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Making Room for Babies:

Which Early Education Centers Have Infants and Toddlers, and How Do They Make It Work?

By **Kendra Hurley**

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The Center for New York City Affairs is dedicated to advancing innovative public policies that strengthen neighborhoods, support families, and reduce poverty.

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Executive Summary: Lessons for The Field

Many child care centers have seen their enrollment of 4-year-olds decline due to New York City's pre-K expansion, which has dramatically grown the number of early education options available to kids this age. In response, some centers have become interested in "aging down" to serve younger children. This would be a tremendous boon in New York City, where quality affordable and subsidized infant and toddler care is in high demand and short supply, despite ample research demonstrating its potential to help families and their children in long-lasting, far-reaching ways.

However, it is difficult for centers to "age down." Serving infants and toddlers is more expensive than serving older children and preparing a center to take infants requires a significant investment upfront.

In its subsidized child care system, the City directly funds few center-based infant and toddler slots in relation to other age groups. Instead, it prioritizes the less expensive family child care programs for this age group, leaving families with little choice.

Here are ways that affordable and subsidized centers who do provide infant care make it work:

- Private centers that are growing new infant-toddler programs charge parents what it takes to cover the expenses. (See p. 19)
- Some centers with longstanding infant programs have special arrangements, like free rent, to help offset the cost of infant care. (See p. 2)
- In the subsidized child care system, being part of a larger, centralized organization that oversees many centers makes infant care more affordable. Today most city-contracted child care centers offering infant care are part of such large organizations. (See p. 7)
- Tapping into different funding streams is also key to making infant and toddler care work in subsidized centers. In gentrifying neighborhoods, a number of centers have filled slots that the City is not subsidizing with babies and toddlers whose parents pay for care out-of-pocket. When introduced to a center thoughtfully, these "private paying" families have the potential to not only bring in added revenue, but to help create a diverse program, which some researchers say is key to program quality. (See pp. 13 and 15)
- Early Head Start programs serving very young children come with ample federal funding and are a rare pocket of growth in center-based, subsidized infant and toddler care in the city. They also come with rigorous program guidelines, helping to ensure quality. Federally-funded partnerships between child care programs and Early Head Start programs are adding resources to help raise the quality of child care. (See p. 11)
- Infant care is very different from preschool. It demands a specific expertise, skill set, and support, yet few infant teachers receive training specific to caring for babies. Place-based models of professional development can be a cost-effective way of delivering individualized instruction. (See p. 17)

Introduction

Last summer, the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) ended its EarlyLearnNYC contract with the Pittsburgh-based child care chain Brightside Academy, which has built a business of opening spacious child care centers in poor neighborhoods. In New York, Brightside had racked up a record number of safety violations¹ and occasionally attracted unflattering press in the local news.² But as one of the largest providers of City-contracted child care for children younger than 2 years old (some 114 such children at the beginning of 2017), it also filled a tremendous need for low-income families. It provided them with an alternative to family child care programs, which are far more common, but which many parents consider less desirable than centers.

About three months after losing the City contract, many Brightside classrooms for 3- and 4-year-olds remained empty, or nearly empty. But the baby and toddler classrooms had been no problem to fill back up, according to enrollment staff at three of Brightside’s centers visited in September. After Brightside’s contract ended, its centers that provided slots through EarlyLearn, which is for low-income working families, simply switched gears to recruiting from another pool of low-income families—those who pay with child care vouchers, provided by another City agency, the Human Resources Administration. Some Brightside centers even started waiting lists for their infant and toddler rooms.

“For infants and 2-year-olds and 1-year-olds, there are always people looking for care,” explained one staff member at a Brooklyn center which lost about 50 families as a result of the terminated contract.

With Subsidized Infant Care Scarce, Families Lack Good Options

The fact that new families with babies and toddlers so swiftly filled the empty Brightside classrooms demonstrates just how steep the demand is for affordable and subsidized center-based child care for very young children, and how insufficient is the supply. In a world of starkly limited child care options for babies and toddlers, many parents must depend on mediocre providers. Even a blemished child care center with space for children younger than 2 can become a much-valued resource for working parents.

Subsidized care for babies and toddlers in early education centers has always been scarce in New York City³, and has become increasingly precious in recent years. Since the Bloomberg Administration’s 2012 implementation of EarlyLearnNYC—a sweeping overhaul of the City’s child care system—the number of children 0 to 2-years old receiving subsidized care in City-contracted child care centers has shrunk by 12 percent.⁴ In January 2017, there were just 7,397 0-2-year-olds receiving subsidized care in centers.

This lack of supply is not for lack of demand. Parents in low-income neighborhoods routinely identify a lack of affordable child care as one of their biggest barriers to securing a job or going back to school. Those with babies have the fewest options. In one survey, over two-thirds of families in New York City who qualified for subsidized child care and wished their children were in care had kids who were 2 years old or younger.⁵

Experts in early childhood development will tell you how quality child care can be a tremendous boon for low-income parents, their children, and

even society, propelling disadvantaged kids and their families toward more successful futures.⁶ They will also tell you that the first few years of life—when the brain is developing most rapidly—are the most important time to receive high-quality care. But typically, at no time during a child’s life will services be scarcer and will a child’s teacher be paid less, have less education, and receive less oversight and support.

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Parents hoping to find center-based care for children too young to speak often begin their search seeking quality. They want more oversight and accountability from their children’s caretakers than they find in family child care programs. Many also perceive centers as better-equipped to prepare young children for school.⁷ But those who cannot afford to pay the steep tuition for infant and toddler programs at private centers quickly find there is very little room in the affordable or subsidized ones.

