily lives. Uncertainty at the federal level has heightened pressure on state and local governments, increasing the stakes of policy decisions and leaving families unsure whether the supports they rely on today will still be there tomorrow.

Child care and public education sit at the center of these issues, shaping whether parents can remain in the workforce, whether children experience continuous support from their earliest years through graduation, and whether communities are able to survive overlapping economic shocks. For families, this can mean turning down opportunities at work or cutting work hours because child care costs exceed wages, or students losing access to counseling, enrichment, or special education when staffing gaps emerge. For school communities, this might appear in overcrowded classrooms or educator burnout.

It was in this context that the Alliance for Quality Education, in partnership with the Public Policy and Education Fund of New York, launched the New York Speaks Tour in the spring of 2025. Through community conversations, school visits, and a comprehensive statewide survey, we directly engaged students, families, educators, child care providers, advocates, and community members about how New York's public education and child care systems are working for people on the ground. People participated from cities, suburbs, Indigenous and tribal communities, rural regions, and immigrant neighborhoods across the state.

Across geography, race, and lived experience, respondents shared a consistent common message. Families experience child care and public education as one continuous system that begins at birth and extends through graduation, regardless of how legislation or budgets separate them on paper. When either is strained, families feel the effects immediately, and communities carry those impacts over time through disrupted routines, lost stability, and fewer opportunities for their children to thrive. Below we have summarized the most common challenges New Yorkers are experiencing.

Child care cost is prohibitive for too many families.

High child care costs force families to make difficult tradeoffs.

These pressures affect families across income levels and communities.

Even when families can afford care, it is often hard to find.

Gaps in care outside the school day leave families without reliable options.

Access to a high-quality education still depends heavily on zip code.

Racial inequities shape students' daily experiences.

Staff turnover disrupts children's learning and sense of stability.

Funding decisions are felt directly in classrooms and schools.

Across the state families share a common vision for their kids.

These findings show that challenges in child care and public education do not operate in isolation. They interact in ways that shape family stability and children's experiences of care and learning over time. When child care is unaffordable or unavailable, families feel the strain well before a child enters a classroom. When schools face staffing shortages or lose key programs, those pressures carry back into homes and communities.

The findings also reflect a cycle many families recognize. Low educator pay and staffing instability make it harder to maintain consistency in both child care and school settings. Uneven funding deepens differences between communities, leaving families to absorb the consequences through disrupted routines and unmet needs. Responding to these challenges with short-term band-aids rather than long-term solutions risks temporary relief without lasting change.

Families also described success in broader terms than test scores or graduation rates. They emphasized safety, belonging, continuity, and the ability to plan for the future. Policies that are responsive to people's needs are more likely to improve daily life for children and families.

The New York Speaks Tour directly shaped AQE's priorities for the year ahead by grounding them in what families, students, educators, and providers shared across the state. AQE, along with its partners, will continue engaging communities and policymakers to make sure these priorities remain anchored in lived experience, and to build the political will needed to protect recent gains while closing persistent gaps. The choices made by state and local leaders in the coming months will determine whether families experience real stability or deeper uncertainty in their daily lives. State lawmakers have the ability to make many of these improvements through budget and legislative action, including by strengthening child care access and affordability, stabilizing the workforce, and making sure that public education funding reaches classrooms in ways that students and their families can feel.

NEW YORK SPEAKS

LISTENING TO FAMILIES ON EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE ACROSS NEW YORK STATE

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2025, the Public Policy Education Fund (PPEF) in collaboration with the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) launched the New York Speaks Tour to listen directly to students, working families, educators, child care providers, advocates, and community members in order to create a comprehensive picture of how New Yorkers are navigating public education and child care in the midst of ongoing economic and social pressures. Through community conversations, school visits, and a statewide survey that remained open through November 2025, AQE and PPEF heard from New Yorkers living in cities, rural regions, suburban communities, Indigenous and Tribal communities, and immigrant neighborhoods. These community engagement opportunities provided nuanced context and grounded the issues in local realities, shedding light on how policies and conditions shape family life across different demographics.

What New Yorkers shared during the New York Speaks Tour and through the accompanying survey reflects both the urgency of their needs and a clear sense of what is at stake. Years of organizing and advocacy have helped New York move toward fairer school funding and expanded access to early care, yet many families now describe growing instability in their daily lives. Families are navigating an escalating cost of living, at the same time that staffing shortages, service cuts, and instability threaten essential services they rely on. The COVID-19 pandemic also left lasting effects on children's emotional well-being and on the availability of stable, consistent adults to teach and care for them, revealing gaps in child care and K-12 education that many communities are still struggling to navigate. These challenges often intersected with broader pressures on household stability, including housing insecurity, making it difficult to maintain consistent school attendance, child care arrangements, and relationships with trusted educators and providers.

