Citizens'
Committee
for Children
of NEW YORK

The Youngest New Yorkers

Building a Path Toward a Universal Early Care & Education System in New York City

About This Report

The Youngest New Yorkers is a new report by Citizens' Committee for Children of New York providing timely data and analysis that inform recommendations to build a path toward a universal early care and education system for New York's children and their families.

In this report, we review the recent history of publicly funded early care and education services in New York City, in particular the contracted part of the early care and education system. We analyze administrative data on system enrollment and capacity, and build on this analysis with findings from conversations with service providers, as well as parents and caregivers. These discussions helped us better understand the barriers families face in accessing public early care and education programs, as well as solutions to those barriers. We leveraged these data and partnerships to develop and launch a citywide survey of parents.

Over the past year, we have shared findings from each stage of this project with multiple stakeholder groups: city government, philanthropic organizations, service providers in center-based and family child care settings, and parents and caregivers who participated in listening sessions and the citywide survey. Collectively, the perspectives of providers and parents have been particularly helpful to contextualize findings, better inform public policy recommendations, as well as future data-driven policy research in partnership with organizations citywide.

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About Citizens' Committee for Children

We cast light on issues, educate the public, engage allies, and identify and promote practical solutions to ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. We advance well-being, equity, and justice for all of New York's children through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. research, advocacy, and civic engagement. We analyze and publish data on child and family well-being. We engage with New Yorkers through participatory and community-based research to identify solutions to systemic inequities. We co-create and support citywide and statewide coalitions and campaigns, leveraging research and civic engagement resources to influence the budget, legislative, and policy decisions made at City Hall, the State Capitol, and in Washington D.C. We mobilize youth and adult New Yorkers through leadership development programs, advocacy trainings and public information campaigns and work to raise the visibility of solutions to systemic inequities, centering the voices of those most impacted.

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Executive Summary

High quality, accessible early care and education (ECE) programs contribute to the well-being of society overall by improving health, educational, and economic opportunities for children and their families. ECE programs support children's healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development, as well as parental employment and, in turn, families' economic security. In these ways, ECE programs are essential to New York City's economy and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

New York City's ECE system is one of the largest publicly funded systems in the country and remarkable in terms of the historic investments and system growth in recent years. Based on enrollment data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the system reached about 127,000 children during the first half of the 2019-2020 school year. During the pandemic, the City began new contracts with family child care providers in the summer of 2020 and center-based care providers in the summer of 2021. With these new contracts, the City both redistributed and expanded capacity by ECE program, setting, and geography. However, several systemic challenges predated these new contracts, were exacerbated by the pandemic, and contributed to roughly 33,000 open seats during the 2021-2022 school year—that is, seats budgeted but not enrolled.

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC), in partnership with child and family service provider organizations, undertook a multipronged, mixed method, community-based approach to understand the systemic challenges that result in open seats in contracted ECE programs and develop solutions to the barriers families face accessing care. Open seats in contracted ECE programs include both subsidized seats in child care for eligible families, as well as 3-K and Pre-K programs that have no eligibility requirements. We leveraged a combination of publicly available administrative data on system capacity and enrollment, and collected novel qualitative and quantitative data through speaking with ECE program providers, as well as parents and caregivers of young children. Providers' perspectives have been invaluable for interpreting trends in the administrative data we analyzed, and without them our interpretations would have been incomplete. Parents and caregivers offered additional insights that helped identify barriers to accessing the City's public ECE system and actionable solutions to overcome these barriers.

Summary of Key Findings

In Part I, we present our analysis of administrative data on capacity and enrollment alongside ECE providers' perspectives. In Part II, we present our analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from listening sessions and a citywide survey of parents and caregivers. Based on the combination of these research activities, we find several reasons why there are thousands of open seats in NYC's public ECE system year despite families' desperate need for high-quality, affordable ECE programming:

A lack of seats for children age three and younger in a system intended to serve children birth to five years of age. Based on our analysis of administrative data, more than 70% of system capacity serves 4-year-olds. Based on results from our citywide survey of parents, the majority of parents (80%) trust non-relatives and child care providers to care for their children as early as 1 or 2 years of age; yet only 12% of the public system serves infants and toddlers through vouchers and contracted seats. While the 3-K program expanded and is one-third of the contracted system capacity, more capacity is needed for children 3-year-olds and younger.

A growing share of seats is limited to school-day, school-year programs that do not fit many working families' needs for extended day, year-round programs. Based on our analysis of administrative data, less than a quarter of contracted seats currently provide extended day programming. Based on our parent survey, about a third of respondents need care most of the day (8AM to 6PM), a greater need for extended day programs compared to what currently exists.

Centralizing the enrollment process within DOE was intended to facilitate access, but instead has prevented contracted ECE providers from enrolling families on site and creates competition between contracted programs in communities and programs operated directly by the Department of Education in school settings. Contracted center-based and family child care providers have lower utilization rates compared to school-based settings. Contracted providers are reimbursed based on enrollment, yet providers must cover fixed cost and staffing regardless of enrollment levels. This systemic challenge creates fiscal instability for providers.

Parents and caregivers of young children face barriers applying for subsidized child care programs or enrolling in universal programs. This is based on evidence from our listening sessions with parents and our citywide parent survey. More than a third of all respondents to our survey did not know about subsidized child care programs, and most parents indicated that they rely on family or friends to learn about ECE program options, indicating a need for community-rooted outreach through credible messengers to ensure all New Yorkers know about public programs. Importantly, today there are more infants and toddlers eligible for subsidized care due to expanded income eligibility thresholds, while public funding for subsidized child care is limited.

Families require child care arrangements and other supports the current ECE system does not fully meet, such as: transportation aid; care locations close to home or work; care during non-traditional working hours, including overnight or on weekends; and other needs related to their children's health and safety or special needs. These findings are supported by our conversations with child and family service providers, listening sessions with parents, and responses to our citywide parent survey.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

New York City has an opportunity to build on its historic progress in the early care and education space. By addressing system challenges and expanding access to services, New York City can position its public ECE system as a key driver of an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic where every family can access the supports they need to work, learn, and thrive. Based on our findings, we propose the following policy recommendations to create a path toward a universal ECE system with increased capacity, support providers, and transparency and communication between the City and local communities:

Protect investments in 3-K and leverage open seats to meet demand for ECE programs for children three years of age and younger by:

Converting school-day, school-year seats to extended day, year-round options across age ranges to ensure maximum utilization of seats; and

Offering greater flexibility in center-based and family child care providers' contracts that increase their ability to respond to emerging community needs.

Build a robust, culturally and linguistically supportive education and engagement campaign at the community level to increase public knowledge and utilization of all public ECE programs.

Support decentralized enrollment options so early care and education providers can enroll children in families who apply for care directly and on site.

Facilitate information sharing and parent access to Fair Fares transportation subsidies to improve working families' access to ECE programs.

Additionally, recognizing the central role ECE providers play in supporting young child development and responding to the health and mental health needs of children and their caregivers, there must be investment in the workforce and programmatic supports that:

Advance the next stage of salary parity for the center-based workforce, and that home-based family child care providers benefit from the increased state market rate; and

Improve connections to the Early Intervention Program and behavioral health services within ECE settings.

We provide more details on these recommendations in the final section of this report, and we look forward to working with City Hall, New York City Council, philanthropic organizations, and our advocacy partners on the path toward a universal ECE system in New York City.

Introduction

High quality, accessible early care and education (ECE) programs are essential to children's well-being. They support their healthy development and school readiness, as well as their families' economic security by supporting parents' participation in the workforce. Understanding the availability and accessibility of ECE programs is particularly important in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic that temporarily or permanently shuttered ECE providers, put a financial strain on families, and widened existing inequities. Women have been pushed out of the workforce due to child care needs at higher rates than men, and parents have expressed concern over the high cost of care along with other basic household expenses.[1] This report provides insights on the strengths and challenges within New York City's (NYC) ECE system, which is essential to the city's equitable recovery from the challenges that emerged from or predated the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this report, we review the recent history of publicly funded ECE services in NYC, in particular the contracted part of the ECE system and the recent challenges it has faced prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We analyze administrative data on system enrollment and capacity and build on this analysis with insights from ECE program providers that contextualize trends in administrative data. To better understand the barriers families, face in accessing public ECE programs, as well as solutions to those barriers, we spoke directly with parents of young children across a dozen listening sessions. We leveraged these qualitative data and partnerships with child and family service providers to develop and launch a citywide survey of parents, which we also report on and inform recommendation for action.

The goal of this work is to inform recommendations for public policy, as well as budgetary and administrative decisions, to build a path toward a universal early care and education system in NYC—a system that has increased capacity, adequately supports ECE providers, and increases transparency and communication between local government and communities.

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[1] See Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, 2022

Historic Investments and System Growth

Over the last decade, the City of New York has made historic investments in its public contracted early care and education system that has significantly grown enrollment (Figure 1). Today, this system is known formally as the *Birth-to-Five System*, which includes Universal Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) for 4-year-olds, Pre-Kindergarten for 3-year-olds (3-K), subsidized child care for infants and toddlers, as well as extended day 3-K and Pre-K programming for children in eligible families. Programming takes place across multiple settings, including schools operated by the NYC Department of Education (DOE) or family child care and center-based providers contracting with the DOE.

During the 2012-2013 school year, roughly 33,000 children were enrolled in publicly contracted programs, just over 15,000 in Pre-K and the remaining in child care. The launch of Universal Pre-K in the 2014-2015 school year expanded enrollment to approximately 53,000 4-year-olds and by 2019-2020 over 67,000 children were reached through Pre-K. The contracted system steadily increased to about 92,000 children enrolled across all program modalities prior to the pandemic during the 2019-2020 school year.

The City's launch of universal 3-K program began in the 2017-2018 school year with 824 seats. By the 2019-2020 school year, 17,500 3-year-olds were enrolled in a combination of newly added 3-K seats and existing seats for 3-year-olds in community-based centers and family child care settings. Infant and toddler care remained relatively flat over time, with enrollment decreasing in recent years.

Figure 1. Enrollment in Public Contracted Programs: Centers, Family Child Care & Schools, 2012 to 2022
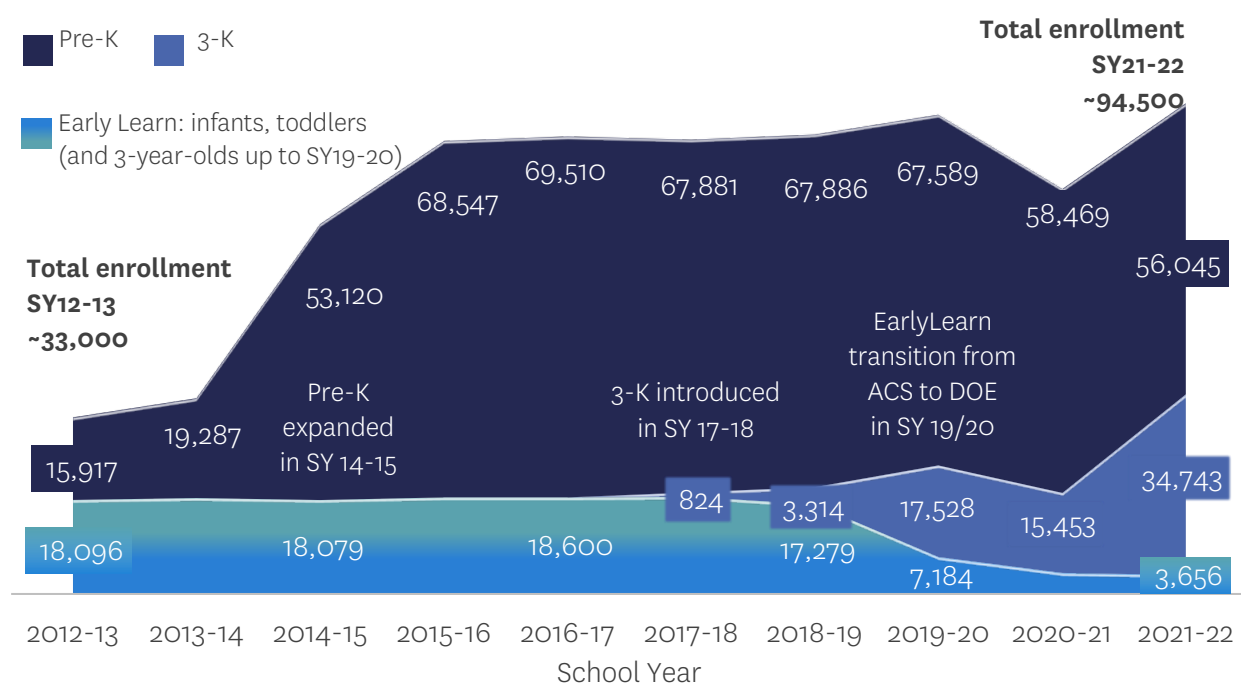
Source: CCC's analysis of Mayor's Management Report (2012-2022); Administration for Children's Services Child Care Data (2017-2022), obtained through request; Department of Education Demographic Snapshots (SY 2014-2015 to SY 2018-2019); and Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022), obtained through request.

When looking at both the contracted system and vouchers, New York City's ECE served around 127,000 children under age five during 2019-2020 school year and 117,000 children under the age of five during the 2021-2022 school year (Figure 2). In 2021-2022, nearly 94,500 of these children were served in public schools or centers and family child care contracting with the NYC DOE an additional 23,000 children were served through child care vouchers managed by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and Human Resources Administration (HRA).[2]

Figure 2. Children Under Five Served in Public ECE System: Contracted and Vouchers

School Year (Total Enrollment)	Contracted Centers, Family Child Care & Schools	Vouchers
2019-2020 (127,327)	91,430	35,897
2021-2022 (117,757)	94,444	23,313
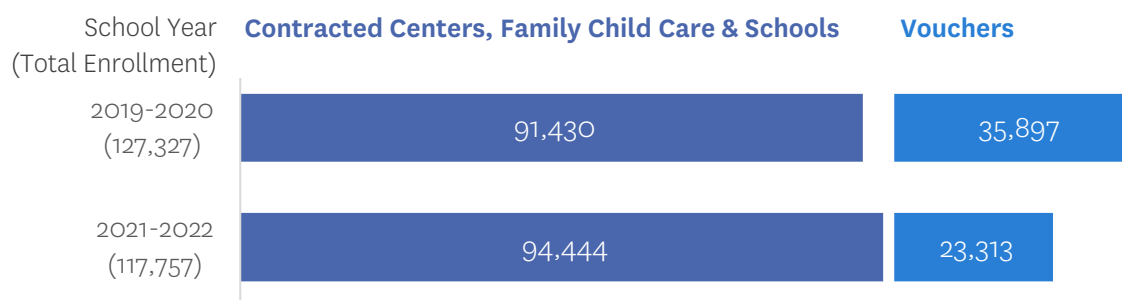
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through data request from New York City Administration for Children's Services, Child Care Data (February 2020 and February 2022) and New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).

In 2021-2022, there was a decline in voucher utilization of around 10,000 children relative to pre-pandemic enrollment in school year 2019-2020 (Figure 2). This was mainly due to fewer families receiving cash assistance and therefore no longer qualifying for vouchers.[3] However, enrollment in contracted care during the 2021-2022 school year increased slightly compared to enrollment pre-pandemic.

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[2] Contracted centers are also known as New York City Early Education Centers—community-based organizations that contract with the NYC Department of Education to provide EarlyLearn, 3-K and pre-K. These programs are selected and supported by the Division of Early Childhood Education.
[3] NYC Mayor's Office of Operations (2022) *Mayor's Management Report*, Agency Capter: Administration for Children's Services

Public Funding of Early Care & Education in NYC
A Brief Overview

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has administered child care since 1998 and has leveraged city tax levy, federal Head Start and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) dollars, and minimal state funds, to provide vouchers to income eligible New Yorkers and public assistance recipients. From 1998 through 2018 ACS also administered and funded *EarlyLearn* contracts that supported licensed family based and center-based child care providers serving subsidy eligible households. The Department of Education (DOE) has leveraged state and federal education funding and city tax levy resources to support Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) since the program was enacted by New York State in 1998. DOE acquired responsibility over the contracted *EarlyLearn* system five years ago.

The movement to build a *Birth-to-Five* early care and education system operated by DOE began with the expansion of universal Pre-Kindergarten for 4-year-olds, in 2014-2015 during Mayor Bill DeBlasio's first term. As near universality for 4-year-olds was reached, the DeBlasio administration piloted and expanded 3-K programming in 2017-2018 and moved funding and responsibility for services provided through Early Learn contracts from ACS to DOE. The transfer of *EarlyLearn* contracts and funding was complete by 2019-2020. Today, ACS manages and holds resources for child care vouchers and care for public assistance recipients, while DOE is responsible for child care, 3-K and Pre-K services offered through contracts with licensed family based and center-based service providers as well as services offered in schools. DOE entered into new contracts with licensed family-based providers in the summer of 2020 and with center-based providers in the summer of 2021.

Over the past decade, the resources dedicated to early care and education have grown dramatically. In city fiscal year (CFY) 2012 the City of New York budgeted $1.2 billion in gross resources (city, state, and federal) for child care and Pre-K services ($866 million at ACS and $346 million at DOE). By CFY 2018 City budget commitments grew to $2.02 billion ($1.14 billion at ACS and $880 million at DOE) and in the current CFY 2023 budget commitments reached $2.69 billion ($522.8 million at ACS and $2.16 billion at DOE).

The proposed budget for CFY 2024 assumes $2.6 billion in gross resources ($478 million at ACS and $2.13 billion at DOE) to support early care and education services. Of the $2.13 billion proposed for DOE's ECE services, $1.6 billion would support PreK for 4-year-olds and $492 million would support 3K and infant and toddler child care services. At ACS, $474 million would support vouchers and care for public assistance recipients. Notably, the proposed CFY 2024 budget for DOE reflects action taken to reject the previous administration's plan to expand universal 3K by eliminating $284 million in resources in the CFY 2023 November Budget Modification.

Supporting charts on public funding sources for early care and education are available in Appendix A, including charts disaggregating resources by agency to demonstrate both the growth in overall budget commitments as well as the shift of resources from ACS to DOE over time.

Systemic Challenges Prior to and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

There has been great progress toward universal publicly funded care, yet several systemic challenges greatly impact families and service providers, which we outline here and explore further in Part I.

1. **NYC has made historic investments in public ECE programs, but there are too few seats for children of ages three and younger.**
2. **Child care is unaffordable for families across the income spectrum, and many families may not be aware they are eligible for child care subsidies.**
3. **The growth of the ECE contracted system has prioritized school-day, school-year seats, rather than full workday, year-round seats that support stable parental employment.**
4. **The challenge of thousands of open seats predates the pandemic and is even greater today following challenges emerging from the pandemic itself.**

Importantly, lower than expected utilization and open seats in Pre-K, 3-K, and in subsidized child care programs suggest families face barriers accessing programs that fit their needs, not low demand.

Amidst Progress on Salary Parity, Ongoing Inequities and Open Seats

The system has struggled with a significant disparity in compensation between center-based and school-based teachers and staff, as well as low market rate compensation for family child care providers. Further, a centralized enrollment process leaves application, enrollment, and service placement decisions solely in the hands of the Department of Education. As a result of these and other challenges we elevate throughout the report, there were thousands of open seats across all age groups and all settings where care is provided. This has left providers more fiscally unstable, with less funding, since contracts are based on enrollment, yet providers still need to cover fixed costs and staffing.