Center-Based Infant Care Is Expensive, and the City Funds Few Slots

A large part of the challenge for early education centers wanting to make space for babies is that it is expensive, and the City directly funds very

few of these slots. Unlike rooms for preschoolers, rooms for babies and toddlers must be on the ground floor and have fire safety sprinkler systems, which require an upfront investment. Moreover, rooms for this age group have smaller numbers of children per room, and greater numbers of staff, adding to the daily cost.

In part because of the expense, the City does not significantly invest in infant and toddler care in center-based settings. During the EarlyLearn transition, ACS capped the number of City-contracted infant slots at just over 200, or about 26 rooms with eight babies each. ACS shifted to intentionally serving most children younger than 3 in the far less expensive, more loosely regulated home-based programs.⁸ Providers in these family child care programs have fewer educational requirements than teachers in centers, and the vast majority do not have sprinkler systems. In 2016, CNYCA looked at EarlyLearn’s efforts to provide home-based providers with increased supports and oversight, and found many of these efforts to be lacking.⁹

Recognizing the need for the City to build sustainable, high-quality, subsidized capacity in child care centers for infants and toddlers, the Center for New York City Affairs explored which subsidized centers have successfully built infant-toddler programs and how they’ve done it. Using data from ACS and the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, we identified where the infant-toddler programs are in subsidized and affordable early education centers. In this brief, through interviews with staff and stakeholders in the city’s early education field, we explore what qualities these programs have in common and what strategies have allowed them to build capacity for very young children. We also visited several centers providing infant care to see them in action.

We found that that the vast majority of centers providing subsidized infant care are part of larger organizations that operate many centers, which allows the “hub” organization to fill holes in a program’s budget and for resources to be shared across multiple programs. It is also administratively easier for ACS to concentrate a large number of slots in a smaller number of organizations. (See p. 10)

Among standalone centers that provide affordable or subsidized infant care but are not part of large organizations, some have special arrangements that keep costs lower for parents as well as the operators. For instance, Hanson Place Child Development Center in Brooklyn has a well-regarded infant and toddler program that is considered reasonably priced for its downtown location. That’s in large part because the State provides it free space in exchange for the center’s prioritizing child care slots for State employees, who pay on a sliding scale based on their incomes.

Similarly, the Future of America Learning Center in the South Bronx, which has a reputable toddler program, offers a sliding scale to hospital and nursing home workers whose union helps to subsidize the cost of their child care.

Sherry Cleary, executive director of the Early Childhood Professional Development Institute at the City University of New York (CUNY), thinks it would behoove subsidized early education programs to consider how they could create similar arrangements with corporations or even job training programs that could help to sustain a program. “Any number of programs could approach a larger company across the street and say, ‘How about you buy 10 percent of my seats at a premium and I’ll keep them open for your staff?’” she says.

Our reporting also turned up other strategies that centers providing subsidized infant and toddler

care employed to make it work, such as diversifying their funding streams by accepting various types of payments or subsidies, or by providing Early Head Start, a federal program that has been modestly growing slots for infants and toddlers. (See p. 11 and 13). None of these strategies is adding capacity at scale, but collectively they provide a set of tools to slowly adapt centers for younger kids. Each of these approaches also has the potential to improve quality of care as well.

To this end, we look at an example of how one Brooklyn neighborhood has come together to increase quality without spending a lot of money. (See p. 17) And we provide a snapshot of what center-based infant care can look like when cost is not an issue. (See p. 19)

A conversation that arose repeatedly during our research is how the City’s precious capacity for infant and toddler care is being impacted, and in some cases unintentionally undermined, by the recent expansion of universal pre-Kindergarten. In centers with baby and toddler care, rooms for older children have long been what researchers refer to as the “bread and butter”¹⁰ of early education centers, helping offset the higher costs of the infant and toddler care.

But with pre-K expansion introducing far more options for 4-year-olds, many early education centers have been losing students. They are also losing teachers to the pre-K programs in public schools or standalone pre-K centers run by the City’s Department of Education, where teachers are better paid and work fewer months each year. Some worry that if the “3-K” expansion Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to institute is implemented without attention to child care centers, these lean operations will falter. If centers close as a result, the city will lose precious capacity to serve babies—a capacity which, once gone, will prove very difficult to get back. ❖

Subsidized Child Care Options for Infant and Toddlers

There are three types of subsidized child care options that allow income-eligible families to offset the prohibitive costs of infant and toddler child care care: EarlyLearn programs; Early Head Start programs that contract directly with Head Start; or vouchers used to pay for child care.

TYPES OF SUBSIDY	WHO IS ELIGIBLE	HOW IT WORKS	CHILD CARE OPTIONS
VOUCHERS	Families receiving public assistance (as mandated by federal law) or transitioning off of public assistance, as well as a small number of low-income families who do not qualify for public benefits	Legally, parents may use their vouchers to pay for any child care arrangement they choose.	<p>Child care centers that accept vouchers, including EarlyLearn centers as well as some private and preschool programs, serve close to 4,500 0-2-year-olds enrolled with vouchers.</p> <p>DOHMH-licensed family child care programs, including EarlyLearn family child care programs, provide care in private homes and serve close to 8,000 0-2-year-olds enrolled with vouchers, over 93 percent who are in group family child care programs, where a provider hires an assistant to serve more children.</p> <p>Informal—but unlicensed—family child care (also called friends, family, and neighbor care) serve just under 3,000 0-2-year-olds.</p>
EARLYLEARN	Low-income families earning no more than 275 percent of the poverty line and either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. work 20 or more hours per week; 2. have a child receiving protective or preventive child welfare services; 3. attend an approved school or training program 	ACS contracts with community-based organizations to directly fund a network of providers that have child care and early education programs. Many have center-based care as well as family child care networks, which oversee family child care programs.	<p>EarlyLearn center-based programs funded by ACS and licensed by the DOHMH serve less than 3,000 0-2-year-olds. (These programs can provide both child care and Early Head Start.)</p> <p>EarlyLearn family child care programs provided in private homes and that are licensed by DOHMH and belong to EarlyLearn networks serve over 5,200 0-2-year-olds, about 85 percent who are in group family child care programs.</p>
EARLY HEAD START	Primarily for families below the federal poverty line (FPL).	The federal government funds EHS programs and contracts directly with providers	Early education centers and family child care providers served close to 2,000 expectant mothers, toddlers, and infants outside of EarlyLearn in 2013, a number that is likely higher today.