The tour created space for people to speak openly about what these pressures mean for their children, their work, and their communities. We received responses from nearly 300 people across the state, representing a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds and roles connected to child care and public education. While local conditions varied, families and educators described many of the same challenges, particularly around affordability, access, staffing, and uneven treatment across communities.

Across geography, race, and lived experience, respondents shared a clear message. Child care and public education together impact stability for working families. When either or both is disrupted, families feel the effects right away, and those effects ripple outward over time, influencing children’s learning, parents’ work, and the health of entire communities.

The hard-won gains in school funding and access to child care now collide with funding cuts and political uncertainty. At the same time, public attention to child care, public schools, and other essential supports has intensified, creating a moment when change is possible, if we are able to leverage this momentum.

PROCESS

This effort had two main components: a statewide survey, offered in two languages and in two lengths to maximize people’s ability to participate across schedules and needs; and the New York Speaks Tour itself, which brought AQE and PPEF into communities across the state for in-person conversations and site visits.

The Tour took place from April through June 2025. AQE and PPEF staff and supporters visited cities, towns, Tribal areas, rural regions, inner suburbs, and immigrant communities for in-person community forums as well as visits to schools and child care programs.

Alongside the tour, AQE and PPEF launched in-depth, bilingual survey, designed in partnership with PhD researcher Dr. Kelly King, that invited detailed reflections on lived experiences. We also created a brief version of the survey that required less time to complete, allowing AQE and PPEF to hear from a broader range of communities across the state.

HOW TO READ TERMS IN THIS REPORT

When we refer to “respondents,” we mean people who completed the statewide survey (in either length and in either language). When we refer to “participants,” we mean people who took part in the in-person tour conversations. In several places, we discuss both together when describing the combined reach of this effort. Additionally, people working in the child care sector often use the terms “educator” and “provider” interchangeably. We follow this usage and use both terms throughout this report.

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Survey respondents and tour participants represented communities across New York State, including urban centers such as New York City, Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Binghamton, Albany, and Utica; rural regions including Plattsburgh in the North Country and New Paltz in the Hudson Valley; suburban communities across Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley, including East Ramapo in Rockland County and Peekskill in Westchester County; Indigenous and Tribal communities; and immigrant communities in both urban and rural areas. This diversity of participants and perspectives allowed us to reflect the wide range of conditions that families experience, alongside challenges that emerged again and again across the state.





SYRACUSE

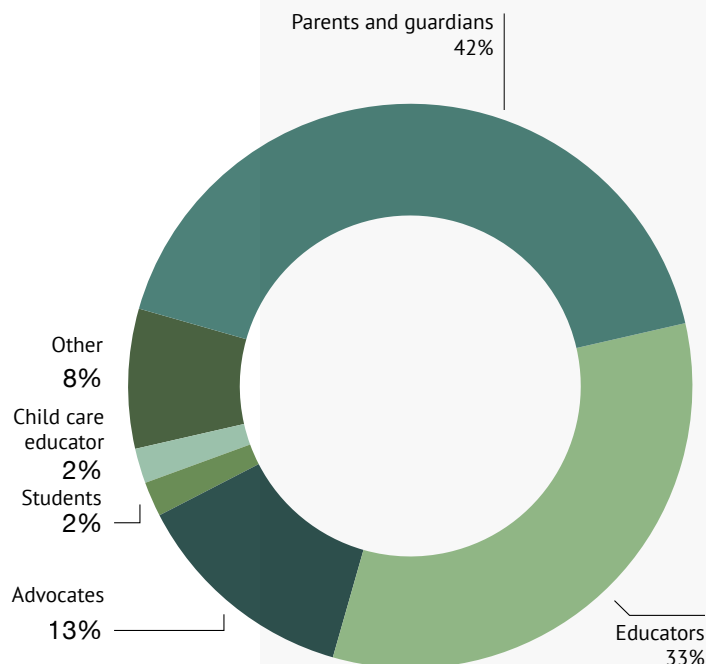
WHO WE HEARD FROM

Survey respondents included parents and caregivers, educators, school administrators, advocates, child care providers, students, and community members. Parents and guardians made up the largest share of participants. Educators represented about one-third of respondents. Advocates accounted for roughly 13 percent. Child care providers and students each contributed a smaller but meaningful share of responses.

