A VOICES FROM THE FIELD REPORT

BLUEPRINT FOR INVESTING IN GIRLS AGE 0-8

THE NEW YORK WOMEN'S FOUNDATION®

MISSION

The New York Women's Foundation creates an equitable and just future for women and families by uniting a cross-cultural alliance that ignites action and invests in bold, community-led solutions across the city.

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THE "BLUEPRINT FOR INVESTING IN WOMEN" SERIES

The New York Women's Foundation's *Blueprint for Investing in Women* series comprises four reports that explore the position, strengths, needs, and best strategies for promoting the economic security of NYC women, across the full span of their lifetimes. In line with NYWF's core mission, the series particularly focuses on the situations of women whose opportunities for progress are limited by outside factors or attitudes related to initial economic position, race, immigration status, or sexual orientation/gender identity.

The goals of the series are to: (1) broaden understanding of the roles and issues of the city's low-income girls and women; (2) stimulate broad, productive discussion of how best to both support those roles and address those issues; and (3) catalyze bold investment by all stakeholders capable of expanding relevant opportunities and resources.

Each of the four *Blueprints* covers a major developmental period in a woman's life:

- ***0 – 8:*** the years of girls' most intense and rapid physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.
- ***9 – 24:*** the prime years in which girls and young women acquire core knowledge, competencies, and good habits.
- ***25 – 59:*** women's most intense years of paid employment, career-building, asset-acquisition, and raising and supporting families.
- ***60+:*** the diversely productive and contributing years of older adulthood.[2]

The ***Blueprint*** series is based on a "Voices from the Field" approach. That is, it draws on qualitative and quantitative data obtained both from the best academic and policy research and from a cross-section of on-the-ground leaders – including members of each age cohort and their supporters. Each ***Blueprint*** includes:

- An overview of the size, scope, and overall demographics of the girls and women in the particular age cohort being considered.

- Discussions of:
  - The strengths, positions, roles and challenges of girls and women at that stage of development.
  - The framework of public and private programs and services for those girls and women – with analyses of the best practice approaches and the main gaps or inefficiencies in service delivery.

- Recommendations for how the public, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors can work separately and jointly to promote the best-practice approaches and address the gaps and inefficiencies.

Each year, the pioneering efforts of the NYWF and its grantee-partners enable thousands of individual New York women to build safer, healthier, more economically secure lives for themselves and their families. But The Foundation and its partners cannot possibly single-handedly address all the global and structural issues that diminish low-income women's opportunities and stability from earliest childhood through the farthest reaches of old age. Nor can they single-handedly reach enough individual women to make a measurable dent in the city's grimly persistent overall 20 percent-plus poverty rate.

The ***Blueprint*** series was conceived as a first step in marshaling the multi-player, coordinated awareness and action required to finally bring down that stubborn marker of destitution. It is offered with the conviction that there is no better strategy for boosting New York's overall economic strength than supporting the women who are both principal economic providers and primary caregivers for families across the richly diverse communities of the city.

[2] Organizing issues and solutions within rigidly age-based phases clearly has certain limitations. Individuals clearly can acquire skills and competencies – and assume roles and responsibilities – at many different points; challenges to health, safety, and economic security can extend across whole lifetimes. It is also true, however, that certain activities and issues tend to cluster within particular periods of a person's developmental trajectory; and that policies and programs – whether related to health, housing, education, employment, or violence prevention – tend to be formulated and delivered within those age-segregated silos. The four ***Blueprint*** reports, thus, will stick to that rubric – while also making note of the themes that transcend particular phases, that link phases together, and that call for a more integrated approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ***Blueprint for Investing in Girls, Ages 0 - 8*** is based on the input of the leading experts in the fields of early childhood development, early childhood education, and maternal and infant health. More than a hundred advocates, philanthropists, scholars, service providers, and government officials generously shared their knowledge, experience, and insights – including key staff members of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the Administration of Children's Services (ACS), as well as the leaders of several major funding and advocacy institutions and of *EarlyLearn* centers, schools, family health organizations, and education training programs. – Most importantly, a number of mothers and a few young girls offered views on what is needed – and what helps.

Their guidance was invaluable to this report and is deeply appreciated.

Strong thanks are also due to the staff of NYWF who offered exceptional collective and individual guidance on early report outlines, presentations, and drafts — and whose ongoing work in support of low-income girls and their caregivers has led the way for nearly thirty years.

A robust and diverse cadre of organizations, funders, policy-makers and individuals are channeling their best energies and thinking towards ensuring that low-income little girls have the care, protections and education they need to flourish – and that their caregivers have the foundation that *they* need to support those girls.

There is still a tremendous amount to be done; but the foundation has been laid and deserves strong recognition, reinforcement and expansion.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Experts in the area of early childhood development explain that for little girls, the period between birth and age eight comprises a coherent, unified period of both extraordinary potential and extreme vulnerability. Given a healthy environment and nurturing round-the-clock care, girls are innately programmed to evolve from totally helpless, self-involved infants into third graders of remarkable competence on multiple fronts – cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and creatively. But denied that vital foundation, their miraculous developmental trajectory can be gravely compromised or even completely derailed.

Promoting little girls' strong progress thus depends absolutely upon making sure that their main caregivers can give them what they need.

Promoting little girls' healthy development depends absolutely upon making sure that their main caregivers can give them what they need.

SCOPE OF THE ISSUE: OVERVIEW OF NYC GIRLS AND THE WOMEN ON WHOM THEY DEPEND

There are approximately 450,000 little girls, ages 0-8 in New York City. Three quarters are either non-white or immigrant – or both. And a majority of those who are non-white or immigrant live in poverty or near-poverty.

Providers serving low-income girls consistently describe them as spunky and determined, caring and compassionate, curious and resilient. But they also stress that all too many of those girls face challenges that no young child should have to face. That by the age of eight, a solid segment of black and Latina girls enter what may be lifelong struggles against malnutrition, obesity or asthma. That nearly 10,000 little girls live in the City's homeless shelters. That roughly 3,000 live in foster homes – and another 6,000 receive "preventive" services because the child welfare system has flagged their families as being "at-risk." That by third grade, a significant number of the girls living in NYC's lowest-income Community Districts (CDs) begin failing the standardized tests that carry such weight within our public school system.

It is easy to be horrified by those sobering statistics, to want to help all those innocent little girls be healthier, safer and better-equipped to succeed. But, the experts observe, the intensity of that desire typically fades once it becomes clear that providing low-income girls with better opportunities and protections requires ensuring better opportunities and protections – and justice – for the low-income women who are principally responsible for their care.

These girls don't suffer in a vacuum. Their health suffers when they and their primary caregivers are forced – by poor wages, by racial bias, by lack of public investment – to live in areas that offer poor-quality housing, polluted air, and limited access to nutritious food. They live with violence when their primary caregivers are trapped in situations of violence. They are left in less-than-ideal care situations when their low-wage working mothers have no viable subsidized childcare options. They fail in school when their parents are not given the tools to promote early learning and their K-2 teachers are discouraged from addressing their inseparably-connected cognitive, emotional, creative and physical needs.

