

# Elevating the Voices of Parents and Providers to Increase Access to New York City's Public Early Care and Education Programs

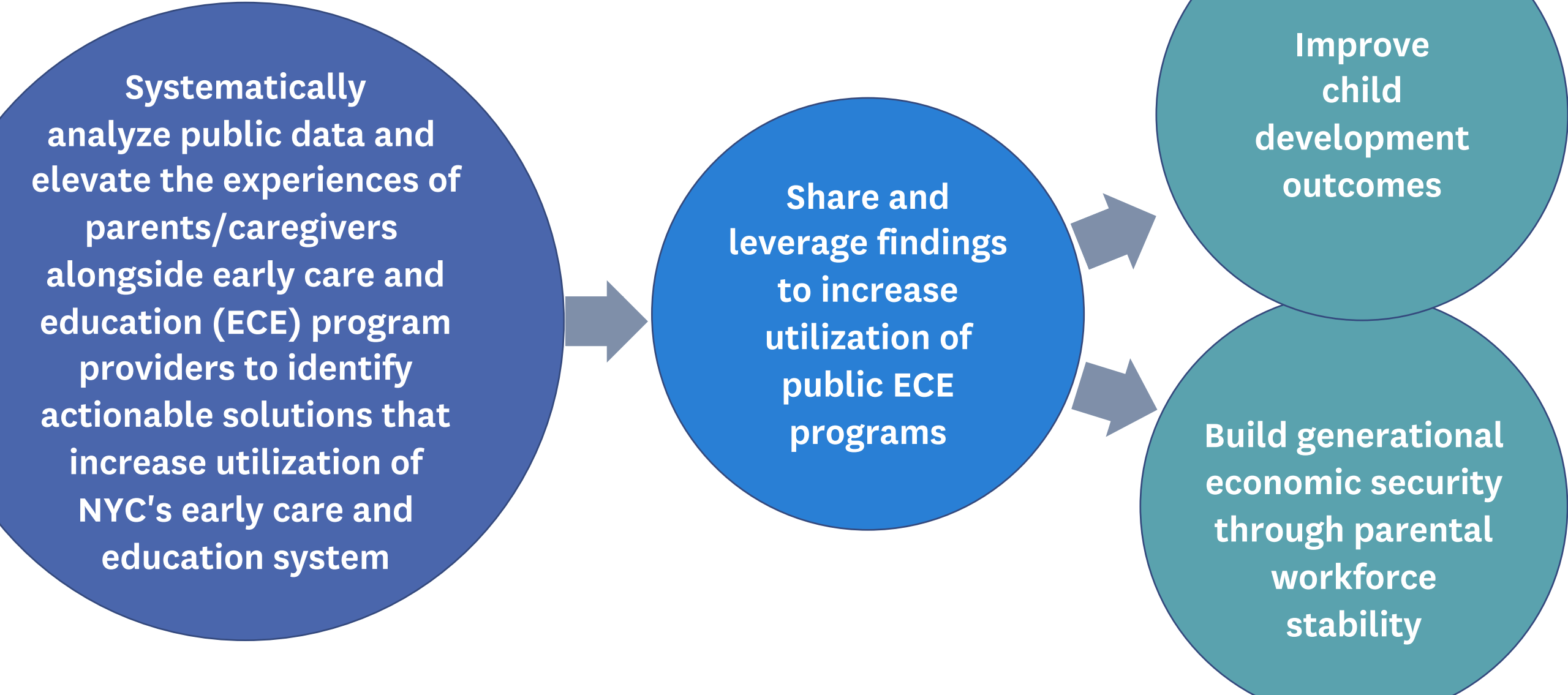
A Summary of Findings from  
Participatory Research  
March 2023



**Citizens' Committee**  
**for Children** *of* NEW YORK



# Project Goal & Intended Outcomes



# Project Timeline

April 2022 to Present



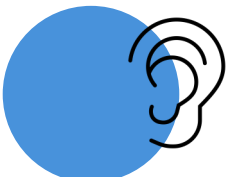
**Analysis of ECE System Enrollment and Capacity Data**

Ongoing



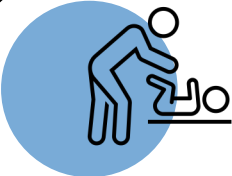
**Conversations and Collaboration with ECE Providers**

Ongoing since April 2022



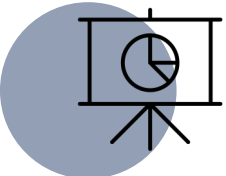
**Listening Sessions with Parents**

July 2022



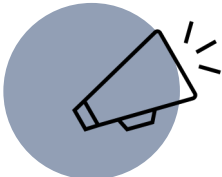
**Parent Survey**

Dec. 2022 to Feb. 2023



**Data Sharing, Survey Development**

Sep. to Dec. 2022



**Survey Data Sharing, Reporting**

March 2023



**Next Phase: Participatory Design with ECE Providers**

April 2023 to March 2024

# Overview of This Data Resource

1

CCC's analysis of administrative data on enrollment and capacity of public ECE programs (Data for SY19-20 & SY21-22 from the Department of Education, as well as the Administration for Children's Services )

2

Conversations with ECE providers to gather needed context to interpret findings from analysis of administrative data and collaboratively plan future project activities (Ongoing since April 2022)

3

Listening sessions with parents to understand barriers and counterpart solutions to accessing public ECE programs (July 2022)

4

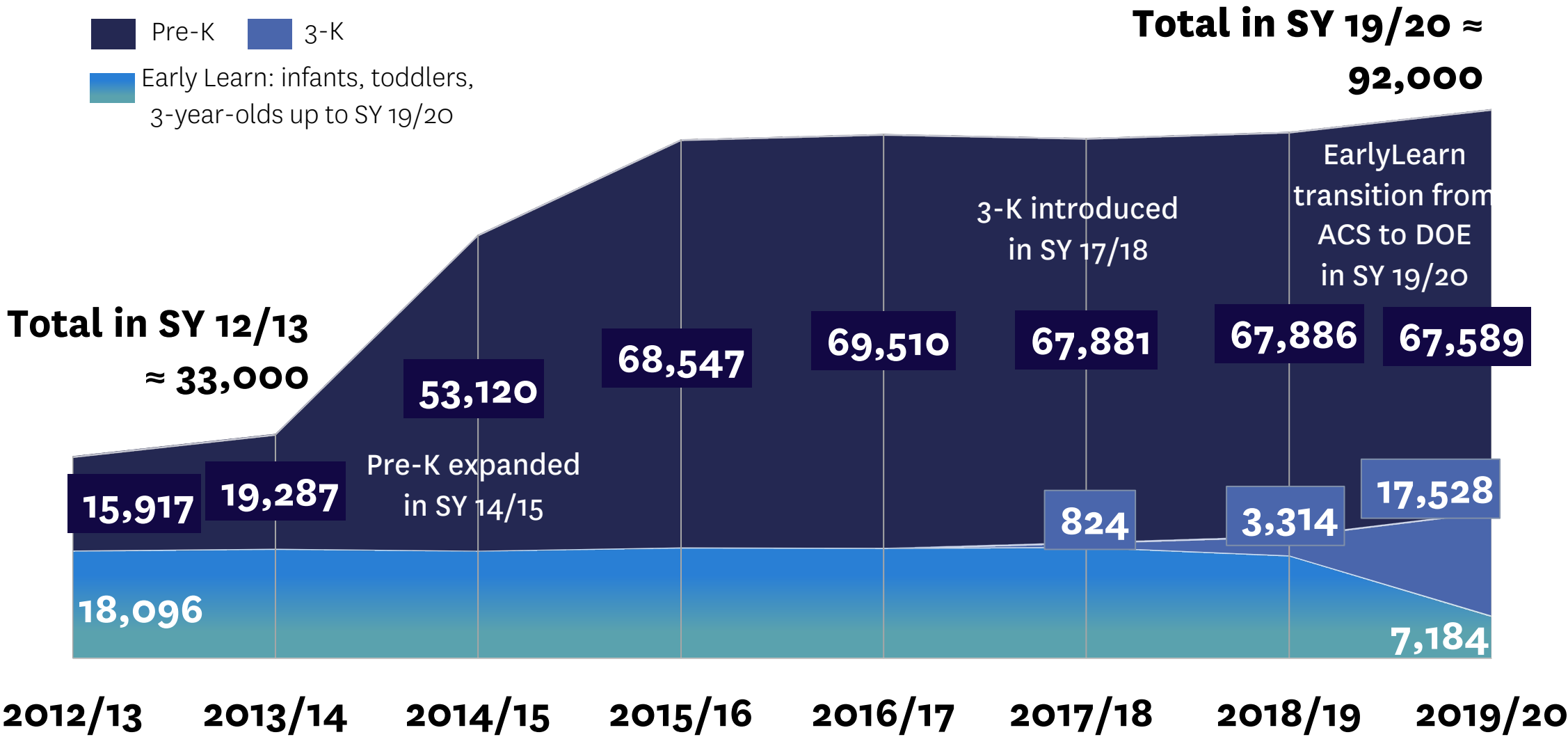
Citywide survey of parents on their child care needs and experiences (Dec. 2022 to February 2023)