New Contracts and Challenges During the Pandemic

Like the rest of the city, the public ECE system shut down at the start of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. During the pandemic, family child care and center-based providers entered new contracts, during the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021, respectively (Figure 3). New contracts added 3-K capacity to the system, and prioritized school-day, school-year seats rather than the extended day, year-round programming. Children under five years of age were the last age group to become eligible for receiving vaccines to protect against variants of COVID-19 during the summer of 2022, significantly influencing families' decisions on their child care arrangements for more than two years.

Figure 3. Timeline of Select Event Impacting ECE System Enrollment

| SPRING, SUMMER & FALL 2020	SUMMER 2020	SUMMER 2021	SUMMER 2022
• Pandemic shuts down ECE system; • Parental workforce disruption, particularly for women	• New Family Child Care contracts start	• New Center-based Care contracts start	• Children under five ineligible for COVID-19 vaccine until Summer 2022

CCC's Approach to Documenting Access to Public ECE Programs

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been closely monitoring enrollment in publicly funded ECE programs for several years with a detailed annual analysis of system enrollment and capacity to inform city and state-level advocacy coalitions, including co-founding and sustaining the local Campaign for Children.[4] We have regularly requested and received data from the Department of Education, as well as the Administration for Children's Services, the agencies overseeing different parts of the system. This included data on the system prior to the City's request for proposals to rebid the contracted portion of the ECE system in 2019, which was part of the transition of the Early Learn program from ACS to DOE.

Using data from the 2019-2020 school year as a baseline and more recent data from 2021-2022 school year, we examined budgeted capacity and enrollment in the contracted portion of the system. Data on new capacity with family child care and center-based contracts that went into effect during the summer of 2020 and 2021, respectively, provided insight into the redistribution of seats across contracted providers. We analyze enrollment data and voucher utilization to illustrate the broad reach of the public system. We also analyze utilization of contracted ECE programs by age group (*i.e.*, infants, toddlers, 3- and 4-year-olds), setting (*i.e.*, schools, center-based care, family child care), length of care (*i.e.*, school-day, school-year seats; extended day, year-round seats), and geographically by Community Districts.

In 2022, CCC systematically documented the views of parents and caregivers of young children alongside conversations with providers (see Figure 4). Specifically, we asked parents about the barriers and associated solutions to finding ECE programs that fit their family's needs. This process included listening sessions with over 160 parents and caregivers during the summer of 2022, as well as a citywide, multi-lingual survey of families with young children launched in December 2022 which captured opinions from over 1,000 parents and caregivers citywide. We have shared back findings from these activities with providers and parents, and in addition to informing recommendations and budget and policy advocacy next steps, the findings will also inform the next phase of research with providers.

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[4] For more information on the Campaign for Children, please visit campaignforchildrennyc.com.

Figure 4. Project Timeline and Activites
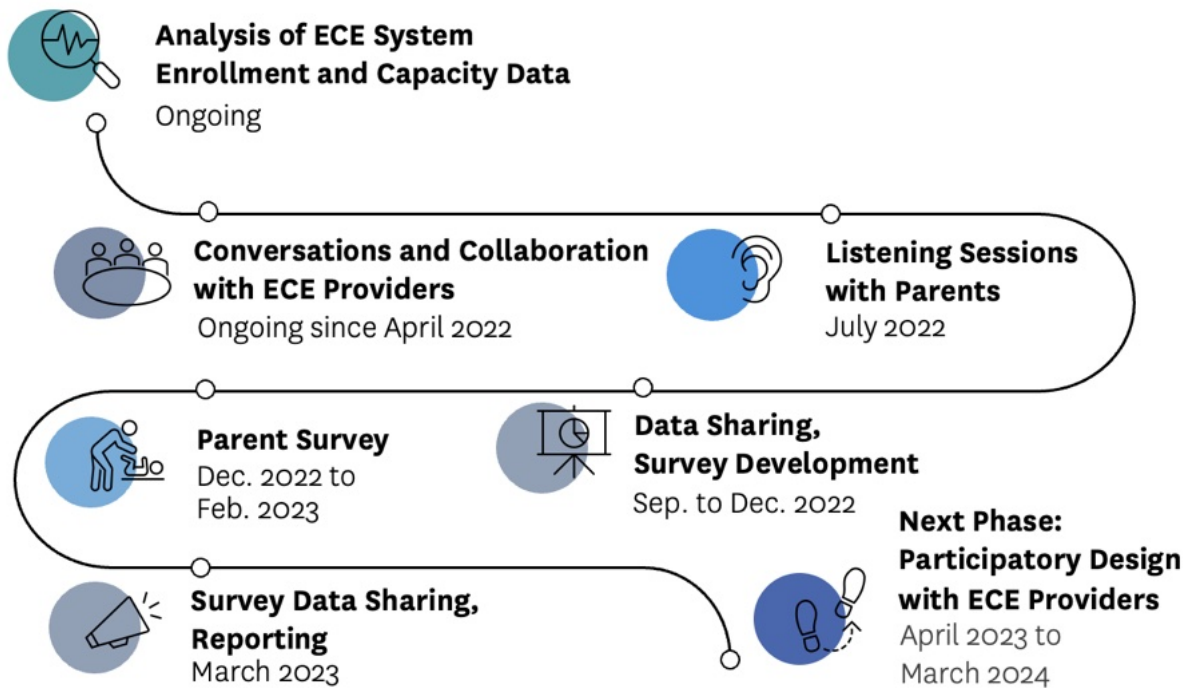
An Overview of This Report

Part I of this report focuses on CCC's analysis of administrative data on ECE program capacity and enrollment, and our conversations with contracted providers whose perspectives on systemic challenges contextualize the data analysis.

Part II provides an overview of listening sessions with over 160 parents, as well as a citywide, multi-lingual survey of more than 1,000 parents that took place from mid-December 2022 to mid-February 2023.

We conclude with recommendations based on these data to inform local and statewide government and philanthropic decision-making. We share these policy and budget recommendations to inform public education and engagement needed to build a universal ECE system in New York City, as well as statewide and nationally. We are also leveraging all of this work to inform ongoing advocacy and collaboration with ECE providers and families, and state and local partners in government and philanthropy, over the coming year.

Part I:
Analyses of Enrollment & System Capacity Data and ECE Providers' Perspectives

Understanding Systemic Challenges with Utilization Data

In this first section of the report, we examine four pre-pandemic challenges that have become even more pressing today using both administrative data and provider experiences.

The utilization analysis we present below compares actual enrollment numbers to the budgeted capacity of the contracted system—services offered in community-based family child care and center-based programs—as well as public schools, including standalone Pre-K settings. Notably, the contracted system, making up 80% of the entire ECE system is separate from the voucher program operated jointly by ACS and HRA.

There are four challenges we examine in depth leveraging administrative data:

1. **NYC has made historic investments in public ECE programs, but there are too few seats for children age three and younger.** With 68,000 4-year-olds in Pre-K seats through the contracted system pre-pandemic, the city had reached expected near universal enrollment for this age group. Despite the system's reach, less than a quarter of the half a million children under the age of five living in the city benefit from public early care and education services.

2. **Child care is unaffordable for families across the income spectrum, and many families may not be aware they are income eligible for child care subsidies.** Notably, infant and toddler care is the most expensive. Newly expanded child care subsidy eligibility includes families up to 300% of FPL ($83,268 for a family of four), and over 180,000 infants and toddlers are eligible for child care subsidies in NYC. Access to subsidies for eligible children is mainly provided through vouchers, while a very small share of infant and toddler care is provided through contracted seats.

3. **Growth of the ECE contracted system has prioritized school-day, school-year seats, rather than a full workday, year-round seats that support stable parental employment.** School-day seats do not meet the needs of working families during traditional business hours, nor those in jobs with non-traditional work hours, including nights and weekends. This additionally affects the fiscal stability of providers who are contracted for a limited number of hours a day and not during summer months and holidays.

4. **The challenge of thousands of open seats predates the pandemic and is even greater today following the pandemic itself.** Underutilization is affecting all settings, age groups, and communities citywide, and data from the recent school year shows around 33,000 open seats in 2021-2022 compared to 21,000 open seats in 2019-2020. **Importantly, open seats suggest families face barriers accessing programs, not low demand.**

Too Few Seats for the Youngest New Yorkers

The ECE contracted system has reached near universality for 4-year-olds in Pre-K and has made significant increases in capacity for 3-year-olds through 3-K. As the NYC system grew with the addition of Pre-K and 3-K seats, it became a system primarily for 4 and 3-year-old children. Although there are over 215,000 4- and 3-year-old children in New York City, there are also 317,000 children under the age of three. Given the need and benefits of high-quality ECE programs for the social and emotional development and school readiness of young children, equitable access to ECE programs demands attention. There is a need for greater system capacity for infants and toddlers while sustaining Pre-K and further increasing capacity for 3-year-olds. However, further 3-K expansion may be halted due to proposed city budget reductions, and there is limited capacity for children younger than three.[5]

Prior to the pandemic during the 2019-2020 school year, 127,000 children under five were enrolled in the public system, including contracted care and vouchers (Figure 5). This means the public ECE system reached around 25% of the 500,000 children under five years of age in NYC. This fact alone speaks to an unmet need given that nearly half of children under the age of five in NYC live in households with incomes below or near the federal poverty level.[6]

Figure 5. NYC's Population of Children Under Five and Enrollment in Public ECE Programs (Contract and Vouchers) by Age, School Year 2019-2020
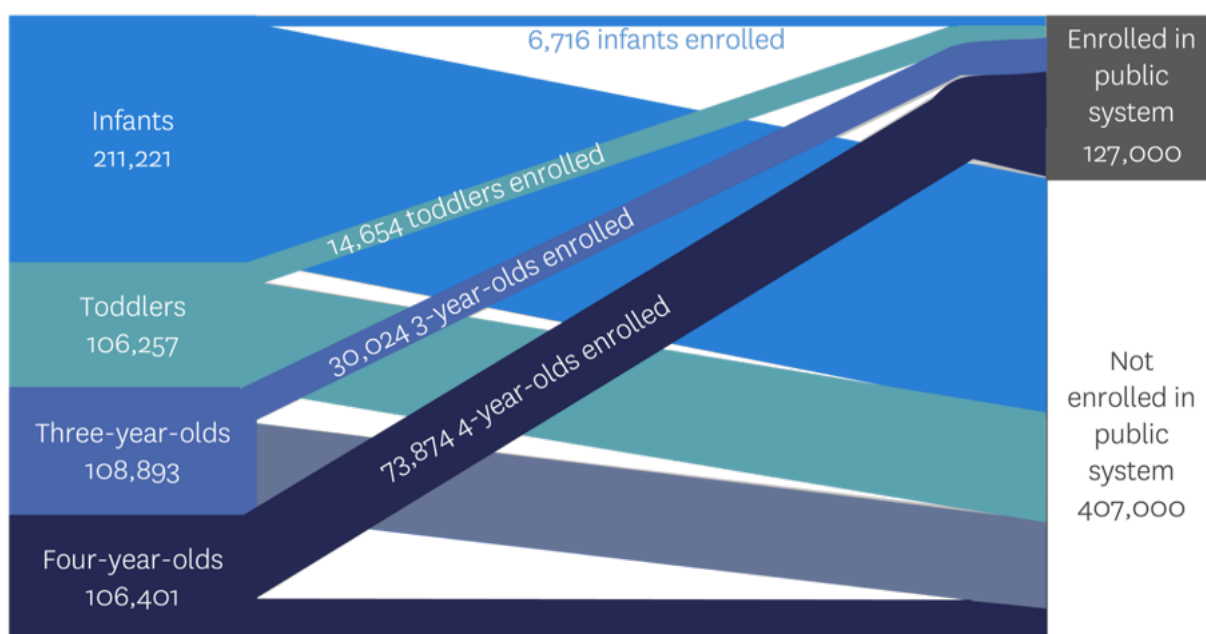
Source: Child population data: US Census ACS 5-year PUMS estimate (2015-2019); Enrollment in public ECE programs: Data obtained through a request from New York City Administration for Children's Services, Child Care Data (February 2020) and New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted ECE sites (SY 2019-2020).
Notes: During the school year 2021-2022, there were 117,500 children in the public system, but this chart could not be replicated as data for the contracted system for that year does not disaggregate enrollment of infants from toddlers.

[5] For more information on this and related issues, please see CCC's testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Education on March 15th, 2023, available at cccnewyork.org.
[6] For more information on the share of children in households facing material hardship, please visit CCC's online database, https://data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/1313/population-of-children-under-5#1315/a/3/1534/62/a/a.

The share of children served through the Department of Education school sites and contracted system—family child care and center-based programs—accounted for 80% of the entire public ECE system in the 2021-2022 school year, serving 94,500 children under five across 1,111 centers, 1,300 family child care providers, and over 800 school-based sites.[7] As noted earlier, the system has grown over the past decade, mainly through Pre-K and 3-K expansion, and the majority of children reached were four years of age, followed by 3-year-olds, and the smallest share infants and toddlers (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Contracted ECE System by Age Groups, SY2021-2022
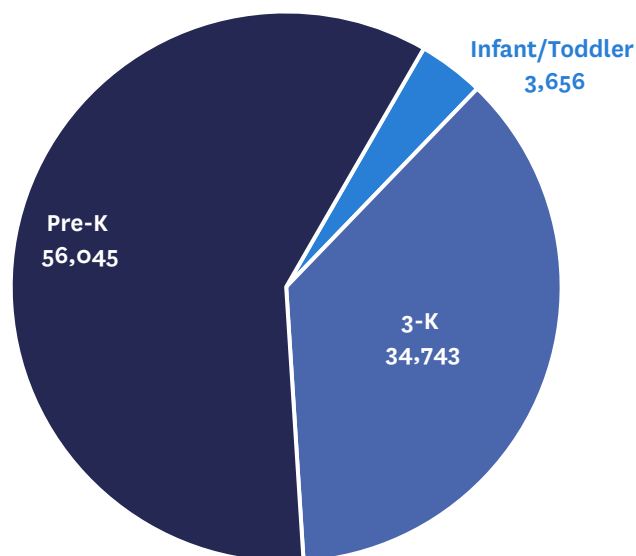
Infant/Toddler
3,656

Pre-K
56,045

3-K
34,743

CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2021-2022).
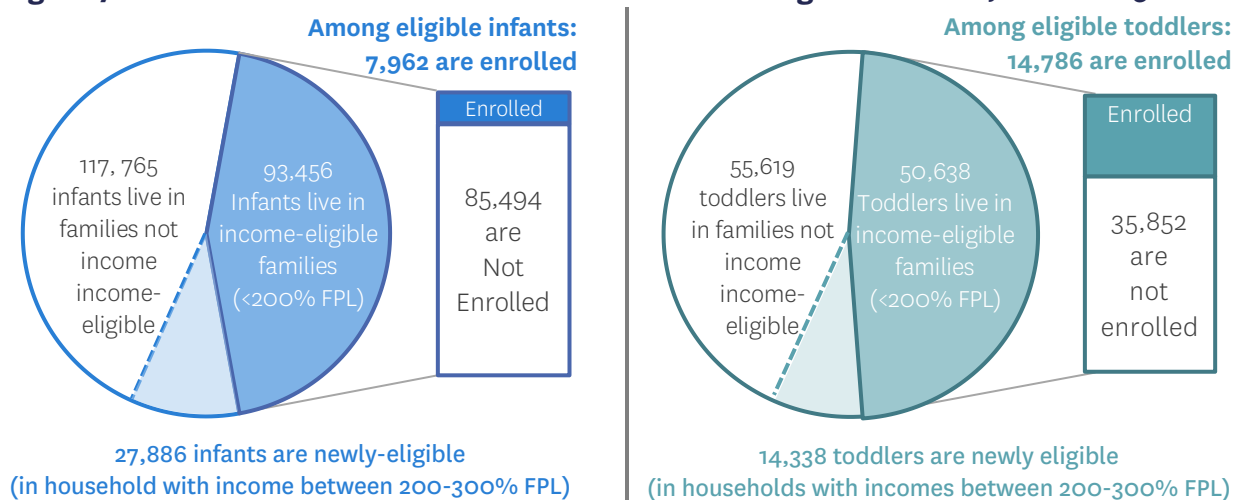
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[7] School-based sites are comprised of 663 district schools, 28 charter, 19 special education schools, as well as 95 standalone DOE Pre-K centers.

Child Care Subsidies Do Not Reach Families Who May Be Eligible

Child care is unaffordable for most families across the income spectrum. Care for infants and toddlers is the most expensive, with home-based child care costing over $16,000 annually, and center-based child care costing around $20,000 annually.[8] Center-based child care for one infant or toddler alone would consume one-third of the median family income on average citywide.[9] This cost burden is even higher for single-parent households who have lower incomes.[10] Based on a federally recommended standard that child care cost not exceed 7% of a family's annual income, over 90% of NYC families could not afford center-based care for one infant or toddler.[11]

Considering the relatively low number of infants and toddlers enrolled in subsidized care, many families who are eligible for subsidized child care based on income may not know this program is available. In 2019, among 210,000 infants in NYC, more than 93,000 were in families with incomes less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL); however, only 7,900 infants, were enrolled in the public ECE system, or about 8% of infants in income-eligible families. Among 106,000 toddlers, roughly 51,000 were in income-eligible families, and nearly 15,000 were enrolled, about 29% of toddlers in income-eligible families (Figure 7). In summary, when looking at infants and toddler enrollment combined, according to 2019 data, the system reached 22,750 (or 7%) compared to 317,000 of all infants and toddlers in the city, of whom close to half (144,095) were income eligible under 200% FPL eligibility criteria (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Enrollment of Infants and Toddlers in Income-eligible Families, SY 2018-19[12]

Among eligible infants: 7,962 are enrolled

117, 765 infants live in families not income income-eligible

93,456 Infants live in income-eligible families (<200% FPL)

Enrolled

85,494 are Not Enrolled

27,886 infants are newly-eligible
(in household with income between 200-300% FPL)

Among eligible toddlers: 14,786 are enrolled

55,619 toddlers live in families not income income-eligible

50,638 Toddlers live in income-eligible families (<200% FPL)

Enrolled

35,852 are not enrolled

14,338 toddlers are newly eligible
(in households with incomes between 200-300% FPL)

Source: Child population data: US Census ACS 5-year PUMS estimate (2014-2019); Enrollment in Public ECE Programs for Infants and Toddlers, Administration for Children Services Child Care Data (March 2019) obtained through a request.

Recent changes in the income eligibility threshold to include families under 300% FPL, resulted in over 186,000 infants and toddlers potentially eligible for subsidized care in New

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[8] Infant/toddler cost calculated using the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Child Care Market Survey. In 2022, the 80th percentile of child care cost is reported, while in 2019, the 60th percentile is reported.

[9] Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2020) *NYC's Child Care Affordability Crisis: The Unaffordable Cost of Care Burdens Families and Impedes Pandemic Economic Recovery in New York City*, cccnewyork.org

[10] Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track Online Database*: Cost Burden for Infant/Toddler Child Care; data.cccnewyork.org. These estimates are produced using 2019 Child Care Market Survey Rate.

[11] The threshold for child care affordability is based on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care and Development Fund benchmark that family copayments should not exceed 7% of a family's income.

[12] See Appendix B for more information on why we report data for school year 2018-2019 and not more recent years.

York City. [13] Expanded income threshold and more eligible families mean that the unmet need has grown, while the resources supporting child care subsidies are limited within constraints of several funding sources (Child Care and Development Block Grant, Federal Head Start funding, and city tax levy). At the same time, there are very few state resources supporting subsidized child care despite state prioritization of income eligibility expansion (See Appendix A).

