

New York State News

OCFS Honors Child Care Providers During Provider Appreciation Week

Child care providers across the state were celebrated during the week of May 4–8 for the essential role they play in supporting children and families. Governor Kathy Hochul issued a proclamation recognizing the week as Early Childhood Educator and Child Care Provider Appreciation Week.

“New York State recognizes the importance of child care providers, early childhood educators, and the organizations that support them as integral partners in raising healthy and well-

rounded young people,” Governor Hochul said in the proclamation.

The OCFS Division of Child Care Services (DCCS) also shared its appreciation by sending thank-you cards to more than 18,000 licensed and registered child care providers statewide. A Provider Appreciation Week video and Provider Appreciation Week resources have also been featured on the [OCFS website](#).

“Child care providers do important work each and every day,” said Nora Yates, OCFS deputy commissioner for the Division of Child Care Services. “Their commitment to nurturing, supporting, and educating children is invaluable, and it makes a lasting difference for families across New York.”

This year’s celebration comes as New York State continues its commitment to invest in innovative ways to strengthen the child care system — making care more affordable, accessible, and equitable for families.



Commissioner Harris-Madden Joins Governor Hochul To Announce Child Care Expansion Pilot Partnerships

OCFS Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden joined Governor Kathy Hochul at a Dutchess County child care center to announce a new state pilot program to help counties offer additional child care options in their communities. The program – a partnership with Dutchess, Monroe and Broome counties – will include a total of \$66 million in state funding, along with new investments from each of the three counties, as they expand child care access with a particular focus on serving children aged 0-3.



Gov. Hochul, at the podium, announces child care pilot program. To the right is Commissioner Harris-Madden.

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Commissioner Harris-Madden Joins Governor Hochul To Announce Child Care Expansion Pilot Partnerships *cont.*

This pilot program is part of the \$4.5 billion investment (\$3.2 billion for child care and \$1.3 billion for prekindergarten) that Governor Hochul proposed in the 2026-27 Executive Budget to help deliver universal child care for all children under the age of 5 across New York State. The budget plan also supports the launch of a 2-Care program in New York City, promotes universal pre-K access for 3-year-olds in New York City, and expands access to child care assistance statewide.

“I’ll never stop working to make life more affordable for New Yorkers – and that’s why my plan will deliver universal child care for families all across New York,” said Governor Hochul. “As part of my plan to support every county statewide, this new pilot program will help counties develop and expand new models for providing child care for families, regardless of their income status.”

Under the plan, the state will provide each of the three participating counties with \$22 million for their pilot programs, with the counties contributing an additional 10% in funding. The programs will support up to 1,000 seats for children from birth through age 3 in each county, with the first seats opening in 2027.



Gov. Hochul, front, and Commissioner Harris-Madden, rear, at Dutchess County child care center.

Governor Announces Next Steps in NYC 2-K Initiative

Governor Kathy Hochul has begun laying the groundwork to deliver universal child care across the state by moving ahead with a plan to deliver free child care for 2-year-olds in New York City.

Governor Hochul joined Mayor Zohran Mamdani recently to announce the selection of the first four communities to receive 2-K seats this fall. The initiative is part of the Governor’s \$1.2 billion commitment to support early child care and early education efforts in New York City, which includes a significant allocation of \$73 million to establish the first 2,000 2-K seats in the city.

The 2-K program is also part of the Governor’s ongoing commitment to expand access to high-quality, affordable child care and move toward a system of universal child care statewide.

“As New York’s first mom governor, achieving affordable, universal child care has been a key



priority for my administration and we are doing the work to see it through,” Governor Hochul said.

The four communities that will receive New York City 2-K seats are Washington Heights and Inwood; Fordham and Kingsbridge; East Brooklyn, including Canarsie, Brownsville, and Ocean Hill; and Ozone Park and the Rockaways.

OCFS Launches Early Literacy Initiative With Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

OCFS has launched a partnership with [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#) to provide free books each month to participating children up to age 5, regardless of family income.

OCFS will distribute up to \$1 million in grants to assist local partners who would like to participate in the program. Partners can include a New York State 501(c)(3) library, public library system, or not-for-profit organization; or a New York State school district or board of cooperative educational services (BOCES). A majority of voluntary agencies are 501(c)(3) organizations and may be eligible to apply. The community partners will cover half of the cost of the book distribution, and the state grants will cover the other half.

“Multiple studies have examined the positive relationship between the literacy environment in the home and children’s reading and writing skills,” said OCFS Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden. “Early access to books is an effective strategy to enhance the literacy and vocabulary skills of young children, create excitement about

reading, and improve the chances for their trajectory of success during their formative years.”



Under this initiative, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library ships a new, high-quality, age-appropriate book once a month to children who are registered for the program from birth until age 5. Inspired by her own father’s inability to read and write, Dolly Parton started her Imagination Library in 1995 for the children within her home county of East Tennessee. Today, her program spans five countries and delivers millions of free books each month to children around the world.

For information about the grants and application process, see the [Funding Opportunities page](#) on the OCFS website.

