

New York State Child Care for All: Roll-out Principles and 2026-27 NYS Budget Request

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care’s definition of Universal Child Care is free child care for all New York children—statewide, treated as a public good, rather than a private family burden. Every family, regardless of income, immigration status, or zip code—inclusive of families of children with disabilities—can access high-quality, free child care for all children under age 13, in the setting of their choice—school, center, or home-based care. Universal child care is free from intrusive applications, work reporting or immigration status requirements, or long processing times, every child care educator earns a thriving wage, and the per child rate paid programs reflects the true cost of care.

Implementation Plan

- 1. Increase child care supply and quality throughout New York State** by immediately increasing workforce compensation through a state-funded workforce compensation fund.
- 2. Implement two types of bridge to universal child care projects in communities around the state; a community eligibility model and a capped-fee model.**
- 3. Fully meet demand for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).** As of October 28, 2025, [26 counties](#)- including NYC, have closed enrollment or started waitlists due to inadequate funding, disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of working families across the state.

Strengths and Core Principles

- **New York raises child care worker wages immediately to build capacity by recruiting and retaining early childhood educators.** There is no path to universal child care that does not start with raising compensation for the child care workforce.
- **Low-income families are prioritized during the rollout to universal child care** by sustaining and strengthening the CCAP program to ensure all eligible working families not residing in communities covered by a bridge project can access CCAP while the state is building toward universal child care. As the communities with universal child care increase, the CCAP program can be scaled down.
- **Middle-income families are protected from rate hikes, benefits cliffs, and shifting supply as we scale up to universal child care** in two ways: (1) creating a state-funded child care workforce compensation fund allows for workforce wages to be increased without raising tuition for middle class families not yet able to access universal care; and (2) the capped-fee projects are targeted to serve families just over the CCAP eligibility limit, addressing one of the sharpest benefits cliffs facing families who make just over the CCAP income limit.
- **From day one, the universal bridge projects are free from stigmatizing and burdensome income-verification, immigration or activities tests,** an approach that would be first-in-the-nation.
- **New York State Child Care for All includes afterschool care, summer care, and evening and weekend care for children 0 to 13, and inclusive of children with disabilities, and regardless of immigration status.** Families’ need for child care extends beyond weekdays 9 to 5, and long after a child enters pre-K or Kindergarten.

- **The bridge projects are structured to ensure that infant and toddler seats are preserved.** Rates to care for babies and toddlers are the highest because caring for very young children (appropriately) requires the most hands-on attention; as a result, these are already the hardest seats to find. Any rollout plan must be sure not to incentivize programs to switch scarce infant and toddler seats to care for older children.
- **This plan is flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of New York State’s current systems of care and early childhood education.** This plan can be coordinated with pre-K and 3-K, New York City’s contract-child care, and other models.
- **This plan recognizes that child care in NYS is primarily funded by state and federal funds.** New York State and federal funds are the primary funding source for child care, pre-K and afterschool programs in most communities; even in New York City, state and federal funds cover a large portion of funding. For example, in FFY 25, NYC received [\\$1.1B in state and federal child care assistance funds](#) to support NYC child care vouchers (out of a state total of about \$2.2B); in [September 2025](#), NYC provided 113,263 children child care vouchers out of a statewide total of 168,671.
- **All types of care are supported in the rollout of New York State Child Care for All** to ensure families have the freedom to choose the care setting that best meets their needs, and recognizing that all modalities of care (home, center, and school-based) will be needed to successfully achieve statewide universal child care.
- **The rollout is structured to maximize federal funding while building to universal child care.** New York State receives \$638 million in Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grants received from the federal government, and is [obligated](#) to spend more than \$221 million of state dollars on the Child Care Assistance Program to draw down those federal funds. In recent years, New York has also directed as much as [\\$483 million](#) (in 2025) in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Funds (TANF) funds to CCAP. All of these funds must follow federal means testing and other eligibility rules. Under this rollout plan, New York can shift some of the additional [\\$1.2 billion in state dollars](#) it currently invests in CCAP to fund the bridge projects, and add significant new funds, which will be needed to achieve universal.

2026-27 New York State Budget Request

- **Enact a workforce compensation program** detailed in Governor Hochul’s Child Care Availability Task Force’s Roadmap to Universal Child Care (**\$1.2 billion**).
- **Include sufficient funding for the Child Care Assistance Program** to ensure eligible families throughout the state can receive assistance
 - NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services estimates a need for **\$1.8 billion** to meet NYC demand
 - An analysis of enrollment and spending trends outside NYC suggests a need for **\$500 million** to meet demand in the rest of the state.
- Invest **\$150 million** to partner with several local social service districts to develop and implement the community eligibility and capped fee bridge projects.

For questions about New York State Child Care for All, contact Pete Nabozny, The Children’s Agenda at pete@thechildrensagenda.org, Dede Hill, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy at dhill@scaany.org, or Shoshana Hershkowitz, ESCCC, shershkowitz@empirestatechildcare.org.