Figure 8. NYC's Population of Infants and Toddlers by Federal Poverty Levels

Federal Poverty Level Thresholds (Annual Income Family of Four)		*Number of Infants and Toddlers*
Under 100% FPL	(Below $ $25,750)	76,930
Under 200% FPL	(Below $51,500)	144,095
Under 300% FPL	(Below $77,250)	186,322
Under 400% FPL	(Below $103,000)	214,979
Above 400% FPL	($103,000 and above)	102,498

Source: Estimates of Infants and toddlers in households with incomes at each federal poverty level threshold are based on analysis of the US Census ACS 5-Year PUMS estimate (2015-2019). Thresholds are also based on the corresponding 2019 Poverty Guidelines. Thresholds for 2023 Poverty Guidelines that inform current income-eligibility criteria are available from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Looking at more recent data, the number of enrolled infants and toddlers combined declined from 22,748 in 2019 down to 13,764 in 2022 (Figure 9). This decline is driven both by fewer infants and toddlers using vouchers (14,472 in 2019 vs. 10,108 in 2022, a 30% decrease) and fewer infants and toddlers in contracted care (8,276 in 2019 vs. 3,656 in 2022, a 50% decrease).

Figure 9. Infants and Toddlers Enrolled in Public ECE Programs, 2019 vs. 2022
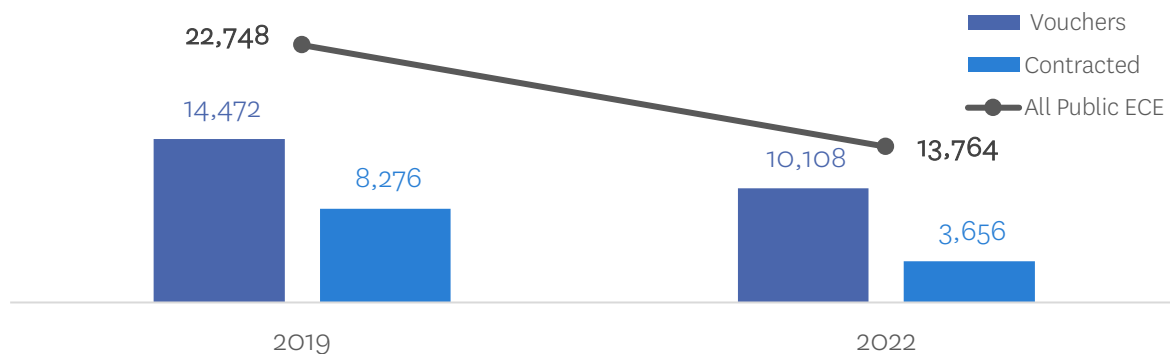
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Administration for Children's Services, Child Care Data (March 2019 and February 2022) and New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2021-2022).

Subsidies are critical for many families to afford care; however, there are significant systemic barriers that both providers and caretakers have identified that have prevented the uptake of vouchers or access to contracted care. Moreover, there are thousands of families not eligible for subsidized care who also cannot afford child care.

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[13] For more information on income eligibility requirements, see New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Child Care Services webpage, *Help Paying for Child Care*, ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/ccap/help.php

School-day Seats Do Not Meet Need for Extended Day Programs

The growth of the ECE system in recent years has prioritized school-day, school-year services, at the expense of extended day, year-round services. Because school-day, school-year programs do not meet the needs of parents working traditional business hours, families must find supplementary child care. School-day, school-year seats are even less supportive for parents and caregivers in jobs with non-traditional hours, including nights and weekends.

School day programs are 6 hours and 20 minutes per day, 180 days per year, excluding summer months and other holidays. Extended day programs, also called full day programs, are between 8 to 10 hours per day, and either 225 or 260 days a year. Pre-K was previously a half day program at its origin, and the move to full school-day, school-year care was a significant expansion. However, care for 4-year-olds and children three and younger, supported through subsidized child care, historically provided extended day, year-round services.
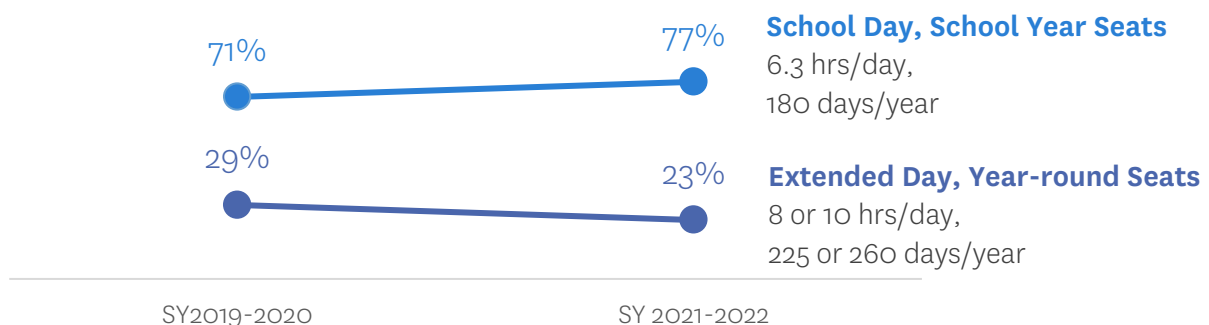
Figure 10. School Day and Extended Day Program Hours

School Day, School Year Program Seats	Extended Day, Year-round Program Seats
6.3 **Hours per Day**	8 or 10 **Hours per Day**
180 **Days per Year**	225 or 260 **Days per Year**

Source: New York City Department of Education, schools.nyc.gov

By 2021-2021 budgeted capacity for school-day, school-year programs comprised 77% of the contracted system, and the remaining share was for extended day, year-round programs (Figure 11). More school-day seats were also added through the new center-based and family contract that went into effect during the pandemic. Capacity for school day seats increased 8% between 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 school year. In contrast, extended day, year-round capacity decreased by 20%.

Figure 11. Budgeted Capacity in Contracted Care by Length of Care: School Day and Extended Day Programs, SY 2019-2020 vs SY 2021-2022

71% ———————————— 77%   **School Day, School Year Seats**
6.3 hrs/day,
180 days/year

29% ———————————— 23%   **Extended Day, Year-round Seats**
8 or 10 hrs/day,
225 or 260 days/year

SY2019-2020   SY 2021-2022

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020) and New Contract Capacity for Family Child Care Networks (contracts started in SY 2020-2021, data as of February 2021) and Center-based providers (contracts started in SY 2021-2022, data as of November 2021).

During the 2019-2020 school year, 87% of Pre-K children alone were enrolled in school-day, school-year seats, while the length of care available for 3-K programs was more balanced with 43% of enrollment in a full-day, year-round care and 57% in school-day, school-year care (Figure 12).

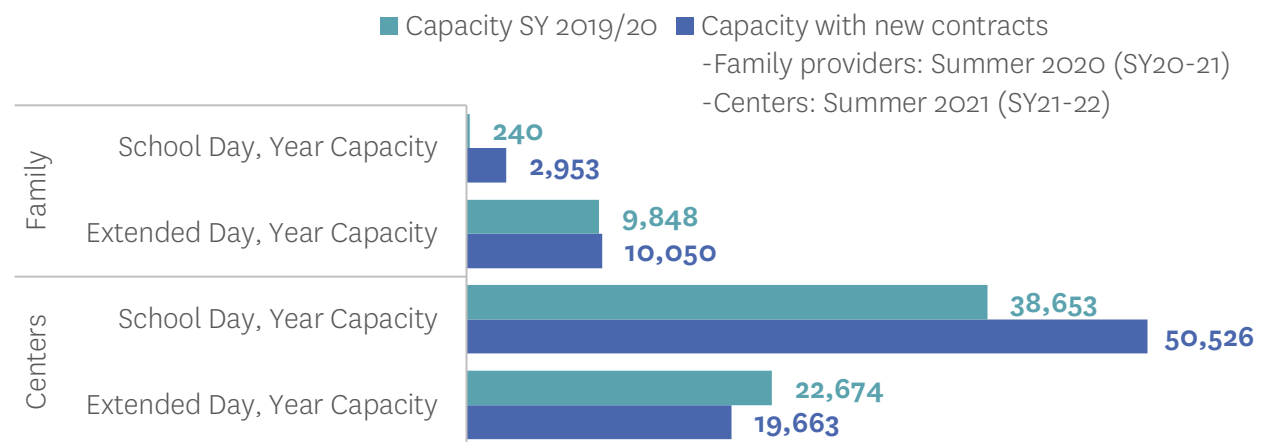**Figure 12. Enrollment in Pre-K and 3-K Programs by Length of Care, SY 2019-2020**
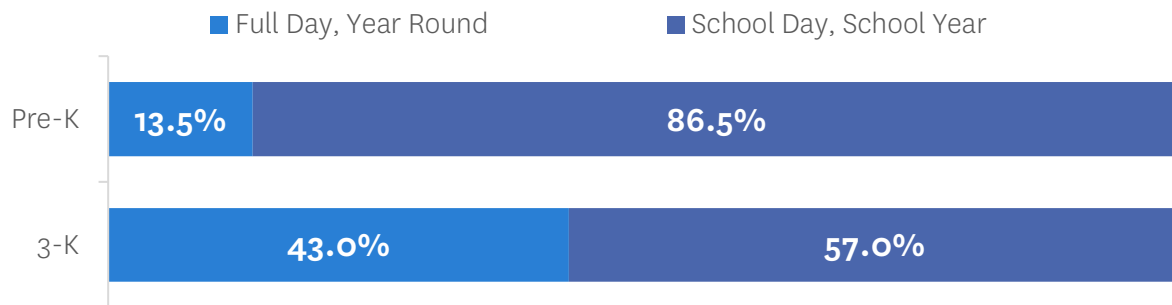
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020).
Note: In SY 2019-2020, school-day, school-year enrollment occurs in schools, including public, charter, special education schools, and standalone Pre-K centers, as well as in contracted community-based centers, while extended day, year-round enrollment is in contracted community-based centers and family child care providers.

Further, new contracts that center-based and family child care providers entered during the pandemic added capacity for school-day, school-year seats and did not add a significant number of extended day, year-round seats systemwide. Specifically, 12,000 school-day, school-year seats were added in centers-based care and another 3,000 among family child care providers. However, extended day, year-round capacity in centers decreased (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Capacity in Contracted Center-based and Family Child Care by Length of Care

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2021-2022) and New Contract Capacity for Family Child Care Networks (contracts started in SY 2020-2021, data as of February 2021) and Center-based providers (contracts started in SY 2021-2022, data as of November 2021).

Thousands of Open Seats

There were thousands of open seats in the system prior to the pandemic, an issue that persists and has gotten worse now. The overall contracted system capacity increased between SY19-20 and SY21-22, from 112,644 to 127,200 seats. In the same period, **the number of open seats also increased by 50% from 21,000 in 2020 to 33,000 in 2022.** Citywide enrollment rates declined from 81% to 74% between the two years (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Capacity, Enrollment, and Open Seats in Contracted ECE Programs, SY2020-21 and SY2021-22

	Enrollment	Open Seats
School Year 2019-2020 (Capacity = 112,644, Enrollment Rate, 81%)	91,430	21,214
School Year 2021-2022 (Capacity = 127,200, Enrollment Rate, 74%)	94,444	32,756

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).

In this section, we look at the two dimensions within the contracted system, open seats, which reflect the sheer number of budgeted seats that are unfilled, as well as at the utilization rate, or enrollment rate, which compares actual enrollment numbers to the budgeted capacity.

Figure 15. Open Seats and Utilization Rate Citywide, SY2021-22

Budgeted Capacity – Enrollment =
Open Seats

127,200 – 94,444 =
32,756 Open Seats

Enrollment / Budgeted Capacity =
Utilization Rate

94,444 / 127,200 =
74% Utilization Rate

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2021-2022).

Pre-K seats comprise most of the contracted system and have the most open seats. Pre-K capacity declined by around 10% between 2020 and 2022, or close to 8,000 seats (Figure 16). Pre-K enrollment declined by around 17%, with over 10,000 fewer children between 2020 and 2022. In turn, open seats in Pre-K programs increased from 13,000 in 2020 to 16,500 in 2022, a 30% increase.

At the same time, the 3-K capacity has doubled from 21,798 seats in 2020 to 44,366 seats in 2022. Enrollment also doubled from 17,500 to 35,000, as well as the number of open seats from 4,200 to 9,600 (Figure 16). Put differently, utilization of 3-K seats remained more or less the same between 2020 and 2022 (Figure 17).
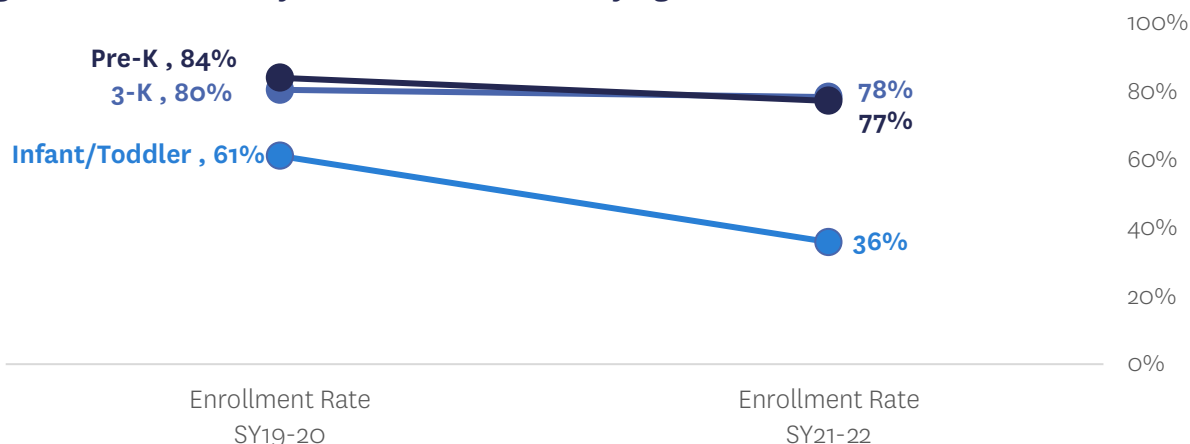
Figure 16. Capacity, Enrollment, and Open Seats in Contracted ECE Programs by Age Cohort, SY2019-20 and SY2021-22
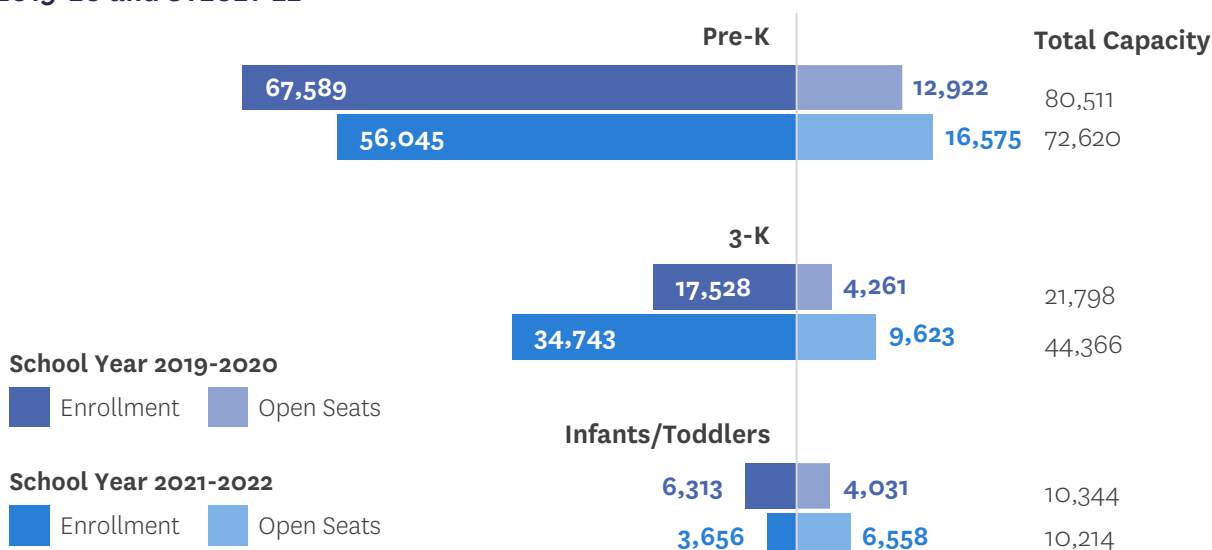
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).
Note: The chart shows enrollment, open seats, and total capacity for each age cohort (4-year-olds in Pre-K, 3-year-olds in 3-K, and infants and toddlers combined) across two school years (2019-2020 and 2021-2022) in settings including schools and contracted center-based and family child care providers. We combined enrollment and capacity data for infants and toddlers because data disaggregated by these two age groups is only available for SY 2019-2020. In that year, the utilization rate among toddler seats was similar to older age groups at 83%, and the utilization rate of infants' seats was lower at 16%.

Utilization rate between the two school years declined by 3% for 3-K and 8% for Pre-K, the major decline of 41% was in the utilization of infant and toddler seats, who also have the lowest budgeted capacity of around 10,000 seats combined (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Contracted System Utilization Rates by Age Cohort, SY2019-20 and SY2021-22

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).

Note: The chart shows the utilization rate (enrollment/ budgeted capacity) for each age cohort (4-year-olds in Pre-K, 3-year-olds in 3-K, and infants and toddlers combined) across two school years (2019-2020 and 2021-2022) in settings including schools and contracted center-based and family child care providers.

Figure 18. Capacity, Enrollment, and Open Seats by Setting and School Year
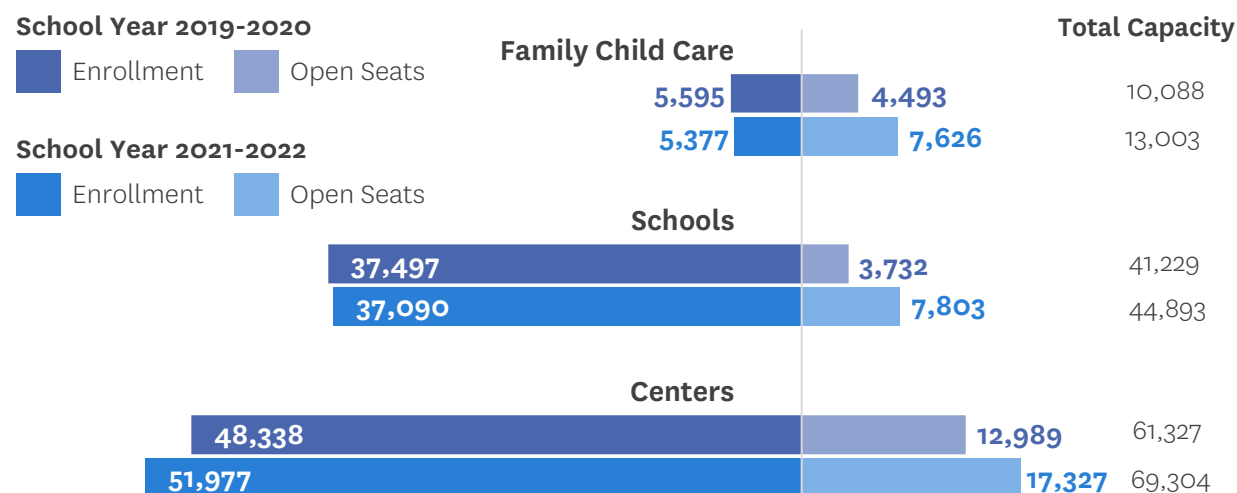
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).