NYS Network for Youth Success Awarded \$5.99 Million To Lead Statewide After-School Systems Initiative

OCFS has awarded a \$5.99 million contract to the New York State Network for Youth Success to launch the School-Age Technical Assistance Resource Center (SATARC).

SATARC is a statewide center aimed at enhancing the quality, stability and sustainability of OCFS-



funded after-school and expanded learning programs, including Learning and Enrichment After-

School Program Supports (LEAPS) and Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST). The initiative will offer technical support to over 175 current OCFS-funded after-school programs.

“OCFS is dedicated to improving the quality and stability of school-age child care and after-school programs across New York State,” said OCFS Commissioner Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden. “We look forward to the partnership with the New York State Network for Youth Success, a trusted partner that is well-appointed with comprehensive resources that support OCFS’s aims to support after-school providers, participants, and their families.”

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NYS Network for Youth Success Awarded \$5.99 Million To Lead Statewide After-School Systems Initiative *cont.*

According to the 2025 *America After 3PM Report*, for every child enrolled in an after-school program in New York State, nearly three more are waiting for access. SATARC will help close this gap by working with programs to increase enrollment and attendance within their current capacity.

SATARC will support providers as they face staffing shortages, transportation issues, shifting family needs, and complex reporting requirements. Through coaching, informed technical assistance, and workforce support, SATARC will help programs

boost participation, so more children can access expanded learning opportunities.

A key part of SATARC is a shared data system called Pathwise, used by New York State's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, that will enable New York State to analyze expanded learning data across agencies for the first time while ensuring distinct program oversight. Shared data infrastructure will reduce administrative workload for providers, enhance data quality, and support better statewide planning.

Supporting Children and Families

Spotlight on Diversity: Past, Present and Future

The month of May is recognized as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. We would like to highlight and celebrate the history, culture and people of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander heritage, those

living in our country and especially those working for OCFS ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families across New York State.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Collaborative Project

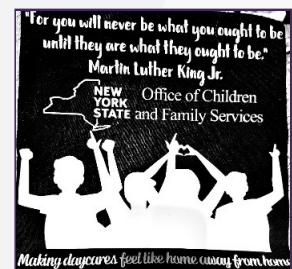


The Division of Child Care Services Diversity Spotlight Committee is proud to recognize Sadie Allison, Erica Redcross, Jenna Stever, and Susan Travis, left to right, from the **Albany Regional Office**,

for their thoughtful contributions to a community quilt created in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy. The team designed and created a quilt square reflecting the importance of connection among children, families and the communities that support them.

This project highlighted the powerful role that communities play in the lives of children and families. When children feel connected to their communities, they gain a sense of belonging, safety, and opportunities for positive social interaction that are essential for healthy development. Strong communities help nurture

empathy, responsibility, and social-emotional skills while strengthening relationships among neighbors, teachers, and families.



The quilt squares created by staff and other community partners were sewn together into a beautiful quilt, which was displayed in January during the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration at the Northern Rivers Early Learning Center in Schenectady.

The Spotlight Committee would also like to recognize the efforts of the **Buffalo Regional Office** who hosted their 24th Annual Black History

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Month Luncheon on February 26. This year's event was especially significant as it recognized the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, honoring the contributions, achievements and cultural legacy of Black Americans. The luncheon featured inspiring guest speakers who reflected on the strength, perseverance and impact of Black leaders and communities throughout history. Attendees enjoyed a variety of delicious cultural dishes, while celebrating heritage and strengthening community.

The Diversity Spotlight Committee would love to feature your future events and personal successes. We are looking for people, teams and

events that elevate voices, histories and traditions from communities across New York. If your region or division has an upcoming event you would like featured in a future newsletter, please reach out to the Spotlight Committee by emailing ocfs.sm.DEIASpotlight@ocfs.ny.gov.



Shown from left to right at the Buffalo luncheon are Riessa Johnson, Tiffany Rose, Megan Sanders, and Candice Thompson.

Governor Hochul Announces Opening of NY PLAYS Grant Opportunities

Governor Kathy Hochul recently announced a new funding opportunity through the New York Places for Learning, Activity, and Youth Socialization (NY PLAYS) Initiative, a competitive grant program that will provide \$67.5 million in capital funding to help municipalities and nonprofit organizations construct, expand and renovate public playgrounds for all abilities across New York State.

NY PLAYS is part of the Governor's broader Unplug and Play Initiative, which encourages children and families to put down their devices and engage in outdoor recreation, physical activity and in-person



social connection. Research shows that outdoor play supports physical health, emotional well-being and social development. The NY PLAYS Initiative is designed to help communities advance safe, welcoming spaces where young people can learn, play and thrive.

"Playgrounds are where kids build confidence, friendships and lifelong healthy habits," Governor Hochul said. "Through the NY PLAYS Initiative, we're helping communities across New York create safe, inclusive outdoor spaces that support physical activity, emotional well-being and real

human connection. By investing in playgrounds, we're investing in the health and happiness of our children of all abilities and the strength of our neighborhoods."