Source for enrollment numbers: ACS, Public Advocate’s “Policy Report: Child Care in NYC.”

Changes in Enrollment by Program Type and Age

This table shows five categories of subsidized programs and the changes in enrollment between January 2012 and January 2017. The child care landscape in New York City underwent dramatic changes during that five-year span, including the institution of the EarlyLearn system for contracted care and the expansion of universal pre-Kindergarten. Moreover, many Head Start programs serving over 5,000 children switched from City contracts to direct federal funding and oversight, so these are not included in the 2017 numbers.

Enrollment across the system has decreased by 17 percent. The largest decrease in enrollment is a 43 percent decrease of 3- and 4-year-olds, which has continued steadily since 2012 due to the combination of many Head Start programs moving to direct federal oversight as well as pre-K expansion, which created more early education options for 4-year-olds outside of the City's subsidized child care system.

Enrollment of 0-2-year-olds has decreased overall by over 7 percent. This change includes a large drop of over 52 percent in the number of families using vouchers to pay for informal child care. This decline has only been partially offset by more families choosing to use vouchers in licensed family child care programs, most often group family child care programs. Total enrollment of 0-2-year-olds in centers has dropped by about 6 percent, or 460 children, largely because EarlyLearn diverted infants and toddlers away from early childhood centers and into family child care programs.

Contracted family child care as a category has shifted younger, as intended by the EarlyLearn vision. Voucher-based family child care increased across all age groups, with the most pronounced increases in the older ages. Across all ages, far fewer families are using vouchers to secure informal care.

Center-based child care has declined across most categories since 2012. The two exceptions are care for 5-year-olds in contracted centers, which has increased by more than 250%, and center-based care using vouchers for school-age children. Both of these shifts may indicate that more early childhood programs are offering afterschool options for older children, possibly in response to their decline in 3- and 4-year-olds.

	Infants and Toddlers		Pre-School			School Age			TOTAL	
	0-2 years old		3-4 years old		5 years old	6 years old and up		All ages		
	Jan-12	Jan-17	Jan-12	Jan-17	Jan-12	Jan-17	Jan-12	Jan-17	Jan-12	Jan-17
Contracted Centers	3,314	2,921	33,874	19,333	270	993	22	0	37,480	23,247
Total Contracted FCC	4,358	5,239	2,616	2,095	402	17	839	64	8,215	7,415
Voucher Centers	4,543	4,476	6,992	6,403	2,840	2,583	12,212	14,746	26,587	28,208
Total Vouchers FCC	6,908	7,923	4,157	5,323	1,535	2,171	5,784	9,458	18,384	24,875
Vouchers IC	6,133	2,911	3,324	1,717	2,199	1,049	16,052	8,699	27,708	14,376
Total	25,256	23,470	50,963	34,871	7,246	6,813	34,909	32,967	118,374	98,121
% Change Since January 2012										
Contracted Centers		-11.9%		-42.9%		267.8%		-100.0%		-38.0%
Total Contracted FCC		20.2%		-19.9%		-95.8%		-92.4%		-9.7%
Voucher Centers		-1.5%		-8.4%		-9.0%		20.8%		6.1%
Total Vouchers FCC		14.7%		28.0%		41.4%		63.5%		35.3%
Vouchers IC		-52.5%		-48.3%		-52.3%		-45.8%		-48.1%
Total		-7.1%		-31.6%		-6.0%		-5.6%		-17.1%

Source: ACS

Notes: Contracted centers are child care centers that contract with the City through the EarlyLearn program. Family child care (FCC) is care provided to small groups of children in a provider's home. Informal care (IC) is usually provided by a child's relative, either in the child's home or in the caregiver's home; IC providers are not required to be licensed by the State.

Being Part of a Large Organization Makes Infant Care More Manageable

Subsidized child care has historically been run by neighborhood organizations, many operating one or two sites serving a few dozen families.¹¹ Their board members and employees typically came from the community, and while they were expected to know about children and the neighborhood, they didn't necessarily need to be experts at business management. The idea was that organizations rooted in a community could best understand and address the needs of local families.

“At large organizations, you are able to tap into expertise of individuals used to running models of service that are thoughtful and financially stable. You have the capacity to diversify your pool of funding and never be reliant on one funding source. You are capitalizing on a very strong infrastructure.”

Much of this changed five years ago when the City introduced its new early education system, EarlyLearnNYC. For the first time, City-funded child care programs had to respond to a formal call for contract proposals. Meeting the new system's reporting requirements begged a high degree of business know-how and technological savvy, and ACS's scoring process heavily weighted organizational capacity.¹²

As a result, a number of the small organizations lost their City contracts. Two years after EarlyLearn, 60 percent fewer single-site providers had contracts with ACS. Those that survived have struggled with meeting EarlyLearn's requirements. Meanwhile, larger social service organizations expanded to fill this vacuum, and have continued to grow, taking over program sites from smaller providers disadvantaged by EarlyLearn.