# 1

# Highlights from CCC's Analysis of Data on Enrollment and Capacity in NYC's Public ECE Programs

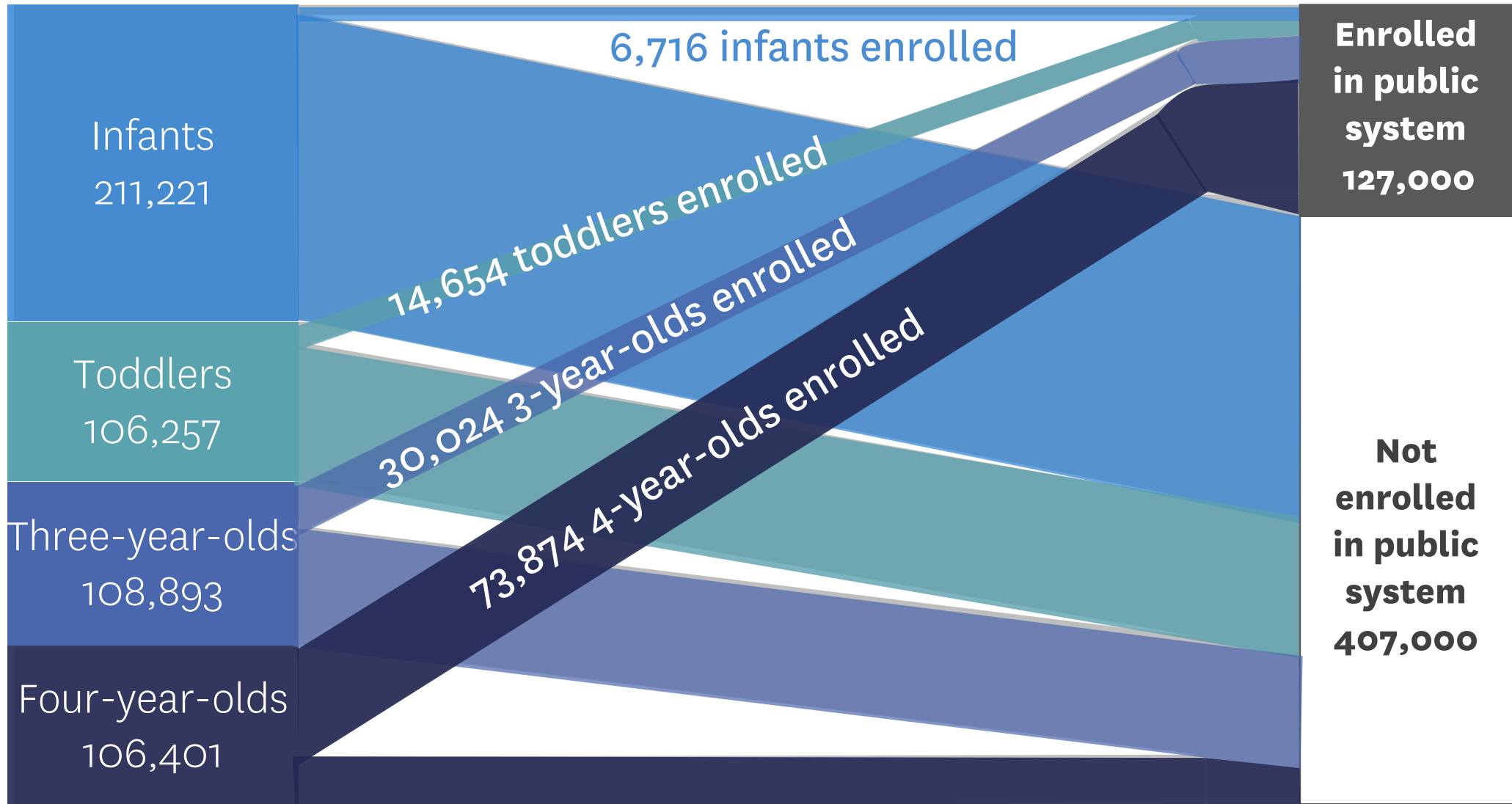
Data from SY19-20 & SY21-22

# NYC has made historic investments in public ECE programs



Note: This chart does not incorporate more recent capacity and enrollment data available

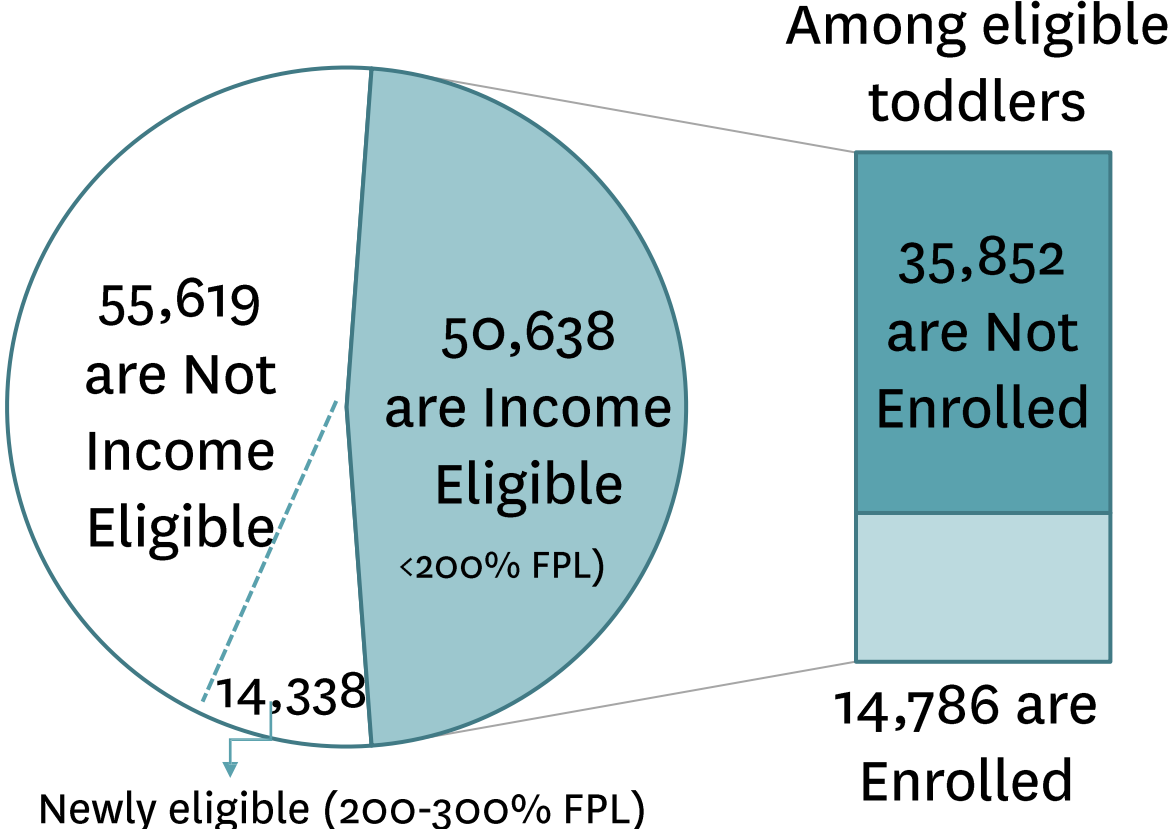
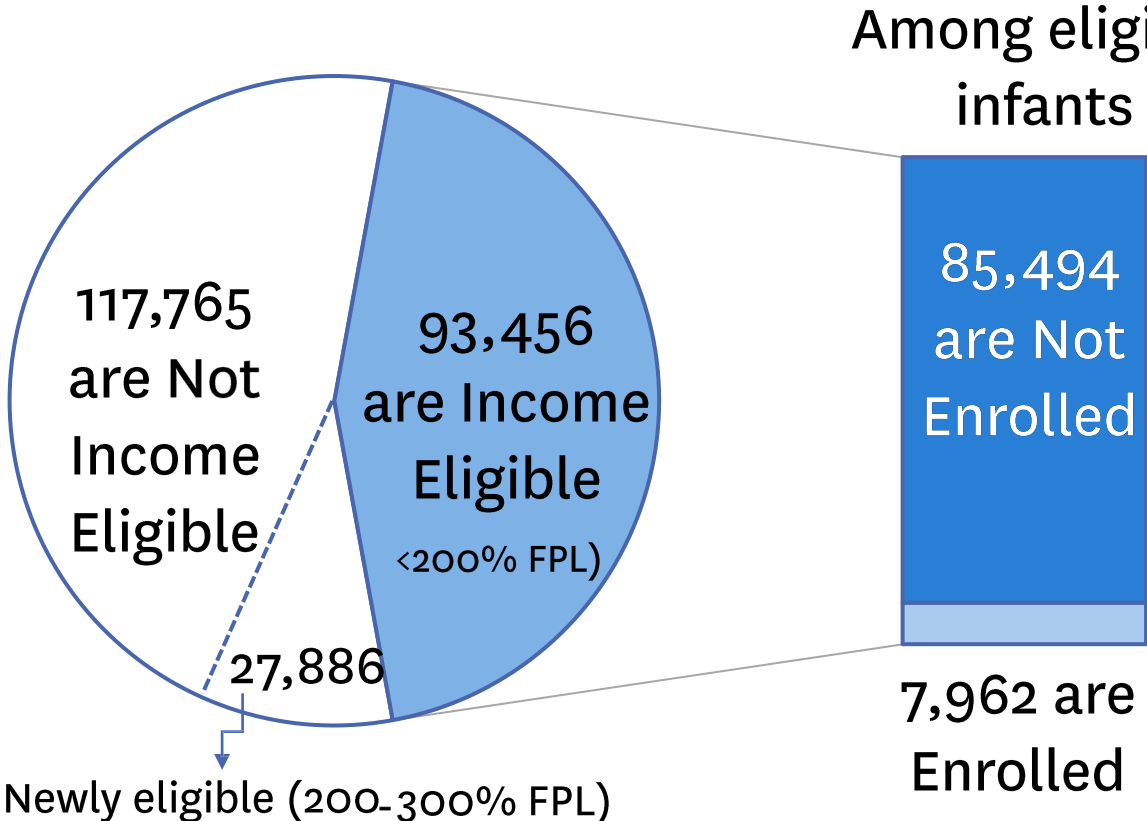
# The publicly funded system primarily enrolls 3- & 4-year-olds. Most children under five in NYC are infants & toddlers.