During the 2019-2020 school year, utilization rates of seats were highest in school settings at 91%, lowest among family child care providers at 55%, and in between for centers at 79% (Figure 19). More recently in 2021-2022 school year, after emerging from the pandemic and with new contracts in effect, the utilization rates declined across all settings, with the most notable decrease in school settings to 83%, as well as family child care to 41%. Although utilization rates were lowest among family child care providers, these settings also have the smallest budgeted capacity. Centers had the greatest number of open seats across both years (12,989 in SY 2019-2020 compared to 17,327 in SY 2021-2022), while the open seats in schools doubled (3,732 in SY 2019-2020 compared to 7,803 in SY 2021-2022).

Figure 19. Contracted System Utilization Rate by Setting, SY2019-20 and SY 2021-22
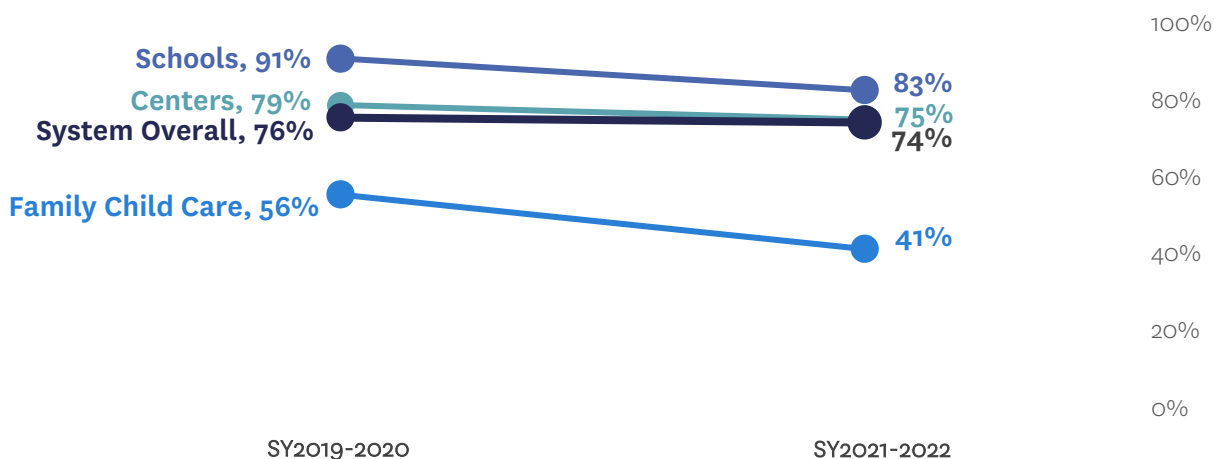
Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2019-2020 and SY 2021-2022).

While contracted ECE providers are reimbursed for expenses based on enrollment, they have neither control over the enrollment process, nor a publicly funded budget for materials and human resources needed for outreach to NYC communities in ways that ensure families are aware of service options. Invariably, providers raised concerns about whether contracted family child care and center-based care programs had equal visibility in the online enrollment system as school-based programs.

Open seats are prevalent across many NYC communities, and our analysis shows that in some parts of the city, open seats are more prevalent in school settings with close to 7,800 unfilled seats, while in others the underutilization is more prevalent across center-based programs with 17,300 unfilled seats.

While we know that among family-based providers, there are around 7,600 open seats, the analysis for those cannot be performed by more granular geography, as the capacity for family child care providers is determined by the Family Child Care Network, which can have affiliated providers across many community districts.

Several factors contribute to open seats overall, and whether open seats are in schools or center-based programs specifically. One factor is the overall capacity and distribution of seats across the two settings within a community. For example, in some communities, not including family child care, 60% of capacity is in centers and 40% in schools; however, 80% of open seats are in centers and 20% are in schools. There are 14 Community Districts with over 600 open seats during the 2021-2022 school year, and in each of these, the majority of open seats are in contracted centers. Importantly, community-level data obscure enrollment patterns at individual sites. Site-level enrollment can vary within communities where some sites have higher utilization rates compared to other sites. Nevertheless, understanding community-level trends is valuable, and informed project outreach to shed light on factors that may contribute to open seats.

Figure 20. Open Seats in Centers and Schools by Community District, SY 2021-22
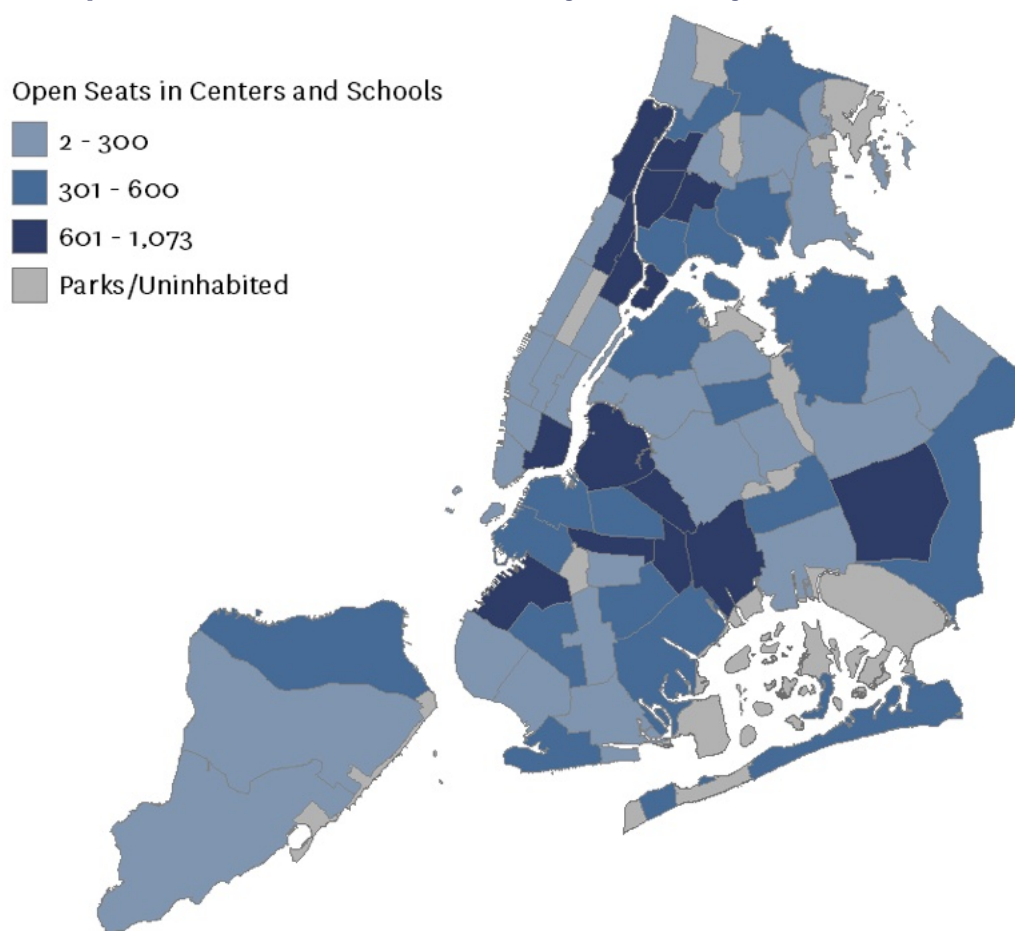
Open Seats in Centers and Schools

- 2 - 300
- 301 - 600
- 601 - 1,073
- Parks/Uninhabited

Source: CCC's analysis of data obtained through a request from New York City Department of Education, Enrollment and Capacity in Contracted Early Care and Education Sites (SY 2021-2022).
Note: The community district map does not capture family providers because capacity data are available only for Family Child Care (FCC) Networks, while enrollment is available both by the FCC Networks and for individual family child care providers. This means that enrollment among family providers can be analyzed by Community District, but utilization, which requires comparison with capacity, cannot.

Gathering ECE Providers' Insights to Contextualize Trends in ECE System Utilization

We have shared findings from our administrative data analysis with multiple stakeholders, including staff from over 30 child and family service organizations, including contracted ECE providers themselves, as well as organizations providing an array of services for families and children. These conversations allowed us to gather insights based on providers' experiences operating programs as contractors, to learn about their experiences providing services, and to understand their perspective on the access barriers that families face.

Examples of Challenges from Conversations with Providers

Providers identified several challenges of the ECE system that present barriers to addressing the needs of families they serve, and while we did not set out to conduct a thematic analysis of providers' reflections on the challenges they face, below we list examples of often mentioned challenges:

Contract inflexibility impedes addressing emerging community needs and the ability to modify program offerings to serve families on waitlists with children in age cohorts not in awarded contracts.

School-day, school-year seats are under-enrolled; and there are wait lists for full-day, year-round seats indicating the unmet need for programming that matches parents' working hours.

Fiscal and operational instability for providers is affected by the pay-for-enrollment model which impacts reimbursement; contracts that prioritize school-day, school-year seats do not cover full-day and summer months services and give rise to multiple issues related to staff retention stemming from disparity in pay between community based and the school-based workforce.

Centralized enrollment prioritizes school-based seats and limits community-based provider visibility and involvement, which in turn is impacting enrollment among contracted providers.

Providers do not have the financial or human resources needed to outreach to NYC communities to ensure parents and caregivers are aware of their options.

The current distribution of contracted seats may not have considered other important factors, such as transportation hubs and if families prefer access close to work or other locations rather than close to home.

Providers Insights on Why Child Care Subsidies Might Not Reach Eligible Families

Providers also experience the effect of highly unaffordable care on the ground, when families who do not fit within income guidelines are left without options.

> *"We are turning people away because they make few hundreds above income eligibility threshold."*
> *–Center-based and Family Child Care Provider*

Providers we spoke to shared that many families they serve could not afford any other type of care other than subsidized options they are eligible for. This directly speaks to the importance of this type of support and how essential it is for many families.

> *"Families cannot afford beyond the free care given."*
> *-Family Child Care Provider*

Providers we spoke with highlighted how families often need someone they trust to navigate and answer questions about available child care and preschool options, and that many may not know they are eligible for subsidized care. Additionally, providers shared that many families feel intimidated with the child care and 3-K, Pre-K application process. More should be done to address trusted support that families might greatly benefit from when applying for *Birth-to-Five* programs.

> *"We would prefer if enrollment were controlled by providers, as we know [families'] communities and are there to help them in the enrollment process, in a way that DOE cannot."*
> *-Center-based and Family Child Care Provider*

Providers Insights on the Need for More Extended Day, Year-round Programming

Providers also shared that the school day, school year model of care also affects their fiscal stability in providing care and retaining staff throughout the year, while having contracts for limited part of the day and school months, excluding summer.

Providers experience multiple challenges related to the increasing reliance on school day, school year programming. From their experiences, more families need extended day, year-round seats than they have capacity to serve.

> *"Our school-day, school year seats are under enrolled, and our extended day, year-round seats are waitlisted."*
>
> *–ECE Provider*

> *"We were giving 150 school day, school year seats to the families that qualify for extended day, subsidized care."*
>
> *–ECE Provider*

Having and retaining qualified staff has been an ongoing issue among contracted center-based providers, even after achieving initial steps toward salary parity back in 2019. While the initial step that established an equitable entry-level wage floor for certified teachers was a huge accomplishment, there is so much more to be done. Positions at contracted center-based settings must be equal to schools where, in addition to higher salaries over time and other benefits, the number of working hours and days throughout the year are less taxing compared to contracted center-based settings.

Providers Insights on Why There are Thousands of Open Seats in the ECE System

Providers shared that the process of applying for subsidies can be complex and intimidating for parents, because of documentation needed and strict requirements which can result in denied applications in the light of centralized enrollment under the DOE and inability of providers to support parents in the enrollment process more directly.

> *"We would prefer if enrollment is controlled by providers as we know their communities and are there to help them in the enrollment process in a way that DOE can't."*
> *-ECE Provider*

Related to low utilization of infant seats, providers we spoke with raised the issue that families may not know that publicly subsidized child care for infants is even available in New York City as the city has not advertised the availability of these programs as it did for Pre-K. Related, providers also shared that lack of information and outreach about all programs available to families, can directly affect where parents gravitate. This in combination with parents' perceived understanding about which sites offer higher quality care, can have an important impact on choices that families make.

> *"DOE recruitment is more geared towards their sites, while CBOs and FCCs need to put in their own efforts and are not fairly represented on the MySchool site."*
> *-ECE Provider*

Related to where seats are allocated is another issue raised by providers who shared that seat allocation with new contracts might have not considered factors such as location where parents prefer to send their child to care (close to home or work), major transportation hubs, the effect of gentrification on certain neighborhood not being viewed as "high need", among others.

Another related concern raised by providers, which we have been hearing about for several years now, is that increased presence of DOE sites in certain neighborhoods, directly speaks to some of the strategic decisions made during expansion of universal programs in school sites, without considering other programs available to families and effect of creating unhealthy "competition" among sites.

> *"Close to one of our centers, there are another five DOE locations that are open and parents may gravitate to."*
> *-ECE Provider*

Another issue that providers brought up is related to contract inflexibility in terms of the child age they serve, so programs might be facing underutilized Pre-K classrooms, while having waitlists for 3-K seats. While there has been some site-specific progress in addressing this issue while we were speaking with providers throughout this project, greater contract flexibility related to age cohorts is important to embed moving forward.

> *"Our Pre-K seats are under enrolled, while we have waitlists for 3-K."*
> *-ECE Provider*

Part II:
Parents' Solutions for Early Care & Education Programs that Fit Their Families' Needs
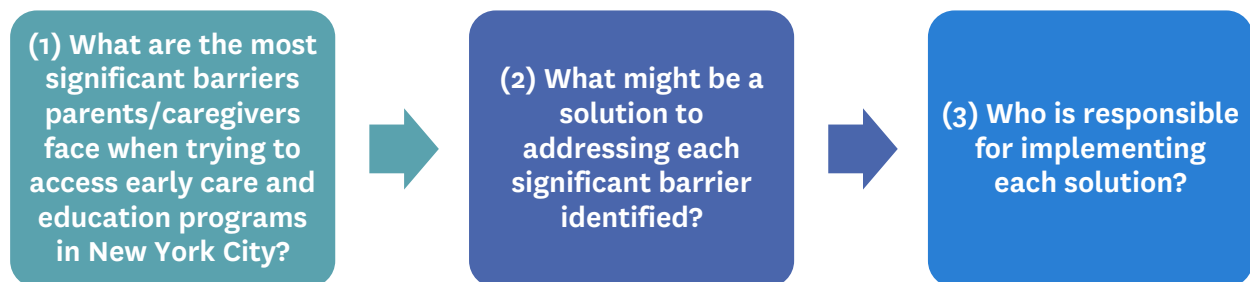
Our Approach to Elevating the Voices of Parents

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is committed to meaningfully involving parents and caregivers in creating solutions to eliminate the barriers to accessing public early care and education programming across New York City. We believe that parents' and caregivers' firsthand experiences and recommendations are essential to improving access to ECE programming.   To better understand parents and caregivers' needs, we used a participatory approach elevating their experiences alongside ECE program providers who have a stake in a robust ECE system in New York City. This involved listening sessions with over 160 parents of young children, as well as a citywide survey of around 1,000 parents.

Listening Sessions with Parents of Young Children

We held listening sessions with parents to understand (1) the barriers they face when attempting to access ECE programs, (2) the solutions that would best support families in getting the care they need for their children, and (3) who they see as responsible for implementing their parent-centered solutions. These sessions, along with input from ECE providers, informed the creation of a citywide survey to corroborate key themes from listening sessions at a larger scale representing more families with young children.

Figure 21. Research Questions Guiding Listening Sessions with Parents

(1) What are the most significant barriers parents/caregivers face when trying to access early care and education programs in New York City? → **(2) What might be a solution to addressing each significant barrier identified?** → **(3) Who is responsible for implementing each solution?**
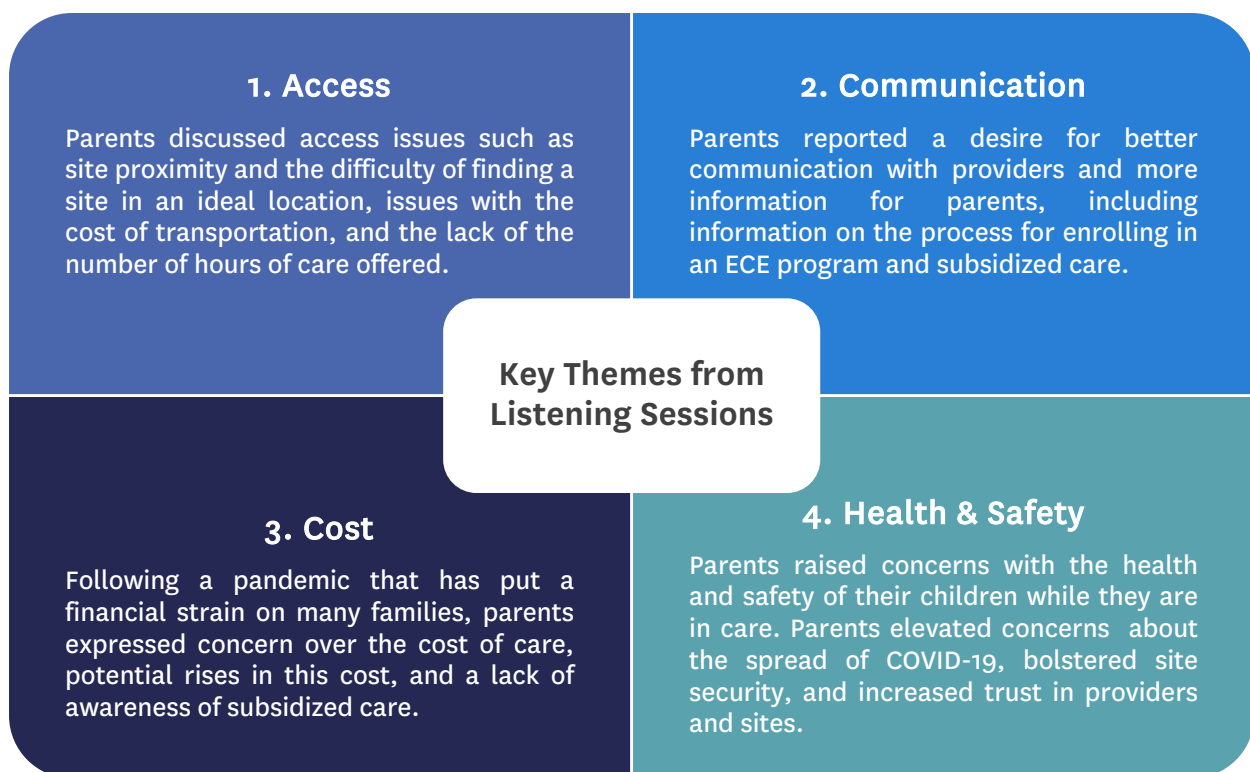
In July 2022, we held twelve listening sessions with 162 parents and caregivers recruited via child and family-serving organizations. About two dozen child and family service providers helped recruit for parents for these sessions, and we targeted outreach via providers serving communities where there were large numbers of open seats in ECE programs based on our analysis of administrative data. These organizations helped broaden outreach to families with children not currently enrolled in any ECE programs and families with low incomes. On the advice of partners, all twelve sessions were held virtually. These sessions helped to frame our understanding of barriers and solutions to accessing ECE programs. While we understood the kinds of barriers that might exist, we approached these sessions without preconceptions or questions that narrowed the focus to known barriers to ensure parents had an opportunity to elevate the broadest range of experiences. After summarizing the analysis into a presentation, we shared it with project partners as part of data-sharing sessions from September to December 2022.