The case is clear: unless we invest significantly more into reinforcing the supports and resources available to the women raising New York's lowest-income girls, the girls they are raising will face the same tough odds as their caregivers.[3]

This blueprint offers guidelines and recommendations for making that investment.

WE COULD ALL USE A MANUAL: REINFORCING GIRLS' CORE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

There is a widespread societal belief that being in full charge of a supremely impressionable, vulnerable and unpredictable child comes instinctively and easily to all women. That women's caregiving responsibilities hardly even count as work.

Women who are in that position know better. They may love children and revel in their caregiving roles, but they also know how hard it is to be in charge of someone's well-being 24 hours a day, seven days a week, week in and week out. To be the chief supporter of a child's early cognitive, emotional and physical development. To continually monitor her safety, comfort her fears and heal her wounds. To show consistent patience and wisdom in the face of her behavioral ups and downs. To be unable to make a single move without first ensuring that she is in reliable alternative hands. And to do it all without formal preparation – and with no magic manual of infallible instructions.

As daunting as these challenges can be for any woman, they are exponentially tougher for women who are simultaneously struggling with deprivation, violence or extreme isolation.

NYC's low-income women of color and immigrant women typically have little access to the resources that lighten the load for parents in higher-income areas – inviting playgrounds; well-stocked libraries and supermarkets; friendly, informative infant-and-toddler classes. Many have had highly limited educations; many speak no English; few have any place to turn to reinforce their skills. Far too many face unthinkable and debilitating choices: Should I pay the rent or buy food? Risk losing my job or leave my child in whatever caregiving situation that I can find? Remain with a batterer or risk homelessness for myself and my child?

To its credit, the current City Administration has been exploring a range of options for better supporting some of New York's most embattled primary caregivers. It has rebuilt some playgrounds, funded some community gardens and created some community schools. It has expanded services for selected groups at the "starting gate" of their mothering journeys – i.e., new mothers in homeless shelters or in foster care, teenage mothers, and mothers with serious post-partum depression. And it has been testing out strategies to help mothers better protect or heal their children from the impact of family or environmental trauma. Key efforts include:

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** – a federally-funded program through which trained nurses make home visits offering two years of pre- and post-partum support to an estimated 1,800 first-time (generally very young) NYC mothers coping with deeply stressful situations.

- **Healthy Families** – a State-funded program offering similar services to an estimated 1,400 women flagged as potentially living with trauma by hospitals, nonprofits or the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

- **A set of new pilot "preventive service" programs** offering private in-home coaching to mothers of infants and toddlers identified by ACS as being at risk for neglect or abuse.

[3] The report recognizes that fathers, grandfathers, uncles, older brothers, male teachers can be, should be – and often are – powerful co-contributors to girls' well being and development. Many of its recommendations (e.g., paid parental leave, dependable work shifts, greater support for parental engagement in schools) will also benefit those participatory men. Nonetheless, in New York's low-income areas, ultimate responsibility for the round-the-clock care and support of little girls overwhelmingly remains with mothers and grandmothers, aunts and older sisters – female paid caregivers and K-2 teachers. And the main advocates and service providers for those girls and their caregivers also predominantly remain women. And thus, the main focus of the report is and has to remain helping the women – with the understanding that any male-driven strategies for promoting men's expanded, ongoing, robust caregiving and income-provision roles would be deeply beneficial to everyone and would be likely to receive strong support.

All these efforts are building strong track records for success. They still, however, only reach a highly circumscribed number of those who need them most. And they do not in any way guarantee that every low-income mother in the city will have access to the core resources that every primary caregiver needs.

In short, significantly more investment is needed into bolstering the basic infrastructure of low-income neighborhoods, expanding basic supports for all low-income parents, and offering tailored programs to low-income parents struggling with special circumstances.

THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB IN THE WORLD: SUPPORTING GIRLS WHILE THEIR CAREGIVERS WORK

A solid majority of NYC's low-income black, Latina and immigrant mothers/grandmothers are the sole or main wage earners for their families. They are also the backbone of the city's low-wage labor force and the bedrock of its economy. As cashiers and office cleaners, clerks and restaurant workers, they provide the foundation on which the city's business and commercial sectors rest. As nannies, childcare workers, home health aides and housekeepers, they provide the support system on which its higher-paid working parents depend.

NYC's low-income black, Latina and immigrant mothers/grandmothers are also often the sole or main wage earners for their families. And they are also the backbone of the city's low-wage labor force and the bedrock of its economy.

And yet those vitally important low-wage working mothers can – themselves – count on very few of the supports and protections that all working mothers need if they are to manage their multiple, frequently-conflicting responsibilities. They are generally minimally-paid for their efforts. Their employers generally demand work schedules that are both too unpredictable to allow for reliable childcare arrangements and too rigid to accommodate the occasional family emergency. And – perhaps most challenging of all – they have extremely limited options and supports available to manage their children's care while they are on the job.

New York's publicly-supported childcare services – while better than what exists in many other parts of the country – do not in any way represent a universal subsidized system. They were never intended (nor adequately funded) to reach all the hard-working low-wage mothers who need them. The current supports comprise:

- **Childcare vouchers** distributed to some 70,000 women who are on – or are at risk for seeking – public assistance (PA) so they can "work off" or avoid requesting this entitlement.

- **EarlyLearn**: A system of some 36,000 subsidized direct childcare slots provided on a sliding-scale fee basis to working mothers meeting certain stringent income and employment criteria. Some EarlyLearn slots are located in centers run by contracted community organizations. The rest are located in the homes of individual licensed or registered family childcare providers.

New York's publicly-supported childcare services were never intended – nor adequately funded – to reach all the hard-working low-wage mothers who need them.

The experts agree that the available *EarlyLearn* services are generally of high quality. Families lucky enough to gain a slot are basically guaranteed ten hours a day of nurturing, strongly learning-focused care within environments that are typically welcoming to both the children and the parents. And yet, the experts also stress, the system as a whole has certain deep flaws:

- The eligibility requirements for slots are so strict, the application processes so complicated, the information provided around slots available in "real-time" so limited, and the sliding-scale fees so high that hundreds of thousands of low-wage working mothers remain unserved while – at the same time – a significant number of care slots remain unfilled.

- Center-based providers are so under-funded that an estimated 40 percent of those centers operate at a deficit, and all offer salaries so low that some staff members cannot afford childcare for their own children. Similarly, the compensation, training and ongoing reinforcement offered to family childcare providers is rarely substantial enough to support their vital efforts.

And – once children enter elementary school – low-wage mothers' options for obtaining subsidized, wrap-around after-school and vacation coverage disappear almost entirely.

Significant additional advocacy, planning and investment is needed to: (1) reduce the low-wage employment sector's ability to demand work shifts that are simultaneously unpredictable and inflexible; (2) better fund and deploy the publicly subsidized pre-school childcare supports available to low-income working mothers; and (3) create solid, affordable after-school and vacation care options for low-income children once they enter school.