Today, the bulk of the City's meager capacity to serve infants in child care centers rests in these large “hub” organizations, which directors of these organizations say are better equipped than smaller ones to offset the high expenses inherent in infant care. In January 2017, over 25 percent of the just under 3,000 0-2-year-olds enrolled in child care centers through EarlyLearn were concentrated in only four large organizations: Friends of Crown Heights, All My Children, B'Above and Brightside Academy (which has since lost its contract). (See chart, p. 10)

Friends of Crown Heights, the largest, has a contract with ACS for over \$42 million, and has been growing its capacity for infants and toddlers by acquiring smaller, struggling child care centers even as EarlyLearn centers overall have been losing capacity. (Some of its infant slots, however, are filled with parents who pay out-of-pocket.)

At these large organizations, resources can be shared across sites and agencies can get discounts for buying equipment and supplies in bulk. Moreover, an organization serving hundreds of children can reserve a few rooms for eight infants

rather than 20 preschoolers without a huge loss in enrollment numbers and, with it, revenue.

In theory, large organizations can also support centers in raising program quality. Their centralized financial and fundraising operations can free up program directors to focus on supporting teachers—an incredibly important task that too often gets lost in the day to day shuffle of managing a center.

Such general support services can provide otherwise small centers with a foundation from which to dream big programmatically, taking risks they wouldn't otherwise—such as the risk built into providing infant care services.

“You are able to tap into expertise of individuals used to running models of service that are thoughtful and financially stable,” says Kathleen Hopkins, a vice president at NYU Langone De-



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Friends of Crown Heights does regular mailings with flyers such as this one as well as other outreach efforts to advertise their large network of 20 child care centers. Having the capacity to do this kind of outreach is just one way in which being part of a large multi-service organization benefits child care centers with infant care. Similarly, when the infant-toddler center Magical Years began recruiting private parents, it relied on NYU Langone to create marketing materials and to help draw up a new business plan. (See p. 18)

partment of Community Programs, which oversees five child care centers, two of which offer infant care. “You have the capacity to diversify your pool of funding and never be reliant on one funding source....You are capitalizing on a very strong infrastructure.”

The health and social service organization NYU Langone only opened one of its five child care centers, says Hopkins; it acquired the others. NYU Langone took over two of them at the request of the boards of directors of those centers. Hopkins says NYU Langone has helped these child care centers with negotiating leases, creating marketing materials, attracting private-paying families, and raising funds for staff professional development. But using such heft to build quality happens only if it’s an organizational priority. Too often, that’s not the case.

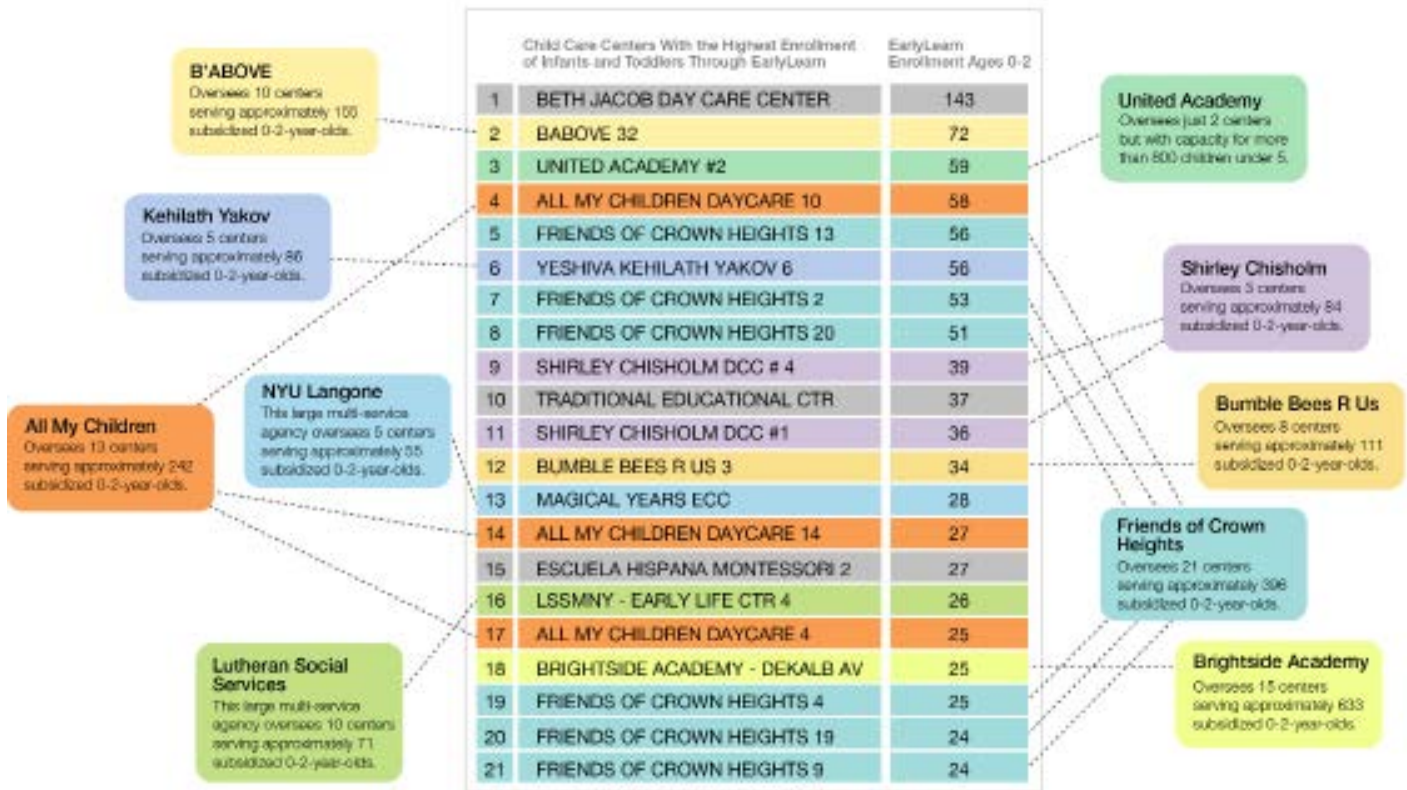
On visits to several centers under the purview of two of the City’s large providers of subsidized care for 0-2-year-olds, we observed that while procedures might be consistent across centers that were part of the same hub organization, quality varied widely center-by-center and even room-by-room.

