



Universal High-Quality Child Care Requires Paying the Workforce a Thriving Wage

The Promise

To achieve universal child care, New York must invest in the child care workforce. Ongoing, publicly-funded compensation supplements are the only way to raise compensation without increasing tuition, which is already too high for most families to afford. A fairly-paid child care workforce is vital to ensure the continuity of care and nurturing, culturally-responsive interactions that children need to thrive.

The Challenge

Educators and support staff are the heart and soul of child care, and yet, most are paid poverty wages and minimal benefits. Child care in New York (and across the nation) is a public-private market. Programs are financed primarily by tuition paid by parents, along with public Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidies paid on behalf of some lower-income families; neither are sufficient to pay the child care workforce a thriving wage. Inadequate wages and benefits have made it challenging for programs to recruit and retain staff, which in turn has resulted in many programs operating at less than full licensed capacity, deepening the state's existing capacity shortfall.

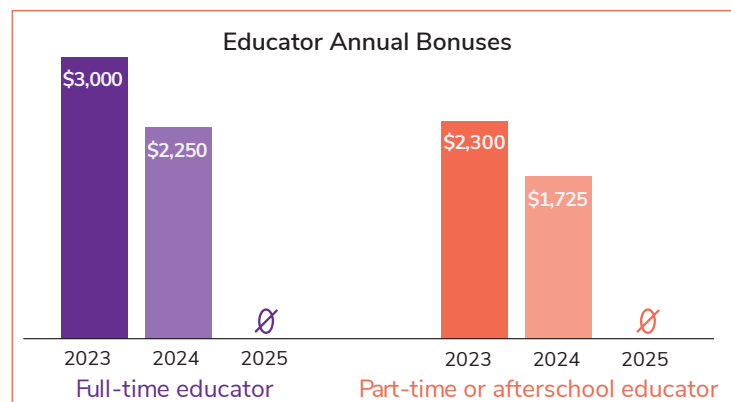
What We Know

The child care workforce and the children they care for are negatively impacted by the inadequate compensation paid to child care educators and support staff.

Children benefit from consistent, high-quality interactions with well-prepared, well-supported educators.¹ Unfortunately, turnover in early childhood education is extraordinarily high due in large part to low wages and minimal access to benefits.² High turnover can cause children—especially young children—to experience anxiety and stress because they cannot bond with their caregivers, and can interfere with children's social-emotional development, including self-regulation skills.³

The median wage of child care educators in New York—a workforce that identifies as 94% women, and majority people of color—is \$37,675/annually or \$18.11/hour. They earn less than 96% of occupations in New York State.⁴ In 2025, many educators essentially experienced a pay cut because New York ended bonuses it began providing the child care workforce during the pandemic.

2025: New York ended child care workforce retention grants program

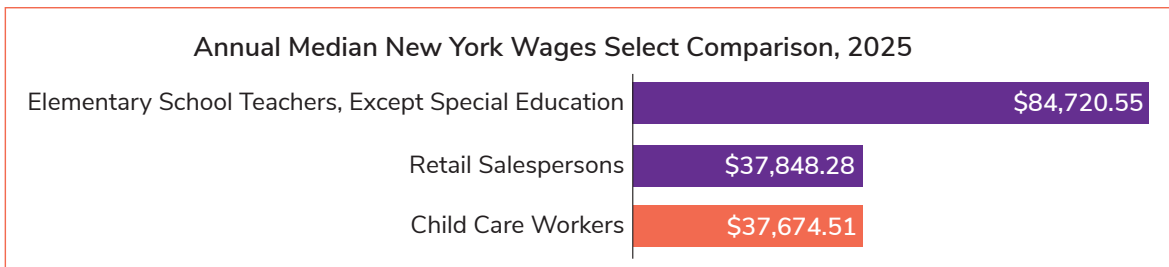


Source: New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Guidance Document: Workforce Retention Grant Additional Award. (2024); Solicitation of Interest (SOI), Workforce Retention Grant Program. (2023).

2027: New Medicaid rules will impact many members of the child care workforce

Due to low pay and minimal access to benefits, nearly 40% of New York's child care workforce relies on Medicaid for health coverage.⁵ Soon, they will be subject to new, frequent recertification and work reporting requirements that are expected to cause many to lose coverage.

The median annual salary of New York child care educators is less than half that of elementary school teachers and slightly less than retail salespersons



Source: New York State Department of Labor. (2025). Occupational Wages for New York State. U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration.

Staffing shortages driven by low workforce compensation make it difficult for New York families to find child care that meets their needs in their communities. While total licensed child care capacity in New York State has slightly surpassed pre-pandemic levels, home-based child care capacity is continuing a long decline. The families most impacted by this decline are those residing in rural communities, Black and brown families, and families needing care during the early mornings, nights, and weekends.^{6,7} Further, licensed capacity does not tell the full story because many licensed slots are left unfilled due to staffing shortages.⁸

Total Licensed Child Care Capacity in New York State Has Slightly Surpassed Pre-Pandemic Levels. Capacity in Home-Based Child Care Settings Continues to Decline.

	2019	2024	Change in capacity (number)	Change in capacity (percentage)
Center-Based Child Care	313,951	327,372	+13,421	+ 4.27%
Home-Based – Family Child Care	26,340	18,889	- 7,451	-28.29%
Home-Based – Group Family	123,034	131,389	+ 8,335	+ 6.79%
Center-Based School-Age Child Care	327,578	334,510	+ 6,932	+ 2.12%
Total	790,903	812,160	+21,257	+ 2.69%

Source: New York State Department of Labor. (2025). Occupational Wages for New York State. U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration.

State Policy Solutions

- ▶ Create a state-funded child care worker compensation supplement to move all members of the workforce closer to wage parity with members of the public school workforce. This fund can sunset once universal child care is fully implemented, and paying rates high enough to pay the workforce a thriving wage.
- ▶ Develop a plan to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation levels.
- ▶ Establish a health insurance premium support program for child care workers; ensure New York child care workers on Medicaid have guidance to meet all new requirements.

“ This year, I had to cut my staff's salaries after New York discontinued the workforce grants it paid to child care programs in 2023 and 2024. Some couldn't afford to stay and left for better-paying jobs. These devoted educators love their work—but love doesn't pay the bills. —Howard, Child Care Center Director, Westchester ”

¹ McMullen, M.B. (2018). *The Many Benefits of Continuity of Care for Infants, Toddlers, Families, and Caregiving Staff*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.
² Office of Budget and Policy Analysis. (2025). *Lingering Challenges in the Child Care Sector (pg. 8)*. Office of the New York State Comptroller.
³ Russell, N. (2025). *The Impact of Teacher Turnover on Child Development and Learning*.
⁴ Schuyler Center computations based on *NYS Department of Labor OEWS Employment and Wage* Data (updated to the first quarter of 2025).
⁵ Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy Center for Children and Families. (2025). *Medicaid is a Critical Support for the Early Childhood Education Workforce*.
⁶ National Women’s Law Center. (2018). *Family, Friends, And Neighbor Care: Facts and Figures*.
⁷ First Five Years Fund. (2024). *Inaugural Rural Child Care Forum Highlights the Administration’s Commitment to Serving Rural Communities*.
⁸ Schuyler Center and Empire State Campaign for Child Care. (2023). *Staffing Shortages Due to Low Wages Are Driving the Child Care Crisis in New York*.
*For all sources and computations go to: <https://scaany.org/sonyc-sources-2026/>