Finally, NYC's childcare tax credit laws do little for most of the low-wage families who struggle to pay for care. The benefits conferred by those laws are restricted to families that earn less than $30,000 a year – and whose children are under the age of three. Huge numbers of families already excluded from the subsidized system are thereby offered absolutely no relief.

THE BEST ALLIES: PROMOTING GIRLS' LEARNING

The experts agree: During the first eight years of life, nurturing and learning are irrevocably intertwined. Little girls do best when their parents regularly read, talk and play with them; when their teachers pay strong attention to all their interconnected cognitive, physical and social-emotional needs; and when teachers and parents strategically reinforce one another's efforts.

The experts agree: During the first eight years of a girl's life, nurturing and learning are irrevocably intertwined.

As noted above, the *EarlyLearn* system strongly promotes both parental participation and age-appropriate teaching methods. Nonetheless, it reaches only a small segment of the children of low-wage working mothers. And – outside of *Head Start* – there are almost no high-quality affordable early learning supports available for children of non-working low-income mothers.

What is more, once low-income girls enter Kindergarten, the twinned core goals of supporting "parents as first teachers" and "teachers as strong nurturers" disappear almost entirely. The experts stress that few schools in low-income neighborhoods invest sufficient resources into creating strong parent-teacher partnerships. They note that recess, sandboxes, blocks and imaginative play have all but disappeared from K-2 classrooms and that teachers spend most of the day simply drilling their very young students to pass the system's standardized tests.

A few nonprofits and a few enlightened schools have been working diligently to counter these counterproductive trends. The best efforts include:

- **Learning Leaders** – A citywide non-profit that trains low-income parents to volunteer in a range of educational and supportive capacities in their children's schools – thereby significantly improving the attendance, grades, test scores and overall behavior of those parents' children.

- **East Side House Settlement's "ReadNYC" program** – a South Bronx multi-site, multi-generation collaboration between parents, childcare center staff and K-2 teachers that seeks to raise reading skills in one of NYC's lowest-performing school districts by providing multiple supports to – and promoting partnership between – all those key stakeholders.

- The **Thurgood Marshall Elementary School** in West Harlem whose full-day programming strongly promotes the principles of "parents as co-teachers;" parent-teacher teamwork; and attention to the emotional well-being of the students, teachers and parents.

These initiatives – and others like them – have been producing consistently impressive outcomes. Nonetheless, they remain the exception. And so, the strategy moving forward once again becomes clear. We need to aggressively support reforms that can help low-income mothers be more effective first teachers, help K-2 teachers be more skilled nurturers of holistic skills and talents, and help schools to engage parents and teachers in mutually-reinforcing team efforts.

CONCLUSION

SUPPORTING GIRLS' ROLE MODELS

The experts agree. To help NYC's low-income little girls, we must invest vigorously into improving the overall infrastructure, resources and protections available to those girls' key caregivers and teachers. We must move from offering "boutique solutions" to guaranteeing a solid foundation of support for all those who are charged with the upbringing of those little girls.

We must move from offering "boutique solutions" to guaranteeing a solid foundation of support for all those who are charged with the upbringing of our city's little girls.

Addressing the core factors that bar so many low-income women from providing all they would like to the girls in their care will go a long way towards improving the overall odds for those little girls. It will help those girls be healthier. It will help them break generation-spanning cycles of abuse and neglect. It will help them do better in school. And – perhaps most importantly – by improving the way society treats low-income little girls' main role models, it will offer those girls a more promising vision of their own futures.

The ***Blueprint***'s specific recommendations for action include:

PHILANTHROPIC/NONPROFIT Sector Recommendations:

REINFORCING GIRLS' CORE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Seek out and support community efforts improving basic overall neighborhood resources – libraries, communal gardens, farmers' markets, playgrounds.
- Seek out, convene and generously fund organizations pioneering Head Start-caliber early education/parenting programs for all low-income families, regardless of whether mothers are in the workforce.
- Fund providers interested in launching/deepening services supporting mother-child healing and bonding for families living under acutely stressful circumstances.

SUPPORTING GIRLS WHILE THEIR MOTHERS WORK

- Support advocacy efforts promoting better workplace protections for working mothers and increased access to high-quality subsidized childcare.
- Support studies to determine better ways to locate, publicize, and equitably and astutely allocate childcare services.
- Support the efforts of nonprofits offering training to center-based and family child care providers both within and outside of the EarlyLearn network.
- Support nonprofits working to improve the skills and resources of individual childcare providers (both center-based and family childcare-based).
- Support youth development-school partnerships seeking to provide Pre-K-2 after-school services in low-income neighborhoods.

PROMOTING GIRLS' LEARNING

- Support individual school efforts to promote school-parent collaboration and to promote nurturing, holistic teaching methods in low-income schools.
- Strongly support nonprofit organizations working to build strong community-school-parent collaborations – and supporting parents' ability to be full educational partners.
- Fund efforts supporting K-2 teacher training in social-emotional development and age-appropriate, holistic teaching approaches.
- Seek out, convene and bring together nonprofits serving immigrant and other low-income communities, local schools, and childcare centers to create programs that support parents as first teachers and that train and place parents in volunteer positions within the schools.

PUBLIC Sector Recommendations:

REINFORCING GIRLS' CORE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- ***Invest robustly into basic child-centered infrastructure elements*** (playgrounds, parks, libraries, protections against environmental hazards) in low-income neighborhoods.

- ***Continue investing robustly into programs offering pre- and post-natal supports*** – e.g., Nurse-Family Partnership, Healthy Families and Early Head Start.

- ***Develop funding streams and mechanisms promoting universal, accessible, attractive early education and parenting programs*** for all low-income parents.

- ***Continue and expand funding towards the promulgation and evaluation of parenting programs that empower and encourage vulnerable mothers*** – i.e., the Administration for Children's Service's (ACS) pilots for mothers in preventive services.

- ***Create and designate funding streams geared to equip the staff members of domestic violence prevention programs to use proven mother-child bonding/nurturing strategies*** to help children recover from the trauma of exposure to family abuse.

- ***Ensure that all programs reaching new low-income mothers include funding towards identifying and addressing post-partum depression***.

SUPPORTING GIRLS WHILE THEIR MOTHERS WORK

- ***Rigorously monitor and enforce the Paid Family Leave Act*** and continue passing the additional legislative measures required to permit working parents to provide adequate care for their young children – i.e., offering reasonable flex-time accommodations and eliminating unpredictable work-shift changes.

- ***Create a new City agency solely focused on Early Childhood*** (preferably defined as 0-8) and move all childcare services out of ACS – where they inevitably occupy a position of far lesser emphasis than does child welfare – and into that agency.

- ***Invest robustly into the EarlyLearn system***. In particular:

    - ***Expand system capacities*** to analyze service need strategically and fully – and then expand coverage robustly where it is most needed.

