



## **Written Testimony on New York’s Child-Serving Workforce Crisis 2026–27 State Budget Hearings: Labor/Workforce Development Committee**

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on the workforce crisis affecting New York’s child-serving systems from birth through high school graduation. This crisis can be addressed with a smart workforce development initiative supported by **Bill A10196** sponsored by Assembly member Bronson.

This crisis is no longer limited to classrooms and child care centers. It now represents a direct threat to New York’s economic competitiveness, workforce participation, and return on public investment in education and human services. Without coordinated, sustained action, workforce instability will continue to constrain growth, weaken communities, and undermine decades of public investment.

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### **The Scope of the Crisis**

New York is facing an unprecedented shortage of qualified professionals across child care, early education, and K–12 systems.

Over the next decade, the state will need more than 180,000 new educators, a figure that grows substantially when child care workers, teacher assistants, and school leaders are included.

Current indicators demonstrate the severity of the challenge:

- More than 16,500 children lacked access to child care in 2025 due to staffing shortages
- 83% of school districts report shortages in special education preschool services, resulting in long waitlists and delayed legally required supports
- Over 20% of teachers in high-poverty schools are teaching outside their certification areas
- 33% of current teachers are eligible to retire within five years, creating an imminent replacement crisis
- Teacher preparation enrollment has declined by 53% since 2015, sharply reducing the future supply of educators

Statewide surveys further indicate that 90% of districts identify educator recruitment as a major concern, demonstrating that this is not a localized problem, but a systemic labor market failure.

At the same time, median child care wages in New York remain near \$38,000 annually—more than \$20,000 below the statewide median wage—making recruitment and retention increasingly difficult in this labor market.

Together, these trends reflect a structural breakdown in workforce supply that cannot be resolved through isolated programs or short-term funding.

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## Why This Matters for New York's Economy

Careers serving children from birth through high school graduation underpin every major industry sector. When child care centers and schools lack qualified staff:

- Parents reduce work hours or exit the labor force
- Employers experience higher turnover and productivity losses
- Regional economies lose skilled workers
- State investments in Pre-K, Head Start, and K–12 systems underperform
- Students exit high school without the prerequisite skills needed by the workforce of tomorrow

National labor force data consistently show that access to reliable child care is among the strongest predictors of parental employment, particularly for women and low-income families. In New York, workforce instability in child-serving sectors functions as a hidden tax on economic growth.

Rural communities, high-poverty districts, and small employers are disproportionately affected, deepening regional and socioeconomic inequities.

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## The Cost of Inaction

Without coordinated statewide intervention, New York will continue to experience:

- Expansion of child care deserts
- Increasing class sizes and course cancellations
- Rising special education compliance issues
- Accelerating educator turnover
- Declining workforce participation

These outcomes will require escalating emergency expenditures for substitute staffing, remediation, and crisis management—costs that exceed the proposed initiative investment as described in ***Assembly Bill A10196***.

The choice before the Legislature is not whether to invest, but whether to invest proactively or continue paying substantially more through fragmented crisis responses.

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## A Strategic \$50 Million Investment

We respectfully urge the Legislature to allocate \$50 million in the 2026–27 State Budget to support the statewide design, expansion, and coordination of:

- Registered Apprenticeship Programs to meet workforce needs in the child-serving sector from birth through high school graduation
- Grow-your-own workforce pipelines
- Strategic staffing and retention models

- Streamlined credentialing for career changers
- Statewide technical assistance and program management

This investment will:

- Increase workforce supply at lower cost than emergency hiring and crisis management
- Reduce turnover-related replacement costs
- Expand provider capacity within current facilities
- Leverage federal and philanthropic funding
- Improve long-term system stability

Workforce infrastructure, like transportation or broadband, requires sustained public investment for the public good. This proposal establishes that foundation for child-serving careers.

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### **Why Apprenticeships and Pipelines Work**

Registered Apprenticeships, as a proven workforce model, represent the most reliable and accessible pathway into high-need occupations because they:

- Combine paid employment with credentialed training
- Reduce student loan dependence
- Improve program completion rates
- Increase retention after certification
- Anchor talent in local communities

Since 2020, EDHUBNY-supported initiatives have helped register 38 educator and child care apprenticeship programs serving more than 105 candidates statewide. Demand now far exceeds current capacity.

With appropriate investment, these programs can scale to serve up to 750 apprentices, creating sustainable regional pipelines aligned to employer needs.

Nationally, apprenticeship completion rates in education and human services far exceed traditional preparation pathways—with impact ranging from 70% to as high 94%.

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### **What We Know Works**

#### **1. Strong Workforce Pipelines**

- Coordinated pathways starting in high school to community college and beyond into child-serving careers`
- Stackable credentials supporting economic mobility
- Partnerships among providers, districts, BOCES, and higher education

## 2. Paid Apprenticeships

- Earn-and-learn models tied to real workplaces
- Reduces financial barriers to entry
- Community-rooted recruitment strategies

## 3. Retention and Stabilization Strategies

- Competitive compensation supports
- Clear advancement pathways
- Coaching, mentoring, and peer networks

## 4. Ongoing Technical Assistance

- Compliance and operational support
- Workforce planning assistance
- Data-informed improvement systems

## 5. Strategic Staffing Innovation

- Team-based instructional models
- Expanded leadership roles for experienced educators
- Improved working conditions and job satisfaction

Research from multiple states demonstrates that educators improve most in collaborative, supported environments, with corresponding gains in retention and student achievement.

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### **Statewide Implementation and Accountability**

EDHUBNY's statewide partnerships with NYSDOL, NYSED, OCFS, SUNY, CUNY, districts, BOCES, and community providers position this initiative for immediate, high-quality implementation.

Funds will support:

- Employer incentives and tuition assistance
- Candidate-centered wraparound services
- Program coordination, technical assistance and monitoring
- Data collection and performance reporting
- Sustainable, replicable workforce pipelines

These systems ensure accountability, equity, access and return on investment.

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### **Statewide Impact and Return on Investment**

Targeted investment in workforce systems will produce measurable returns:

- Increased provider capacity
- Reduced staff turnover
- Improved instructional quality
- Greater family access
- Higher labor force participation
- Stronger regional economies

Every additional stable educator or child care provider supports dozens of families and enables hundreds of work hours annually, compounding economic benefits statewide.

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### **Conclusion and Call to Action**

New York has the institutional capacity, policy infrastructure, and leadership necessary to solve this challenge. What is required now is sustained, coordinated investment.

Since 2020, EDHUBNY has been nationally recognized for pioneering educator and child-serving workforce development and successfully building cross-sector partnerships that span agencies and regions.

A strategic investment in educator and child-serving workforce development—including paid apprenticeships, retention supports, and technical assistance—offers a scalable solution to strengthen service delivery and ensure that every child in New York is served by a well-trained, stable workforce.

Therefore, we urge the Legislature to support this \$50 million appropriation, as outlined in **Assembly Bill A10196**, in the 2026–27 State Budget to stabilize the child-serving workforce, protect public investments, and secure New York’s economic future.

The consequences of inaction will be significant. The benefits of leadership will endure for generations.

*Respectfully Submitted: Colleen McDonald, Executive Director, EDHUBNY*