Black and Latinx respondents participated at higher rates than their share of the statewide population. We decided against weighting the survey results to be representative of statewide demographics, because doing so would have reduced the overall power of Black and Latinx voices in our overall dataset. These voices are often absent from policymaking discussions while still surfacing patterns that appeared across regions, backgrounds, and roles. Centering these voices reflects AQE and PPEF's long-standing relationships with communities most affected by inequitable conditions, and it aligns with the purpose of this effort in listening: to ground public conversation in the experiences of families who have lived the consequences of underfunding and instability.

BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES

Most respondents were parents, caregivers, and educators, grounding this report in direct, day-to-day experience with child care and public education



These roles reflect what families and schools experience on ordinary weekdays, not just in policy debates.

KEY THEMES AND CHALLENGES

THE COST OF CHILD CARE IS PROHIBITIVE FOR TOO MANY FAMILIES

Across racial and regional groups, families named the cost of child care as the most immediate challenge affecting their lives. More than one-third of respondents (35.4%), identified high child care costs as the single biggest issue facing families like theirs.

More than one in three respondents named the cost of child care as the single largest challenge facing families like theirs. For many households, this is the difference between keeping a job and losing one.



FAR ROCKAWAY

CHILD CARE COSTS ARE UNAFFORDABLE FOR NEARLY ALL FAMILIES, FORCING DIFFICULT TRADEOFFS

Across income levels and regions of the state, respondents described child care as a daily financial strain that shapes work, household budgets, and long-term planning and stability. Parents spoke about cutting back hours at work, passing up better-paying jobs, or being forced to rely on temporary or unreliable care arrangements. Middle-income families often found themselves priced out of care entirely, while families eligible for assistance described long waitlists or difficulty securing care that fit their schedules. Others described drawing from savings meant for other essentials. In practice, this means that child care costs shape whether families can stay attached to the workforce and maintain basic stability, particularly for women and women-led households, leaving early care and learning out of reach for many who need it.

AVAILABILITY IS A BARRIER EVEN WHEN COST IS MANAGEABLE

Many families said that even when they could afford child care, they struggled to find it. Respondents described shortages of licensed providers, especially for younger children, along with long waitlists and the need to search across multiple neighborhoods. The result is that families are pushed into patchwork arrangements that disrupt work, strain routines, and undermine consistency for children.

This interactive map shows how subsidy waitlists and uneven access to assistance limit child care availability across the state. In many regions – particularly in high-need and rural communities – families remain eligible for help but cannot access care due to long waits or insufficient provider capacity. These system level barriers help explain why families describe persistent gaps between eligibility, affordability, and actual access to care in their daily lives.

LOW WAGES DRIVE INSTABILITY ACROSS CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Families and child care educators repeatedly described child care workers as underpaid and overextended, with wages that do not match the responsibilities of caring for young children. High turnover was a recurring concern among respondents, particularly for families who described the loss of trusted caregivers and the difficulty of maintaining stable routines when staff leave or programs reduce capacity. In schools, workforce strain appeared through the loss of staff and supports, including special education services, and through classrooms where strained educators were perceived as exhausted and disengaged.



MANHATTAN

GAPS WIDEN FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL DAY

Respondents frequently described care for school-age children as difficult to secure beyond regular school hours. They spoke about early mornings, late afternoons, school breaks, and summer months as periods with few reliable options, particularly in rural areas and communities with higher poverty.

SCHOOLS IN WEALTHIER COMMUNITIES ARE ABLE TO OFFER MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAN THOSE IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Families described sharp differences between schools in wealthier communities and those serving lower-income areas. In wealthier areas, schools were described as well staffed and able to offer a wide range of learning opportunities. In low-income areas, respondents spoke about overcrowded classrooms, fewer course options, and limited access to support.

Respondents explained that these differences showed up in class size, access to arts and enrichment activities such as music, sports, clubs, and hands-on learning, the availability of special education services, and whether schools had counselors, social workers, or librarians. Many connected these challenges to how schools are funded and to district boundaries that separate communities by income and resources, ultimately shaping opportunity long before a child ever enters a classroom.