    - ***Create a comprehensive, citywide marketing and enrollment process*** similar to what is utilized by UPK.

    - ***Raise compensation*** for all system workers and ensure that childcare teachers and Pre-K teachers working in childcare centers are compensated on a level comparable to Pre-K teachers working in public schools.

- ***Strongly increase support for family child care providers*** by increasing funding for the organizations assigned to – and capable of providing – that assistance.

    - ***Ensure that low-income working families have better access to the system*** by substantially raising the income-eligibility cut-off point, simplifying application procedures, improving the "real-time" information available on available slots, and reducing sliding-scale fees.

- ***Expand New York City's Child Care Tax Credit eligibility criteria to reach families making up to $65,000 a year.***

- ***Invest robustly into after-school programs for children in K-2 – and create after-school options for children in public school-based Pre-K***.

PROMOTING GIRLS' LEARNING

- ***Continue, expand, and rigorously evaluate the City's First Readers*** program, ***Head Start*** and other similar early education/parenting services for low-income parents.

- ***Continue and expand funding to enable EarlyLearn sites to support/engage parents***.

- ***Provide robust support towards enabling public elementary schools to reach out to and engage parents in a range of school-based activities***.

- ***Create/implement administrator and teacher training and support efforts*** promoting imaginative hands-on learning and social-emotional development throughout the K-2 years.

II. INTRODUCTION:
The Best Way to Support Young Girls

"In an airplane, they tell parents to put on their own oxygen masks before putting masks on their children. There are good reasons for that."
– Dr. Megan McLaughlin – former President/CEO of Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

The Blueprint for Investing in Girls, Age 0-8 explores how the public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors can best improve the odds for the young girls of NYC's low-income communities of color and immigrant communities.

It is a long report that covers much ground. But it can be summarized in a single sentence:

The best way to better support NYC's low-income little girls is to better support the low-income women who hold those girls' futures in their hands.

Experts in the field of early childhood development concur that the first eight years of a girl's life represent a remarkably unified and coherent period of time. Girls go through a wealth of physical, cognitive and social-emotional changes over the course of those years. While a four-year-old is very different from an infant and a second grader from a four-year-old, certain constants hold true across that whole miraculous transformational trajectory.

And those constants all relate to young children's need for full-time, consistent, age-appropriate adult care and attention.

The experts stress that throughout that full time span:

- **Core survival is totally dependent on adult support and supervision.** No four-year-old girl can provide herself with food and shelter. No six-year-old can exercise reliably sound judgment. No seven-year-old can defend herself against abusive behavior. If little girls do not receive full-time adult assistance and protection – if they are regularly or frequently neglected or left unprotected – they can be completely derailed from their natural course of development.

- **Perceptions and self-control are largely shaped by adult guidance.** Before the age of eight, girls are programmed to take in everything that goes on around them but remain ill-equipped to decipher what it means on their own. To develop those vitally important "de-coding" skills they need ongoing reinforcement and direction from caring adults. Girls who can confidently turn to their primary caregivers and teachers for help interpreting and processing the constant barrage of stimulation – who can count on thoughtful reactions to their questions, swift comfort for their bewilderments and fears, gentle steering through new situations and activities – will eventually develop their own strong sense of how the world works and how to negotiate its demands. Girls who are ignored on those vital fronts will have a far harder time appropriately understanding and reacting to life's challenges.

- **Skills and knowledge acquisition is dependent on adult sensitivity to developmental needs.** At some point around the age of eight, something clicks into place and girls become able to approach skill-building in a strategic fashion – to go beyond

wanting to just plink away at the piano keys to start willingly practicing scales. Before that major turning point, however, skill-honing and knowledge-acquisition tend to be predominantly instinctive and playful. If little girls' teachers and primary caregivers provide them with rich opportunities for active, engaging exploration – if they frame learning tasks in enticing ways – those girls will easily and eagerly absorb information and build new competencies. However, if those key adults consistently stifle young girls' curiosity or relegate them to seated, passive repetitive activities, those girls can become bored and frustrated with the whole process of learning or shut down altogether.

Across the board, youth providers and teachers describe the low-income little girls with whom they work in extraordinarily consistent ways. They assert that they are innately spunky and determined, caring and compassionate, curious and resilient. They talk about five-year-old immigrant girls taking newer arrivals under their wing while they master the demands of English, eight-year-old budding athletes devotedly coaching the younger girls on their teams, seven-year-old girl drummers dazzling audiences with their prowess, and six-year-olds figuring out how to build a house using hoola hoops.

They also, however, invariably note that far too many of those girls wrestle with challenges that no child should have to face. They describe kindergartners who are clearly battling malnutrition or unaddressed depression. Second graders who have been relentlessly "seat-drilled" out of their natural love of learning. Toddlers and pre-schoolers who act out in shockingly sexual ways because of abuse sustained at an unspeakably young age.

The experts remark that it is easy to be appalled by those circumstances. To be seized by the desire to change the odds for all those innocent little girls. They point out that New York's recent – and impressive – effort to create a Universal Pre-K system was largely spurred by the strong public desire to change the odds for all the low-income students who begin failing school at such a young age.

They also advise, however, that providing a single extra year of public school will never be enough to make a true difference. What is called for is strong support across all the years before those girls enter Pre-K; in the three years between entering kindergarten and starting third grade; and in all the hours, days and weeks when school is not in session.

Providing that support translates into providing strong resources, protections, compensation and respect for the adults who are ultimately responsible for the round-the-clock nurturance and guidance of those girls.

Those adults are overwhelmingly women.

It is clear that children benefit incomparably from receiving love and attention from diverse sources. And that if more men in low-income communities were more reliably and directly committed to providing care, attention, encouragement and resource support to the little girls in their lives, it would be deeply advantageous for everyone – for the girls, for the women who bear the main burdens of child-rearing, and for the men themselves. As Ted Bunch, the co-founder of A CALL TO MEN - a violence prevention organization that educates men on healthy, respectful manhood - puts it:

"Men are socialized to think of caregiving as 'a woman's job.' Because of this collective socialization, men who choose to show interest in caregiving can have their manhood questioned. Devaluing the roles of women and girls is, of course, bad for those women and girls. But it is bad for the men as well. Being unable to express care and vulnerability creates huge stresses. It can take years off of men's lives."

The lack of commitment is not, of course, absolutely universal. There are, in fact, many men in low-income communities who play major roles in their little girls' lives and who could also benefit from this report's recommendations – from more robust parental leaves and more reliable work shifts, from better pay and better neighborhood resources, and from schools with a strong emphasis on promoting parental engagement.

Nonetheless, it remains true that the adults who tend to end up bearing the most consistent and central responsibility for caring for, providing for and educating New York's low-income little girls are almost invariably mothers and grandmothers, aunts and older sisters, and female childcare workers and teachers.

Sadly, the first order of business remains reinforcing the resources, supports and protections that are readily and solidly available to those women.

