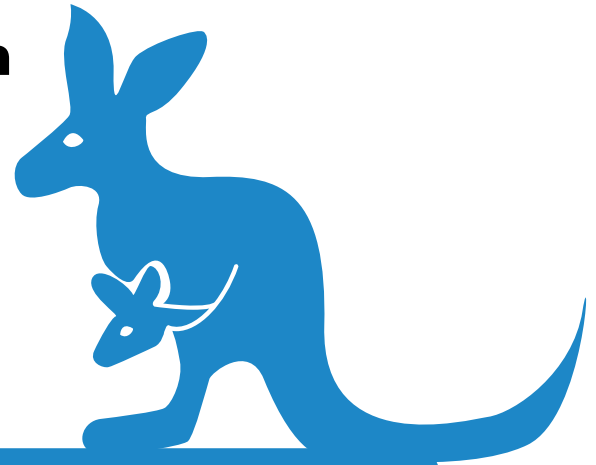


# 5 Ideas

## For a Better Child Care System

Not only do working families rely on child care; quality early education programs can set young children up for successful futures. More than a century ago, settlement houses started New York's first child care programs. The City has made tremendous strides in expanding access to early childhood education since then, but the current system is piecemeal and operationally challenged. To meet the needs of New York's children and families, policymakers can:



### 1 Commit to a free, universal system of accessible and conveniently-located care

Currently, around 80% of families struggle with the cost of child care. The lack of affordable child care is driving parents out of the workforce and families out of the City.<sup>1</sup>

- **Publicly commit to a universal system** of close-to-home child care offering full days for a full year, without restricting access based on income or immigration status
- **Invest in existing 3-K programs** to ensure classrooms have the resources they need
- **Expand the 3-K system** to guarantee seats for every family that applies and advertise this broadly

### 2 Begin to build a universal 2s program

Expanding free care options to 2-year-olds is the next logical step for New York City's universal childcare system. Although there are already some publicly subsidized child care programs available,<sup>2</sup> the majority of care available for the City's approximately 90,000 2-year-olds is in private market settings with families shouldering the entire cost.<sup>3</sup>

- **Draw on existing licensed capacity for expansion**, beginning in child-care deserts
- **Publicly commit to a timeline to reach 60,000 seats**, which is estimated to be universal 2-care

1. New Yorkers United for Childcare, *UPC: A Five year Roadmap for Universal Public Child Care*, <https://www.united4childcare.org/upcny>

2. Only 20% of eligible toddlers in NYC receive child care subsidies

3. Currently, care for 2 year olds costs an average of \$23,400 per year, which is far out of reach for most New York City residents.

# 3

## Make it as easy to apply as possible

Families miss out on child care because the application process is complicated and inefficient. The MyCity Portal is only for subsidized child care programs; MySchools is just for Pre-K and 3-K applications; and Head Start programs have a separate application process.

- **Create a one-stop-shop** to apply for care where families can compare options and complete their applications with the assistance of a navigator who can answer questions and provide technical support
- **Advertise care options** through every avenue possible such as nonprofits, houses of worship, pediatrician's offices, online and television ads, and even cold calls to eligible families

# 4

## Pay staff their worth

Early childhood educators play a crucial role in a child's development, but those in center-based and family child care settings are not compensated at the same level as their school-based counterparts – even though the credentials are the same. Salary parity would mean an equal base rate that also accounts for the additional hours worked by center- and family-based educators. Lack of salary parity threatens the long-term stability of the City's child care infrastructure.<sup>4</sup>

- **Renegotiate contracts for early childhood educators** in center- and family-based child care settings mirroring agreements reached for public school teachers and staff
- **Extend wage investments to all child care staff**, regardless of program or union affiliation, including pre-school special education staff

# 5

## Meet legally-mandated special education services requirements

In 2024 14,400 Pre-K students with disabilities ended the school year without receiving support services the City is legally mandated to provide. This violates civil rights laws, and is shameful in a City as well-resourced as New York.

- **Invest in new, dedicated classrooms** for students with special needs
- **Boost the amount of staff** providing supportive therapies
- **Fund evaluations for services** so they are efficient and accessible, and ensure that referral partnerships are in place and ready to receive students when a need is identified

4. Day Care Council of New York, *The Enduring Value of the Early Education Workforce*, <https://www.dccnyinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Enduring-Value-of-the-Early-Childhood-Workforce-9-2023-2.pdf>