Key Themes from Parent Listening Sessions

Based on listening sessions with over 160 parents, we identified multiple barriers to accessing NYC's public ECE programs that can be grouped into four key themes. These include: (1) accessibility barriers due to program location, transportation, or hours offered; (2) communication barriers related to obtaining trusted information about the public options available to them, including subsidized child care programs, and the importance of communication between parents and ECE providers; (3) affordability barriers of child care in general, public and private, the costliness of supplemental care even when families were enrolled in a universal or subsidized program; and (4) concerns about health and safety, in large part related to the spread of COVID-19 as well as general anxieties about children's needs and safety.[14]

Figure 22. Key Themes from Parent Listening Sessions

Key Themes from Listening Sessions

1. 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 the lack of the number of hours of care offered.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

The following sections provide details and example quotes from discussions during listening sessions with parents.

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[14] Importantly, these listening sessions took place in July 2022, around the same time children older than 6 months and younger than 5 years became eligible to receive doses.

Key Theme 1: Access

Parents value someone offering guidance on care options, and raised the specific needs for affordable transportation, hours of care that fit their families working hours, and other supports to overcome economic and social challenges of the pandemic.

When parents lacked people in their personal networks for information, they described the process of finding care more difficult and explicited pointed to the lack of guidance a reason for difficulty.

Parents expressed the challenge of finding care hours that allow them to balancing parenthood and employment. Many parents need extended day, year-round programs, as well as child care during evenings, nights, and weekends.

Many parents expressed issues with accessing care locations. Often parents raise transportation as a barrier to care which results in difficulty balancing care and employment.

Accessibility is complicated further by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that compounded barriers to accessing ECE programs.

The Role of Social Networks and Guidance in Learning About Care Options

To navigate the processes of learning about available options and enrollment, parents and caregivers used personal and professional networks to gain agency in a nebulous process. For example, a parent in our listening sessions turned to their colleagues to help them navigate choosing a care setting for their child. "*I didn't know where to take my child, I asked someone at work and got information about a center and decided to send my child there.*" Parents and caregivers raised many examples of their utilization of personal networks and expressed more ease and confidence in selecting care, applying for subsidized care, and preschool options and trusting that their child would be adequately cared for in a setting that was recommended by a trusted source. One parent mentioned: *It was difficult for me since I did not have someone to guide me through… I was afraid because of the uncomfortability since I did not trust people with my child.*

Parents who were able to access care through personal networks also reported having more trust in the care setting. For example, a parent who relied on a colleague for information found it easier to trust that information than information they seek on their own: *I searched online but I didn't have much confidence as the one referred by a colleague.*

While parents have found solace in their networks, the lack of trusted messengers to represent ECE programs creates a precarious landscape for both parents who rely on informal processes of gathering information that may not always be accurate, and for providers, who often lack the resources and support to become trusted messengers for their communities.

Finding Programs with Hours that Fit Families' Needs

Even in situations where parents do not have the ability to receive care during needed hours, they attempt to create their own access to care. As one parent put it: *I ask for help from my family when hours aren't sufficient.* We learn from this parent, among others, that asking family members for help is the main way they choose to alleviate the pressure that comes with not being able to access care due to the gap in capacity they experience when searching for care that meets their needs. Turning to personal and professional networks is another way that parents try to mitigate a gap in a system that does not provide care that matches their working hours or their needs more broadly. This combined with the lack of trusted messengers is creating multiple barriers which prevent parents from accessing the accurate information they need to feel confident in the ECE system.

Unaffordable Transportation Options Can Be a Barrier

Transportation as a barrier is ultimately further complicated by the location of the care setting. In these listening sessions, parents regularly cited the difficulty of traveling to care locations that are a considerable distance from their home or workplace. There were instances of parents expressing such limited care options that the only accessible site is still too far. One parent in these sessions noted: *In my end child care facilities are not located near me, making it hard for me to access one center.* Many parents in the listening session describe turning to public forms of transportation when taking their child to care settings. They even describe public transportation as costly, pointing to the financial struggles that parents continue to face as a barrier which limits access to care.

Barriers Emerging from the Pandemic

Parents struggled with the transition to online services and learning and expressed the lack of resources to help parents navigate new ways of learning and being in the world impacted their ability to help their children adjust as well. During the listening sessions, a parent disclosed the difficulty they experienced with the transition: *Basically, everything comes to the root of maybe the pandemic. You know, we had to move to online teaching, and so that transition has not been easy, because you need to acquire the resources.* Other parents echoed this sentiment, often citing a lack of information or resources to help support their children in a time of novel ways of learning that are inherently inaccessible to large proportions of the population that lack experience with new technologies and educational tools.

Key Theme #2: Communication

Parents desire more information about public care options, and communication with trusted messengers

Parents reported unfamiliarity with publicly subsidized child care.

Friends, family, and co-workers are trusted sources of trusted information, and parents want more easily accessible information from official sources. They raised the issue of feeling overwhelmed with finding care and knowing which programs are available.

Lack of Information Overall

Parents raised concerns over the lack of information they were able to access, as well as the lack of effort to spread awareness of information related to ECE programs. In our fourth listening session, a parent posed that "*not enough broadcasting has been done.*" Parents desire an abundance of trusted sources that can relay information about ECE programs, but the consensus in these sessions is that this does not currently exist in a systematic way. Unfortunately, this gap in public education and assistance seems to exacerbate issues around accessibility and trust. As we learn from a parent in our eighth listening session, "*[I was] worried about security but [a] friend's referral made me feel better.*" There are concrete ways to ensure parents are confident and empowered to make the best decisions for their families. Having trusted information to rely on has a considerable effect on parents' confidence and trust in care settings.

Lack of Information about Child Care Subsidies

Parents associated the lack of information on public ECE program options with difficulties in accessing care. Parents agreed with the sentiment raised by a parent in our second listening session: *I can say it was difficult because I was not aware of the process.*

Parents are confused with the process for applying for subsidies, citing a lack of guidance that hinders them from accessing subsidized programs. When parents did express having knowledge about the existence of subsidized opportunities for care, they still did not have enough information to apply for these resources. One parent said: *I heard about [subsidies] but I didn't find how to access the subsidies.* The difficulties parents and caregivers encountered when searching for information substantially contribute to the burden they feel when trying to access affordable care options.

Key Theme #3: Cost

Cost of care is a significant barrier for parents, especially for families who continue to experience the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial cost parents associate with child care is a significant barrier to accessing services.

Parents described the financial impact of the pandemic as a source of fear and insecurity because of perceived rising costs of so many goods and services, including child care.

Overall Cost of Care

One parent described the cost of care as, "a key barrier actually, because some of [these] centers charge a lot of money" (Parent group 1). However, parents agreed that the cost of care is compounded by transportation costs as well as financial hardship caused by the global pandemic that forced families to make difficult economic decisions. A parent set this tone in the first listening session by sharing, "Cost is a very important factor. During Covid we exhausted all our savings." Parents and caregivers feel pressure to continue balancing care in rapidly changing socio-economic conditions. However, this is further complicated by providers' ability to continue providing care in a precarious time of financial instability that deeply affects them.

Pandemic-related Financial Insecurity

Parents and caregivers are currently navigating child rearing in a moment of uncertainty and instability. The pandemic has caused families to contend with less exposure to care resources, less economic security, and greater needs for support. Parents' accounts of accessing care cannot be examined without also recognizing the impact of COVID-19, which has made the cost of care a considerable barrier. "*It was affordable before COVID-19 but now it's way up*" (Parent group 4). Parents in the group agreed with this sentiment and one parent added that feelings of insecurity are ongoing; "*I feel maybe the cost of care might go up and I may not be able to raise the money.*" Without the knowledge of subsidized care and how to navigate the eligibility and application processes, parents do not have the reassurance they need to feel stability in their ability to afford or select the right care options for their families' needs.

Key Theme #4: Health and Safety
Parents and caregivers are concerned about the health and safety of their children and need more information on how care settings are ensuring child safety.

Health and safety prove to be main concerns for parents and caregivers who are worried for their children and want assurance and communication that care settings are actively implementing protective guidelines and solutions for keeping children healthy and safe.

Parents reported feeling more at ease if they know the specific measures used to keep their children healthy and safe in a care settings.

Consideration of the Health and Safey of Children Related to the Pandemic

It is not a coincidence that concerns about health and safety are top of mind for parents who are still processing the effects of a global pandemic. A parent in the first listening session reminded the group: *These are pandemic times, and personally, as a parent, I do fear for the safety of my child when it's outside there.*

It is particularly difficult for parents to feel comfortable and reassured of their child's safety when information about providers and care settings is difficult to obtain. Parents find leaving their child in care is "*a challenge [when] providers are new, I find it hard trusting them with my child*" (Parent group 6). However, these issues seem to decrease when care providers communicate the guidelines, they implement to keep children safe.

Guidelines that were required at facilities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 helped parents better understand how their children are protected. One parent expressed gratitude for the transparency of pandemic related guidelines, "*In the pandemic, more stringent measures were brought about and this made it easier for child safety for one is able to see the child's safety*" (Parent group 3). Because COVID-19 health guidelines were widely distributed and implemented, parents had the information they needed to better understand how their children were receiving trustworthy care. This supports parents' and caregivers' previously expressed need for more information and better communication in order to gain more confidence in ECE programs.

The wide distribution of safety and care guidelines would be beneficial to all parents, who are often worried about leaving their children in someone else's care. Parents often described fears that their child was too young for care or not ready to leave the home setting, possibly indicating a lack of

awareness of the benefits of these kinds of programs for infants and toddlers. In the third listening session, a mother described the conflict she felt when considering care for her daughter: *Parting with my kid was a bit difficult. I felt I was not ready for her to leave home.*

Parent-led solutions for ensuring health and safety included the suggestion that there is a need for accountability. In the eighth listening session, a parent suggested: *The center should have a good track record and protocols in place to bind the caregivers to being responsible.*

This suggestion demonstrates dissemination of information related to care protocols and philosophies might address parents' worries, and fears may become greater when the information parents desire is inaccessible.

Responsibility for Implementing Solutions to Barriers

As part of listening sessions with parents, we asked participants to identify the entity or entities that should be responsible for implementing the solutions to the barriers they identified earlier during discussions.

The greatest number of mentions of responsibility was placed on ECE providers, followed by government, parents, and collective community responsibility.

Some responsibilities parents identified for ECE providers are outside providers' immediate control.

During these discussions, participants identified four entities of responsibility: the collective responsibility of communities, and the responsibilities of ECE providers, government agencies, and parents themselves. The greatest number of mentions of responsibility was placed on ECE providers, followed by government, parents, and collective community responsibility. The same pattern was true for the average number of mentions per listening session.

Figure 23. Mentions of Entities Responsible for Implementing Solutions Raised During Listening Sessions with Parents and Caregivers

Parent Group Listening Session	Collective Responsibilities	ECE Providers' Responsibilities	Government's Responsibilities	Parents' Responsibilities
Parent Group 1	5	4	5	2
Parent Group 2	6	4	3	4
Parent Group 3	10	9	5	5
Parent Group 4	4	7	5	0
Parent Group 5	3	7	0	4
Parent Group 6	0	14	6	8
Parent Group 7	1	14	9	7
Parent Group 8	2	9	4	1
Parent Group 9	1	26	3	7
Parent Group 10	3	6	5	5
Parent Group 11	4	1	8	3
Parent Group 12	1	20	7	1
Total mentions	40	121	60	47
Average mentions	3.3	10.1	5.0	3.9

The number of times parents mentioned providers as responsible for solutions suggests parents see providers as the face of the public ECE system, and that parents rely on providers for information and support.

Notably, some responsibilities identified by parent caregivers for ECE providers are well outside their locus of control or immediate responsibilities. For example, in several listening sessions, participants suggested that ECE providers might coordinate transportation for families enrolled in their programs, or that providers might address the cost burden of care by lowering tuition and fees. The accessibility of public transportation and the cost of care are barriers not within the locus of control of ECE providers, but rather the government's responsibilities and our collective responsibility as a society to create reliable and accessible shared community infrastructure.

"The day care can start training their staff on child care safety."
- Participant in Parent Group 2

"The providers should ensure parents get the information maybe through having each parent's phone number or emailing them."
- Participant in Parent Group 7

"If the care centers can cater for some costs such as transportation it would be really helpful."
- Participant in Parent Group 8

"I think there should be assistance at the centers concerning the complicated enrollment processes."
- Participant in Parent Gro up 10

Designing a Citywide Survey of Parents

The purpose of the citywide survey of parents was to further investigate the topics raised during listening sessions with a larger sample of parents of young children. We developed the survey using three inputs: (1) findings from the thematic analysis of listening sessions, (2) existing surveys with questions related to child care and that address topics from listening sessions, and (3) feedback on draft questionnaires from child and family service providers and other institutions conducting similar research. These efforts were to ensure the questions and discrete answers were accessible and that our survey complemented prior and concurrent efforts to understand families' child care needs and experiences.

Figure 24. Sources Used to Develop Citywide Parent Survey

(2) Existing surveys with questions that addressed topics from the listening sessions

(1) Findings from the thematic analysis of listening sessions

(3) Feedback on draft questionnaires from child and family service providers and other researchers conducting similar research.

Questionnaire for Citywide Survey of Parents
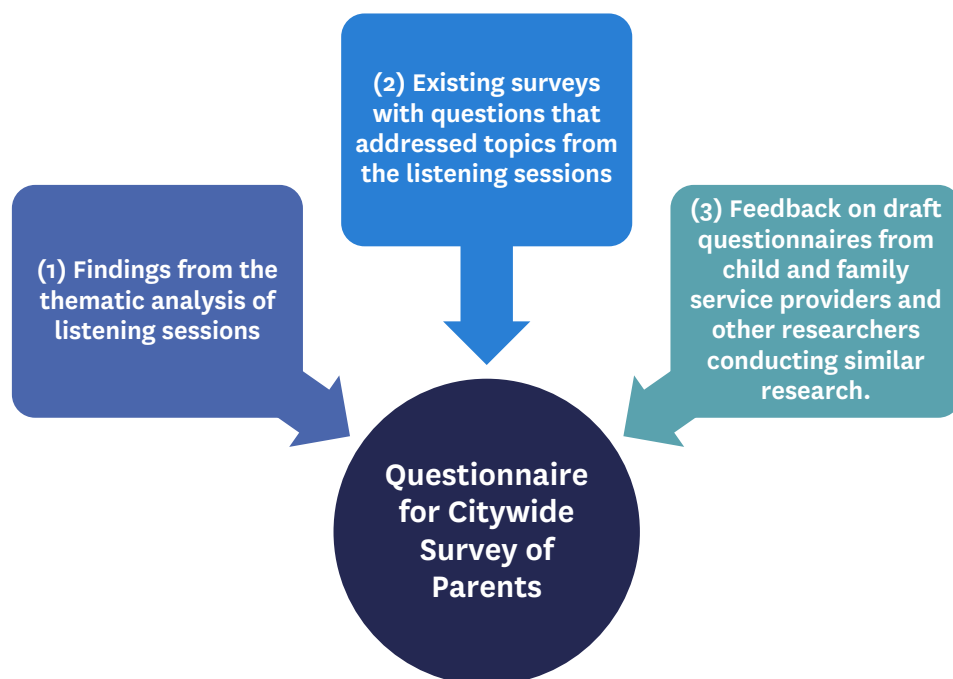
Parent listening sessions informed our understanding of the different barriers parents and caregivers face in accessing care for their children, the solutions they would implement to reduce these barriers, and the perceptions of where responsibility lies for these solutions. In order to better understand if these barriers and solutions are felt by a wider range of parents and caregivers in NYC, we created a survey that used knowledge parents shared with us and distributed it with the intent of validating some of these listening session findings. The survey was shared with providers, who could suggest additional context to help us formulate the questions in a way that would support the communities they serve.

Cellphone-based Survey Format and Language Accessibility

We chose to use an SMS-based format for several reasons that support accessibility. First, we had used this method for several projects in the past, including two community focused parent surveys and a citywide survey of youth in New York City with success.[15] Second, this method ensured that busy parents and caregivers could start, stop, or pause the survey at will and take as much time as necessary to complete all the questions. If they started but did not complete the survey within 24 hours, they would receive a reminder text asking if they would like to continue, and they could opt out at any time. Third, cellphone access with an unlimited messaging plan is ubiquitous among New York City families, and even cellphone-based internet access is greater compared to broadband internet access via a device at home.[16] To ensure language accessibility, we offered the survey in four languages—English, Spanish, Mandarin, and French—and hired professional, New York City-based translators who are familiar with language access needs for parents and caregivers in their community networks.

Sharing Report Findings with Survey Participants and Project Partners

The parent survey launched in all four languages by mid-December of 2022 and closed in mid-February 2023.[17] CCC staff analyzed the survey results and shared findings as part of data-sharing sessions with project partners during March 2023. These sessions occurred concurrently with drafting this report, and project partners' feedback and contextualization of the findings from the survey are incorporated in this report. We shared a summary of findings with survey respondents via SMS with a link to a webpage with more detailed findings.

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[15] See CCC's community-based assessment in Elmhurst Corona, Queens, cccnewyork.org/elmhurst-corona-neighborhood-sms-pilot-findings-from-the-project/ : See also, CCC's *Voicing our Future* project, cccnewyork.org/voicing-our-future-surveying-youth-on-their-priorities-for-2021-and-beyond/

[16] See Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track Online Database,* Broadband Internet Access, 2021, data.cccnewyork.org/data/map/1325/household-internet-access#1327/283/1/1551/127/a/a

[17] The English-version of the questionnaire is available in the appendix.

Results from the Parent Survey

This survey corroborates many of the findings from the listening session and provides more detail on parents' experiences with ECE programs and parents' childcare needs.

This section includes findings on:

The Most Important Considerations for Parents When Choosing a Child Care Provider

Families' Current Child Care Arrangements

The Most Needed Supports Parents Desire

The Earliest Age of Child at which Parents Trust Non-relatives with Child Care

The Hours Families Need for Regular Child Care

Parents' Preference for Proximity to Child Care

Parents' Awareness of Subsidized Child Care Programs

Parents' Experiences with Applying for Subsidized Care and Enrolling in 3-K or UPK

Parents' Communication Preferences for Learning About Child Care Option

Parents' Most Important Considerations When Choosing a Care Provider

Based on listening sessions, we heard many reasons why a family might choose their child care provider. These discussions informed the multiple-choice options available in the questionnaire, which included an option to add a consideration not listed as an open-ended response.

Most survey respondents indicated the health and safety of their child as the most important consideration for choosing a child care provider. Child care affordability, location and transportation considerations, communication with providers, and providers' experience or quality of the facility were also among the most important considerations.

Figure 25. Most important considerations for choosing a child care provider, ranked by the number of respondents selecting each option

Consideration	Number of respondents
Health and safety of the child	775
Cost of care is affordable for my family	389
Location and transportation	287
Communication with childcare provider(s)	259
The provider's experience or quality of the facility	223
Hours of care offered that meet my needs	161
The degree of trust I have with the provider	132
Recommendation by a friend, relative, neighbor, or co-worker	94

The survey allowed participants to select up to three options. While several options were not among those most often selected, they may still be important. Other questions in the survey offer insights on other considerations, including hours of care offered, trust in providers, and recommendations by trusted messengers.

Families' Current Care Arrangement

Parents responding to our survey had child care arrangements comprising of one or more settings, and most parents reported using their preferred child care arrangement. The most common arrangement was in a child care center, followed by some combination among the options of care arrangements (Figure 26). The third most common were arrangements where the parent (and their partner if present in the household) cared for their child exclusively, followed by nursery school or preschool, and family day care. A small number of respondents cited using another option exclusively.

