Massive Needs Remain Unaddressed in New York's Child Care System

More than 75% of children under five lack access to publicly-funded system

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As Mayor Eric Adams has taken office, Council Member Adrienne Adams has become Council Speaker, and the majority of City Council members and borough and citywide office holders have stepped into new roles, it is important to assess the state of the City’s early care and education system; acknowledging the urgent opportunity to address massive unmet needs.

Due to historic investments, enrollment in Universal Pre-K for three- and four-year-olds has grown, but infants and toddlers still comprise the smallest share of the system. The City’s contracted system has grown from 33,000 seats in 2012 to over 92,000 seats in 2019. Pre-K expansion added the most seats, and 3-K capacity is increasing, with a plan for universality by 2023.

Source: Mayor’s Management Report (2012-2020), Administration for Children’s Services Child Care data (2017-2020) obtained by request, Department of Education Demographic Snapshots (2014/15 – 2018/19) and DOE Child Care data (SY 2019/20) obtained by request.
Only 24% of all children under five are served by the publicly-funded system, including only 7% of infants and toddlers.

91% of infants and 70% of toddlers are income-eligible for subsidized child care but not enrolled. Only 23,000, or 16% of income-eligible infants and toddlers are enrolled in subsidized seats, both through contracts and vouchers, which leaves around 121,000 children whose families are potentially eligible and not receiving subsidized care.

Infant/Toddler care is unaffordable for families across income spectrums with the greatest cost-burden shouldered by low income families. The cost of one year of center-based child care for infants and toddlers is $18,746, and one year of home-based care costs $10,296.

93% of families with young children cannot afford center-based care using a federally recommended threshold that costs be no more than 7% of income. 31% of median income for families with young children would be consumed by the cost of center-based child care.
Only 13% of four-year-olds in the City’s Universal Pre-K program received full-day, year-round care (8 or 10 hours a day; 225 or 260 days a year). The vast majority of seats in schools and centers are only providing school-day, school-year care (6 hours and 20 minutes a day; 180 days a year).

As 3-K has expanded there has been a subsequent decline in full-day, year-round seats for three-year-olds. Data show a decreasing trend of availability of full-day seats as 3-K expanded; centers’ capacity for providing full-day care is decreasing, while school-day capacity is increasing.

For more information see our infographic “NYC Lacks Full Workday Year-Round Child Care Options for Working Parents” and Contracted Enrollment by Length of Care by Age Group on CCC’s online database.

For more information, visit:
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