ALBANY

RACIAL DISPARITIES SHAPE DAILY SCHOOL CONDITIONS

Most respondents said schools are generally safe and clean, and many noted improvements over time. At the same time, families described unequal experiences across racial groups. Ninety-four percent of white respondents reported that schools are clean, compared with 79% of Black respondents. White respondents were also more likely than non-white respondents to say they feel safe at school. This disparity signals that baseline conditions – cleanliness, safety, dignity – are not consistently experienced across communities. Families emphasized that safety and cleanliness are basic expectations for learning environments, shaping how children feel walking into school each day and how confident families feel about the environments their children are in.

WHEN STAFF LEAVE, CHILDREN FEEL THE LOSS IMMEDIATELY

Families and educators repeatedly raised staffing instability as a serious concern across both child care and K-12 settings. Nearly one in five respondents named teacher and staff shortages as a top issue. Concerns extended beyond classroom teachers. Respondents described losing paraprofessionals, librarians, social workers, counselors, arts educators, and special education providers. Low pay and difficult working conditions were often cited as reasons staff leave. Over time, these staffing turnovers erode continuity for young learners, weakens families' support structures, and makes it harder for schools and programs to maintain stable relationships and consistent care.



SHINNECOCK NATION

FUNDING CUTS SHOW UP IN THE CLASSROOM

Across lived experiences, respondents described loss of funding that directly affects children's daily experiences at school. Families and educators pointed to the loss of special education services, arts and enrichment programs, mental health supports, library access, and basic classroom materials. Respondents described these cuts as something children feel in real time through larger class sizes, fewer chances to explore interests, and less support when students struggle. These impacts were common in respondents' accounts. Several noted that schools increasingly depend on family fundraising to cover basic needs. In effect, funding instability translates quickly into inequitable access. Schools with fewer local resources are less able to fill gaps, widening disparities between communities with very different levels of household wealth.

Families described funding cuts that show up in children's daily school experiences, including reduced access to:

- Special education services
- Mental health supports
- Library access
- Classroom materials
- Arts and enrichment

ANALYSIS/TAKEAWAYS

FAMILIES ARTICULATED A SHARED VISION OF CARE, STABILITY, AND BELONGING, REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE

Families across New York described a shared vision for child care and public education, even as their local circumstances differed. They talked about care they can rely on, educators who are supported well enough to remain in their roles, and schools that feel welcoming and connected to the communities they serve. They also described success in broader terms than test scores or graduation rates. They spoke about feeling safe, supported, and able to plan for the future. This alignment suggests that families are not divided on what they want, but broadly agree on the conditions that allow children and households to feel secure. When asked to imagine what schools and child care could look like if resources were not a barrier, families described the full realities of family life. They spoke about access to care from the earliest years, learning environments where students are known and supported, opportunities to explore interests and creativity, and schools that offer help rather than hurdles when families need support. These responses frame success in terms of stability, belonging, and the ability to plan for the future, rather than outcomes on paper alone.

Chronic underinvestment raises costs for families, weakens the workforce, and leaves students' futures to absorb the fallout.

Educators/providers are paid too little to stay → staff turnover and reduced program capacity → fewer seats, longer waitlists, reduced coverage → families pay more or lose access altogether → children lose familiar adults and relationships/connections → household instability, disrupted routines → communities absorb the cost of instability → political pressure for short-term fixes instead of long-term change like workforce investment → the cycle continues....

CHILD CARE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION ARE INTERTWINED

The themes that emerged from the conversations and survey responses show how closely child care and public education are connected in families' daily lives and in their effects on family and community well-being. Providers and educators described low wages, personal sacrifice, and constant turnover across both early care and K-12 settings. When educators cannot support themselves and their families on the wages they earn, they leave classrooms and programs they care deeply about, whether those are child care centers or public schools. As staff leave, children must adapt to new adults and shifting routines, and parents must reorganize work around child care and schooling that may lose staff, change, or even close without warning. Over time, this instability compounds across a child's early and school-age years, disrupting learning, straining the basic functioning of households, and placing the greatest burden on working families, particularly those living in poverty.

Child care and public education operate as one connected system. Decades of uneven and insufficient investment has deepened inequity. Addressing these challenges in isolation, rather than holistically, will not lead to lasting change. The stability that families, child care educators, and schools need will not be possible with temporary fixes. It will come from sustained, long-term investment.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC REVENUE

New York's families and communities contribute every day to the state's economic vitality, yet years of policy choices that prioritize wealth accumulation and corporate protections have left essential public programs and services underfunded. These structural imbalances weaken schools, child care, health care, and other supports that families rely on to remain stable. With the future of federal funding under threat, New York must raise revenues to ensure there are no gaps in essential public services. Long-term investment in education, child care, housing, and health depends on closing corporate loopholes, modernizing tax structures, and reinvesting in public goods. Revenue policy must align with the goal of protecting and strengthening the public services that support working families and children across the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Adopt progressive revenue policies that ensure those with the greatest wealth and profitability contribute equitably to sustaining public programs and services.

