



Columbia University Communities Speak Project Reveals That New York’s Families are Facing Extraordinary Challenges Locating Affordable Childcare

Communities Speak recommends that the New York State and New York City enact policies to rectify this urgent problem.

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NEW YORK, April 4, 2022 – Columbia University’s Communities Speak Project, led by Professor Ester Fuchs, released its first policy brief based on data from their latest New York City survey. The survey focuses broadly on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, while the [**Communities Speak Families with Children Policy Brief**](#) reports on the needs of families with children and offers immediate policy proposals based on the data. *Lead community partners for this report are Jennifer Jones-Austin, Esq, [Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies](#); Geoffrey Canada, [Harlem Children’s Zone](#); Louisa Chafee, [UJA-Federation](#); Michelle Jackson, Esq, [Human Services Council](#); Frances Lucerna, [El Puente](#); Andrew So, [South Bronx United](#); and Christina Hanson, [Part of the Solution \(POTS\)](#).*

Families with children in New York City face extraordinary challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the most recent [Communities Speak](#) survey shows that COVID-19 is continuing to hurt New York’s families with children, impacting every aspect of their lives. [**The Communities Speak Families with Children Policy Brief**](#) reports that New York families with children face difficulty finding and paying for childcare; continue to worry about COVID-19 in schools; are more likely to have difficulty affording rent and paying bills; and experience food insecurity at much higher rates than households without children. Moreover, the data show that the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 have exacerbated the challenges for families with children, particularly Black and Hispanic families and those living in the Bronx.

Not only do New York’s most vulnerable families face unprecedented economic, social and health hardships, but by not effectively addressing their needs, the entire City’s economic recovery is jeopardized. Accessible and affordable childcare will provide needed economic relief to New York’s families with children and is central to the City’s economic recovery.



Key policy recommendations

- The City must expand the availability of all forms of childcare by working with community organizations in high needs neighborhoods identified by the Communities Speak survey.
- The city must identify vacant storefronts/retail space and code compliant vacant space in religious institutions that can be quickly converted into daycare centers in all high needs neighborhoods.
- The City must collaborate with philanthropy and business to create a Childcare Capital Investment Fund to build out additional childcare space.
- The State must increase funding for childcare by expanding eligibility to 400 percent of the poverty level to achieve universal childcare. The State and City subsidy to providers of childcare for those who are eligible must increase to a minimum of 90 percent of the cost. The co-pay would be calculated on a sliding scale based on household income.
- Any childcare provider that receives the City and State subsidy must be funded to pay its workers a minimum of \$45,000 per year.
- The City must work with philanthropy to fund pilot training programs to expand the number of qualified individuals who can provide home childcare.

The policy recommendations are data-driven and call for immediate action. They focus on both systemic and targeted responses that can be implemented quickly for both immediate relief and long-term sustainability.

Report's key findings:

- **Most households with children struggle to secure childcare. Nearly one-third of all respondents with children indicated that they are not always able to find childcare when they need it.**
- Affording childcare is an acute problem for Hispanic, Black and Asian families, with fewer White families reporting this problem
- Access to childcare differs by borough, with 60 percent of respondents with children in the Bronx reporting difficulty finding childcare
- Hispanic and Black families were most likely to report challenges with both finding and affording childcare
- Families with children are more likely to experience food insecurity than households without children
- Black and Hispanic New Yorkers with children are more than five times as likely to experience food insecurity than White households with children



- Food insecurity among households with children also varies significantly by borough, with Bronx residents most likely to experience food insecurity
- The vast majority of respondents, 98 percent, have sent their children back to in-person school. However, concerns about COVID-19 in schools remain high.
- Adults in households with children are less likely to have received a COVID-19 booster

The data suggest that many of these experiences were exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic, including job loss and income decline, school closures, and a shortage of childcare workers. The report also highlights urgent challenges with meeting basic needs, particularly a concerning rise in food insecurity for families with children. Over 30 percent of families with children surveyed reported worrying about or experiencing food running out in the last year. The data also highlight the concerns of families as students return to school and NYC schools drop their mask mandate. The report also highlights the interconnected nature of these challenges, with financial difficulty impacting family’s ability to pay for childcare while labor shortages among childcare workers restrict the availability of childcare, even for those who can pay.

“New York City is facing an inflection point in its efforts to recover from the economic and social impacts of COVID-19. Communities Speak research makes it clear that the inability to find affordable and accessible childcare has a cascading effect on families, contributing to their economic insecurity. Government must work with community organizations and implement policy recommendations that are data driven and target resources to the need,” said **Professor Ester Fuchs, PI Communities Speak and Director, Urban and Social Policy Program at Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs.**

Support from our Community Partners:

“The FPWA has been on the frontlines advocating for affordable childcare. The challenges facing New York families have been heightened by COVID-19, and government’s response must match these challenges. The City and State must work together and provide targeted support for communities that need it the most to ensure that families don’t just recover from the last two years but do better than before,” said **Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO of The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies.**

“The Communities Speak survey confirms what we at the Harlem Children’s Zone already know: There is a real need for affordable childcare, and the burden is disproportionately affecting New York City’s Black and Hispanic families. The time for State and City government to act is now,” said **Geoffrey Canada, President and CEO of Harlem Children’s Zone.**



“UJA-Federation and our partners have long supported New York’s low-income families, and now is the moment to help our community heal and get back on its feet. The new data that suggests that one in three children may not have enough to eat is unacceptable and alarming. The public and private sectors need to work together to ensure that all families have the resources they need to meet their basic needs, and find employment to become self-sufficient,” **Louisa Chafee, Senior Vice President of Public Policy and External Relations at UJA-Federation.**

“Our families worry about safe and affordable childcare and continue to be concerned with the health and wellness of their children as the mask mandates have been lifted. These concerns and needs are documented in the Communities Speak survey. We must take these concerns seriously and continue to engage and most importantly empower families as we rebuild safe and supportive schools,” said **Dr. Frances Lucerna, Co-Founder & President of El Puente.**

“The needs of families with children reflect a broader challenge for the entire city. Part of the solution to making childcare more accessible and affordable is to increase the wages of childcare workers. This is both a moral and economic imperative,” said **Michelle Jackson, Executive Director of Human Services Council.**

“This is an opportunity for our city to reset and provide necessary supports to our most vulnerable residents. Families in the Bronx need affordable childcare and Communities Speaks microdata shines a spotlight on the challenges communities in the Bronx are facing. Meaningful change can happen now, if the State and City follow the data and target resources to where the greatest needs are,” said **Andrew So, Executive Director of South Bronx United.**

The Families with Children Policy Brief was published by Columbia SIPA and supported by Columbia University and Bloomberg Philanthropies. It can be viewed at <https://www.communitiesspeakproject.com/policy-briefs>