One center’s infant room, for example, was everything one could hope for: attentive staff in slippered feet sat on the floor cooing back and forth with babies. But in another room at that center, two unhappy-looking toddlers sat confined in high chairs that were inexplicably placed alone in the center of the room. A third child cried on a mat. Meanwhile, two teachers sat across the room with two other kids, who were in chairs. The teachers talked just to each other, as if oblivious to the other kids and their distress.

“Some teachers are a disaster,” the enrollment staff of that center confided, adding that the organization overseeing their center made their priorities clear: when staff from the central office visited, it wasn’t the teachers or the classrooms they were interested in. Their focus stayed relentlessly on making revenue and meeting regulations to avoid fines.

Quality in the classrooms, then, was often hit or miss, he said, dependent almost entirely on the individual teachers. Now, with the influx of new Department of Education pre-K jobs, the good teachers, or at least the certified ones, were getting snatched up fast. ❖

Most Child Care Centers Providing Infant Care Are Part of Larger “Hub” Organizations



Source: DOHMH and ACS

Note: Enrollment numbers represent an approximate point-in-time count for January 2017. Subsidized enrollment of hub organizations represents both vouchers and EarlyLearn.

As of January 2017, of the 21 child care centers enrolling the most children age 2 and younger through EarlyLearn, all but three belonged to larger “hub” organizations. These organizations have additional child care centers and many provide social services beyond child care.

The 10 hub organizations to which the 21 highest-EarlyLearn-enrollment centers belonged enrolled a total of nearly 1,200 0- to 2-year-olds whose care was subsidized through EarlyLearn. This represented more than 40% of the total EarlyLearn center enrollment for 0- to 2-year-olds.

Centers with the highest enrollment of 0- to 2-year-olds using vouchers were also often connected to hub organizations. However, more of them were standalone centers than centers with high EarlyLearn enrollment. One reason for this may be that EarlyLearn entails many requirements that vouchers do not, so centers providing EarlyLearn care have higher costs.

Early Head Start: A “Tremendous Vehicle” for Building Capacity and Quality

New York City’s federal contract for thousands of Head Start seats and millions of dollars is set to expire in 2019. Many of these seats have sat empty in recent years, in part because the City’s expansion of pre-Kindergarten increased the pool of programs for 4-year-olds. Early childhood stakeholders say that if the City as well as the Head Start providers who contract directly with the federal Head Start office want to hold on to their Head Start funding, they will need to focus fast on serving babies and toddlers.

Early Head Start is the Head Start model designed for babies and other children under the age of 3 whose families have incomes below the poverty level. The program also works with pregnant mothers.

In recent years, flat City funding, rising rents, and the high costs inherent in center-based infant care have all contributed to a loss of total overall slots for children younger than 2 years old in subsidized child care centers. Between 2012 and 2017 the number of infants in EarlyLearn child care centers fell by nearly 12 percent, or about 400 children, even as parent demand for these slots appears to be rising.

Early Head Start is bucking this trend. With ample federal funding, these programs appear to be a rare pocket of growth in center-based, subsidized infant and toddler care in the city. Because Early Head Start programs have rigorous quality guidelines, they may also be helping to raise child care quality.

“Early Head Start provides a tremendous vehicle to do infant-toddler care that is well-funded with

high standards,” says Sherry Cleary, CUNY’s Early Childhood Professional Development Institute executive director.

Over the past two years, for instance, an organization called United Academy, Inc. in the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn has alone added nearly 90 new Early Head Start slots for children younger than 2 years old, according to an analysis of DOHMH data. This past year, ACS has created more than 125 Early Head Start slots for toddlers 2-3 years in its child care centers.

These numbers are small, and because Early Head Start classrooms for infants and toddlers serve fewer children than Head Start classes for 3- and 4-year-olds, the result is a net loss of seats in the City’s total Head Start portfolio. Still, many of the City’s Head Start seats have sat empty. The Early Head Start classrooms make use of this space while adding some capacity for a deeply underserved age group.

The path to increasing Early Head Start slots has been paved in two important ways. First, federal officials now allow centers to convert empty Head Start seats into Early Head Start. That’s because nationwide, the expansion of pre-Kindergarten programs has diverted 4-year-olds who would otherwise be enrolled in Head Start, opening space for infants and toddlers instead.

And second, about five years ago Head Start began funding partnerships with subsidized child care programs to help them adopt Early Head Start standards as a way to improve their quality. These standards come with a price tag the programs might otherwise find too steep.