# Citywide, 91% of infants and 70% of toddlers are income eligible and not enrolled in publicly-funded system.

There are 211,000 infants in NYC

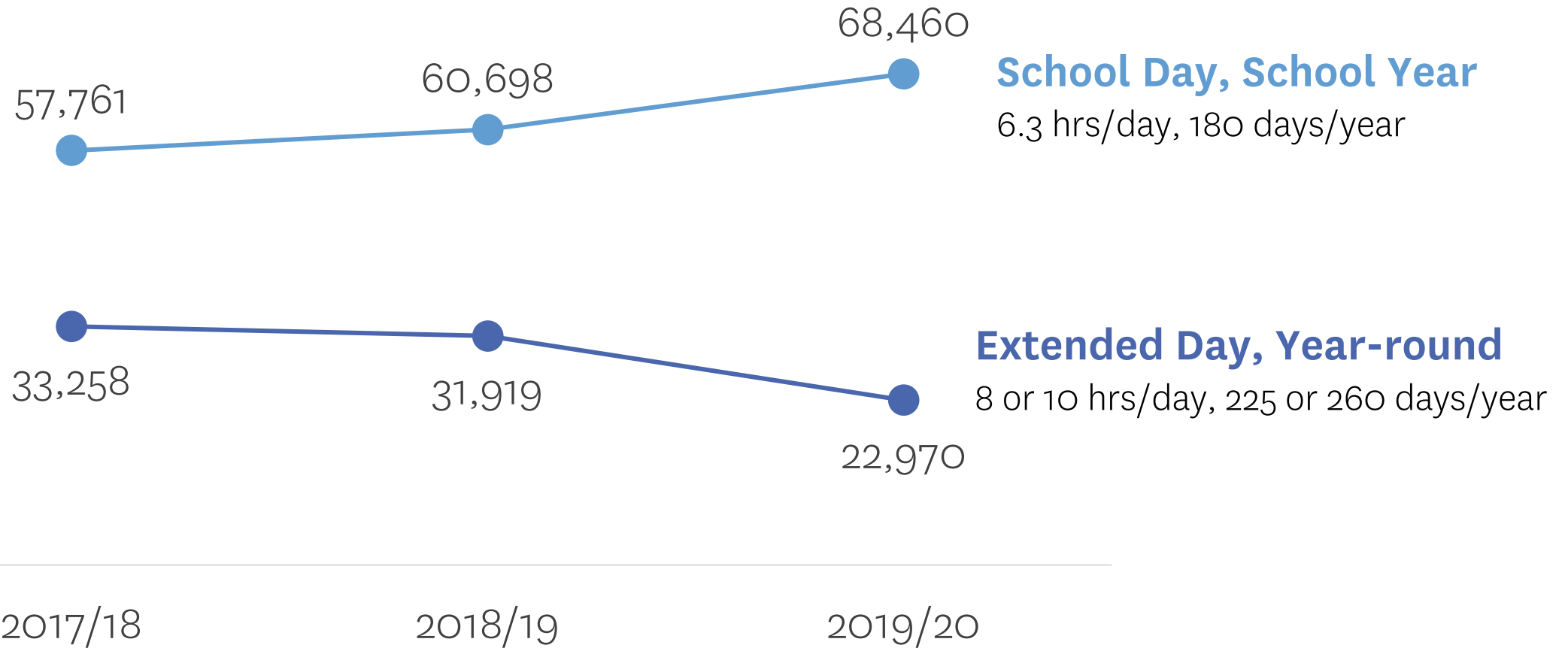
There are 106,000 toddlers in NYC





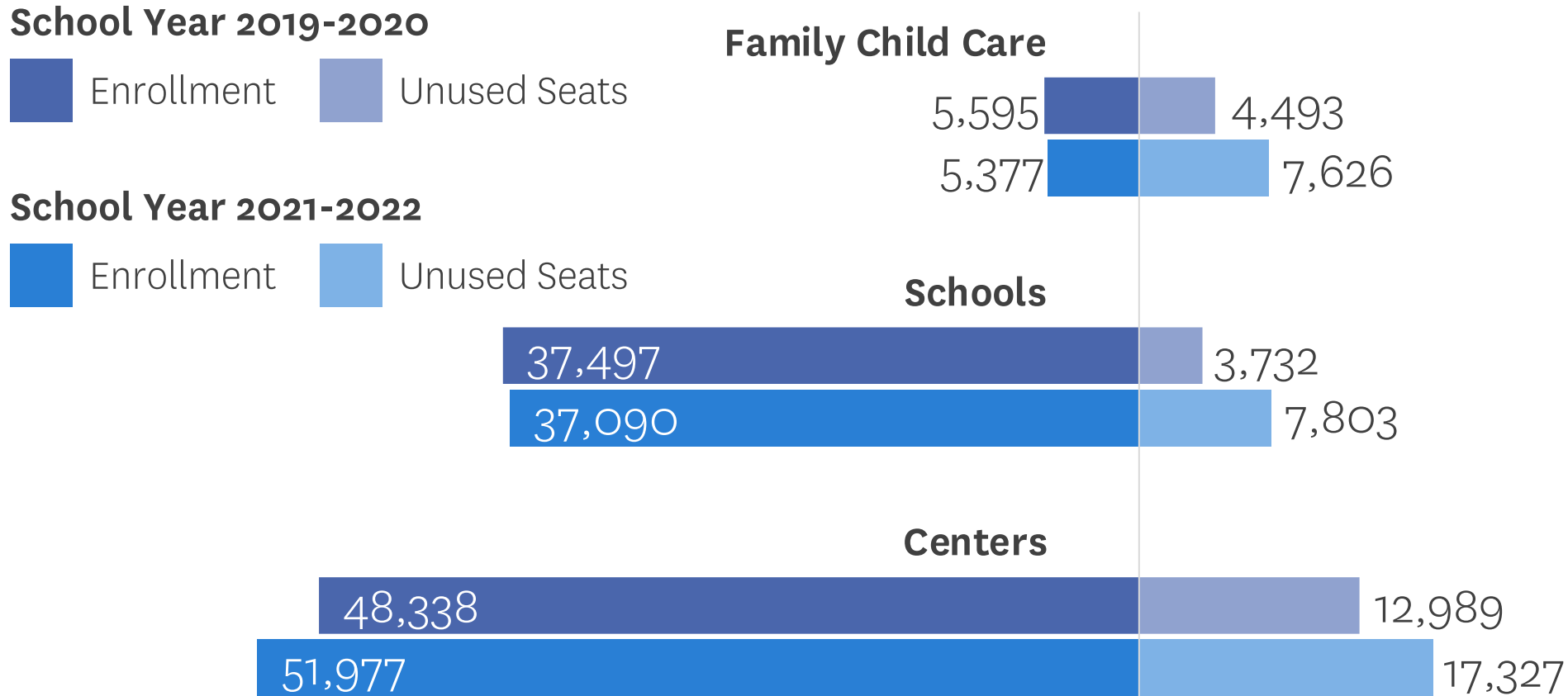
# Increasingly the public ECE system relies on school-day, school-year programs. Citywide, these seats comprise 75% of seats.