Figure 26. Current Child Care Arrangements by Choice Preference

Is this child care arrangement your preferred

■ Yes ■ No

Child Care Arrangement

Arrangement	Yes	No
Childcare or day care center	266	20
Caring for child myself/partner	94	35
Nursery or preschool	86	6
Family day care	72	7
Paid care such as a sitter, nanny, or au pair	60	6
Free care other than the parent, such as friend, neighbor, sibling, or grandparent	26	10
Federally supported Head Start Program	24	1
Some combination of two or more of the options above	189	13

Most Needed Supports Parents Desire

Most survey participants selected "more time with my child" or "mental health supports for myself and children" as the most important support they needed (Figure 27). Participants selected this option more often than employer supports, a part-time job, more information about how to support their children's learning and development, or financial security. In speaking with child and family service providers about these findings, some corroborated this finding based on their experiences working with families.

Figure 27. Most Important Support Parents Desire by Household Composition

- ■ More time with my child
- ■ Mental health support for myself and children
- ■ Employer support (employer paid childcare, flexible schedule, sick leave)
- ■ More information about how to support my child's learning and development
- ■ Financial and/or job security (ex. Monthly income support, child allowance, paid family leave)
- ■ Part-time job
- ■ Not listed
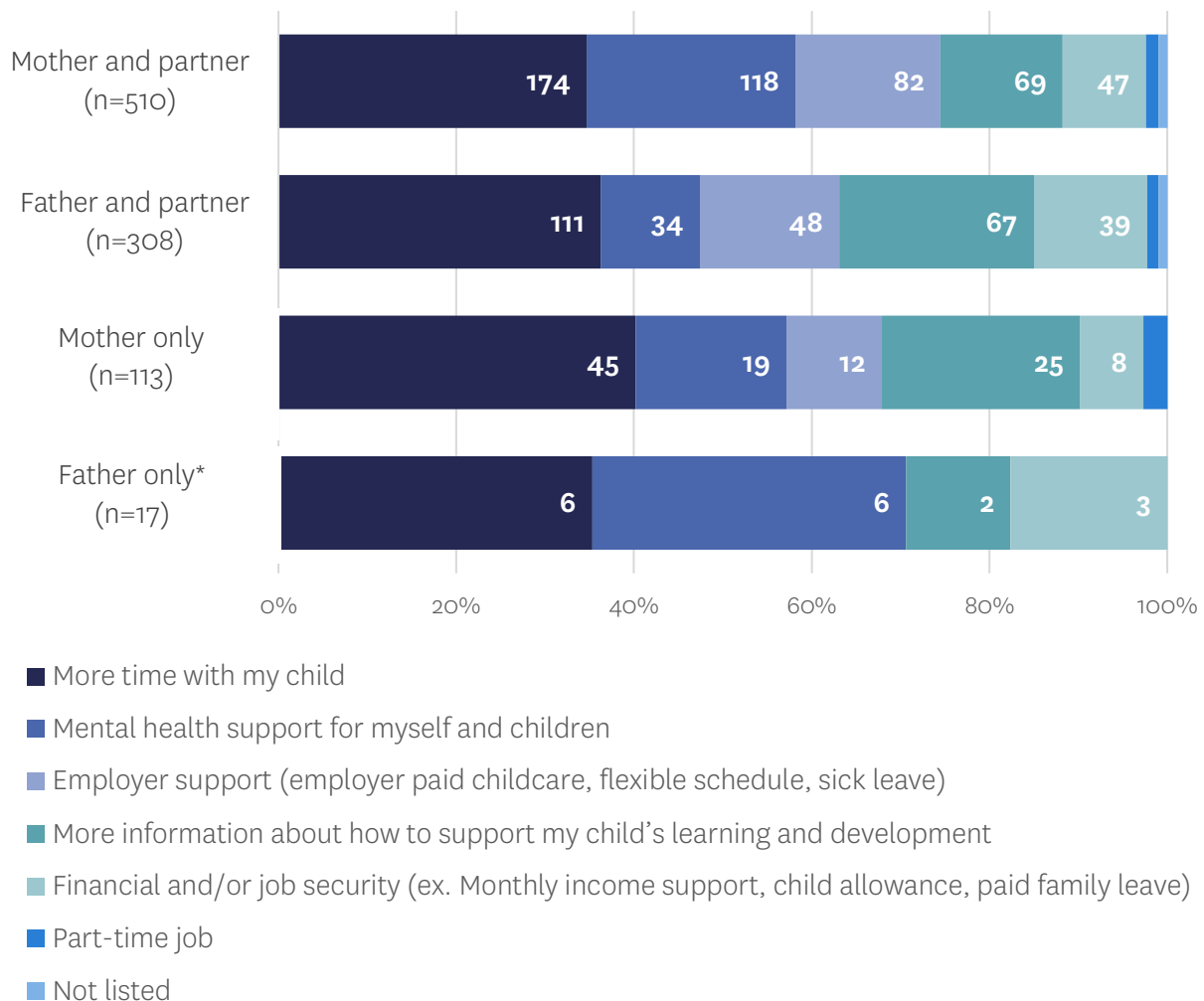
* Note: The survey sample includes a small number of respondents of single-parent households headed by a father. These results should be interpreted with caution.

Earliest Age of Child at which Parents Trust Non-relatives with Child Care

Considering the low utilization rate among seats for infants (16%) compared to other age groups revealed in the analysis of administrative data, we asked a question to gauge if underutilization may be related to parents preferring to care for the youngest children themselves or another close relative. Specifically, we asked, "At what age do you trust first leaving your child in a care facility or with other non-relatives (someone other than you or a close relative)?" **Most respondents, nearly 80%, first trust child care providers with their children between the one and three years of age** (Figure 28). While the current ECE system has made great progress with Pre-K and 3-K expansion, this finding suggests a need as well for seats serving children younger than three years of age.

Figure 28. Child's Age at which Parents Trust Leaving Their Child at a Child care Facility or with a Non-relative
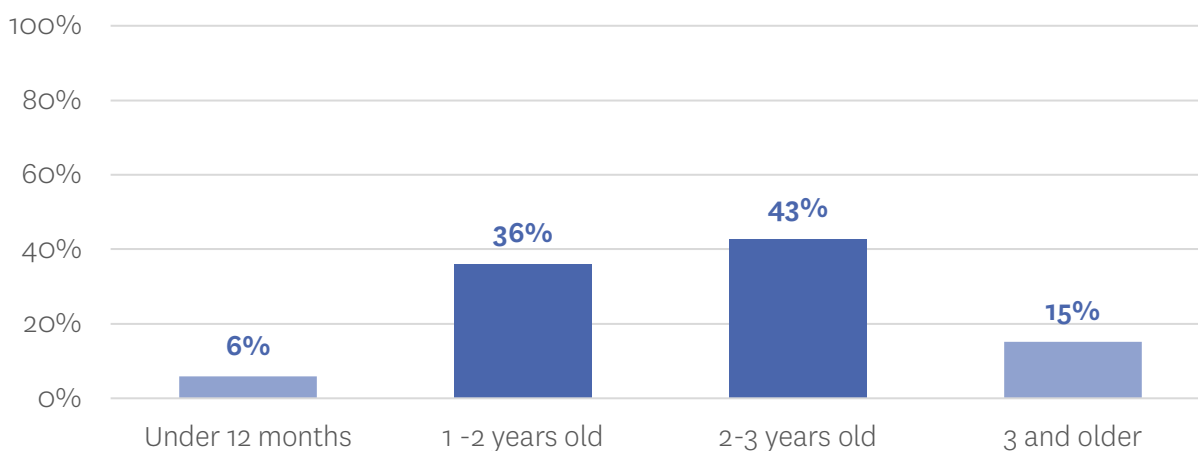
Hours Families Need Regular Child Care

Considering three-quarters of seats in the contracted system offer school-day care (6.3 hours) for a school year (180 days during the year), we asked parents if they need regular care during the week for most of the day (8AM to 6PM), school day (8AM to 3PM), half day (8AM to 12PM), or if they do not need regular care during the week. **A significant share of parents reported needing regular care during the week for most of the day**, including 33% of parents whose youngest child is between three and five years of age (Figure 29). This finding suggests that there is greater need for seats in Extended Day programs (8 to 10 hours per day) compared to what is currently available in the contracted system.

Figure 29. Share of Parents Reporting a Need for Child Care "Most of the day" by Age of Youngest Child, Compared to Enrollment in Contracted Extended Day Seats
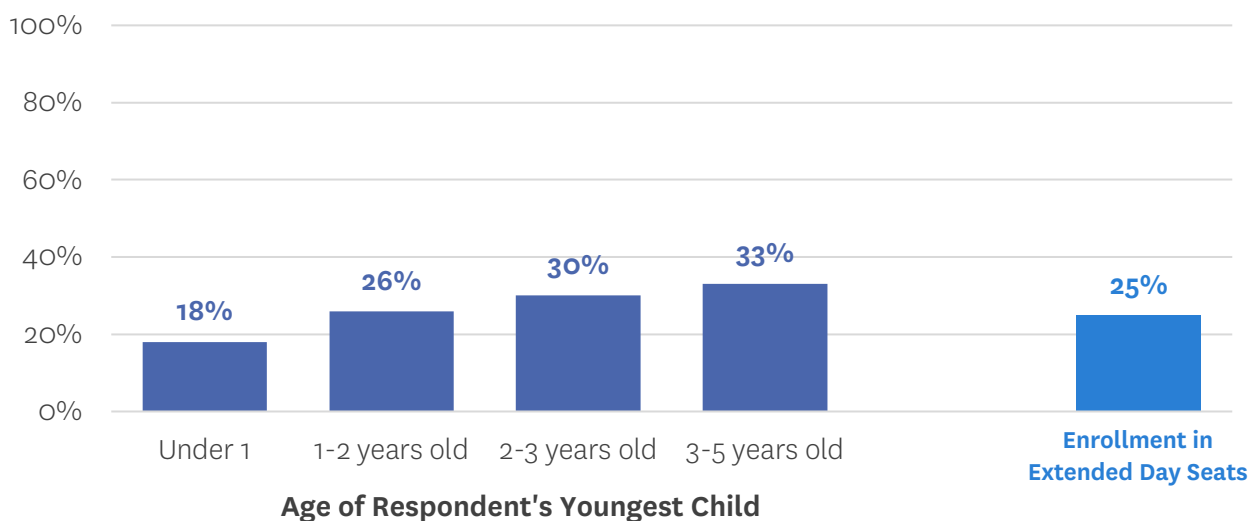
We also asked parents, "Do you need regular care during evenings, overnight, or on weekends?" About 40% of parents employed full-time needed this regular care (Figure 30). Importantly, no publicly funded program offers care during these hours.

Figure 30. Need for Regular Care During Evenings, Overnight, or on Weekends by Parents' Employment Status
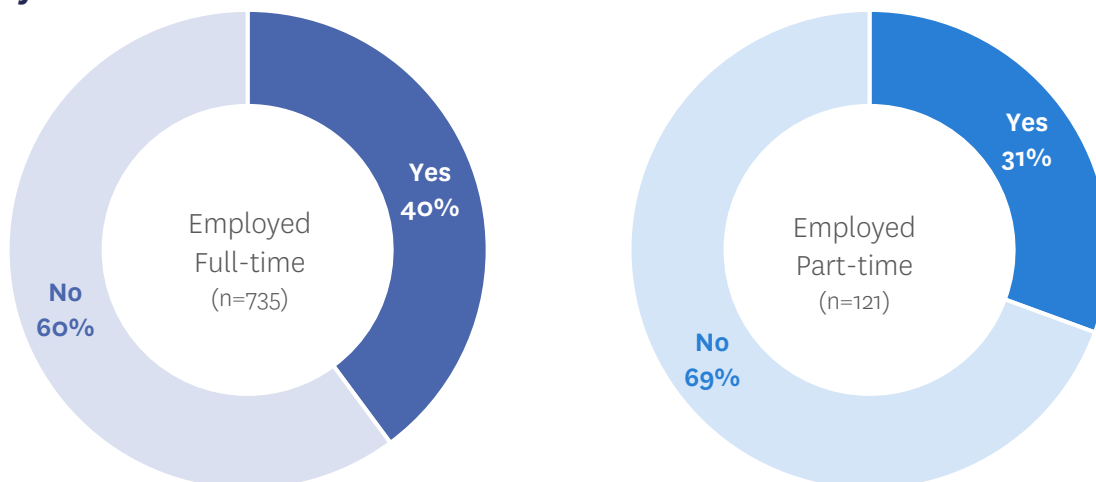
Parents' Preferences for Proximity to Child Care

Considering the frequency with which parents raised the topic of provider location and transportation barriers during listening sessions, we asked whether parents preferred early care and education programs that were close to home, close to work, or somewhere else.

> **Most parents preferred a provider located close to home**, regardless of whether they were employed full time or part time (Figure 31).

> **A significant share of parents preferred a provider close to work**, just under third of parents employed full time and an even greater share of parents employed part-time preferred this option. Less than 1% of parents in either category preferred proximity to a different location.

Together, these findings suggest the need for greater flexibility or location choice in care options.

Figure 31. Share of Parents Reporting Preferences for Providers Located "Close to home" or "Close to work" by Employment Status

	Preference of proximity to 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%
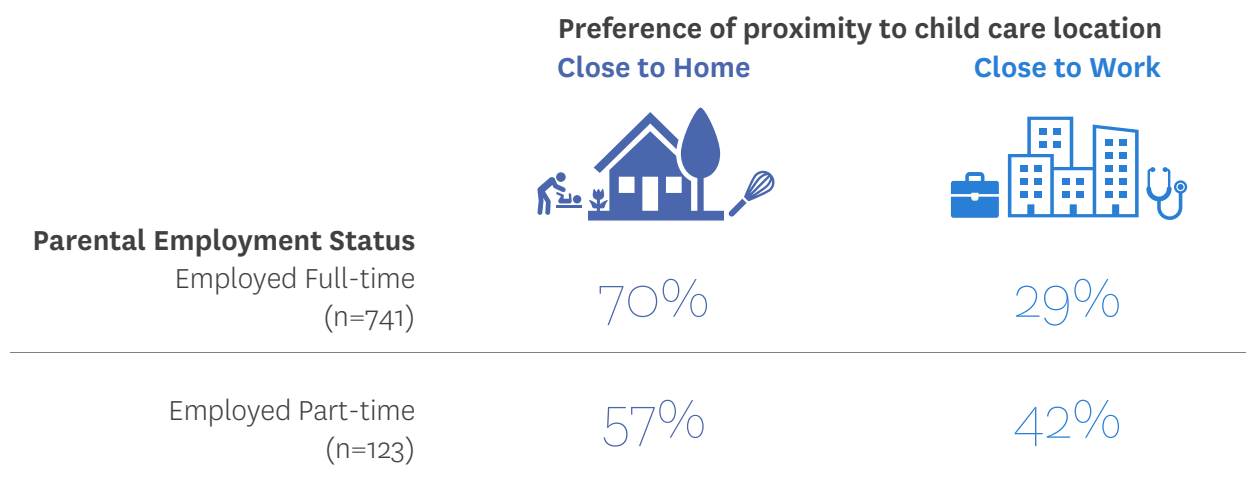
Parents' Awareness of Subsidized Child Care Programs

Lack of access to ECE programs is a key finding from our listening sessions that extended to subsidized care. Most parents in our listening sessions reported not knowing about subsidized care options and if they did, they did not know how to navigate the application process. This crucial gap in available information means that many families could benefit from subsidized access to ECE programs, but they are not aware of this opportunity. Given the magnitude of this preliminary finding, we included questions about subsidized care programs and access to subsidized care in the parent survey in order to better understand the landscape of information parents can access. To summarize Figure 32:

> **More than a third of all respondents did not know about subsidized child care programs** in New York City, excluding universal Pre-K.

> **A quarter of respondents who reported receiving income-based benefits**—such as Medicaid, housing subsidies, WIC, SNAP, and cash assistance—**also reported not knowing about subsidized care options.**

> **Among respondents reporting not receiving income-based benefits, half said they were not aware of subsidized care options.**

Figure 32. Share of Respondents Aware of Subsidized Child Care Programs
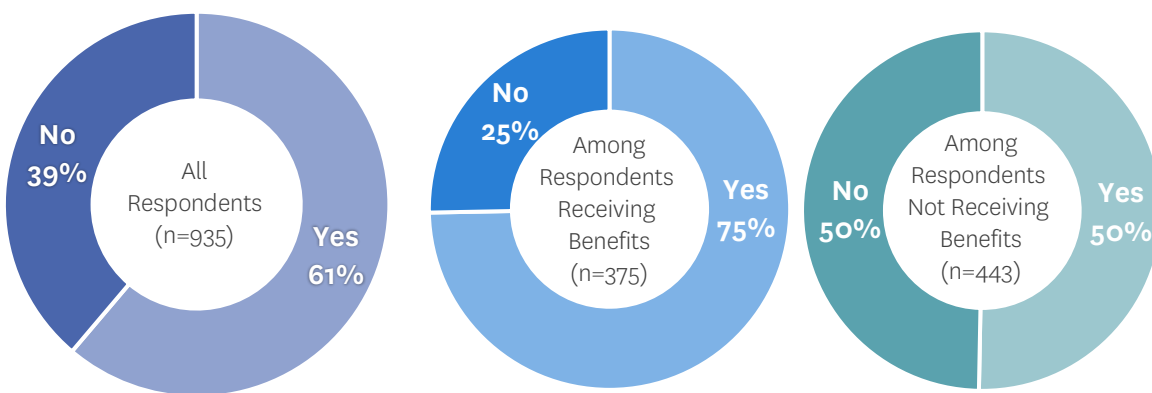
The quarter of respondents who report receiving a public benefit but did not know about subsidized care suggests some families may be unaware of child care support they may be eligible for. Nearly 50% of those who stated they do not receive benefits also reported a lack of knowledge of subsidies. This, however, does not necessarily mean these respondents are not eligible for subsidized care programs. In fact, because eligibility for childcare subsidies has been raised to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level, more parents are eligible now than they have been in past years and might not be aware of these changes that could determine eligibility for childcare assistance. The less connected parents might be to systems of support, the less likely it is that they know about the resources available.

Parents' Experiences Applying for Subsidized Care and Enrolling in 3-K or Pre-K

When asked about the enrollment process, parents and caregivers had several concerns and frustrations about the difficulties of the process.

Parents enrolling in subsidized care described difficulties in accessing information and resources, confusing enrollment policies, and an inflexible and discouraging application process.

Parents enrolling in Pre-K or 3-K described a lengthy and overwhelming process with delays in communication.

Even when consulting tools that are meant to be helpful in starting the enrollment process, parents found those tools to be inaccessible. For example, one parent wrote:

> *"The process of searching for schools is overwhelming. It's hard to do research and learn more about each school. I even had trouble applying for 3k in My Schools [app] and had to eventually call the phone line to get an agent to help submit my application."*
>
> *- Parent Survey Participant*

The difficulty in accessing information is a significant problem for parents who are already fatigued by a lengthy process. Parents wrote about stressful delays in communication about their application, which left them worried about being able to afford care for their children. One parent wrote about this experience as anxiety inducing, "It takes a long time to get feedback and the fear of not getting funding eats me up."

In addition to these worries, parents reported that the inflexibility of the application itself is a barrier that could leave parents without the subsidies necessary to afford child care. The stringent process is described by one parent as problematic, "The problem is that there are a lot of [subsidy] instructions that must be adhered to strictly and at the slightest nonadherence, the [subsidy] is cut off."[18] Parents need flexibility and reassurance that they can find affordable child care without depleting their financial resources.