This enables an organization that has an existing Early Head Start program—and all that goes with it, such as a nutritionist, licensed social worker, family engagement specialist, and more—to offer these resources to a partner child care organization.

These partnerships benefit children who are eligible for subsidized child care, but whose family incomes may be too high to qualify for Early Head Start. They also allow for the mixing of families living in poverty with low-income working families. That’s something that Patty Persell, New York State Head Start Collaboration Director, says “is really good for everyone involved”—for children, their grownups, their teachers and the centers’ administrators.

The combination of these two factors has helped to grow the new Early Head Start classrooms in

organizations such as United Academy, Inc. and in the Administration for Children’s Services’ EarlyLearn Programs. “We worked over the last two years to convert a portion of our Head Start seats that were vacant to Early Head Start, with the recognition that there’s a need for high quality infant and toddler seats,” explains ACS deputy commissioner Lorelei Vargas.

Laura Ensler, a consultant to ACS on these conversions, says the process has been exciting for centers. Some have long wanted to “age down” and serve younger children, but were previously deterred by the costs.

“Most preschool programs would love to serve infants and toddlers,” says Ensler. “I think early education professionals understand supporting children and families right from the beginning has an enormous impact on future success.” ❖

Average, Approximate Rate of Full-Time, Infant Care by Type of Care:

Type of Care	Daily Rate	Annual Rate
Early Head Start center-based care:		\$23,000
EarlyLearn center-based care:	\$83	Approx. \$22,000
Private center-based care (average cost for 2013):		\$16,230
EarlyLearn group family child care:	\$37	less than \$10,000
EarlyLearn family child care:	\$30	less than \$8,000

The federal funding for a full-time, full-year infant Early Head Start slot in New York comes to about what EarlyLearn child care centers receive. Early Head Start funding for child care partnerships and home-based programs serving infants is considerably less, and more common.

Source: Child care rates provided by University Settlement, NYU Langone, NYS Council on Children and Families, and from “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care,” Child Care Aware of America, 2013 http://www.childcare.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/The_High_Cost_of_Child_Care_2013.pdf.

‘Private Pay’ Families Can Bring Income and Diversity—or Produce Segregated Classes

Five years ago, as part of its EarlyLearnNYC reform, New York City began intentionally diverting children younger than 3 away from early education centers and into less-expensive family child care programs. As a result, Magical Years, a child care center in Brooklyn’s Sunset Park that exclusively serves infants and toddlers, lost 10 of its close to 50 slots. Staff there lobbied to gain back the subsidized seats they would have to cut. Their effort fell short, so they turned to another funding stream: families in the neighborhood, Brooklyn’s Sunset Park, who were desperate for high-quality child care spots and who could pay for it.

Bringing together all these families has resulted in a warm if unusual community where families who might otherwise never brush elbows actively mingle and learn from one another, broadening all of their worlds.

Today, the center is a vibrant space with toddlers singing songs in Spanish, Chinese, and English, and with a waitlist numbering in the hundreds. At any given time, nearly four-fifths of their babies and toddlers come through the City’s contracted child care system; the rest are from families that pay \$250 a week for baby and toddler care. That’s well below the over \$425 a week the center receives for EarlyLearn infants and toddlers, and is also much less than what most private center care costs.

Some working-class families stretch to pay the bill. Other children at the center have parents who work at NYU Langone, the large health and social service organization that oversees Magical Years. Former Magical Years director Ann Goa says that bringing together all these families has resulted in a warm if unusual community where families who might otherwise never brush elbows actively mingle and learn from one another, broadening all of their worlds. “We can see the connection and communication that parents have” with each other,” she says.

Child care has historically been a highly segregated undertaking, with early education centers typically serving one type of family—be it families receiving public assistance or those living in nearby luxury housing. But subsidized centers reliant on one type of funding or family have opened and closed at a rapid pace¹³ as their neighborhoods gentrify or their funders’ priorities shift. Many subsidized centers that have survived such changes have what Kathleen Hopkins, vice president of NYU Langone’s Community Programs, describes as “flexible and nimble” business plans that are adjusted to respond to fluctuations.

During the City’s transition to EarlyLearn, a number of child care centers lost space for babies in their new contracts with the City. Like Magical Years, some of these centers in gentrifying neighborhoods responded by actively recruiting private-paying families to help supplement lost revenue. Because of the scarcity of affordable center-based infant care throughout the city, the baby room made for a natural entry point for private-paying families.

Magical Years places its babies and toddlers whose families pay out-of-pocket in the same classrooms with children whose families are in EarlyLearn, paving the way for socioeconomic and racial integration—something that research suggests benefits poorer students and doesn't harm other students. But other centers funnel children from private-paying families into classrooms separate from the children enrolled through EarlyLearn.

At a Friends of Crown Heights center in the gentrifying Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, for example, several infant and toddler rooms are reserved primarily for “private pay” families. These rooms appear to be more racially diverse than other rooms in the center.

The organization's administrators, who operate 20 early childhood programs under a \$42 million contract with the City, explain that the decision was largely driven by a desire to simplify book-keeping. Different funding sources come with different regulations, they say, so it is easiest to group children whose spots are paid in the same way together.

If a City representative wants to see the medical records of all the children in the EarlyLearn program, for instance, having those children in one classroom makes it easier for the center to comply, according to the administrators.

Staff at Friends of Crown Heights add that when the children at their centers play outside, kids of all backgrounds come together.



Closed daycare: As gentrification has barreled through the New York City neighborhoods, many centers that are reliant on one type of funding have closed as the neighborhood changed.