"It isn't rocket science," remarks Elba Montalvo, former President/CEO of the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (CHCF) and long-time board member of the The New York Women's Foundation (NYWF). "If we want to improve the situations of low-income girls of color, our society needs to do better by the women who – generally – are in charge of raising them."

III. SCOPE OF THE ISSUE: Overview of NYC Girls – and the Women on Whom They Depend[4]

"I met with a bunch of girls the other day who had been through more in their short lives than anyone should ever have to go through."
– Benita Miller, Executive Director of the New York City Children's Cabinet

Even the briefest perusal of the demographics and circumstances of NYC's little girls reveals that a sizable number regularly contend with deprivation, instability and challenge – and that those who suffer the most tend to be girls from non-white and immigrant communities.

A substantial segment of New York's youngest girls of color and immigrant girls live in households in which the total earned income is too low to meet basic family needs. Many contend with undermining bias against their races, ethnic backgrounds or gender. Many face inappropriate demands upon their maturity. And a grimly large cohort have no permanent homes, no steady caregivers – no solid protections against neglect and abuse.

The sections below provide a brief overview of those girls' situations – and of the (comparably stressful) situations of the women who are principally responsible for supporting those girls' survival and wellbeing.

A sizable segment of New York's youngest girls of color and immigrant girls live in households in which the total earned income is too low to meet all family needs.

THE GIRLS

NUMBERS, RACE AND FAMILY ORIGIN

New York City is home to an estimated 450,000 little girls, age 0-8. They comprise slightly more than 5% of the total population and are as diverse a population as can be found anywhere in the world. Some 75 percent are non-white; fully 50 percent are immigrants or daughters of immigrants drawn from every corner of the globe. Their specific demographics break down as follows:

- **12% are Asian** – representing a wide range of nations, races, ethnicities and religions.
- **24% are black** – some born into families that have been in the United States for centuries and others into more newly-arrived families from the Caribbean and Africa.
- **35% are Latina** – representing every country in Latin America.
- **25% are white** – including many new arrivals from the former Soviet Union or the Balkans.
- **4% are listed as "other."**

The diversity and richness of these girls' backgrounds is, of course, a huge advantage in many ways. Growing up bi-lingual confers significant

[4] The figures in the sections that follow derive from a number of sources, including the Citizens Committee for Children of New York City (CCCNY)'s 2014 ***Keeping Track of New York City's Children***; http://www.aafny.org/cic/briefs/pakistani and bangladeshi; 2013.pdf; the NYC Administration for Children's Services' (ACS) FLASH bulletins; and the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) websites. All these various sources organize the data they present differently. Some provide statistics for children age 0-5 and 6-11; some for children ages 0- 9 and 10 – 18; and some for children ages 0-6 and 7-12. Some give breakdowns by gender and some do not. As a result, many of the figures presented in this section are, of necessity, extrapolations and estimations.

cognitive benefits. Learning to pick up cues from – and to negotiate demands across – multiple cultures strengthens perceptivity, flexibility and adaptability.

At the same time, however, having a home culture that is different from the "dominant" culture can lead to significant challenges. The experts stress that a girl who picks up English faster than her parents may be asked to play the role of linguistic and cultural interpreter at an age when that kind of "reverse parenting" can be highly detrimental. A girl who is required to behave one way in public and another way in private may experience split loyalties and confusion. A girl who looks or acts differently than her peers in the dominant culture may face dismissive or destructive assumptions, remarks and behaviors.

"I've seen far too many immigrant mothers expect their four-year-old daughters to 'be the adult' because those daughters can speak English and they can't," reports one child care provider. "They ask them to be their translators, interpreters and advocates in situations in which those girls should not even be involved. Not only do those demands represent an unfair burden, they can lead to terrible battles when the mothers try to re-assert their authority."

"My little granddaughter," adds the former head of a major Latina organization, "is already self-conscious about her lovely dark skin and kinky hair. She wants white dolls. She thinks her hips are too big. Our society's strong spoken – and unspoken – biases against non-white girls can be unspeakably damaging to those girls' self-image. Little girls pick up on everything from their earliest years, you know."

ECONOMIC STATUS

Poverty conditions surround a huge segment of the young girls growing up in NYC's communities of color and immigrant communities. In certain Community Districts (CDs) of the City (e.g., the South Bronx; Brownsville, Brooklyn), nearly 60 percent of all children live at or below the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Citywide, an average 31 percent of black girls and 40 percent of Latina girls live in households with incomes at that level. For Asian girls, the overall percentage is slightly lower (26 percent) but among certain groups of newer immigrants (e.g., Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Vietnamese and certain new Chinese groups) the percentages can be as high as 38 percent.[5]

Of course, it is not just households living at or below the FPL that struggle with deprivation. The experts stress that, given the exceptionally high cost of living in NYC, the nationally-determined FPL seriously underestimates true economic disadvantage. The Citizens Committee for Children of New York City (CCCNY) calculates that, taking the cost of living into account, *fully 63 percent* of NYC's young girls are growing up in households that lack adequate food, housing or other basic resources. And that the vast majority of the girls living at that poverty level are girls of color and immigrant girls.

LIVING SITUATIONS

Young New York girls live within a range of household configurations and situations:

- **Slightly more than half (53 percent) of all NYC girls live with two or more responsible adults** – sometimes two parents and sometimes other combinations of parents, grandparents or other relatives. In many immigrant households, multiple generations – or multiple families – live within the same tight quarters.

[5] See, for example, http://www.aafny.org/cic/briefs/bangladeshi2013.pdf; http://www.aafny.org/cic/briefs/pakistani2013.pdf

- **Slightly less than half of all NYC girls live with only one responsible adult – generally a mother or grandmother**.[6] Most of the households headed by a single woman are black or Latina and – conversely – a significant number of low-income black and Latina households are headed by a woman.[7]

- **Nearly two thirds of New York's youngest girls are growing up in households in which every responsible adult works** – and this is particularly true within immigrant, Latina and black households.[8] The highest rates of non-employed mothers are not found in the city's lowest-income Community Districts (CDs); they are found in the extraordinarily high-income census tracts abutting Central Park on Manhattan's Upper West and East Sides.[9]

HEALTH

Latina and black girls are consistently less healthy than their white counterparts. They die in infancy nearly twice as often as white girls.[10] Mothers of girls of color are 15 to 25 percent less likely to say that their pre-school daughters are in good health than are mothers of white girls.[11]

EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA

A sobering number of low-income girls of color live with the constant threat of violence and trauma:

- As many as 10,000 girls under the age of eight are housed in NYC's Homeless or Domestic Violence shelter systems at any time. Some have never known another home.[12]

- Nearly 3,000 girls under the age of eight are being raised in foster homes because of neglect, abuse or sexual abuse; and the families of some 6,000 additional little girls receive "preventive care" services – i.e., close monitoring, service referrals and mandated parenting classes – because they have been flagged by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) as being at "strong risk" for abusive or neglectful actions.[13]

- Untold additional thousands of girls being raised in the presence of family violence that has never been officially reported but that is no less traumatizing for having escaped tracking on any formal radar screen.