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[18] In this direct quote, we replaced the survey participant's word, *funding*, with *subsidy* to clarify their response.

Parents' Communication Preferences for Learning About Care Options

Many parents and caregivers reported the lack of information about ECE programs as stressful and frustrating.

Parents crave information from a trusted and reliable source who can also help with guidance in learning about and applying to care settings.

Parents are not aware of a well-established mechanism for outreach, and parents would like to have a variety of sources to be able to receive information about these settings.

Most relied on their own networks for information and these networks continue to serve as trusted messengers. When we asked parents about how to most effectively learn about ECE programs, 41% selected receiving recommendations from family members or friends (Figure 33). This finding suggests that parents need a trusted messenger, and they have a good idea about how to obtain that when it does not yet exist in an official capacity. Considering this finding, it is important there be broad public awareness about where to find information and guidance to ensure the information parent networks are sharing is accurate and up to date.

Figure 33. Parent Reported Most Effective Way to Learn About Child Care Options

Number of Respondents

Source	Number of Respondents
Recommendation from family members/friends	392
Referral through community programs or pediatrician	135
Public Ads	134
Social media (Facebook, Twitter)	118
Neighbors or neighborhood groups	66
Visit childcare programs or go to events like tours and…	54
City run websites and print resources (DOE, DOHMH,…	44
Other	12
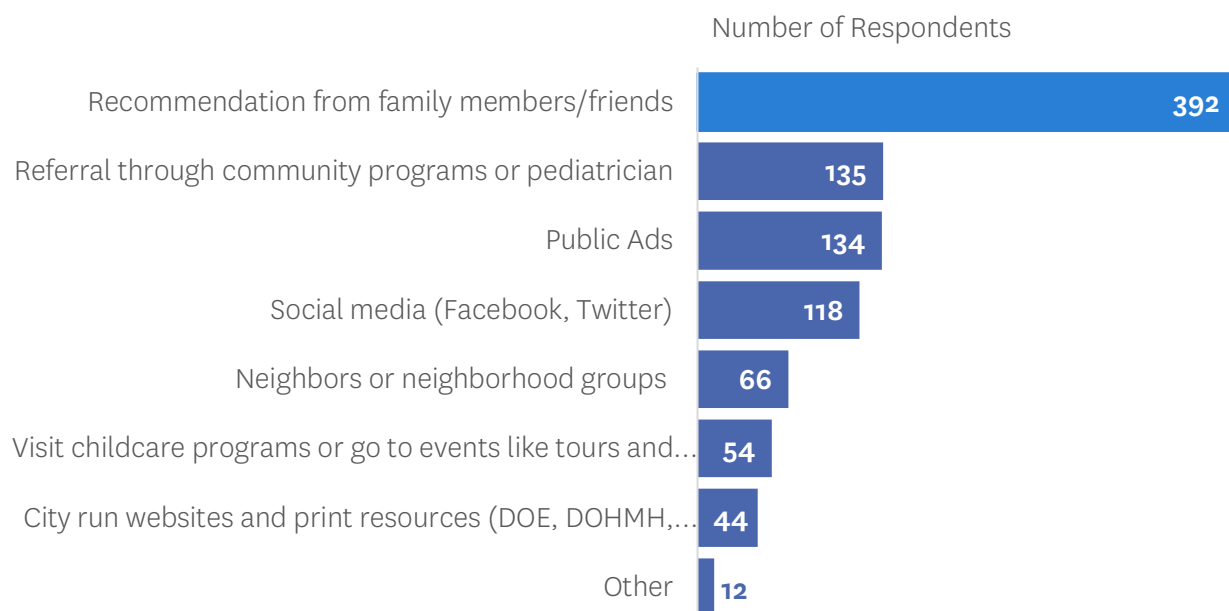
Summary of Findings

Based on analysis of administrative data on ECE system capacity and enrollment:

There is a lack of seats for children 3 years of age and younger;

Many more families are eligible for subsidized child care than are currently enrolled;

A growing share of seats are limited to school-day, school-year programs; and

Thousands of open seats in the public ECE system is not equal to a lack of demand.

Based on conversations with contracted ECE program providers:

Contract inflexibility impedes addressing emerging community needs;

School-day/year seats are under-enrolled; and extended-day/year seats are wai listed;

Fiscal and operational instability for providers is affected by the pay-for-enrollment model;

Centralized enrollment prioritizes school-based seats and limits involvement of contracted providers;

Providers do not receive the financial resources needed for community outreach; and

The current distribution of contracted seats may not have considered other important factors on why subsidized child care and universal programs are underutilized.

Based on listening sessions with parents:

Parents raised the need for affordable transportation, hours of care that fit their families working hours, and other supports to overcome challenges of the pandemic.

Parents desire more information about ECE options from trusted messengers.

Cost of care is a significant barrier for parents, especially due to economic impacts of the pandemic.

Parents are concerned about the health and safety of their children and need more information on how care settings are ensuring child safety.

Parents see providers as the face of the public ECE system and rely on them for support.

Based on responses to our citywide survey of parents:

Most parents surveyed utilized their preferred child care arrangement, but parents caring for their children themselves are most likely to prefer a different arrangement

Parents prioritize spending more time with their children and cite the need for mental health supports for themselves or their children as the most important supports.

There is likely an unmet demand for publicly subsidized care for the youngest children.

Many working families need care for more hours per day and days per year than what is currently provided with school-day, school-year seats.

Most parents prefer care locations close to home, but a large share prefer a location close to work.

Many parents are unaware of subsidized child care programs, and many parents who have applied to subsidized child care or enrolled in 3-K or Pre-K programs report challenges.

Parents enrolling in subsidized care described difficulties , as did parents enrolling in Pre-K or 3-K.

Most parents rely on family, friends, and neighbors, as well as community organizations and pediatricians for information about their care options.

The Path Toward a Universal ECE System in NYC

Policy Recommendations

New York City has made historic and transformative investments in early care and education and in doing so, it has established a foundation upon which to build a truly universal *Birth to Five* ECE system. The COVID-19 pandemic brought seismic shifts to families' daily life, not least of which were disruptions to their child care arrangements. However, thousands of open seats in the public ECE system predate the pandemic, and are exacerbated now and point to systemic challenges separate from the economic and health challenges of the pandemic itself. The city's ECE system must be reoriented to be consumer centric and meet the needs of working parents. Based on our findings, we propose the following policy recommendations that would help carve a path toward universal child care, increase system capacity, adequately support providers, and increase transparency and communication between the City and local communities:

Protect investments in 3-K and leverage open seats to meet demand for ECE programs for children three years of age and younger. City leaders must negotiate a budget that maintains the commitment to universal 3-K and leverages resources tied to open seats to meet the demand for care across age range by:

Converting school-day, school-year seats to extended day, year-round options across age ranges to ensure maximum utilization of seats. The lack of full-day, year-round care prevents many seats from being filled.

Offering greater flexibility in center-based and family child care providers' contracts that increase their ability to respond to emerging community needs, including for new or expanding populations, extended day and year services, and rising needs for particular age cohorts.

Build a robust, culturally and linguistically supportive education and engagement campaign at the community level to increase public knowledge and utilization of all public ECE programs. This effort should educate communities and families about child care subsidies and universal program eligibility, as well as how to enroll. This campaign should employ trusted messengers and work in partnership with direct service providers to prioritize cultural and language accessibility, transparency, and consistent communication across communities and with providers of service.

Support decentralized enrollment options so early care and education providers can enroll children in families who apply for care directly and on site. Currently, families enroll in contracted *Birth-to-Five* service options through the DOE and—while parents can identify setting (center, family child care or school) and specific site preferences—the DOE ultimately determines where children receive child care, 3-K, or Pre-K. The option of on-site enrollment would support greater parental agency and engagement with trusted providers, as well as expedite take-up of care options.

Facilitate information sharing and parent access to Fair Fares transportation subsidies to improve working families' access to ECE programs. Many families cite transportation costs as a primary barrier they face to accessing child care.

Additionally, recognizing the central role ECE providers play in supporting young child development and responding to the health and mental health needs of children and their caregivers, there must be investment in the workforce and programmatic supports that:

> **Advance the next stage of salary parity for the center-based workforce** by ensuring staff left out of the initial 2019 agreement (early childhood directors, preschool special education teachers, and community-based support staff) are included; that longevity is factored into compensation; and that a minimum wage floor of $25 an hour is established for all support staff. **Additionally, the City must ensure home-based family child care providers benefit from the increased state market rate**. Since access to the increased rate is administered through the City, it is imperative that home-based providers across the city have timely access to this rate change.

> **Improve connections to the Early Intervention Program and behavioral health services within ECE settings** to address children's developmental and social-emotional needs. Improved access to Early Intervention and behavioral health services can be achieved by funding the integration of staffing and services into ECE program settings and facilitating warm handoffs to external service providers whenever needed.

Conclusion

Given the fact that the vast majority of families in New York City cannot afford child care or preschool programming for just one child, it is unreasonable to suggest thousands of seats in public ECE programs are open because of lack of demand. In fact, our analysis of the City's own administrative data, alongside our community-based research, has identified multiple systemic challenges ECE providers experience and barriers families face accessing high-quality, affordable ECE programming.

ECE programs contribute to the well-being of our society overall by improving health, educational, and employment opportunities for children and their families. Our ability to strengthen New York City's public ECE system will drive an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic future for all New Yorkers. We look forward to working with City Hall, New York City Council, philanthropic organizations, and our advocacy partners on the path toward a universal ECE system in New York City.

Appendices

A. Public Funding Sources for Early Care and Education

Figure 34. ECE System Funding (DOE and ACS), CFY 2012 to 2023 and Proposed CFY 2024
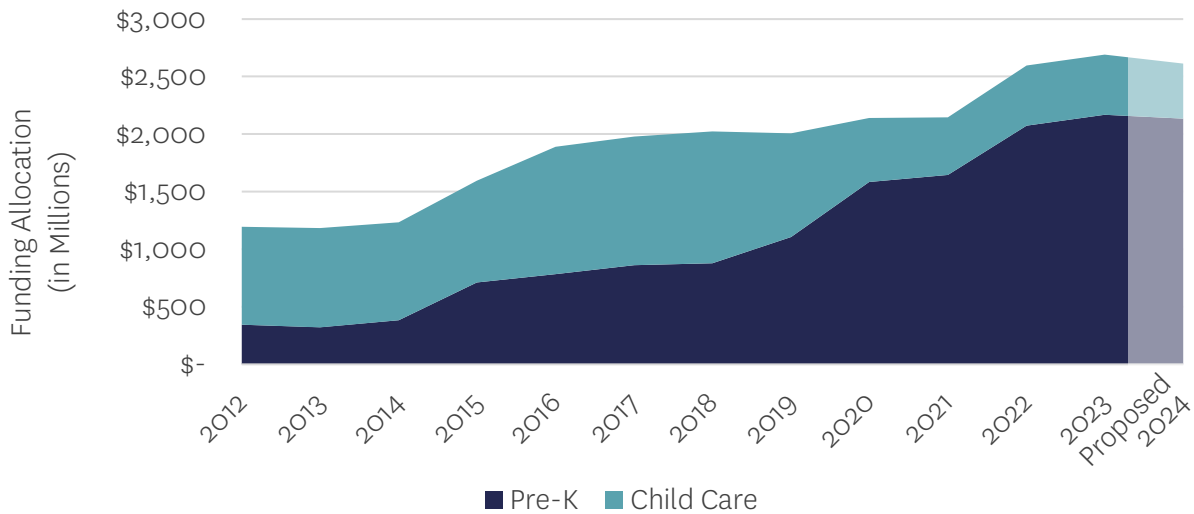
Figure 35. City, State, Federal Funding for ACS, CFY 2016 to 2023 and Proposed CFY 2024
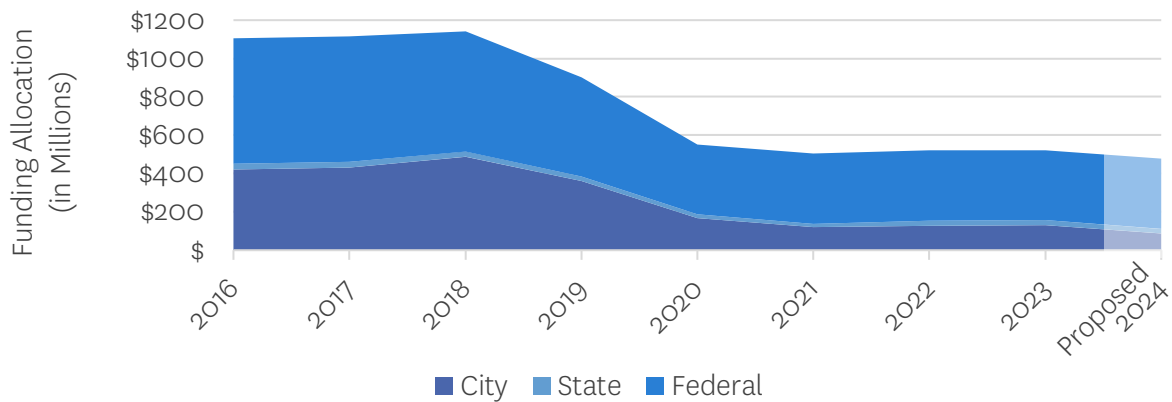
Figure 36. City, State, Federal Funding for DOE, CFY 2016 to 2023 and Proposed CFY 2024
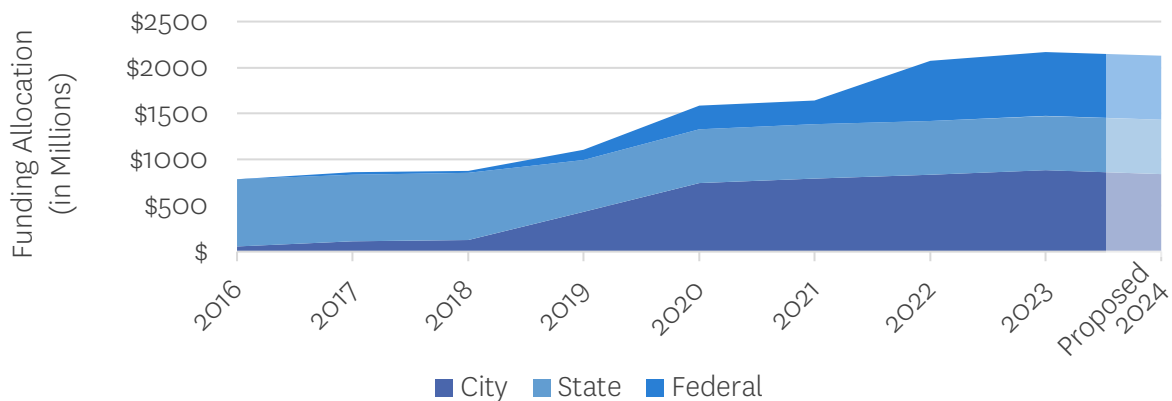
Sources: Independent Budget Office, City Fiscal Years 2012 to 2015; City of New York Office of Management and Budget Supporting Schedules, City Fiscal Years 2016 to 2023, and Departmental Estimates for City Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget.

B. Administrative Data Sources and Analysis Methodology

We analyze several administrative datasets represented throughout Part I of the report, either obtained through data requests with the agencies overseeing different parts of the system, including the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and Department of Education (DOE), or accessed through public data sources such and NYC Open Data, DOE Info Hub, Mayor's Management Report, and U.S. Census website.

The datasets we obtain through requests from the ACS and DOE have changed over time because of the shift in the oversight of contracted centers and family child care providers (Early Learn) between the two agencies completed in 2019-2020. Importantly, the datasets' structure remained the same in the sense that they always capture site-level data and disaggregate by type of setting where children receive early care and education, as well as by age cohorts. This allowed us to produce analysis over time, citywide, borough wide, but also analysis by varying NYC geographies, including Community Districts and Zip Codes. In this report, the majority of the data represent citywide averages, but many of the data are also available on our online database (data.cccnewyork.org) by Community Districts and other more granular geographies.

Child Care Enrollment and Capacity Data Sources prior to School Year 2019-2020

Prior to the 2019-2020 school year, we obtained child care data for years 2018 and 2019 through a data request from the ACS, which was inclusive of child care voucher utilization data and contracted enrollment and capacity data, which combined represent the universe of subsidized, publicly funded care. In the report, a subset for infants and toddlers was used for data on enrollment of infants and toddlers in income-eligible families for School Year 2018 – 2019 (Figure 7). The data frame included site-level data on voucher utilization across licensed centers, family child care providers and informal care, and enrollment among contracted center-based and family child care providers, as well as budgeted capacity across contracted center-based sites and by Family Child Care Networks. While the data frame originally disaggregated by infants, toddlers, preschool (*i.e.*, 3 and 4 years olds combined), and school age children (*i.e.*, 5 through 12 years of age), enrollment was also broken down by birth years of children which allowed us to disaggregate enrollment for 3-year-olds from 4-year-olds. Starting with 2019-2020, after the transition of the oversight of contracted center-based and family child care providers from ACS to DOE, we continued to obtain the child care voucher utilization data from the ACS, which follows the same format described above with data available for 2020, 2021 and 2022 data years.

In order to create a dataset that illustrates the entire publicly funded system prior to 2019-2020, we combined data on vouchers and contracted care in centers and family providers with enrollment in universal Pre-K and 3-K programs. For Pre-K and 3-K enrollment data, we used DOE Demographic Snapshots datasets in a format that was publicly available at the time, ending with the 2018-2019 school year. Demographic Snapshots at the time differentiated enrollment of 4-year-olds in full-day Pre-K and 3-year-olds in 3-K, across different site types, including public, charter, special education schools, standalone DOE Pre-K Centers, as well as community-based centers which were differentiated between the two agencies that had oversight at the time, ACS and DOE. In our analysis, we grouped all school-based sites along with standalone DOE Pre-K centers, under *Schools*, while contracted community-based centers are *Centers* and family child care providers are called *Family*.

Child Care Enrollment & Capacity Data Sources Starting with 2019-2020 School Year

After the transition of the contracted centers and family providers to the DOE, the Demographic Snapshots, starting with the 2019-2020 school year, have never encompassed enrollment in the entire *Birth-to Five* system, and included only components of the system, in a format that was different from one year to another. Through a data request with the DOE, we obtained the dataset for the 2019-2020 school year which captured enrollment and capacity data across the entire *Birth-to-Five* system, comprised of care provided in schools and through contracted centers and family child care providers. This includes universal Pre-K and 3-K, but also programs available to families eligible for subsidies, including infant and toddler care as well as extended day programs for children in 3-K and Pre-K. This data frame included enrollment and capacity data structured by site level and included public, charter, special education schools, standalone Pre-K Centers, as well as community-based centers and family child care providers affiliated with Family Child Care Networks. We grouped these in the same way we did while using Demographic Snapshots dataset so that *Schools* encompass all school-based sites as well as DOE Standalone Pre-K centers. Related to family child care providers affiliated with Family Child Care Networks it is important to note that enrollment data are available across individual family child care providers, while capacity is available by Family Child Care Network.[19] This is relevant for Figure 20, where we map open seats by Community Districts only for Centers and Schools, excluding family settings because of this data limitation. This dataset provided both enrollment and capacity by age cohorts, including infants, toddlers, 3-year-olds, and 4-year-olds, as well as by the length of care relevant for 3-K and Pre-K programs, which included differentiation between school-day, school-year, and extended-day, year-round within individual sites. These data were used to report budgeted capacity in contracted care by length of care for school years 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 (Figure 11), as well as enrollment in Pre-K and 3-K programs by length of care for school year 2019-2020 (Figure 12). Additionally, the dataset indicated for each site whether the model of care provided is universal, subsidized, or a mixed model with a combination of universal and subsidized seats.

