

# Workforce Shortages and Low Wages Are Deepening New York's Child Care Challenges

From January 27 – February 12, 2025, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care surveyed more than 1,250 child care programs\* from across New York State on the impact staffing shortages\*\* have had on their programs' ability to serve families in their area.

**A \$1.2B investment in a permanent child care workforce compensation fund in this year's budget will help NY families find the care they need.**

**Our 1,253 respondents, representing 61 counties in New York State, reported:**



**16,592**

**children cannot receive care in their programs due to the workforce shortage**



**13,222**

**children are known to be on their waiting lists\*\*\***



**2216**

**staff positions are unfilled in respondents' child care programs**



**250**

**classrooms are completely closed in respondents' center and afterschool programs due to understaffing**

**57%**

**of respondents are currently understaffed**

The average wage for a child care worker in New York [\\$37,970/annual / \\$18.26/hour in May 2023](#)  
Family child care educators earned less than minimum wage, approximately [\\$10.49/ hour in 2021](#)

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I am constantly losing staff for better paying jobs and benefits and not able to replace them. **I have never been so short-handed, and we have been in business for 50 years.**

- Carie-jo Cleary, Provider



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## Licensed capacity is not the whole story:

New York's current licensed child care capacity is 812,160, surpassing pre-pandemic capacity for the first time by about 18,000. While this marks an important milestone in New York's recovery, it is not the whole story -- as the data from this survey demonstrates. Specifically, we know from this survey data that the number of children being served is significantly less than licensed capacity, in many cases because of staffing shortages.

Survey respondents report being unable to compete with school districts, retail, and food service industries, which offer higher salaries and more attractive benefits. This disparity is leaving many child care positions unfilled for months, with potential applicants citing the low wages that child care programs can offer as the reason they decline offers.

## Respondents experiencing a staffing shortage reported that:

**86%**

of home-based child care programs could provide much-needed care for **infants and toddlers** if they were fully staffed.

**51%**

reduce capacity or close classrooms on short notice due to staff absences, leaving families to scramble for last minute care or miss work.

**3 in 10**

**close their programs earlier** than they used to due to staffing shortages.

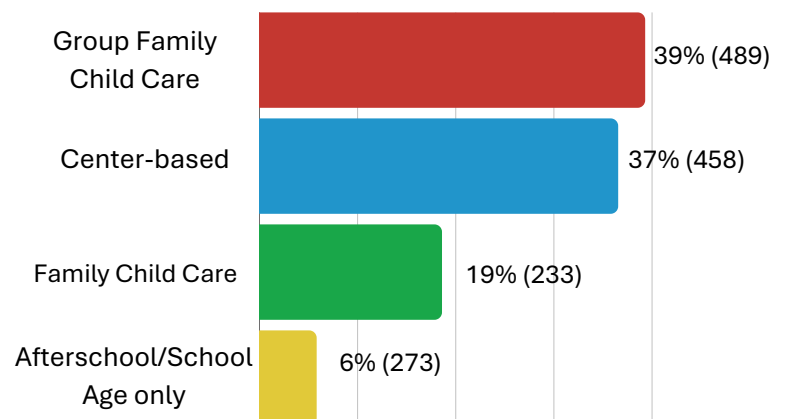


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Having staffing shortages creates a safety risk for our children, and this is unacceptable to the families that we serve. We need additional permanent staffing funds to hire, retain, and train potential employees, so they can make this a career, rather than a job!

-Jason Wellington, Watervliet

## Respondents' Child Care Program by Type



\*Respondents were asked to include all programs they own, operate, or oversee.

\*\*“Staffing shortage” is defined as one or more staff roles that are currently unfilled.

\*\*\*Waiting lists are fully voluntary. Many programs do not keep a waiting list. Others cap their waiting lists at a number of their choice.