Benefits Plus
Learning Center

Helping Families Identify Early Childhood Education Programs in New York City



In New York City, there are many free child care options, and most have no income or immigration criteria. Due to funding limitations, many families who rely on informal providers or other paid child care arrangements cannot access child care vouchers to help cover costs. In these situations, families may need to pay out of pocket or **explore free early childhood education programs.**

Below are the different child care options in NYC.

Early Childhood Education Programs in New York City

NYC Public Schools (NYCPS)

Many children under age 5 may be eligible for free early childhood education through NYC Public Schools via 2-K, 3-K, or Pre-K programs which typically provide 6 hours 20 minutes of care per day during the school year.

Some families may qualify for additional hours of care (over 6 hours) through Extended Day and Year (EDY) or City Transitional seats.

NYCPS programs may be provided in the following settings:

- **Public School (District School)**: Child care is located within a NYC public school building.
- **New York City Early Education Centers (NYCEEC)**: Licensed programs operated by community-based organizations that partner with NYC Public Schools. NYCEECs may serve children from infancy through preschool and offer NYCPS-funded 2-K, 3-K, and Pre-K seats.
- **Family Child Care (FCC/Home-Based Program):** Care and education provided by a licensed provider in a home setting. NYCPS-funded 2-K and 3-K may be offered in this setting.

Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start (ages 3-5) and Early Head Start (birth to 3) continue to be available through community-based organizations and nonprofit providers in NYC.

Head Start provides **6-10 hours** of child care and education a day; some programs operating year-round, at no cost to families.

Head Start is funded by federal grants, which requires that families qualify for services.

APPLICATION PATHWAYS

NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (NYCPS)

NYCPS uses the MySchools portal for families to find programs and apply for 2-K, 3-K, Pre-K, and K-12 admissions. Application timelines vary by program and are posted in MySchools.

EXTENDED DAY AND YEAR (EDY)

To apply for EDY seats, families should submit an application through MyCity. There is no deadline for the application; families can apply at any time.

HEAD START/ EARLY HEAD START

Families should use the Head Start/Early Head Start federal locator at headstart.gov to find programs in their community.

Enrollment is open year-round. There is no application deadline, and children can begin a program whenever an eligible seat opens.