DAILY CARE ARRANGEMENTS

As many as 100,000 pre-school-age daughters of low-wage working mothers have no solid access to subsidized, reliable, quality childcare – and an even larger number of school-aged girls have no solid access to publicly-supported care during their out-of-school hours and school vacations.[14] Some of those girls are lucky enough to have devoted grandparents, aunts or family friends available to provide supervision and care while their mothers work. But a serious proportion are, of necessity, placed in various makeshift or precarious situations: in unregulated programs, with neighbors who simply put them in front of TV sets, with older sisters who may be ill-prepared for that task – or may legitimately resent being saddled with that responsibility at a time when they should be pursuing their own interests and skill development.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

While recent societal attention has predominantly focused on the school challenges of young boys of color – and while girls in communities of color do

[6] For one in ten girls, that woman is a grandmother.
[7] The New York Women's Foundation, Economic Security and Well-being Index for Women in New York City, NYC 2013
[8] Kids Count, 2014; Annie E. Casey Foundation; Baltimore, 2014
[9] The sections of the city in which women are least likely to be working full-time are the Upper West Side and Upper East Side of – i.e., two of the wealthiest communities in the metropolis, if not in the country. See Aisch, Gregory, Josh Katz and David Leonhardt, "Where Working Women Are Most Common," ***New York Times***; January 6, 2015
[10] NYC DOHMH Summary of Vital Statistics, Infant Mortality Overview; NYC, 2015
[11] NYC DOHMH ***Epiquery Survey***, 2009.
[12] Extrapolated from the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) "Daily Report."
[13] Extrapolated from the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) ***FLASH*** bulletin, April 2016.
[14] NYC Public Advocate's Office, ***Policy Report: Child Care in New York City, Part II: Investing in Child Care***; NYC, November 2015; NYC DYCD website.

tend to do better than their brothers – the girls of those communities also often face huge challenges. In 2015, more than 70 percent of the third graders in the city's four lowest-income school districts – and roughly 60 percent of the third graders in the next five lowest-income districts – failed to pass the annual English Language Assessment (ELA) exam.[15] Even though boys are likely to comprise a larger segment of those grim statistics than do girls, the imbalance is not totally overwhelming; a considerable number of girls are inevitably represented in those totals.

THE PRIMARY CAREGIVERS

The demographics and situations of the women (generally mothers and grandmothers) who predominantly serve as primary caregivers and providers for the city's lowest-income girls unsurprisingly mirror those of the girls for whom they are responsible. They are comparably impoverished, comparably homeless and comparably exposed to neighborhood and family violence. What is more, the situations of those grown women are often even more complicated and stressful than those of their daughters. In particular:

- The mothers who live under the same conditions of extreme poverty as their girls must also live with the discouraging reality that they have been unable to do anything about their situation – that all their grueling hours of labor have not been enough to lift themselves and their daughters out of that poverty.[16]

- The new immigrant mothers who struggle with the same cultural challenges and societal biases as their daughters are unlikely to possess their daughters' innate capacity to pick up new languages and cultural cues – and are less likely than their U.S.-born daughters to possess the legal documentation on which self-protection and progress so strongly depend.

- The mothers whose daughters are beginning to fail school are likely to have struggled in the same way. They may never have received the support or encouragement to complete school themselves,[17] have even less chance of receiving a "second chance" of reprising or finishing their education than those daughters, and often feel anguished that they do not have the tools to help their daughters do better.

- In tandem with their daughters, tens of thousands of mothers struggle with homelessness and family violence.[18] They also, however, must contend with the pain and shame of knowing that they cannot fully shield those daughters from the traumatic fall-out of those situations.

In sum, the situations of NYC's lowest-income little girls and their primary caregivers are deeply similar and deeply intertwined. To understand the situations of the girls, we need to understand the situations of those caregivers. And to remedy the situations of the girls we need to better acknowledge and address the situations of those caregivers.

[15] Citizens Committee For New York City Children, Keeping Track Online 2015

[16] According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research and The New York Women's Foundation, ***Economic Status of Women in New York State***, 2008, the positions most frequently held by black New York mothers include: home health aide, nurse, clerk, retail worker and childcare worker. For Latina women, they are: stock clerk, childcare worker and housekeeper. In the newer South Asian, Southeast Asian and Chinese communities, they include: nail salon worker, restaurant worker and domestic worker. Except for nursing, almost all of those positions pay less than $35,000 a year – an amount far below what is needed to raise a family in today's New York.

[17] In the city's lowest-income CDs, less than 50% of the women have high school diplomas – ***Ibid.***

[18] See the NYC Department of Homeless Services ***Daily Report***; and data from ***New Destiny Housing***.

IV. WE COULD ALL USE A MANUAL:
Reinforcing Girls' Core Support Systems

"In many societies, when a woman has a baby, someone comes to help. In this country – in this city – young panicked mothers don't get that. And, frankly, it's not just the most vulnerable mothers who need help. All new mothers need it."

– Lilliam Barrios Paoli, Chair of the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation

The experts in the field explain that in a little girl's first years, all learning and development is what they call "relational." That is, it takes place within the context of those girls' primary caregiving relationships.

A host of studies reveal that primary caregivers play an incalculably critical role in promoting girls' long-term development, positive self-image and resilience. Besides tending to core survival needs –providing food, housing, clothing and first aid – they essentially set the stage for those girls' ongoing healthy cognitive and emotional progress. When they regularly talk, read and play with those girls, they provide critical stepping stones for later academic success. When they show strength in the face of challenge, they show girls how to do it as well. When they respond appropriately to girls' uncontrolled emotions, they model vital mechanisms of self-control.[19]

And yet – despite the vital importance of their role – most of the women who take on the relentless, exhausting, ever-evolving, and challenging intellectual, physical- and emotional tasks of caregiving do so with no solid preparation. They do it in the face of the broad and pernicious societal assumption that caregiving is easy and instinctive for them. That it requires no training, no support – and no real respect. That, on some level, it is not really "work."

"Motherhood is a complex undertaking," asserts Jennifer March, Executive Director of the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York City. "All at once, it can be both profoundly rewarding and joyful and incredibly challenging. There is no magic manual for motherhood, so it helps when mothers have a network of support to rely on."

The advocates point out that mothers of material means typically have a range of core parenting supports available to them. Most live near well-stocked libraries and attractive playgrounds – oases in which they can sit with peers from time to time to compare notes while their children play safely. The grocery stores in their neighborhoods typically carry an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables. The air they and their daughters breathe is relatively clean. Most are able to find good pediatricians and specialized medical care, as needed. Some are able to afford nannies or nurses to provide respite, guidance and suggestions. Most can easily find high-quality early education programs for their toddlers and welcoming, culturally-competent skill-building programs for themselves.