Enrollment in the Contracted System for Children Under Five by Length of Care



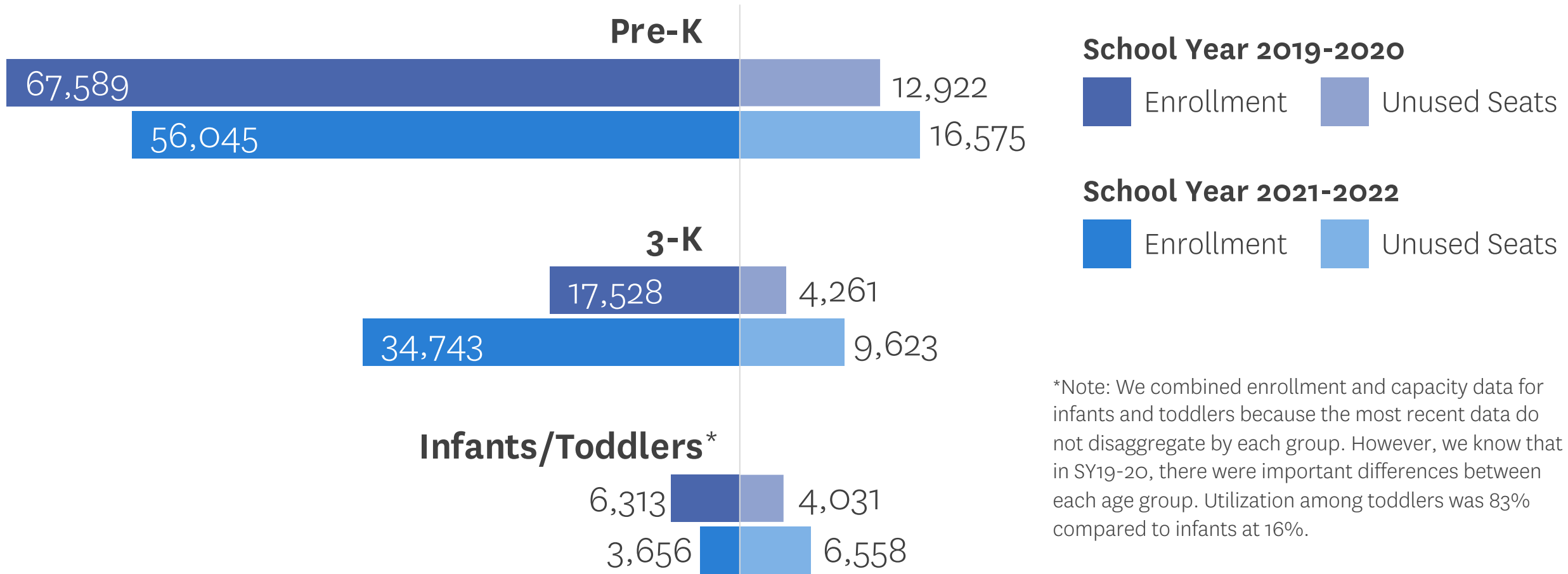
**The largest number of open seats are in center-based programs, the largest component of the public system. Utilization rates were lowest in family child care for infants, the smallest component of the system. Utilization rates decreased from SY29-20 to SY21-22 in all three settings.**

**Children under five in contracted system by setting (SY19-20 and SY21-22)**



**The largest number of open contracted seats are for four-year-olds. Utilization rates are lowest among seats for infants. The number of open seats increased from SY19-20 to SY21-22 across all age groups.**

**Children Under Five in the Contracted System by Age (SY19-20 and SY21-22)**



# Summary of Findings from Analysis of Enrollment and Capacity Data

NYC has made historic investments in public ECE programs.

The public contracted system primarily enrolls 3- and 4-year-olds and prioritizes school-day, school-year services.

The largest number of unused seats are among Pre-K seats and centers-based programs; and

The lowest utilization rate is among infant and toddler care and family child care providers;  
**HOWEVER...**

Underutilization is not equivalent to lower need for care.

**2**

# **Conversations with ECE Providers**

Ongoing since April 2022

# Conversations and Collaboration with ECE Providers and Family Service Organizations

- Throughout the project, we met with dozens of staff across 30 child and family service organizations, including contracted ECE program providers, as well as organizations providing an array of services for families and children who helped broaden outreach to families with young children not enrolled in ECE programs.
- Also throughout the project, we shared with project partners the findings from our analysis of enrollment data, parents listening sessions, and citywide survey. This iterative process offered 1) further context to interpret what we were learning from parents, and plan future project activities, including the citywide parent survey. Separate from these meetings, we met with staff at NYC government offices to brief them on the project.

# Summary of Provider- identified System Challenges

Contract inflexibility impedes addressing emerging community needs

Centralized enrollment prioritizes school-based seats and limits community-based provider visibility and involvement.

School-day, school-year seats are under enrolled; and there are wait lists for full-day, year-round seats.

How need for seats is determined may not consider key factors, such as transportation hubs and if families prefer access close to work or other locations rather than close to home

Fiscal instability for providers who contract for school day/year seats, not covering full day and summer months

# 3

## **Highlights from Listening Sessions with Parents**

Data from July 2022



# Listening Sessions: Participants and Data Analysis

## Participants

- Recruitment via partners and geographies based on analysis of administrative data.
- Though we offered to host in-person meetings. All partners recommended virtual meetings. Each group was facilitated and used Jamboard for visual notetaking, transcription service used, and sessions recorded. Participants received a \$50 gift card.
- 162 parents/caregivers participated across 12 listening sessions. 145 completed a brief demographic questionnaire
- Participants' Zip Codes represented all boroughs. The majority provided a Manhattan Zip Code, possibly a work location.
- About 10% had young children not enrolled in an ECE program. Most participants had children enrolled in Center-based (38%), Family Child Care (27%), or DoE Pre-K (25%)

## Analysis of Qualitative Data

- Thematic analysis by coding transcripts, chat logs, and notes
- Three coders used open-ended coding and memo writing to developed a shared coding structure. The three coders reviewed one another analysis and held meetings to resolve a small number of discrepancies

## Access

- Parents discussed access issues such as site proximity and the difficulty of finding a site in an ideal location, issues with the cost of transportation, and whether the hours offered met families' needs.

## Communication

- Parents reported a desire for better communication with providers and more information for parents, including information on the process for enrolling in an ECE program and subsidized care.

