



FAQS: 2026 Top Child Care Policy Priorities

(April 2026)

Permanent investment in child care compensation

What is in the Executive and One-House Budgets for the child care workforce?

The Executive Budget allocates no funds for the child care workforce. If no funding is added before the budget is finalized, this will be the second year in a row since the pandemic that there are no funds for the child care workforce. In 2023, one-time [retention bonuses](#) were awarded to child care educators: \$3,000 full time; \$2,300 afterschool. In 2024, bonuses of \$2,250 for full time educators; \$1,725 for afterschool. The Senate one-house proposes \$500 million for a child care workforce fund.

Recommendation: Adopt the Senate proposal along with language that makes this fund permanent and the compensation supplements ongoing. This is a necessary investment if New York is to tackle the field's persistent workforce shortages - which worsens the state's capacity shortfall - and achieve the goal of universal child care across the state.

Why is the child care community calling for publicly-funded workforce supplements?

Finding and retaining child care educators and those in supporting roles is the number one issue we hear from the field. We cannot achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining far more professionals in the field. The average wage for the child care workforce (94% women, and more than 53% people of color) is approximately [\\$38,000](#), with family-based providers earning even less. Compensation supplements are the best way to provide a raise for the workforce without increasing the tuition costs for already overburdened private-pay families until such time as New York has transitioned to statewide universal publicly-funded child care.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) shortfalls

We've heard a lot about CCAP waitlists and enrollment closures – what is the status?

CCAP currently helps approximately 165,000 low-income families around New York State afford child care. For those families able to access CCAP, this assistance can be life-changing. They can see their annual child care bill for one infant in home-based child care drop from [\\$16,000 to \\$500](#). Unfortunately, notwithstanding a surge in state funding into the CCAP program in recent years, demand still far outpaces funding. To manage this shortfall, as of March 2026, [35 counties and NYC](#) have closed enrollment or started waitlists. In New York City, more than 17,000 children are on the CCAP waitlist, and that number is growing by more than 1,000 a month. These enrollment closures and waitlists are leaving thousands of eligible families across the state scrambling to patch together care for their children, with some having to reduce their work hours, or leave the workforce altogether.

What is in the Executive and One-House Budgets for CCAP?

The Executive Budget proposes \$1.2B in new, recurring funding for CCAP - the largest increase to CCAP in NYS history. The Assembly one-house budget adds \$18.7 million to end the inequitable rule excluding parents' whose income is less, on average, than the minimum wage from eligibility for CCAP for their children.

Recommendation: Add additional state funds to ensure communities across the state can clear the CCAP waitlist and meet demand (approximately \$1.14 billion); adopt the Assembly proposal to make supplemental CCAP funds for counties outside of New York City more easy to access to ensure counties can reopen enrollment without delay (budget language change); adopt the Assembly proposal to end the inequitable minimum earning requirement (Article VII language and an additional \$18.7 million).

Why is fully funding CCAP Critical to an Equitable Rollout of Universal Child Care?

With insufficient investment in CCAP to end waitlists and meet projected need, many low-income families will not benefit from this initial stage of the universal child care rollout. Imagine a low-income family with a baby, and a 4-year old. Even if the 4-year old is enrolled in pre-K, until the family gets off the waitlist and enrolled in CCAP to afford care for their baby, and afterschool care for their 4-year old, the parent(s) will struggle to find the care they need to return to work.

The CCAP/ voucher waitlists are playing a role in keeping compensation for child care educators low by leaving programs with empty seats, particularly family-based programs. A November 2025 report by the New School's Center for New York City Affairs, [Dignified Pay for Quality Care](#), found that while home-based provider average hourly wages in 2023 were \$7.33 for Family Child Care and \$5.98 per hour for Group Family Child Care, their hourly wage increased threefold if they had full, or close to full enrollment, to \$18.84 and \$17.62, respectively. However, only 29 percent of the FCC providers and 51 percent of GFCC providers surveyed had "good enrollment" in 2023. Across the state, licensed home-based providers serve 38% of families receiving CCAP/vouchers, leaving this modality of care particularly vulnerable to experiencing low-enrollment because families are languishing on a CCAP/voucher waitlist.

What about Pre-K, 3-K, 2-K and Community Care pilots?

To ensure a successful rollout of universal child care and pre-K, New York must get it right at the outset by fully funding CCAP, and increasing workforce pay this year. There are countless [examples](#) from around the country, and from communities in New York - including New York City - of pre-K expansions destabilizing the fragile child care sector, leading to reduced child care and pre-K capacity in community-based child care and pre-K programs. Among the reasons for this dynamic is that it is less expensive to care for older children than babies and toddlers because they require less one-on-one, constant attention, and because pre-K salaries in public schools are often higher and pull early childhood educators from community-based programs, leaving them even more understaffed.

The Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC) is a statewide coalition of parents, educators, and advocates who believe that every family in New York State deserves high quality, universal child care, and that every child care educator deserves to earn a thriving wage. The campaign was founded in 2017 and advocates at the state and federal level for investment in child care that best serves the needs of New York's families and child care educators.