[19] See, particularly, Thompson, Ross A.; "Stress and Child Development," ***Future of Children***, volume 24, No. 1; Princeton New Jersey, Spring 2014; Center for New York City Affairs, ***Child Welfare Watch; Baby Steps: Poverty, Chronic Stress and New York's Youngest Children***, NYC, fall 2013; Grove, Betsy McAlister, ***Children Who See Too Much***, Beacon Press, Boston Massachusetts, 2002; and National Scientific Council on the Developing Child; The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do, Harvard University: Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007.

"Have you looked at the most recent 92nd Street Y catalogue?" asks Gail B. Nayowith, Principal of 1digit LLC and longtime advocate for children and families. "Have you seen what they offer to parents of young children? Classes on whatever mothers and babies could possibly need – on breastfeeding and managing sibling rivalry and supporting robust language acquisition. Classes that assume that all mothers have questions and need support delivered in ways that don't minimize their concerns or expect them to be all-knowing and hard-wired for parenting success. Classes in which no one is made to feel inadequate or incompetent – in which everyone is welcomed, encouraged and empowered."

For women who live outside the protected boundaries of the city's more affluent Community Districts (CDs), however, the picture is typically very different.

There are few inviting parks and playgrounds in the city's lowest-income CDs. The available pediatricians are not always of the highest quality and culturally-competent mental health providers are a rarity. The very air in low-income neighborhoods can be a threat to good health. The available housing is often crumbling. The bodegas that serve as the main supermarkets are generally devoid of fresh produce. There are few infant-toddler and parenting classes offered at times or locations that work for them – or at prices they can afford. Low-income mothers can't afford to employ nurses and nannies – they are nurses and nannies, taking care of other women's children while scrambling to find appropriate care for their own children. Even La Leche League – that much-acclaimed free group support service for nursing mothers – tends to locate its chapters only within higher-income census tracts.

The very air in low-income neighborhoods can be a threat to good health.

Low-income women, in short, are generally left without the "whole village" of help and resources that every parent needs.

And when low-income women face challenges extending far beyond "normal" parental difficulties – when they are homeless or in violent relationships or struggling with serious post-partum depression – their ability to access appropriate support narrows even further.

Historically, the most common parenting services provided to NYC's most deeply embattled low-income mothers have been the classes that ACS (the City's Administration for Children's Services) mandates for families flagged as being potentially neglectful or abusive. Classes that are typically a far cry from what is offered at the 92nd Street Y.

"When a mother is required to take an ACS 'parenting class,' what she hears officially is: 'We're here to help you to be a better mother!'" remarks one advocate. "But what she really hears is: 'You are a bad mother and if you don't attend our classes we're going to take your kid away.' And then we're surprised when she reacts with defensiveness!"

The advocates stress that many of the mothers identified as being "at-risk" by ACS never received much in the way of solid nurturing, themselves. They may have grown up in foster care. They may never have been told by their own parents and teachers that they can succeed – whether as mothers or as anything else. They may be living with the strain and terror of ongoing domestic violence.

If a mother is directly inflicting injury upon her daughter, that daughter of course needs to be protected from that abuse. But if she is simply overwhelmed by past and present danger and humiliation, she needs something other than additional threats, judgments or reprimands. She needs careful, encouraging guidance and

role-modeling – assistance that can help her to be the parent that she would like to be.

Mothers living with past and present danger and humiliation don't need additional threats, judgments or reprimands. They need careful, encouraging guidance and role-modeling – supportive assistance enabling them to be the parents that they would like to be.

In recent years, thankfully, there seems to have been a small but clear shift in the resources, attitudes and approaches offered to multiply-besieged, low-income New York mothers. In particular, both the public and the nonprofit sectors have been working to:

- Re-build certain playgrounds, re-stock certain libraries, encourage the development of community gardens and healthy food pantries, and build community schools offering multiple support services to parents and children.

- Expand or launch intensive support programs for key groups,:

    - Potentially vulnerable mothers at the "starting gate" of their parenting – e.g., pregnant and new mothers in homeless shelters and in the foster care system.

    - Mothers grappling with the impact of ongoing trauma on themselves and their young daughters.

    - Mothers grappling with post-partum depression.

The following sections provide descriptions of some of the most effective efforts currently serving the mothers in the most acute need, together with recommendations for making those – and other vitally-needed parenting and early educational supports – more available to all mothers in low-income communities.

SUPPORTING MOTHERS AT THE STARTING GATE

The City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has long made universally-accessible pre-natal care a central goal of its work. Its efforts have been impressively successful. While, as previously noted, NYC's low-income black and Latina babies still die in infancy twice as often as do white babies, infant mortality rates within those communities have been falling steadily and significantly. Over the past decade, the rates for black babies have dropped by more than 30 percent. Among Puerto Rican babies, they have plummeted by nearly 50 percent. NYC's overall infant mortality rates are currently significantly lower than those for the nation as a whole.[20]

Nonetheless, solid pre-natal care is only the first step in a mother's journey. When a new or young mother lives in precarious circumstances or when she has had a consistent history of receiving poor nurturing herself, she is likely to need guidance and support extending considerably beyond the safe gestation and delivery of her child guidance that will help her prevent her child from suffering from the same trauma and neglect that she did.

A few good models exist for providing supportive preventive care to new mothers across the full first couple of years of their first children's lives; commendably, the City has begun investing more robustly in those models. The best models include:

- **The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** – a federally-funded program in which trained nurses make home visits to an estimated 1,800 first-time NYC mothers living in highly stressful circumstances – teen mothers, young mothers in foster care and new mothers in homeless shelter systems. Program staff work with those mothers from late pregnancy

[20] NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Summary of Vital Statistics, 2013; NYC, 2015, op.cit.

through their children's second birthday. They offer intensive personal coaching, model best-practice nurturing and provide information about community resources. They also periodically bring mothers and their children together to support one another – and simply to have fun.

- **Healthy Families** – a State-funded program offered to an estimated additional 1,400 pregnant mothers flagged as being "at-risk" by hospitals, nonprofits or ACS. The services offered are very similar to those provided by ***NFP*** except that the people providing the services are trained community volunteers rather than nurses – and that there are no group services offered in the mix.

- **The NYC Healthy Newborn Home Visiting Program** – a new effort offering short-term, highly individualized and supportive home visit-based supports to all mothers who have given birth in Department of Homeless Shelters (DHS) facilities.

- **Early Head Start** – a long-standing federally-funded home visit program in which early childhood educators make regular visits to the families of infants and toddlers living below the federal poverty line. The educators offer pre- and post-natal coaching around child health, parent-child bonding, and early learning strategies.

- **City's First Readers**. — a new, $1.5 million City Council effort that strengthens the "first teacher" capacities of very low-income parents of infants and toddlers through home- and library-based strategies that increase their access to books and toys and that model activities to support early reading and overall learning.