### Key Themes from Listening Sessions

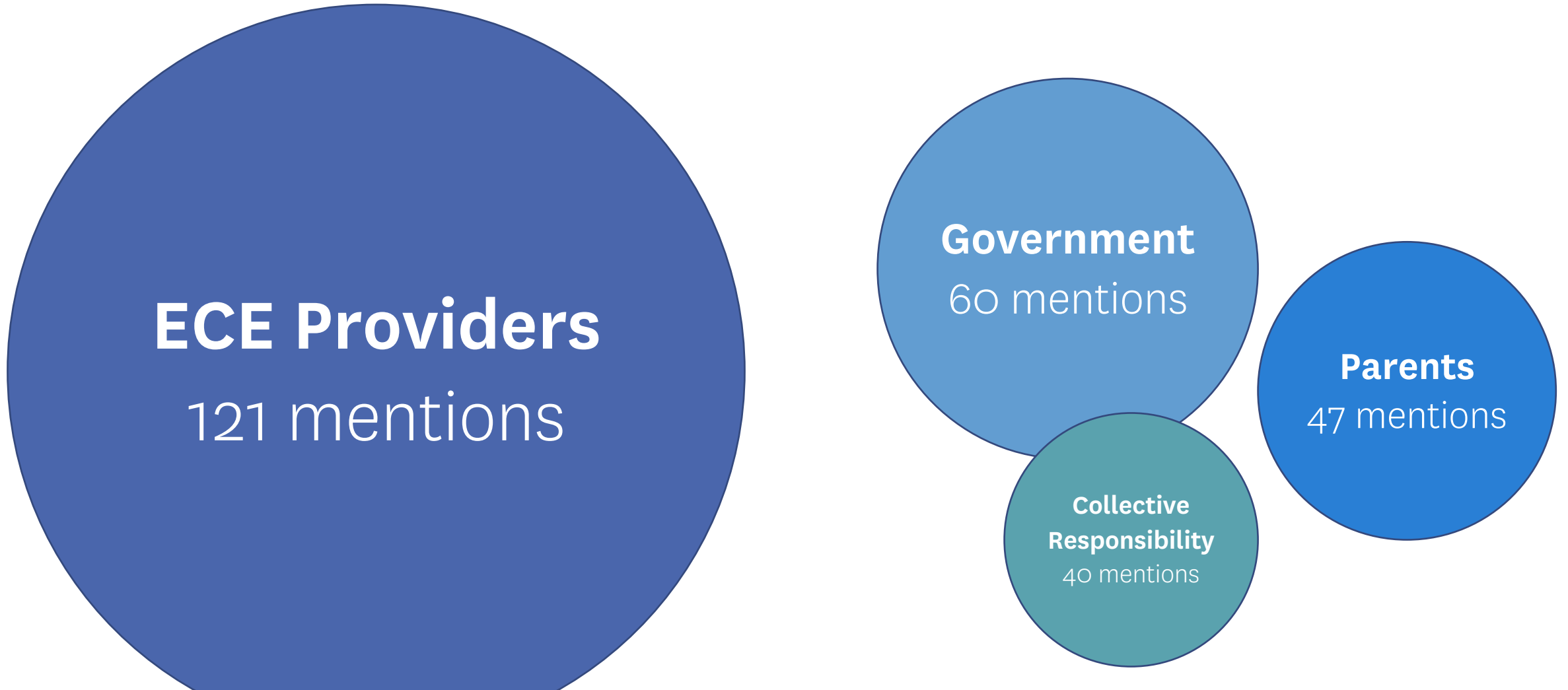
## Cost

- Following a pandemic that has put a financial strain on many families, parents expressed concern over the cost of care, potential rises in this cost, and a lack of awareness of subsidized care.

## Health & Safety

- Parents raised concerns with the health and safety of their children while they are in care. Parents elevated concerns about the spread of COVID-19, bolstered site security, and increased trust in providers and sites.

**Listening session participants identified four entities responsible for implementing the solutions they raised. The greatest number of responsibilities were placed on ECE providers. This suggests parents see providers as the face of the public system and rely on and trust them.**



# Summary of Parent-identified Barriers, and Solutions

Parents' greatest barriers were related to a lack of trusted messaging to help them navigate the process of finding and applying for care.

Parents and caregivers often suggested more guidance and information for finding and applying to care settings and greater flexibility in the number of hours and locations of care offered.

Parents most often identified ECE providers to implement solutions to improve access to the ECE system, evidence of how parents trust and rely on providers for information and support.

# 4

## **Highlights from a Citywide Survey of Parents**

Data from Dec. 2022 to Feb. 2023

# Parent Survey Overview

- Cellphone-based; Recruitment via printed and digital flyers shared by child and family service providers citywide.
- 2,700 individuals started the survey either in English, Spanish, French, or Chinese versions available. Among them, around 1,800 met the eligibility requirements (*i.e.*, parent of young child(ren) living in NYC). Among those eligible, about 1,100 completed the questionnaire and comprise the working survey sample.

## PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

TAKE OUR SURVEY  
AND RECEIVE A \$5  
DIGITAL GIFT CARD

WE NEED YOUR HELP  
MAKING EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION AND CHILD  
CARE MORE  
ACCESSIBLE TO NYC  
FAMILIES.

TEXT THE  
WORD "ECE"  
TO  
1(877) 661-5647  
to enroll in the  
survey

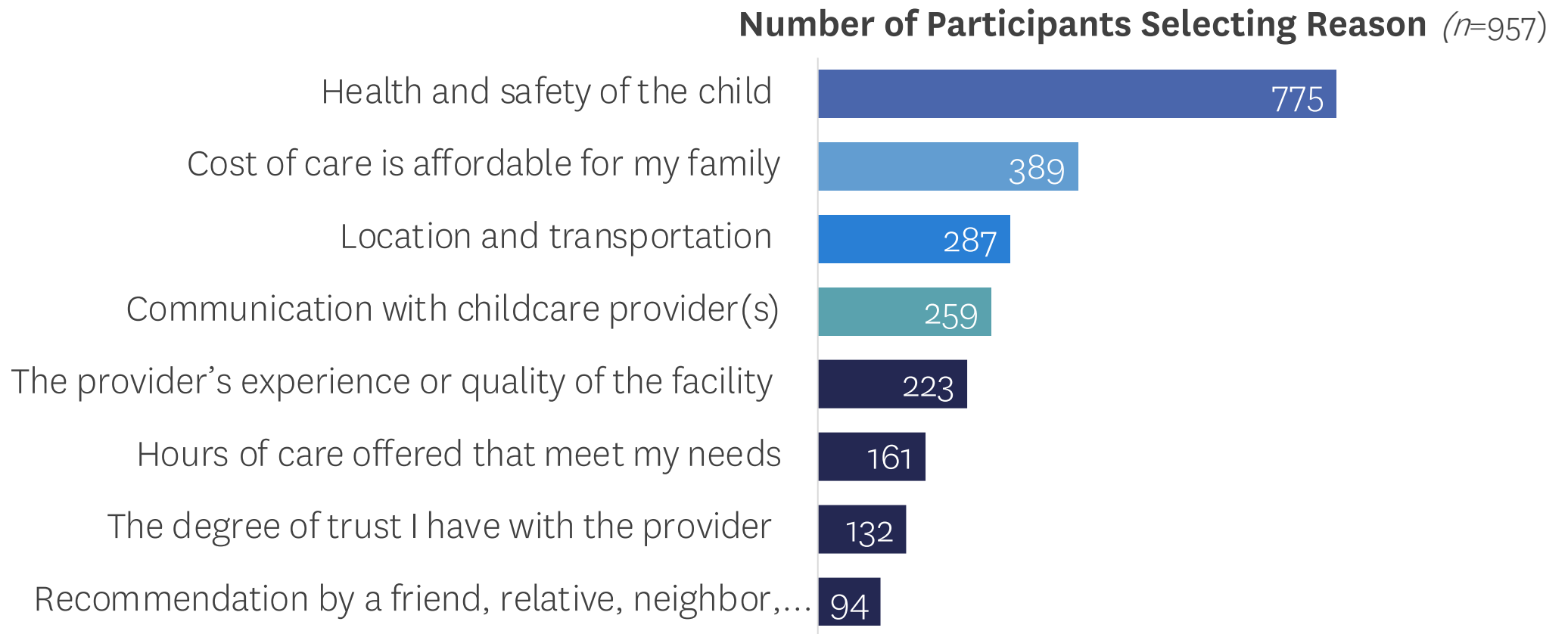
CCC is a child and family advocacy non-profit working to eliminate barriers families face when accessing early education and care programming across New York City. Help us include your voice in advocating for better access to early education and care programming in New York City.

MORE INFORMATION:     

 Citizens' Committee  
for Children of NEW YORK

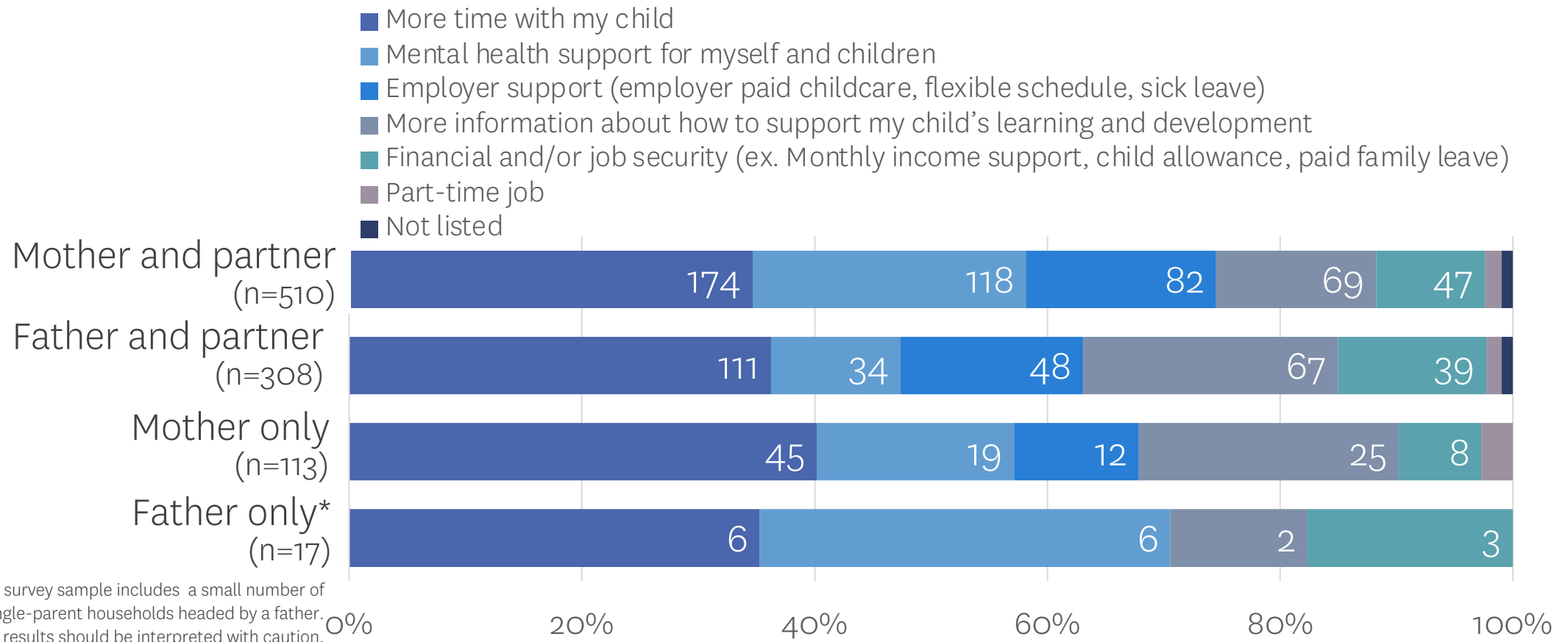
**The most important considerations when selecting child care that survey respondents selected align with the key themes from parent listening sessions: health and safety of the child, affordability of care, access issues related to proximity and transportation, and communication needs.**