The NY PLAYS Initiative is overseen by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and administered by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York. Of the total funding available, a minimum of \$35 million will be reserved for playground projects located in underserved communities, helping ensure equitable access to high-quality outdoor play spaces statewide.

Eligible municipalities and nonprofit organizations may apply for NY PLAYS grants ranging from \$100,000 to \$2.5 million for the acquisition, design, construction, major renovation or equipping of public playgrounds, along with other related capital costs necessary to complete a project. Grantees must demonstrate a 20% match toward total project costs. For-profit entities are not eligible to apply.

The NY PLAYS Request for Applications (RFA) and supporting materials became available on January 6, 2026, on DASNY's website at www.dasny.org/PLAYS. Applications will be accepted from May 4 through June 15, 2026. Grant awards will be announced no earlier than August 3, 2026.

Early Childhood Provider Corner – FYI and Reminders from OCFS

Encouraging Brain Skills Through STEAM

Did you know that STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) activities help to support brain growth in infant and toddlers and success in kindergarten and beyond? Skills such as critical thinking, language development, problem-solving, social-emotional development, communication, and more can all be gained through STEAM experiences.

If you're wondering how to incorporate STEAM into your program, chances are you are already doing it without realizing it.

Do you use music in your program? Then children are interacting with the beat to learn number sense skills. Are children playing with balls and other gross motor items? Physical activities such as throwing

a ball and watching it land can introduce the basis for scientific topics and inquiry.

Are your young artists fingerprinting and mixing paint to create new colors? Then your children are experimenting and using science skills. Building towers with blocks? You are encouraging engineering. Counting out loud the fingers and toes on the infants in your program? That's STEAM!

If you want to expand on STEAM activities, you can look for STEAM toolkits for curriculum ideas. By mindfully incorporating STEAM into your programs, you are helping children succeed.



OCFS Introduces Empire State Child Care Share Pilot Program



OCFS has launched its latest child care initiative – the Empire State Child Care Share (ESCCS) Pilot Program in which the cost of child care is shared by eligible

families, employers and New York State. Participant enrollment in the pilot program, which includes the Buffalo, Syracuse and Albany regions, began on April 1.

ESCCS is an innovative approach to expanding access to safe, affordable, high-quality child care while increasing employee retention in the overall workforce and improving financial stability for child care providers.

During the pilot phase, New York State will invest up to \$4.8 million to cover a portion of child care costs and support regional administration by contracting with nonprofit organizations to serve as facilitator hubs.

“Child care is the backbone of a strong economy and a thriving future for our children,” Governor Kathy Hochul said. “That’s why we’re delivering the largest investment in child care in state history – because when we support working families, we support the entire State of New York.”

Under the ESCCS program, regional facilitator hubs will offer supportive services, including community outreach and engagement, application review, and eligibility determination to families, employers and child care providers. Each facilitator hub will serve approximately 272 children in their local region.

Facilitator hubs’ services in the pilot regions will include helping eligible families that make between 85% and 100% of the state median income access safe, affordable, and high-quality child care that meets their needs and enables them to remain in or enter the workforce. The hubs will also empower employers with an innovative and effective recruitment and retention tool that supports employees and their families. In addition, the hubs will support licensed/registered child care providers by diversifying funding sources and creating strategic business partnerships.

The Child Care Resource Network (CCRN) in Buffalo and Brightside Up, Inc. have been designated the first two ESCCS facility hubs. CCRN will work with families in the Buffalo region, while Brightside Up serves families in the Albany and Syracuse regions.

For more information, visit the [Empire State Child Care Share Pilot Program](#) page on the OCFS website.

OCFS DCCS [Dear Provider Letters](#)

Available in Spanish and English, DCCS distributes [Dear Provider Letters \(DPLs\)](#), which provide information on various division-wide initiatives, upcoming trainings, and any important health news among other topics. Below are the various ones that have been released since January 2026, with many more coming.

Foundations in Health and Safety | March 31, 2026

This letter provides updates to the Foundations in Health and Safety training, including new information on CPR and emergency preparedness to support programs in meeting health and safety standards.

[English](#) | [Español](#)

Infant Walkers | March 31, 2026

This letter informs programs that, effective March 12, 2026, infant walkers are no longer permitted in child care settings and outlines the importance of maintaining safe environments for infants.

[English](#) | [Español](#)

Child Tax Credit | March 27, 2026

This letter shares information about the New York State Child Tax Credit, including recent updates

that may provide financial support to eligible families.

[English](#) | [Español](#)

Homelessness | March 27, 2026

This letter highlights the impact of homelessness on young children and emphasizes the role of child care programs in supporting their social, emotional and developmental needs.

[English](#) | [Español](#)

Cold Weather | January 21, 2026

This letter contains important cold weather resources about how children's safety and comfort may be impacted during outdoor activities. Providing children with the opportunity to explore and enjoy fresh air throughout the seasons is an essential part of their development. Cold weather presents challenges and precautions that must be taken to keep children safe.

[English](#) | [Espanol](#)



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