Some researchers who study early education say separated classrooms is a mistake.

“Programs that are segregated by race/ethnicity and income are rarely, if ever, of equal quality,” write Jeanne Reid and Sharon Kagan of the National Center for Children and Families at Columbia University in their report “A Better Start: Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education.”¹⁴

No one knows exactly how many private-paying families are sending children to child care centers that are otherwise City-funded, as the City does not keep track. But as the Department of Education prepares to take over the City’s massive early education system, providers seen an opportunity for the city to rethink how these slots should be handled.

EarlyLearn’s Denied Dream: Socioeconomic Integration in NYC’s Child Care Centers

The benefits of bringing together children from low- and higher-income families in education settings is well-documented among school-aged children, but is just beginning to be explored among the preschool and younger set. Because child care in the United States tends to be divided along household economic lines, there is not yet much research in this area.¹⁵ But two studies suggest it could be effective in helping to bridge the achievement gap.

One study in Connecticut found that children from low-income families in economically integrated preschool demonstrated much larger language growth than their counterparts in classes primarily composed of other children from low-income backgrounds.¹⁶

A larger study looking at data from eleven pre-Kindergarten programs found that children in classrooms with, on average, a higher socio-economic status generally learned more than those in classrooms composed primarily of children from low-income backgrounds—an association that held true regardless of a child’s own background.¹⁷

This study, which controlled for factors such as teaching quality, discovered that all children can benefit from socioeconomically diverse classes. Children in classrooms that had socioeconomic diversity but were overall high-socioeconomic classrooms fared better in gaining

Vaughan Toney, president of Friends of Crown Heights, says his preference would be for the City to reinstate all of the subsidized infant slots lost during the EarlyLearn transition. Families with the means to pay privately, he says, have other options, while some low-income families that his organization serves have to travel to Friends of Crown Heights centers because their neighborhoods have no early childhood centers.

Kathleen Hopkins, vice president of NYU Langone’s community programs, has a different take. Though Magical Years’ private-pay slots reap far less revenue than the subsidized ones, Hopkins says the center wouldn’t want to switch those slots back to City-funded ones.

She’d rather see the center expand to make space for more of everything — more subsidized and more private slots. “Segregated centers are never a good thing,” she says. ❖

skills related to understanding language than those in high-socioeconomic classrooms with little income diversity.

In New York City, staff at the handful of child care centers that have successfully brought together children of different economic backgrounds say it's not just for the kids. Even when the income difference among families is modest—and even when the overall socioeconomic status of the class might be low—parents of different backgrounds learn from each other. Staff also benefit from having a range of families, some who might need support beyond child care and others with resources to offer.

This is one reason why Head Start programs, which are designed for preschoolers of families living in poverty, reserve a few spots for families above the poverty line as well.

“There have been so few resources provided to early childhood leaders in terms of program development. Program quality comes from creating a diverse population.”

In 2010, when New York City was gearing up to reform its subsidized child care system, an early vision of the reform encouraged subsidized child care centers to enroll children whose families were not eligible for subsidized care and who would pay privately as a way to “better serve children and ensure the economic sustainability of the system,” as well as “to be reflective of the community served.”

The 2011 Request for Proposal made the same request “to promote socio-economic diversity.” It also promoted classrooms filled with both children whose families were eligible for subsidized child care—or had incomes within 275 percent of the federal poverty line—and children whose families lived in poverty, meeting the eligibility requirements for Head Start.

In the end, that vision has gone unrealized, with most EarlyLearn centers having separate classrooms earmarked for either Head Start or subsidized child care.

Meanwhile, some subsidized centers do enroll private-paying families, but receive little guidance from the City on how to make it work. In part for ease of record-keeping and staying compliant with various program regulations, some of these centers keep the children whose parents pay privately in separate classrooms from the children whose families receive subsidies for child care, creating economic segregation, rather than integration, within the centers.

“There have been so few resources provided to early childhood leaders in terms of program development,” says Laura Ensler, founder of the FirstStepNYC early childhood center in Brownsville, Brooklyn. “Program quality comes from creating a diverse population.” ❖

Best Practice: A Neighborhood Comes Together to Improve Its Child Care

Talk to enough people concerned with raising the quality of infant and toddler child care and you're likely to hear this refrain: Infant care is not preschool.

"There's a very specific expertise in teaching infants and toddlers, and staffing needs to reflect that... You can't say a great teacher of 4-year-olds will be great for 1-year-olds unless you provide a lot of training and support," explains Jeanette Corey, director of the Family Center at Bank Street College of Education.

"There's a very specific expertise in teaching infants and toddlers. You can't say a great teacher of 4-year-olds will be great for 1-year-olds unless you provide a lot of training and support."

Corey adds that training and support for teachers in baby rooms should focus on promoting children's attachment to their caregivers, nurturing their social and emotional development, and working with their parents. But few infant or toddler teachers get this kind of guidance.

NYU Langone has helped to solve this problem for teachers of babies and toddlers in Sunset Park by creating a cost-effective neighborhood learning network of early childhood programs, including five centers, three family child care programs, and two homevisiting programs. The network provides teachers with group trainings as well as individualized coaching catered to children's and providers' needs.

The Early Learning Network, as it is called, is part of a small but growing movement to provide a neighborhood's early childhood educators with cost-effective professional development that is catered to local needs. East New York is piloting a similar "place-based" professional development model for its early childhood educators. Also, the collective South Bronx Rising Together is making plans to engage local family child care providers as a way to improve reading readiness in one district of the South Bronx.

