The recently approved 2024-25 state budget continues and enhances initiatives to expand access to affordable child care, invest in New York State’s child care workforce and support working families as part of the historic $7 billion, four-year investment in child care services.

“OCFS is profoundly grateful to Governor Kathy Hochul and the state legislature for their unwavering dedication and commitment to improving child care services statewide. This historic investment conveys a strong message that child care supports for our families are of top priority. We look forward to continuing to work on innovative and collaborative strategies that propel New York State toward a truly equitable, universal child care system,” said OCFS Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden.

The budget allocations include:

- More than doubling funding to $1.8 billion for the Child Care Assistance Program which subsidizes the cost of child care for eligible families, based on family income.
- More than $100 million in funding for the new LEAPS after-school grant program.
- $50 million in capital grants for the construction or expansion of child care centers.
- $50 million in business tax credits for workplace-based child care expansion.
- $1 million in continued support for the Business Navigator program in each of the 10 Economic Development Council regions to assist businesses that help employees identify child care options.
- $280 million in underutilized federal pandemic funds allocated to the Workforce Retention Grant program, which will provide recruitment funding and bonus payments to nearly 14,000 child care providers statewide.
- $5 million to pilot staffed Family Child Care Networks in various regions to offer technical support and coaching to home-based child care providers, who are mostly women of color and make up the largest component of the state’s child care workforce.

NYS Senate Votes Unanimously to Confirm Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden as New OCFS Commissioner

Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden was confirmed by the New York State Senate on May 15 as OCFS commissioner. Dr. Harris-Madden, who was the executive director of the Westchester County Youth Bureau for the past six years, had been serving as acting commissioner since April 8.

“I am deeply grateful to Governor Kathy Hochul and the Senate for entrusting me with the privilege to serve the children, youth and families of our great state,” said Commissioner Dr. Harris-Madden. “My passion to help others, drive equitable outcomes, and improve systems is inherent. My aim has
always been to seize the opportunity to highlight the good and work for continued improvement. In collaboration with our committed OCFS team members, I am eager to build meaningful opportunities that improve outcomes and enhance the overall well-being of all New Yorkers.”

Dr. Harris-Madden has spent more than 20 years working for community and government organizations serving youth and families. In her most recent position as executive director of the Westchester County Youth Bureau, she was responsible for managing a department that deploys financial and technical resources to hundreds of programs and contractors operated by nonprofit, private and municipal agencies that support children, youth and families within the 46 communities of Westchester County.

Before joining the Westchester County Youth Bureau, Dr. Harris-Madden served in four mayoral cabinets in the City of Mount Vernon, where she worked as an executive director and grants writer at the Mount Vernon Youth Bureau and helped to expand the city’s services significantly. She also previously served as assistant program director of the Urban League of Westchester, a federal and local grant reviewer, and a New York State 21st Century Community Learning Centers program evaluator.

Dr. Harris-Madden holds a doctorate in education and executive leadership, master’s degrees in business administration and human resources management, and a bachelor’s degree in English and African American studies.

The New York State Child Care Availability Task Force (CCATF) recently released its latest comprehensive report, *Making Child Care More Affordable, Accessible and Equitable for New Yorkers*, highlighting the state’s goal to begin developing a “road map” for a universal child care system open to all New York families.

The report comes on the heels of the passage of the state fiscal year 2025 budget which continues funding for the ongoing four-year, historic state investment of $7 billion to expand access to affordable child care, invest in New York State’s child care workforce, and support working families.

The first CCATF report was issued in May 2021, and New York State has made significant advances in child care since then. Governor Kathy Hochul reconvened the Task Force in March 2023 – under the leadership of co-chairs New York State Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon and then OCFS Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave – to evaluate the state’s progress and develop additional plans. The CCATF’s latest report has been transmitted to the Governor and state legislative leaders.

“Since the release of the Child Care Availability Task Force’s original report in May 2021, New York State has made strong progress in increasing equitable access to affordable child care by raising the child care eligibility limit to the federal maximum as well as investing $7 billion into supporting children and families,” the new Task Force report said. “However, the work is far from over. If New York State is to move towards universal child care, a strong framework and short-term changes are needed to develop and implement a statewide, universal system.”
Key recommendations in the newly released Task Force report include:

- Implement a permanent line of funding to support the child care workforce with increased wages and benefits.
- Increase support for workforce development and resources, including enhancing training opportunities.
- Implement multiyear funding for the Child Care Assistance Program and continue to expand eligibility for child care assistance.
- Increase the number of available quality child care providers who can meet the needs of diverse communities.
- Encourage corporate support for employees’ child care needs with such incentives as tax credits.
- Create an implementation plan and timeline to transition to a new system of universal child care.