What are the TOP THREE reasons that are most important for you when selecting child care?



Survey participants selected “**more time with my child**” or “**mental health supports for myself and children**” as the most important need among a list of options. When we shared these results with family service providers, several validated that these priorities mirror those they hear from the parents they serve.

*Of the following supports, which is the MOST IMPORTANT one you wish you had more of?*

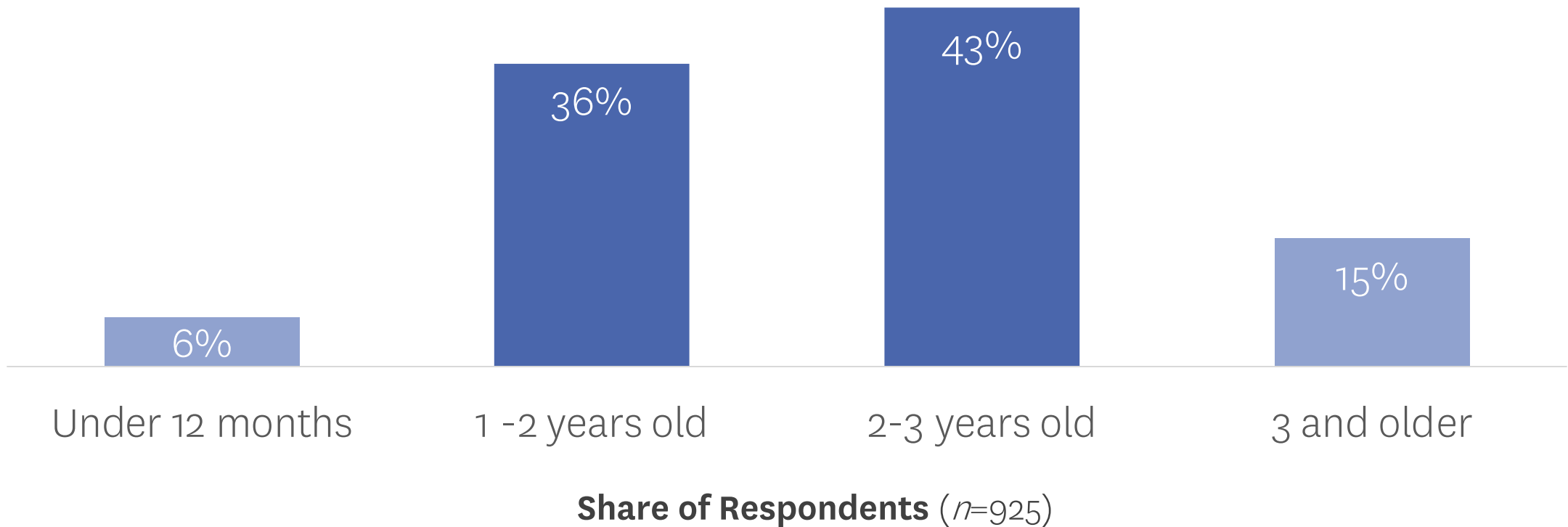


\* Note: The survey sample includes a small number of respondents single-parent households headed by a father. These results should be interpreted with caution.



**Nearly 80% of respondents trust child care providers with their children as early as one or two years of age. Whereas the current ECE system has prioritized expansion of seats for three- and four-year-olds, this finding suggests a need for more seats serving children younger than three as well.**

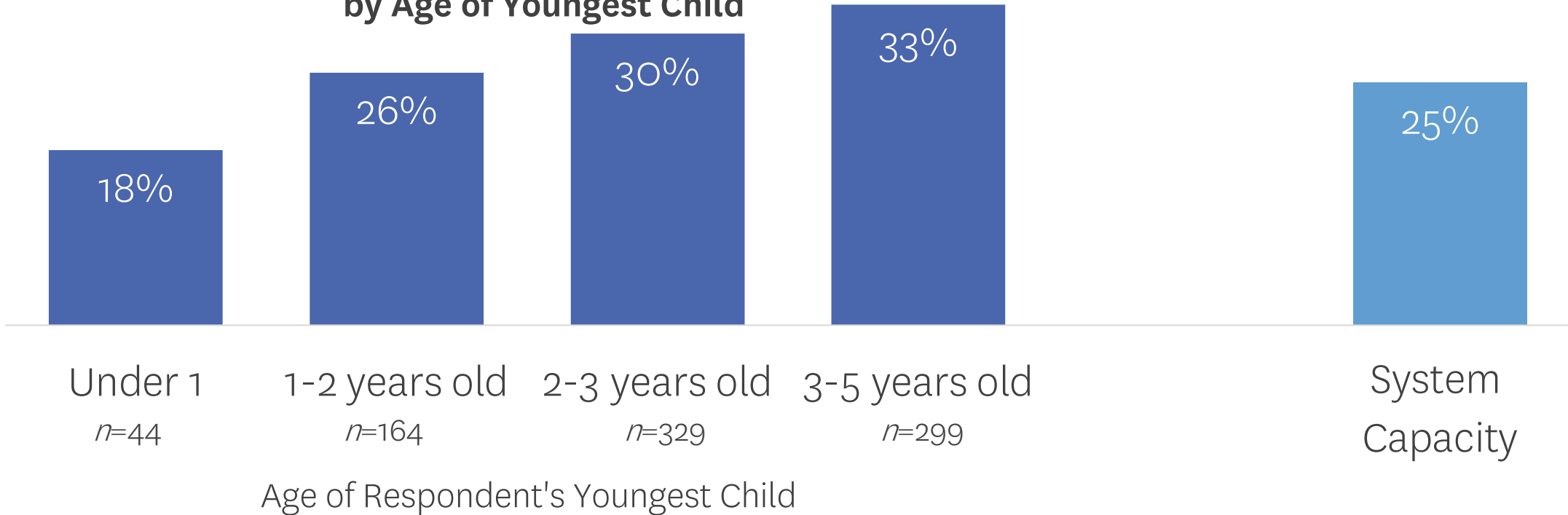
*At what age do you trust leaving your child in a care facility or with other non-relatives?*



A significant share of parents reported needing regular care during the week for **most of the day**. This finding suggests a greater need for seats in extended day programs (8 to 10 hours per day) compared to the current **system capacity**.

