



**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2026-27 Executive Budget
Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing
January 29, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the 2026-27 New York State Executive Budget. The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy is a 153-year-old statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to policy analysis and advocacy in support of public systems that meet the needs of disenfranchised populations and people living in poverty.

Among the Schuyler Center's top priorities for New York children and families is to achieve a high-quality, coordinated, early education and afterschool system that is universally available to all families with children ages zero through 12, and free to all. Universal access to high quality pre-K and child care has myriad benefits for children, including improved health outcomes and kindergarten-readiness, and is among the most effective strategies for reducing child poverty and shoring up the economic security of families with children.^{1, 2}

We are pleased the Executive Budget proposes significant new investments in pre-K and 3-K, the child care assistance program, and to launch universal child care pilots, including 2-Care in New York City and community care models for children ages zero to three in three communities outside of New York City. If these proposals are included in the final budget, along with additional funding to ensure adequate and equitable compensation for the early childhood and afterschool workforce, and are carefully implemented, they will be game-changing for New York families, and will move New York State decisively closer to achieving statewide universal pre-K, child care, and afterschool.

Pre-K

The **Executive Budget** proposes a \$431 million increase for universal pre-K aid for the 2026-27 school year, as well as \$131 million to fill gaps for pre-K for three-year-olds in New York City, for a **total increase of \$561 million for pre-K**, bringing total proposed state pre-K investment to approximately \$1.761 billion. The proposal includes raising rates for all school districts to \$10,000 per child or their selected Foundation Aid per pupil amount, whichever is higher.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- **Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest approximately \$561 million to expand universal Pre-K aid for 4-year olds outside of New York City and to fill gaps for pre-K for three-year-olds in New York City, and to create a uniform statewide Pre-K grant funded**

at either \$10,000 per pupil or the district's current selected Foundation Aid per pupil, whichever is greater.

- Ensure expansions of Pre-K along with 3K and 2-Care in NYC are undertaken in a manner that fully integrates center and home-based child care programs into the expansions. This is necessary to ensure expansions do not unintentionally destabilize child care programs and lead to a greater shortage of infant and toddler seats – which are already in short supply. We cannot meet the affordability challenges facing New York families, nor achieve the state's goal of universal child care and pre-K, unless we act with intention to ensure we don't expand care for one age group of children at the expense of other age groups. Instead, we must both protect existing care capacity for children ages zero through 12, and build out new capacity to meet the needs of all age groups, along with the needs of children with disabilities, and of parents who need non-traditional hour care.
- One important way to prevent pre-K expansions from destabilizing child care programs is to ensure that community based child care programs and home-based child care programs have a fair opportunity to participate in pre-K. Currently, school districts are required to contract with CBOs in their district for at least 10% of seats, and are permitted to keep a percentage of the pre-K per child grant amount to cover administrative costs. As these pre-K expansions are implemented, we urge the state to consider increasing the minimum percentage of seats school districts must contract with CBOs to provide, and lowering the maximum amount of administrative costs the districts may keep for administrative costs.

Early childhood 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. Notably, this workforce includes many pre-K teachers who teach pre-K in community based settings. In 2023, one-time [retention bonuses](#) were awarded to child care educators: \$3,000 full time; \$2,300 afterschool. In 2024, bonuses were \$2,250 for full time educators; \$1,725 for afterschool.

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. In contrast, the median annual salary for full-time New York workers is approximately [\\$67,000](#) per year.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

Build upon the Governor's strong child care and pre-K proposals by providing ongoing and reliable compensation supplements to all members of the child care workforce until New York has achieved statewide universal child care that pays providers adequate rates to pay the workforce a thriving wage. (\$1.2 billion)

- Create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income (Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund S.5533 (Brisport)/A.492 (Hevesi)); and
- Develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.

Child care assistance and universal child care pilots

While not a part of the education budget, it is important to note the importance of the Executive Budget's proposal to significantly increase sustained investment in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which indicates a commitment to prioritizing low-income families as the state builds toward statewide universal child care and pre-K. In addition, the Community Care models and 2-Care (in NYC) represent an important step away from the traditional model of providing child care only to families that meet onerous income, immigration status, and activities tests toward a model that recognizes child care is a public good that should be available to all children and families.

The Schuyler Center urges the Legislature to:

- Adopt the Governor's proposed \$1.2 billion recurring investment in New York's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and add additional funding as needed to ensure no eligible families are turned away or placed on waitlists.
- Adopt the Governor's proposal to invest \$60 million to support Community Care models in three communities, and add more funds if necessary to ensure they are truly universal, and are treated not as one-time pilots, but as a bridge to statewide universal child care. All modalities of care—including center and home-based child care providers—must be able to participate in these models.

About Us

Schuyler Center is the home of and participates in the leadership of [Empire State Campaign for Child Care](#), a campaign that advocates for universal child care in New York State and the compensation child care providers deserve, and [New York Can End Child Poverty](#), a group dedicating to ending child poverty in New York. Schuyler Center also participates in leadership of the Child and Family Wellbeing Action Network (CFWAN), advocates, providers, and people impacted by New York's child welfare system working toward a vision of New York where the state prioritizes investing in and implementing policies that strengthen and support children, youth, and families; and serves on Steering Committees for *Kids Can't Wait*, focused on reform and improvement of New York's Early Intervention program and *Medicaid Matters New York*, focused on making sure Medicaid works for the people it covers. Dede Hill, Schuyler Center's

Director of Policy, was an appointee to New York's Child Care Availability Task Force and Kate Breslin is an appointee to New York's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council.

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¹ Taryn Morrissey. The Effects Of Early Care And Education On Children's Health. April 25, 2019.
<https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/briefs/effects-early-care-and-education-children-s-health>

² Kyle Ross, Kennedy Andara. Center for American Progress. Child Care Expenses Push an Estimated 134,000 Families Into Poverty Each Year. Oct 31, 2024. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-expenses-push-an-estimated-134000-families-into-poverty-each-year/>