Close corporate loopholes and modernize tax structures to stabilize long-term funding for child care, public education, health, and housing.

Establish a permanent child care workforce compensation structure to stabilize the sector and reduce educator turnover.

Expand affordable child care access, including pathways for families who earn too much to qualify for assistance but cannot afford market rates.

Invest in statewide child care supply, with targeted strategies for rural and high-need communities.

Update and maintain equitable school funding structures that reflect real costs and student needs, while protecting districts from destabilizing funding losses.

Stabilize and equitably fund pre-K across all delivery settings to ensure consistent access and quality.

Reduce exclusionary discipline practices and invest in evidence-based alternatives that strengthen school climate and student support.

Provide sustained investment in mental health supports, staffing, and educator training.

Advance democratic school governance reforms that center family and community voice and address long-standing inequities.



ROCHESTER

CHILD CARE FOR ALL NEW YORK'S FAMILIES

Early care and education is not a privilege; it is essential infrastructure that supports children's development, parents' ability to work, and community stability.

High-quality early childhood education yields lifelong benefits, yet the current system relies on a workforce paid far below what is required for a stable livelihood. Many classrooms remain dark due to understaffing, and educators—predominantly women, immigrants, and women of color—are forced to leave the field due to poverty wages. Meanwhile, families struggle to afford care. New York State must invest in building a universal child care system that provides free care for all children ages 0 to 13, and ensures that educators are paid a thriving wage for the essential work they do.

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care's New York State Child Care for All Roadmap lays out a six-year pathway to universal care for children up to age 13. The Roadmap begins with major investments in workforce compensation and CCAP, recognizing that access cannot expand unless the people providing care are paid enough to stay. It also proposes two bridge programs – one based on community eligibility and one that caps out-of-pocket costs – to extend coverage to families who earn too much to qualify for assistance but still cannot afford market rates. The components of these programs have been designed to directly respond to gaps participants described during the New York Speaks Tour, where affordability and availability repeatedly collided.

Key elements of this transition include:

- **Workforce Compensation:** Establishing a permanent workforce compensation structure that raises wages across the child care sector and allows educators to remain in the profession.
- **Access:** Strengthening and expanding child care assistance so families are not priced out of care, while ensuring programs have stable, predictable funding.

- Bridging Gaps: Creating pathways for families who earn too much to qualify for assistance but cannot afford market rates, ensuring continuity of care across income levels.
- Statewide Equity: Addressing disparities across regions so rural, high-need, and historically under-resourced communities are not left without viable child care options.

EQUITABLE AND ADEQUATE SCHOOL FUNDING

Public education remains central to equity, opportunity, and democratic participation. For families, schools are not just academic institutions; they are anchors of stability, care, and community. New York’s school funding formula must reflect real costs, evolving student needs, and regional differences. Core funding structures should be regularly updated to ensure they align with lived realities, including cost of living, staffing needs, and the growing complexity of student supports.

The funding formula must:

- Reflect current economic conditions and regional costs
- Ensure districts are not destabilized by funding volatility or cuts
- Account for the needs of students experiencing poverty, homelessness, and language barriers
- Provide predictable, sustained investment that schools can rely on over time

Stable funding translates directly into stable staffing, smaller class sizes, access to mental health supports, arts and enrichment, and learning environments where students feel safe and supported.

The Foundation Aid formula has not been fully updated to reflect current regional costs, student needs, and economic conditions. The Regional Cost Index, a key component of the formula, has remained largely unchanged since 2007, limiting schools’ ability to hire and retain staff in high-cost areas. Updating the formula, while simultaneously making sure that no districts experience funding cuts, is essential to translating education investments into stable staffing, services, and learning conditions that young learners and their families can actually feel.



BINGHAMTON

UNIVERSAL, EQUITABLE PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Pre-K is a foundational component of the education continuum. While access has expanded, structural funding gaps continue to undermine program stability, particularly in high-need communities and community-based settings.

A sustainable universal pre-K program must:

- Align funding with K–12 structures so resources keep pace with costs
- Ensure equitable funding across delivery settings
- Support strong partnerships between school districts and community-based providers
- Provide predictability so programs can plan, staff, and serve families consistently

Research consistently shows that investments in early education produce long-term benefits for children, families, and the economy. Ensuring stable, equitable pre-K funding is both an educational and economic imperative.

POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Schools must rely on evidence-based approaches that keep students engaged and supported. Reducing exclusionary discipline practices and investing in alternatives strengthens school climate, improves outcomes, and keeps students connected to learning. Sustained investment is required to support educator training, student mental health, and the staffing needed to meet students' academic and emotional needs.

DEMOCRATIC AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Funding alone cannot deliver education equity without governance structures that reflect the voices of families, students, and educators. Decision-making processes that invite meaningful participation help schools respond more effectively to local needs and sustain public trust. Because of New York City's size and influence, governance decisions there carry statewide implications, making clarity, representation, and continuity in policy especially important. Changes to school governance should be approached deliberately and inclusively, and kept separate from budget negotiations, so that decisions are guided by educational outcomes rather than political leverage.

WHAT COMES NEXT

What participants shared through the New York Speaks Tour leaves little ambiguity about what must come next. Stability will not emerge on its own without public investment and political will. Families are asking for child care and public schools they can rely on as they work, raise children, and plan for the future. This will require moving beyond short-term fixes toward decisions that recognize care and education as permanent public responsibilities.

A sustainable child care system must be built, starting with the workforce that makes it possible. When educators are paid enough to stay and programs have predictable funding, access becomes real and stability follows. Expanding eligibility without stabilizing the workforce will only reproduce the gaps families already face. Meeting the demands of public education will demand similar levels of sustained, long-term public investment. Funding structures must reflect real costs and student needs so schools can offer continuity and support in their learning environments over time. Investment that cannot be felt in classrooms will not deliver stability for New York's families.

This calls for universal, no-cost child care for all that values and adequately compensates its educators so that they can thrive. Too often, early childhood educators earn poverty wages and are forced to leave the workforce, while parents struggle to afford its costs and programs find it impossible to charge any less. Like child care, equitable public schools require long-term commitments to remain stable and responsive to students' needs. Without adequate resources, schools cannot educate their students or meet their diverse needs. We know that the availability of resources in New York's public schools closely correlates with opportunity and outcomes, and so school aid distribution should be based on accurate student and district needs.

State leaders, local governments, the business community, philanthropy, and civic institutions all have a role in what happens next. Decisions about funding, workforce compensation, and program stability will determine whether experienced educators can stay in their current roles, whether child care programs can keep their doors open, and whether families can rely on care and school as dependable parts of daily life. The voices in this report point toward the same conclusion: Stability for children and working families is built through sustained public commitment, not short-term fixes.

What families shared through the New York Speaks Tour is already shaping how AQE and PPEF build power, organize communities, and press for policy change. The work ahead will focus on turning lived experience into political will through continued engagement with those most impacted by these policies, sharing learning with key decision makers, and collective action that keeps child care and public education at the center of budget and policy decisions.

What happens next will determine whether care and education become reliable foundations that families can build their lives around, or ongoing pressures they are left to manage alone. The cost of delay is already being paid by working families every day. The question now is whether public investment will finally rise to meet the lives it is meant to support.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Alliance for Quality Education, The Black Institute, Citizen Action of New York, Make the Road New York, & New York Communities for Change. (2020). [Pay to play: Charter schools buy influence with New York's Senate Democrats.](#)

This investigative report examines political contributions from major charter school backers to New York State lawmakers, analyzing how campaign donations intersect with education policy decisions and state budget priorities.

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. (2023). [From birth to age 12: Child care affordability and cost burden in New York City.](#)

This data brief documents the high cost burden of child care across New York City, finding that the vast majority of families—particularly those with young children—cannot afford care under accepted affordability benchmarks, with significant geographic disparities.

Empire State Campaign for Child Care. (2025). [New York State Child Care for All.](#)

This coalition report outlines a comprehensive plan to achieve universal child care in New York State, including workforce compensation standards, expanded access through the Child Care Assistance Program, and a phased pathway toward free, high-quality care grounded in racial and economic equity.

First Five Years Fund. (2025). [2025 New York State fact sheet: Child care & early learning in New York.](#)

This fact sheet provides key statewide data on child care access, costs, federal funding streams, and the number of children served, offering a high-level overview of early learning infrastructure and remaining gaps.

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. (2025). [The State of New York's Children annual report & data book.](#)

The Schuyler Center's annual report compiles statewide data on child well-being—including poverty, health coverage, and child care access—and provides policy recommendations to improve outcomes for children and families.

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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