The Task Force will continue to work on these issues throughout 2024 with a focus on its charge to advise New York State in developing a framework leading to a phased-in rollout of universal child care. “New York is poised and ready to lead the nation in rolling out universal child care – a strategy that will help support and nurture New York families, and ensure New York remains one of the best places in the nation to raise children,” the report said.

For more information about the Child Care Availability Task Force or to read the full report, please visit the Task Force webpage on the OCFS website.

New Associate Commissioner Named to the Division of Child Care Services

Emily Badalamente Meyer was appointed as a new associate commissioner in the OCFS Division of Child Care Services (DCCS), effective May 28, 2024. She will join the two current associate commissioners in DCCS, Erin Cassidy and Joy Connolly, in this new leadership role.

Previously, Meyer had been serving in the Governor’s Office, most recently as the assistant secretary for human services and mental hygiene. In addition, she worked on the state’s child care and early childhood policy agenda and was the Executive Chamber representative on the New York State Child Care Availability Task Force.

Meyer began work with the Executive Chamber in September 2018 as an Excelsior Fellow. In September 2020, she began a new fellowship working on human services and mental hygiene issues. In March 2021, Meyer took on the role of senior policy advisor to the governor for human services and mental hygiene.

In her new role at OCFS, Meyer will provide executive leadership and management while developing major early childhood care and education policy recommendations. She will also be the OCFS lead on the New York State Child Care Availability Task Force. She will also lead family engagement efforts and will work on policy implementation and system upgrades for the Child Care Assistance Program.

Meyer earned a master’s degree in public administration from the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, as well as a bachelor’s degree in political science from SUNY Oneonta.
The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) recently announced the distribution of a second round of child care workforce development and retention grants, totaling about $280 million, to eligible child care providers statewide.

The funds, which will be used to provide retention bonuses to eligible child care staff as well used to recruit and hire new staff, are part of New York State’s ongoing historic, four-year $7 billion investment to enhance child care services for New York families and make child care more affordable, accessible and equitable.

“This historic investment conveys a strong message that child care supports for our families are of top priority,” said OCFS Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden. “We look forward to continuing to work on innovative and collaborative strategies that provide the excellent child care services our families need to thrive.”

In May 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul announced a $500 million investment to bolster New York’s child care workforce through the Workforce Retention Grant program. Funding from the program will ultimately support up to 150,000 child care workers with bonus payments ranging from $1,725 to $2,250 for individual staff in caregiving roles, as well as provide funding to support child care programs’ efforts to recruit new staff, offer sign-on and referral bonuses, and more.

“New York State’s nation-leading commitment to child care is continuing to fund groundbreaking initiatives designed to support children, families and the child care workforce,” said Nora Yates, OCFS deputy commissioner for the Division of Child Care Services. “This additional round of workforce retention grants will reward our deserving providers by helping increase wages and assisting programs in recruiting and retaining staff, thereby aiding the stability of child care programs as the demand for services continues to grow.”

According to recent data collected by OCFS on the impact of the pandemic workforce investments, the majority of grant recipients increased the wages of their staff, in addition to providing bonuses.

More than $340 million in workforce retention grants were already awarded as of May 16, 2024 in the first round of payments. In January, Governor Hochul announced that up to another $280 million would be distributed in underutilized federal funding to support the child care workforce. Those additional payments were distributed in May to all current grant recipients who are in good standing and have met and continue to meet the grant requirements. All awarded funds must be spent by Sept. 1, 2024.

Details about the grant program can be found on the Workforce Retention Grant page on the OCFS website.
Supporting Children and Families

USDA’s Summer Nutrition Program (SUN) and Local Food Bank Finder

During the summer months, families now have more ways to get nutritious choices to their kids, when school meals are not available. The SUN program has a new website, which is also available in Spanish to learn about:

- SUN meals,
- SUN Meals-To-Go and
- SUN Bucks.

A list of local food banks and other assistance programs can be found by contacting the National Hunger Hotline, operated by Hunger Free America, or by calling toll-free Monday-Friday, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.:

- English: 866 3-HUNGRY (866-348-6479)
- Spanish: 877-8-HAMBRE (877-842-6273)

Sensory Gardening with Kids Activity Kit

Eager to get your kids involved with gardening, but unsure where to start? Kids Gardening has a new activity kit which is full of ideas on how to create your own sensory garden. This tool kit provides sensory garden tips and tricks, along with fun and engaging activities to try, even if you don’t have a garden space.