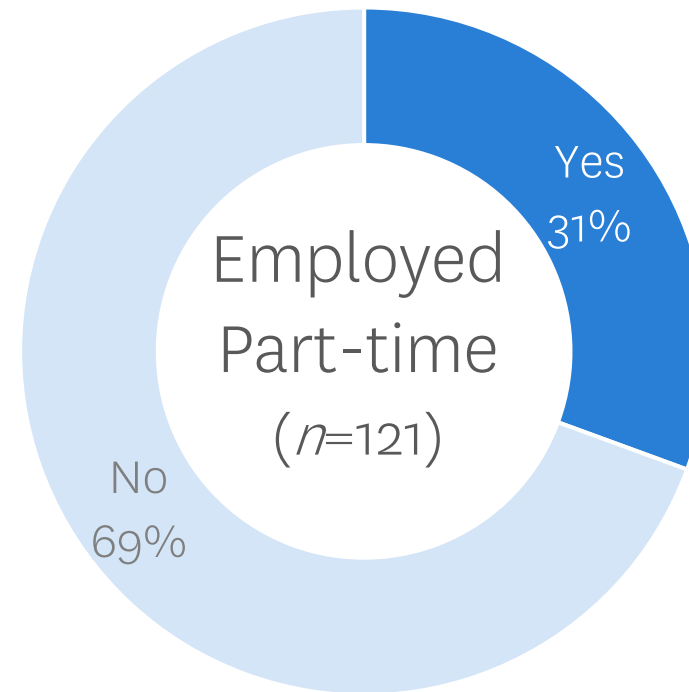
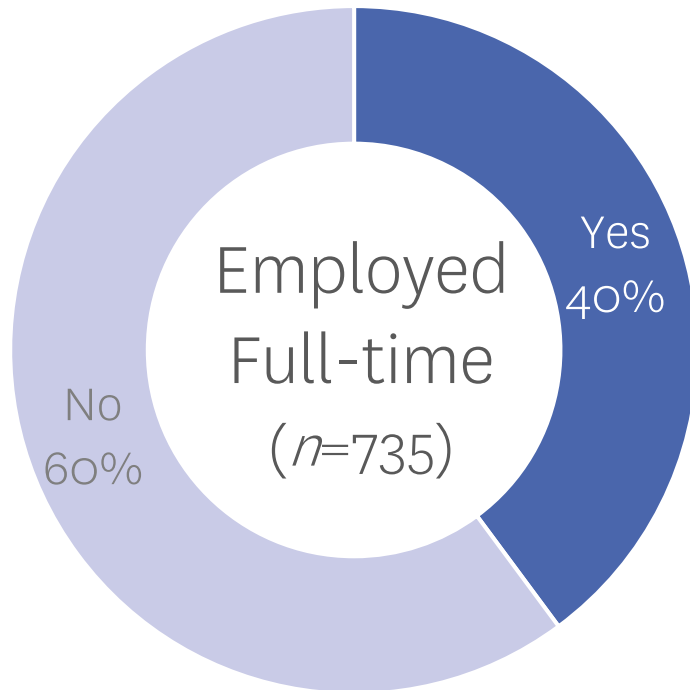
*During what times do you need regular child care during the week? Select only one option: Half day, 8AM to 12PM; School day, 8AM to 3PM; **Most of the day, 8AM to 6PM**; I don't need regular care during the week*

**Share of Respondents Who Report Needing Care **Most of the day** by Age of Youngest Child**



**About 40% of parents employed full-time need regular care during evenings, overnight, or on weekends. No public program offers care during these hours.**

*Do you need regular care during evenings, overnight, or on weekends?*



**Most parents, both those employed full-time and part-time, preferred a provider located **close to home**. However, a significant share preferred a provider **close to work**. This finding suggests the need for greater flexibility of location choice in care options.**

Prefers proximity of child care location

Close to Home

Close to Work



Parental Employment Status

Employed  
Full-time  
(n=741)

70%

29%

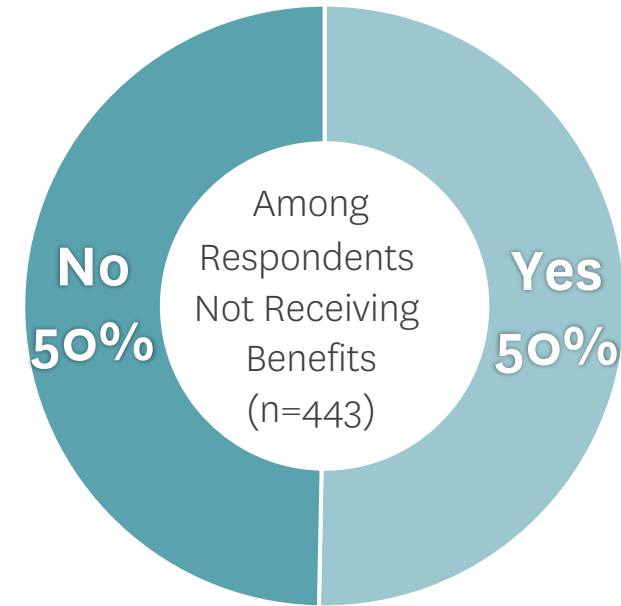
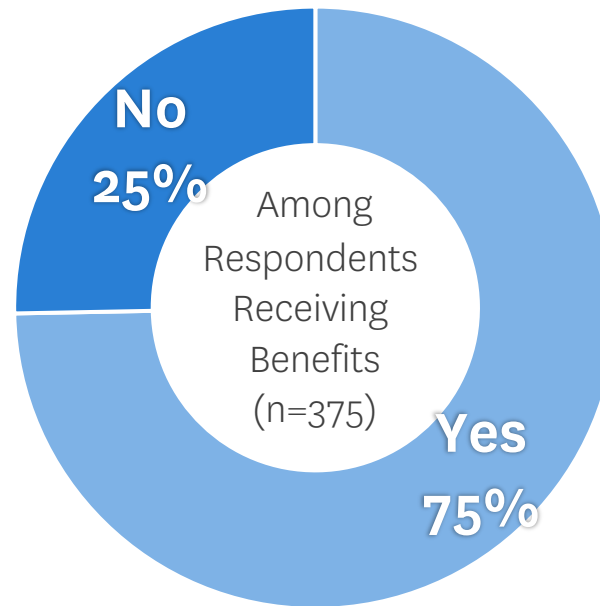
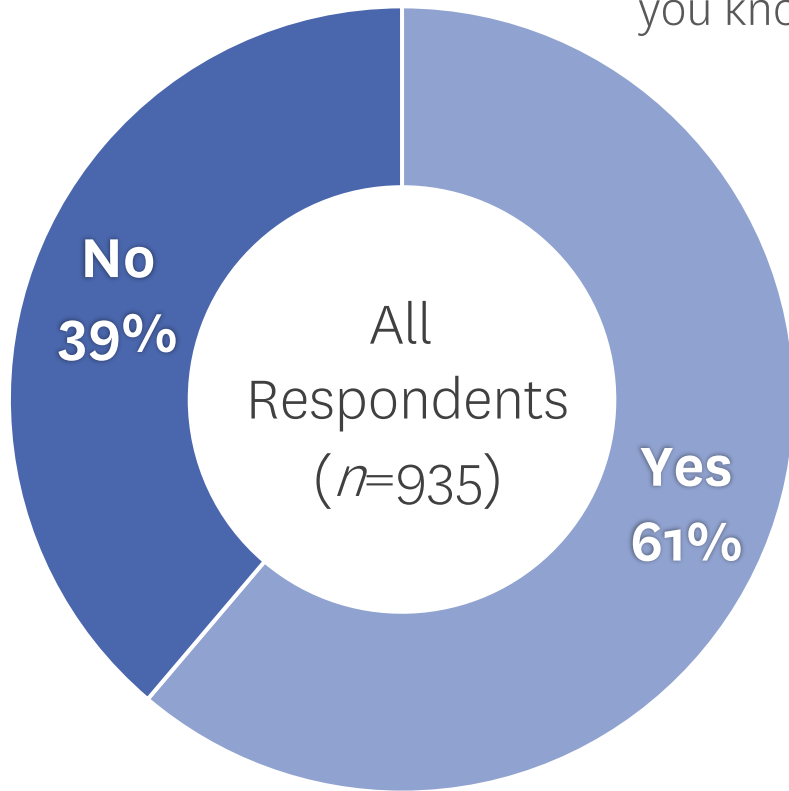
Employed  
Part-time  
(n=123)

57%

42%

**More than a third of all respondents DID NOT KNOW ABOUT subsidized child care programs available in New York City. Respondents who receive public benefits (e.g., Medicare, SNAP, WIC, Housing Support) were more likely to know about subsidized child care programs compared to respondents who do not receive benefits.**

"Child care vouchers help cover the cost of child care. Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that offer full-day, year-round care and services for families. Early Learn NYC is a New York City subsidized child care program offered in family child care or center-based settings to eligible families. Did you know about subsidized child care programs?"



**Parents reported a range of experiences applying for subsidized care. The barriers they cited most often included access issues (41% of open-ended responses), such as a need for guidance about the process, or that the process itself was time consuming (27%) or stressful (14%), including the stress of gathering documentation.**

### **Examples Among Open-ended Responses** (*n*=170)

it takes a long time to get feedback and the fear of not getting the funding eats me up

[Translated from Chinese] We missed the Head Start Program and Early Learning Infant and Toddler Program, which was in dire need at that time, full time plus childcare, very hard, plus no parenting experience.

You don't get approved at times and there's delay in the process

When we applied for subsidized childcare, some of the folks treated us nice and some made the process a little bit hard for us to cope with. We even thought of not applying anymore.