We also obtained through a data request with the DOE more recent data, for the school year 2021-2022, and we call it preliminary while we are still working with the DOE on receiving a complete dataset that has a data frame similar to the one described above. While this preliminary dataset has many components needed for the analysis, it does not differentiate between infants and toddlers, therefore we present them combined for data on the contracted ECE system by age groups for school year 2021-2022 (Figure 6); as well as infants and toddlers enrolled in public ECE programs, 2019 vs. 2022 (Figure 11). The dataset does not provide the length of care differentiation within Pre-K and 3-K, which is essential for examining trends between school-day, school year and full-day, year-round, enrollment and capacity. This is why Figure 12. is using 2019-2020 year of data rather than 2021-2022.

The datasets on enrollment and capacity allowed us to calculate utilization rates (enrollment / budgeted capacity) and the number of open seats (capacity - enrollment) both for the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 school years, by age groups (Figure 16. Capacity, Enrollment, and Open Seats in Contracted ECE Programs by Age Cohort, SY2019-20 and SY2021-22 and Figure 17. Contracted System Utilization Rates by Age Cohort, SY2019-20 and SY2021-22), by settings (Figure 18. Capacity, Enrollment, and Open Seats by Setting and School Year and Figure 19 Contracted System Utilization Rate by Setting, SY2019-

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[19] See more about Family Child Care Networks here: https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/family-care-(fcc)-network-handbook.pdf

20 and SY 2021-22) and by Community Districts (Figure 20. Open Seats in Centers and Schools by Community District SY 2021-22). We looked at the sheer number of open seats in addition to enrollment rates because of the impact that open seats have on providers and families across many communities throughout the city.

These DOE datasets, combined with the child care voucher data obtained from the ACS, allowed us to illustrate enrollment in publicly funded care in the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 school years (see Figure 2. Children Under Five Served in Public ECE System: Contracted and Vouchers; and Figure 5. NYC's Population of Children Under Five and Enrollment in Public ECE Programs by Age, School Year 2019-2020).

Additional Data Sources

Additional datasets used for the analysis, also obtained through data request with the DOE, are related to the budgeted capacity with new contracts that family child care providers entered during summer 2020 (2020-2021 school year, data as of February 2021) and contracts that center-based providers entered during summer 2021 (2021-2022 school year, data as of November 2021). These data frames differentiate among age cohorts (infants, toddlers, 3-year-olds, and 4-year-olds), as well as the length of care, and allowed us to access changes in the budgeted capacity that went into effect with new contracts (see Figure 11. Budgeted Capacity in Contracted Care by Length of Care: School Day and Extended Day Programs, SY 2019-2020 vs SY 2021-2022; and Figure 13. Capacity in Contracted Center-based and Family Child Care by Length of Care). We relied on Mayor's Management Report for some of the historic data on enrollment across different parts of the contracted system, including Early Learn, 3-K and Pre-K, which along with several datasets described above, informed enrollment in public contracted programs (Figure 1).

We used US Census *American Community Survey* 5-year PUMS estimates (2014-2019) to derive the total population of children by age cohorts, including infants, toddlers, 3-year-olds, and 4-year-olds, (see Figure 5. NYC's Population of Children Under Five and Enrollment in Public ECE Programs by Age, School Year 2019-2020), as well as the share of infants and toddlers in households that fall under different income thresholds (see Figure 7. Enrollment of Infants and Toddlers in Income-eligible Families, SY 2018-19; and Figure 8. NYC's Population of Infants and Toddlers by Federal Poverty Levels). Additionally, we intentionally represent the data for 2019 on the infant and toddler population in income eligible households and enrollment in public care and not more recent data for several reasons. While we have reliable 2020 data on enrollment in publicly funded early care and education system, the 2020 US Census *American Community Survey* 1-year estimates were experimental, and we did not want to use them.[20] Alternatively, the most recent 2021 US Census *American Community Survey* 1-year estimates are reliable and available, but the most recent dataset on enrollment in publicly funded early care and education for 2021-2022 school year does not allow us to differentiate the enrollment for infants and toddlers separately, because of the limitations within the dataset for contracted care (described above).

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[20] Due to disruptions and biases in data collection during 2020, the Census Bureau released the "experimental" 1-year estimates for 2020 and advises against comparing against estimates from prior or future years

C. Methodology for Listening Sessions with Parents and Caregivers

While we used a mixed methods approach to this project, we used a qualitative approach to elevating the voices of parents and caregivers, alongside program providers to ensure that we were able to understand the barriers to accessing care as well as the solutions that parents and caregivers most need to access ECE programs. The listening sessions served as focus groups in which we asked parents what the greatest barriers are to accessing early care and education programs, which potential solutions could lessen the barriers, and where responsibility lies in implementing those solutions.

While we had some ideas about the kinds of barriers that could be significantly impacting access and use of ECE programs, we wanted to be led by parents to ensure the barriers we elevate are informed by those who experience them every day. For listening sessions, we used broad questions to remain open to parents' experiences and solutions to significant barriers they face. This approach also allowed for a participatory ethos which centers the voices of those most impacted by barriers to accessing ECE programs. Parents' and caregivers' experiences provided invaluable knowledge on how barriers might be addressed and inform our policy recommendations.

The 12 virtual listening sessions were held with parents and caregivers who we recruited with the help of partner organizations in the ECE space. We relied on partner organizations in geographic areas with the most open seats to gather participants for listening sessions, paying special attention to parents who might be facing more barriers as well as to parents who might not already be connected to an ECE program. These sessions were offered in-person and virtually through video conference, Zoom; however, project partners advised us that virtual meetings would be the most successful approach since parents preferred this as the more accessible option. Each session was equipped with a facilitator, a note taker, and a person to support any technical needs such as those related to translation and interpretation. Notetakers documented conversations on a virtual whiteboard, Google Jamboard, as parents were sharing and were visible to all participants. Three staff members from CCC thematically analyzed notes and transcript recordings from all 12 sessions including reviewing, validating one another's analysis, and meeting to resolve any questions or discrepancies.

D. Parent Survey Questionnaire (English Version)

WLCM1
Welcome! We are advocates from Citizens' Committee for Children of New York working to ensure every child in NYC is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. We are speaking with parents and caregivers of children under five years of age about their current or recent experience accessing childcare and early education in New York City.

WLCM2
This survey is confidential, meaning we plan to share a summary of what we learn from you and others who participate, but WE WILL NEVER SHARE any personal information or individual responses. It should take about 10 minutes to complete these questions, and you will receive a digital gift card worth $5 via text message after you complete survey.

WLCM3
At any time, text SKIP to move on to the next question, BACK to return to the previous question, or CLOSE if you no longer wish to participate. If you would like to continue, please text OK

[Wait for response]

Great! Let's start with a few questions about your family so we can better understand your childcare needs.

FllwUp1
Hello, are you still interested in sharing your experience with early childcare and education? To start this poll, write OK. You can write CLOSE to end messages.

CLSE
No problem! We won't send any more messages. Text ECE to (877) 661-5647 if you change your mind.

Q1
If you add all the adults and children in your home together, how many people are in your household? [open ended]

Q2
In your household, are there ... (You may select all that apply, ex: B and C)
A - Children under 5 years old
B - Children ages 5-11
C - Children ages 12-17
D - No children under 18
E - Pregnant people

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Q3
What is your relationship to the children in your household?
A - Mother, raising kid(s) with partner
B - Mother, raising kid(s) myself
C - Father, raising kid(s) with partner
D - Father, raising kid(s) myself
E – Grandparent
F – Not listed [Go to Q3.1]

> Q3.1
> In your own words, what is your relationship to the children in your household?

Q4
What is the age of your youngest child? Text the letter next to each option.
A - Under 1 year
B – Between 1 and 2 years
C – Between 2 and 3 years
D – Between 3 and 5 years
E – Between 5 and 7 years
F - Not listed [Go to Q4.1]

> Q4.1
> Thanks for your interest in participating. We are speaking with families with young children about their current or recent experiences with childcare and early education in New York City. If you would like to share this opportunity with someone you know, please text OK.
>
> Q4.2
> Thank you for spreading the word! Please copy and send the following message to one or more people you know who have young children and live and/or work in New York City.
>
> [Send SHR1.2]

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Q5
In what zip code do you live? Please write five digits, for example: 10032.
     [Open-ended, data validation for NYC Zip Codes]

Q6
What is your current employment status? Are you …
A- Working Full-Time [Go to Q6.1]
B- Working Part-Time [Go to Q6.1]
C- On leave from a job or temporarily laid off
D- Looking for Work
E- Unable to work
F- Keeping house
G- Going to school
H- Retired
I- Other: [Go to Q6.2]

     Q6.1
     In what zip code do you work?
     [Open-ended, data validation for NYC Zip Codes]

     Q6.2
     In your own words, what is your current employment status?
     [Open-ended]

Thanks! The next few questions are about public programs your family participates in, including public childcare support programs.

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Childcare vouchers help cover the cost of childcare. 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 childcare program offered in family childcare or center-based settings to eligible families.

Q7
Did you know about these subsidized programs?
A- Yes
B- No

Q8
For your YOUNGEST Child, do you receive help with paying for childcare through one of the following programs?
    A- Vouchers (HRA/ACS) [Go to Q8.2]
    B- Head Start or Early Head Start [Go to Q8.2]
    C- Early Learn NYC [Go to Q8.2]
    D- 3-K or Universal Pre-K [Go to Q8.4]
    E- Not listed [Go to Q8.1]
    F- I do not receive help in paying for childcare [Go to Q9]

Q8.1
In your own words, what help do you receive to pay for childcare?

Q8.2
Families in NYC have a range of experiences with the childcare subsidy system. How about your family - how difficult or easy was the application process to access the subsidized childcare program you use (vouchers, Head Start, Early Learn, etc.)?
    A- Very difficult
    B- Difficult
    C- Neither difficult nor easy
    D- Easy
    E- Very easy

Q8.3
In your own words what's worked well for you and what problems have you experienced with applying or reapplying for subsidized childcare. [Open-ended response]

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Q8.4
Families in NYC have a range of experiences enrolling in Universal Pre-K or 3-K. How about your family - how difficult or easy was the application process to access 3-K or Universal Pre-K?
- A- Very difficult
- B- Difficult
- C- Neither difficult nor easy
- D- Easy
- E- Very easy

Q8.5
In your own words, what's worked well for you and what problems have you experienced? [Open-ended response]

The next question is about your annual household income. We are asking about this because the state has expanded income eligibility for childcare subsidies and more families will be eligible for assistance to pay for childcare. Your answer is completely confidential, and regardless of your answer we will share more information about applying for childcare subsidies.

Q9
What was your total household income before taxes and other deductions in the past 12 months? Your best estimate is fine. [open ended]

Q10
Are you or anyone in your household receiving or eligible for any of the following benefits:
Medicaid; Housing Subsidy; WIC; SNAP; Cash Assistance?
- A- Yes
- B- No
- C- Not Sure

Thanks! Here is link to more information about applying for a public childcare subsidy in New York City, [Link to https://access.nyc.gov/eligibility/#step-1]

The next few questions about the childcare you have used in the past 3 months. If you have more than one child, please respond only about your YOUNGEST child.

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Q9

In the past 3 months, did you use any of the following childcare arrangements? Again, if you have more than one child, please respond only about your YOUNGEST child. Select all that apply.

- A- Family day care provider caring for 2 or more children outside your home
- B- Childcare or day care center
- C- Nursery or preschool
- D- Federally supported Head Start Program
- E- Paid care such as a sitter, nanny, or au pair
- F- Free care other than the parent, such as friend, neighbor, sibling, or grandparent
- G- Before care or aftercare
- H- Summer camp or summer childcare program
- I- Caring for child myself/partner

Q10

Is this childcare arrangement your preferred choice?

- A- Yes [Go to Q11]
- B- No [Go to Q10.1]

Q10.1

Please tell us what your preferred choice would be and why you are not using it. [Open ended]

[Wait for response, then go to Q11]

Q11

In your own words, what are your most important considerations when selecting childcare? [Open-ended]

Q12

Families have many reasons for choosing specific childcare arrangements. What are the TOP THREE reasons that are most important for you?

- A- Health and safety of the child
- B- Cost of care is affordable for my family
- C- Communication between me and childcare provider(s)
- D- Hours of care offered that meet my needs
- E- Location and transportation
- F- The provider's experience or quality of the facility
- G- Recommendation by a friend, relative, neighbor, or co-worker
- H- The degree of trust I have with the provider

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Q13
Paying for childcare is hard for many families these days. Below is a list of things some families have done. How about you – have you done any of the following because of the cost of childcare? (Select all that apply)

    A- Cut back on household expenses
    B- Borrow money from family members/friends
    C- Move child from regulated care to informal care
    D- Reduce child(ren)'s program attendance
    E- Reduce working hours
    F- Switch to a less expensive program
    G- Apply for subsidies
    H- None of these

Q14
What is your preferred mode of communicating with your childcare provider? Please select one.

    A- Speaking on the phone
    B- Texting/WhatsApp
    C- Updates via an app
    D- Speaking in person
    E- Updates via email
    F- Not listed [go to Q14.1]

Q14.1
What is your preferred mode of communicating with your childcare provider?

Q15
During what times do you need regular childcare during the week? Select only one option.

    A- Half day, 8AM to 12PM
    B- School day, 8AM to 3PM
    C- Most of the day, 8AM to 6PM
    D- I don't need regular care during the week

Q16
Do you need regular childcare during evenings, overnight, or on weekends?

    A- Yes
    B- No

Q17
If given a choice, where is your preferred location for childcare?

    A- Close to where I live
    B- Close to where I work
    C- Close to another location, not listed

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Q18
If transportation to and from your childcare provider is a problem for you, explain in your own words why. If it is not a problem, type SKIP.
[open ended]

Q19
Parents have different views about when a child is old enough to be cared for by someone outside of the home. At what age do you trust leaving your child in a care facility or with other non-relatives (someone other than you or a close relative)?
- A- Younger than 12 months
- B- 12 to 24 months (1-2 years old)
- C- 24 to 36 months (2-3 years old)
- D- Older than 36 months (3 years and above)

Q20
Of the following supports, which is the MOST IMPORTANT one you wish you had more of?
- A- More time with my child
- B- Mental health support for myself and children
- C- Employer support (employer paid childcare, flexible schedule, sick leave)
- D- More information about how to support my child's learning and development
- E- Financial and/or job security (ex. Monthly income support, child allowance, paid family leave)
- F- Part-time job
- G- Not listed above [Go to Q14.1]

    Q20.1
    In your own words, what supports do you wish you had more of?
    [Open-ended]
Q21
What is the most EFFECTIVE way for parents to learn about childcare options? Select one.
- A- Recommendation from family members/friends
- B- Referral through community programs or pediatrician
- C- Public Ads
- D- Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
- E- Neighbors or neighborhood groups
- F- Visit childcare programs or go to events like tours and open houses
- G- City run websites and print resources (DOE, DOHMH, MySchools)

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THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SHARING YOUR IDEAS. These final questions help us know that we are speaking parents and caregivers who reflect the diversity of New York City.

Q22
Which race/ethnicity do you identify with? You may select more than one.
    A- Asian/Pacific Islander
    B- Hispanic/Latina/Latino/Latine
    C- Black/African American
    D- Native American/Indigenous
    E- White/Caucasian
    F- Biracial/Multiracial
    G- Prefer not to answer

Q23
Do you prefer to speak in a language other than English?
    A- Yes [Q17.1]
    B- No [Q18]
    C- Prefer not to answer [Q18]

Q23.1
What language to you prefer to speak if other than English?
[Open-ended]

Q23.2
Have you faced any challenges accessing childcare related to the language you prefer to speak, such as enrolling in a program or communicating with a childcare provider?
    A- Yes
    B- No
    C- Prefer not to answer

Q23.3
Is the anything else you'd like us to know that we did not ask about? Please write as much as you like. If there is nothing else, please write SKIP to go to the next step.
[Open-ended]

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CNCLD1
Thank you! Your answers directly inform our campaign to put parents and caregivers at the center of the upcoming elections. We will share our findings with you soon and be in touch with ways to get involved in our campaign. Text us at (877) 661-5647 if you have any questions.

SHR1
One last thing: would you be willing to share this survey with a friend? Please text OK.
[Wait for response]

SHR1.1
Thank you for spreading the word! Please copy and send the following message to one or more people you know who have young children and live and/or work in New York City.

SHR1.2
Hi! I just took this survey about childcare in NYC and thought you would be interested too. The survey takes about 10 minutes, and you will receive a $5 digital gift card over text message once you complete it. If you are interested, text ECE to 877-661-5647.

GFTCRD1
Here's your gift card! [LINK]

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E. Recruitment Flyers (English Versions)

Figure 41. Parent Listening Session Recruitment Flyer (English version)

Figure 42. Citywide Survey Recruitment Flyer (English version)

F. Survey Respondent Demographics

This cellphone-based survey collected responses exclusively over SMS (*i.e.*, text messages) from December 8th, 2022, to February 17th, 2023. Participants were recruited using digital and print flyers shared by child and family service providers citywide. Approximately 2,700 individuals started the survey either in the English, Spanish, French, or Chinese version. Among them, around 1,800 met the eligibility requirements, which included living in NYC (based on zip code) and being the parent or caregiver of one or more children age seven or younger. Among those eligible, around 1,100 participants completed the survey, and we removed cases suspected to be duplicates or unauthentic; for example, having an identical response to all multiple choice and open-ended questions. The resulting dataset includes 957 respondents. All data presented in this report are unweighted, meaning we did not stratify our sample to adjust for over or underrepresentation of participants relative to the NYC population. Sample and NYC population characteristics are available below for descriptive purposes. All NYC population data come from the US Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Figure 43. Citywide Survey Sample Demographics

	Survey Sample		NYC Population
Household Composition & Relationship of Respondent			
Number of Respondents	948		
% Two Parent	86.2%		55.9%
% Mother and Partner		53.8%	
% Father and Partner		32.5%	
% Single Parent	13.7%		29.3%
% Mother		11.9%	
% Father		1.8%	
Household Income			
Number of Respondents	957		
% Below $15,000	7.0%		9.3%
% $15,000 to $24,999	4.2%		7.1%
% $25,000 to $34,999	3.2%		7.1%
% $35,000 to $49,000	6.9%		10.6%
% $50,000 to $74,999	22.7%		14.9%
% $75,000 to $99,999	23.6%		11.5%
% $100,000 to $200,000	29.7%		24.8%
% Above, $200,000	2.7%		14.9%
Household Size			
Number of Respondents	944		
% Two People		5.5%	
% Three People		25.0%	
% Four People		35.6%	
% Five People		25.8%	
% Six People		6.7%	
% Seven People		0.9%	
% Eight People		0.4%	
Race/Ethnicity of Respondent			
Number of Respondents	955		
Asian/Pacific Islander		11.6%	14.2%
Hispanic/Latina/o/e		6.9%	21.4%
Black/African American		35.4%	28.9%
White/Caucasian		40.8%	31.9%
Other		4.5%	3.5%
Native American		2.4%	
Biracial/Multiracial		0.9%	
Not listed		1.2%	

Credits & Acknowledgements

Citizens' Committee for Children *of* NEW YORK

We advance well-being, equity, and justice for all of New York's children through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. We cast light on issues, educate the public, engage allies, and identify and promote practical solutions to ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

For more information about CCC, visit www.cccnewyork.org.