Child Care Assistance Program: Updated Annual Income Limits

Need help paying for child care? NYS OCFS Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides eligible families across New York State with financial assistance for child care. CCAP promotes early childhood learning and development while allowing parents/caretakers to work, get training or go to school. CCAP is administered by local departments of social services (LDSSs) in 57 counties and New York City.

On June 1, 2024, the income limits were updated.

For more information, including the annual income limit for families with more than seven people, visit the CCAP website.

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*from June 1, 2024-May 31, 2025
Child care providers statewide were honored the week of May 6-10 for the critical services they offer to working parents and their children. Governor Kathy Hochul issued a proclamation declaring the week as Early Childhood Educator and Child Care Provider Appreciation Week and state landmarks were lit in the primary colors of red, blue and yellow on the evening of Friday, May 10.

“Safe, high-quality child care is vital to allowing parents to work or attend educational programs that enhance their economic stability while their children are being cared for and nurtured in a developmentally appropriate program,” said Nora Yates, OCFS deputy commissioner for the Division of Child Care Services (DCCS).

DCCS also sent thank you cards to 15,561 state-licensed and registered child care providers.

The appreciation week celebration was held as the state is in the midst of a sweeping, four-year $7 billion plan to transform the child care system to make services more affordable, equitable and accessible. The initiatives include efforts to recruit and retain child care workers.

The OCFS regional offices also celebrated around the state through various celebrations in partnership with the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, unions and other partners.

Here is a round-up of photos from Early Childhood Educator and Child Care Provider Appreciation Week:
OCFS’s Division of Child Care Services (DCCS) is working with the New York State Department of Health (DOH) to educate child care providers about the current opioid crisis sweeping the nation.

Nora Yates, OCFS deputy commissioner for DCCS, recently worked with DOH to develop a short video for child care providers that discusses the signs of an opioid overdose and how to use naloxone (also known by the brand name Narcan), an opioid antagonist medication available over the counter that can be used to reverse an overdose in either adults or children.

In the video, Dr. Charles Gonzalez from DOH explains how to check for responsiveness in someone who may be experiencing overdose and how to use a naloxone nasal spray. “It’s always safe to administer naloxone to children,” he says.

Also in the video, public health specialist Axcel Barboza adds that naloxone does not cause harm even if it turns out it is not an overdose. Administering naloxone and calling 911 can help save a life, he says.

Yates said she would encourage child care providers to become trained in recognizing when someone might have been exposed to fentanyl or other opioids and how to administer naloxone nasal spray to help reverse an opioid overdose.

Training is available from the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). For more information and to register for training, visit the OASAS website.

Child care providers will need to amend their health care plan if they intend to obtain, stock, and potentially administer naloxone.

Child care providers can find more details in the Dear Provider letter dated Oct. 20, 2023. Watch for details about the release of the “DOH Naloxone Training for Day Care” video coming soon.

SED Webpage Fosters Positive Behaviors in Prekindergarten Classrooms

The NYS Education Department Office of Early Learning has developed a dedicated webpage entitled Positive Behavior Guidance that includes a series of resources for educators and families to help foster positive interactions in the prekindergarten environment. These resources include information, guidance, strategies, and frequently asked questions to build systems and practices that promote positive behavior and social-emotional learning within the prekindergarten classroom.
Tool Kit Helps Early Care Providers and Educators Keep Children’s Vaccinations Up to Date

Early childhood providers are pivotal in supporting routine vaccinations and protecting children, families and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. A new tool kit for providers is part of a series of tool kits being developed for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention’s broader “Let’s RISE” (Routine Immunizations on Schedule for Everyone) playbook. This actionable tool kit has been created to support providers across various settings, including center-based, family and group family, Head Start, early intervention and preschool/prekindergarten programs. The tool kit contains evidence-based strategies, tools and resources that can be used to communicate with families about helping protect children against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Training Updates

Allergy and Asthma Information Available

May was “National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month,” declared by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). This year’s theme was empowering individuals, families and the community to save and improve lives for people with asthma and allergies. A Dear Provider Letter was sent out, containing information about supporting allergy and asthma awareness, including an ongoing professional development opportunity to increase providers’ knowledge of asthma and allergies.

ECETP eLearning offers a course titled “Identifying and Responding to Anaphylaxis.” Here is the course description: As a child care professional, you play a critical role in protecting the health and safety of children in your program. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that allergies affect 1 in 13 children. These allergies have the potential to cause a life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. This training will help you learn about allergies, anaphylaxis prevention, and what to do during an allergy-related medical emergency.

eLearning courses are available 24/7 on the ECETP website. Visit ECETP: Find Trainings (albany.edu) to register.