What worked well was that it was easy to access them. But the problem is that there are a lot of funding instructions that must be adhered to strictly and at the slightest non adherence, the funding is cut off.

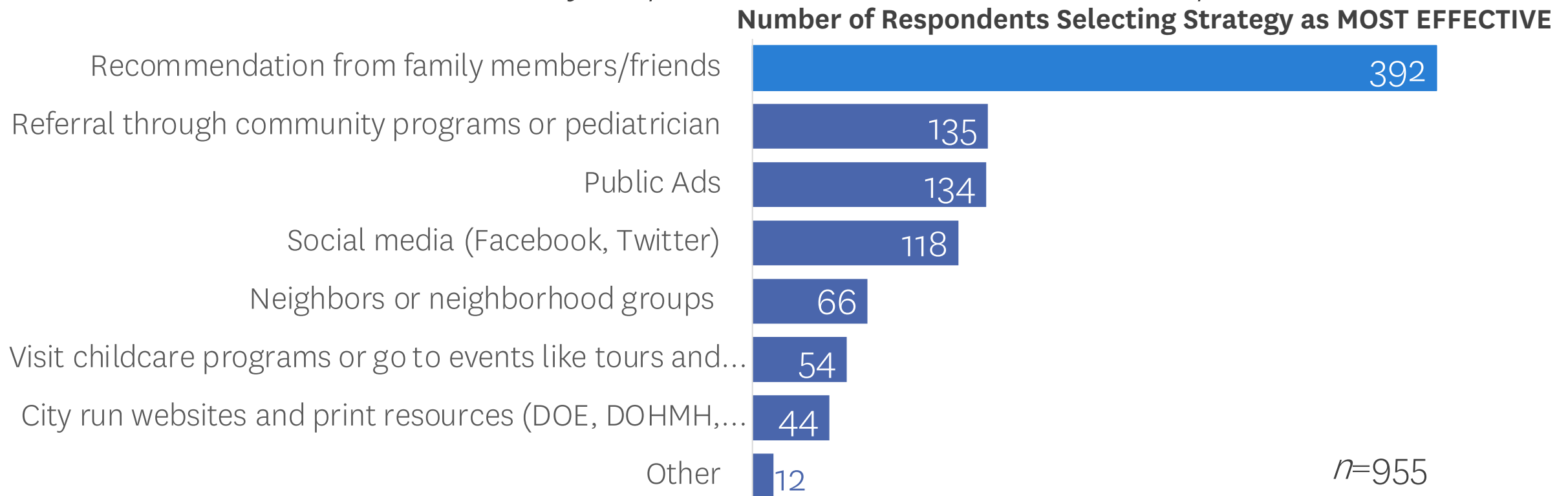
We were guided properly and assisted through the application

We do appreciate any kind of help we can get in trying to care for kids needs but sometimes we find it difficult to apply and also difficult to get it but the little we've got we appreciate

The system; support for the subsidies is what worked well for me. The problem I encountered is not knowing how to apply, Lack of enough resources and information in the city.

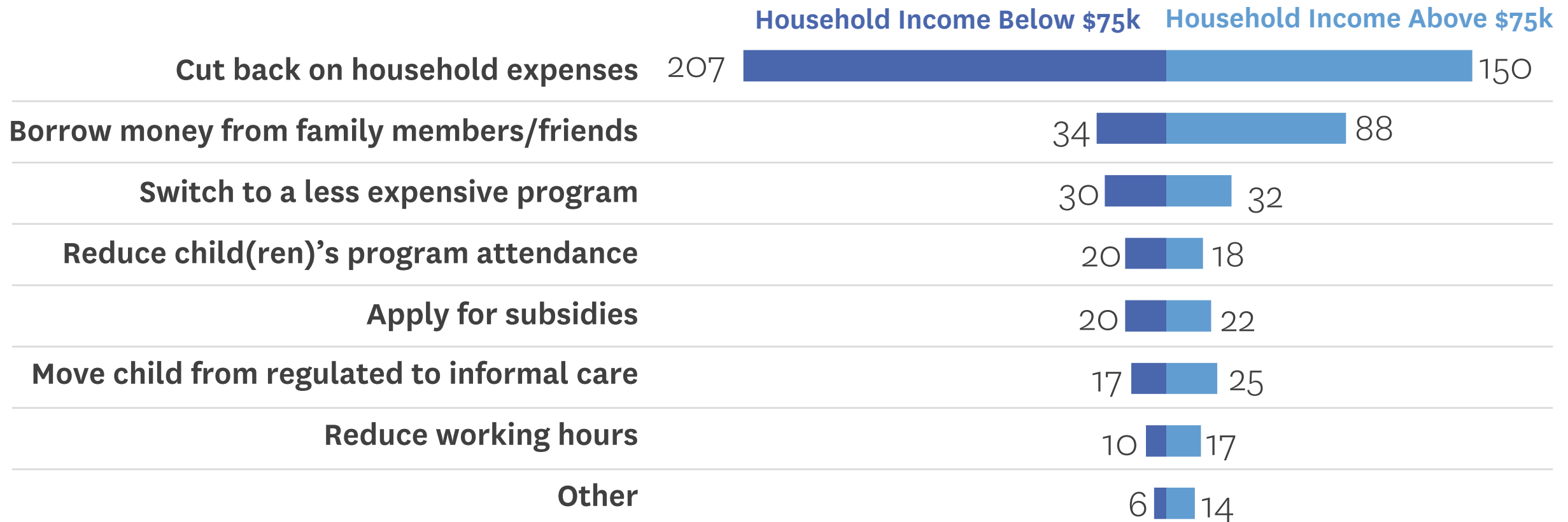
**Although the most important factor parents consider when selecting a child care arrangement is the health and safety of their children, the MOST EFFECTIVE way parents LEARN about their early care and education program options is through a recommendation from family members or friends.**

*What is the MOST EFFECTIVE way for parents to learn about child care options? Select one.*



**75% of survey respondents reported using one or more strategies to mitigate the cost of child care. Most reported reducing household expenses, and a smaller number made changes to their child care arrangement in one or more ways. Households with higher incomes were more likely to borrow money from family or friends.**

*Paying for child care is hard for many families these days. How about you – have you done any of the following because of the cost of child care? (Select all that apply)*





# Summary of Findings from Citywide Survey of Parents

Considering “more time with my child” and “mental health supports for myself and children” are the most important supports parents desire, it is critical public ECE providers are equipped to support parents’ with these needs and embed or connect to behavioral and developmental services, among others.

Most parents trust a child care provider or non-relative to provide care once their children reaches 1 or 2 years of age. While the current public ECE system has expanded capacity for 3- and 4-year-olds (in 3-K and UPK), far more seats are needed for children younger than 3 years of age.

A significant share of parents reported needing regular care during the week for most of the day. This finding suggests a greater need for seats in extended day programs (8 to 10 hours per day) compared to the current system capacity. Many parents need regular care during evenings, overnight, or on weekends; a need not currently addressed by public programs.

More than a third of all respondents did not know about subsidized child care programs available in NYC. Considering most parents rely on family or friends to learn about options, it is critical to support for community rooted outreach efforts to ensure New Yorkers know about and can access public ECE programs.

# Policy Recommendations

**Cumulatively, the findings reinforce advocacy to create a consumer-centered system that positions ECE programs as vehicles to promote child and family well-being and pandemic recovery. The report makes clear the need for a well-orchestrated and well-funded effort to build a sustainable path to universal birth-to-five services in NYC. This includes:**

- **Protecting investments in universal 3-K** and leveraging open seats to meet needs across age ranges;
- **Building a robust culturally and linguistically appropriate education and engagement campaign** at the community level via trusted messengers and via partnership with providers;
- **Creating and supporting decentralized enrollment options** so that CBOs can directly enroll children whose families apply for care
- **Ensuring existing provider contracts and new capacity better meets the needs of working parents – offering greater contract flexibility to respond to emerging community needs** and increasing access to full-day, year-round care, addressing the needs of particular age cohorts and special needs;

## **Recognizing the ECE system's central role in supporting young child development**

and responding to the health and mental health needs of children and their caregivers:

- **Advancing the next stage of salary parity** for center-based workers that includes those left out of the original 2019 agreement (early childhood directors, preschool special education teachers and community-based support staff), and ensures longevity is factored into compensation and establishes a minimum wage floor of \$25 for support staff. Ensuring home-based family child care providers benefit from the increased state market rate.
- **Improving connections to Early Intervention (EI) and Behavioral Health (BH) services to address childrens' developmental and social emotional needs.** Improved access to EI and BH services can be achieved by funding the integration of staffing and services into ECE settings and facilitating warm handoffs to external service providers whenever needed.