In Brooklyn, The Early Learning Network began with the goal of building both the capacity and quality of child care in Sunset Park, a neighborhood home to many immigrants and working families, who are often in desperate need of affordable or subsidized child care. The place-based model gives content ownership to its participants, who together identify what issues they want to work on as a group. One year, the group decided to explore how they could better support the language development of bilingual children.

"We have English, Spanish and Chinese speakers, which is wonderful," says Nadia Alexander, educational director of Magical Years, an infant-toddler center in Sunset Park. "But how do we make sure the children do not lose their home language, and at the same time support them to learn another language?"

The network partnered with Bank Street to deliver workshops focused on topics like how to help children relate to other children who speak different languages. On-site visits from a coach consultant reinforced these visits. The coach typically focused on working with the teachers in a

center's strongest room, expecting them to serve as a model and to help set the standards for other rooms.

Alexander says that the coach's twice-monthly visits to the center have been particularly helpful. "You have someone from the outside who has a different view, so you can get a different eye on their perspective," says Alexander. "Maybe they see something you didn't see, or you're already doing something good but you didn't realize that, and they actually see you're doing it, which gives you a boost."

When Alexander started working at the center as a teacher, she only knew English, but has come to understand how important it is to families and children for her to be able to say some words in Spanish and Chinese too. "Even if it's just to say 'good morning' it makes a huge difference to the child," she says.

Kathleen Hopkins, a vice president at NYU Langone's Department of Community Programs, attributes the network's success to two main factors: First, it has the support of an anchor institution, NYU Langone, which has expertise in early childhood and is able to do the network's heavy lifting. Second, it is member-driven and, as a result, cost-effective, making it ripe for replication in other neighborhoods. Staffing involves only one full-time coordinator, a community organizer who brings members together; the trainer; and the coach consultant who works in collaboration with the trainer.

"What we didn't want to do was create an infrastructure that would take resources from programs," says Hopkins. "We wanted to be as lean as possible and create impact." ❖



A sign at the Magical Years early childhood center in Sunset Park, Brooklyn welcomes families in three languages.

When Cost Isn't an Issue: Snapshot of a High-Quality Infant-Toddler Program

At the Bank Street College of Education's child care center, which provides on-the-job training for student teachers, you see what quality infant care in a center should aspire to. In many ways, it's a no-frills center—one of the classrooms doesn't have a window, for instance, and parents provide their kids' lunches and diapers.

But it is focused on best practices in early education, which, to director Jeannette Corey, comes down to how the teachers are connecting with kids in the room and adjusting the curriculum to meet each child's needs. "It's the moment-by-moment interaction," she says. "That's why the piece of who the teachers are is so critical."

Infants and toddlers in this center are taught by head teachers earning between \$85,000 and \$100,000 a year—more than most center directors earn. All teachers have master's degrees and are dual-certified in special education and general education. The assistant teachers are students in Bank Street's graduate school, and there's a whole team of therapists who work with kids who have special needs.

Rooms appear to mimic a home more than a classroom, with sofas, soft lighting, and children ranging in age from a few months old to 2.

When a child first comes to the center, a "tremendous amount of thought" goes into what Corey calls the "separation phase period," when a child first separates from her parent and begins to explore the center. Teachers spend as much energy building a relationship with the parents as with the child. To that end,

the center spent an entire year researching and revamping the daily note they send home to families, telling them about their child's days.

"You can't truly be successful with a child unless the parent is part of it," explains Corey. "If you're really thinking of brain development and [all that happens between the ages of] 0-3, that's when you really need to have this intensity of care that you may not have if [the center] is not set up right."

"If you're really thinking of brain development and all that happens between the ages of 0-3, that's when you really need to have this intensity of care that you may not have if the center is not set up right."

But Corey also admits that at a cost to parents of over \$40,000 a year, the model is nearly unreplicable. "I have a hard time talking to other programs as to how they can make our program happen."

More typical is what one of her student-teachers experiences when working in an infant room in Coney Island. She looks after eight infants alongside the room's head teacher. When the head teacher goes to lunch, she is left to look after all eight babies on her own. "But I can do it," she told Corey.

"Yes," Corey said. "But under those circumstances, what can you actually do other than keep them safe?" ❖

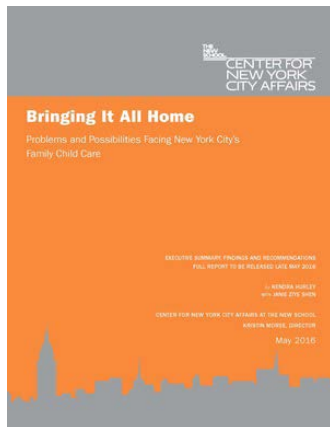
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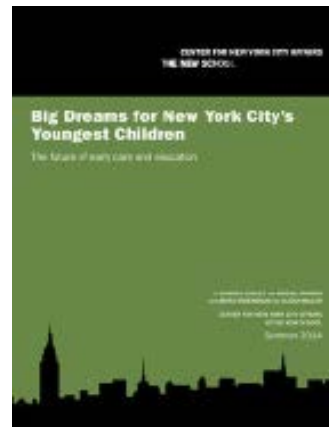
CNYCA's research aims to increase access to and quality of subsidized early education

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In 2012, NYC launched one of the country's largest experiments in raising the quality of subsidized family child care. More than three years since the launch of EarlyLearnNYC, we investigated what has worked and what has not.

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This report looks at the monumental impact that the EarlyLearnNYC reform had on the city's subsidized center-based early education programs. Drawing on dozens of interviews and program observations, it provides a series of recommendations for moving forward.

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