The providers responsible for implementing these programs offer strong anecdotal accounts of their effectiveness. The three programs that have been most rigorously evaluated (*NFP, Healthy Families* and *Early Head Start*) have well-documented records of positive impact.[21] Nonetheless, the experts stress, all these programs – individually and collectively – still reach only the very smallest segment of all the low-income mothers who could benefit from strong and dependable initial support.

"We finally seem to have learned what works in terms of bolstering vulnerable new mothers' basic skills and resources," remarks the director of one of the city's largest providers of early childhood services. "Programs like the Nurse Family Partnership and Early Head Start. But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. At best, those programs reach only a few thousand of the city's neediest mothers and children – while the need for basic, overall high-quality early parenting and educational supports is in the hundreds of thousands. If we want to make a true difference, we need to aim higher. We're headed in the right direction, but far too slowly and far too timidly."

SUPPORTING MOTHERS WHEN TRAUMA HAS ALREADY OCCURRED

By concentrating on pregnant and brand-new mothers – by focusing resources at the point at which the potential for preventing long-term trauma is greatest – the City is clearly doing some astute triaging. But the assistance that those programs offer does nothing for the tens of thousands of additional mothers who, together with their young daughters, are already living with trauma. Those vulnerable mothers also need astute and sensitive assistance if they are to help themselves and their daughters deal with and heal from the impact of the deprivation and violence that surrounds them.

[21] Documented outcomes include significant reductions in incidents of neglect and abuse and of unwanted additional pregnancies; reductions in children's language delays and behavioral problems; and increases in breastfeeding and in mothers' pursuit of additional education and employment opportunities. For an excellent overview of a range of promising programs see: Berger, Lawrence M. and Sarah A. Font; "The Role and Family-Centered Programs and Policies;" ***Future of Children***, Volume 25, No. 1, Princeton: Spring 2015.

Over the past couple of years, the City has been testing out a couple of sound approaches to supporting this second group of mothers and daughters. For example:

- **Safe Horizon's Child Advocacy Program:** Safe Horizon, the city's leading provider of services for victims of domestic violence, has been pioneering five borough-wide "Child Advocacy Centers" that offer one-stop comprehensive legal, counseling and social service supports to the families of children who have experienced serious abuse. They particularly focus on equipping the mothers to: (1) deal with the emotions that the abuse of their daughters may trigger – particularly if they, themselves, have also experienced childhood abuse; (2) support their daughters' efforts to process what has happened; (3) deal with the behavioral issues that their daughters are likely to demonstrate; and (4) create or re-establish oases of safety and recovery for themselves and their daughters.

- **The Administration for Children's Services' Preventive Service Pilot Programs:** Over the past few years, ACS has begun piloting new approaches to providing preventive services for vulnerable mothers of young children. They are identifying and removing the practices that traditionally communicated reprimand or threat and replacing them with the kind of supportive approaches employed by NFP or Healthy Families – i.e., coaching delivered in a nonjudgmental and encouraging fashion within those mothers' own homes. Unsurprisingly, providers receiving these pilot contracts have been reporting both an uncharacteristic degree of receptiveness to their efforts and a marked improvement in the degree to which the mothers receiving those services are able to create or rebuild a sense of hope and progress within their homes.

"Parents involved in the child welfare system have historically tried to keep that fact a secret," remarks the Director of Preventive Services at one of the agencies holding one of ACS's new contracts. "They are ashamed. But ACS's new approaches are changing all that. I have had mothers who have never even been on the ACS radar screen come to me, saying that they've heard how great our new services are from their friends – and wanting to know how they can receive those services too. Who ever heard of someone telling her friends that she's receiving ACS services? Who ever heard of someone actually asking for ACS services? It's a real and positive revolution."

These new approaches are still in the early stages of development and evaluation, but the initially positive responses they have been generating offer strong evidence that they merit strong ongoing evaluation and robust expanded support.

A Little Help With the Rough Spots

Eighteen young Orthodox Jewish mothers sit on the floor, bending over their babies. A small bottle of safflower oil is passed around and each mother puts a few drops on her fingertips, listens attentively to the group leader sitting at the head of the circle, and begins to massage her child.

"Baby massage is something that you do for both you and your babies," the group leader advises. "Nourishing and healing. A way to bond, to comfort, and also to take care of yourself. A way to let your babies know that you love them and also to feel more at peace with your own feelings. You can sing to them as you do this, you know. Or you can pray. It all helps."

Each of the mothers is self-identified as having post-partum depression (PPD), a maternal condition that accompanies one in every eight births – provoking feelings of helplessness, despair and fear so strong that it can lead mothers to harming themselves, ignoring their babies, and even harming their babies. Linked to specific neurobiological stressors that can appear after any gestation and birth experience, the condition knows no income, racial or ethnic boundaries.

"A mother with PPD can feel so ashamed, so guilty, she can enter a tunnel of complete grief," explains Esther Kenigsberg, the founder and Executive Director of SPARKS, a NYWF-funded organization that helps women in the Orthodox Jewish community understand what they are experiencing and take steps to overcome it. "Our referrals and counseling – our group services like this massage group – help those mothers feel less isolated, less self-blaming and more able to find their way back to health."

PPD is finally being recognized for what it is: a medical condition that requires support, reassurance, practical guidance and – occasionally – medical intervention. Growing awareness of PPD's causes and effects has led to the infusion of new screening and support practices within a range of City programs. Experts familiar with PPD assert that the new awareness is probably saving more than a few lives and urge strong expansion of non-judgmental and truly supportive efforts such as SPARKS.

"SPARKS helped me see that I am not a bad mother – that I just needed a little help with the rough spots," murmurs one mother, gazing down at her child. "There is nothing worse than thinking that you can't connect with your own child. But often it's just that the mother needs a little help herself."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND INVESTMENT

As the advocate quoted in a previous section stated, we "finally know what works." We have solid models to follow. The task at hand becomes taking those models out of the "boutique and piloting stage" to create programs that are broadly accessible by all who need them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC/ NONPROFIT SECTOR:

Seek out and generously support:

- **Community efforts improving overall basic neighborhood resources** – libraries, communal gardens, farmers' markets, playgrounds.

- **Family-centered providers interested in and capable of offering a range of regular, core early educational and parenting services (e.g., parenting classes, support groups, play groups, individual coaching, Mommy and Me classes, early education, swimming, music)** to mothers and children in low-income neighborhoods within accessible locations.

- **Domestic violence providers and child welfare providers interested in launching or deepening specialized services in support of mother-child healing for parents at risk**, foster parents and biological parents seeking to reunite with their children.

- **Culturally-knowledgeable and competent providers interested in identifying and offering supports to women dealing with post-partum depression** in a range of demographic communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR:

- **Invest robustly into basic child-centered infrastructure elements** (playgrounds, parks, libraries, protections against environmental hazards) in low-income neighborhoods.

- **Continue investing robustly into programs offering pre- and post-natal supports** – e.g., Nurse-Family Partnership, Healthy Families and Early Head Start.

- **Develop funding streams creating and supporting attractive, accessible affordable combined parenting and early education programs** of the caliber of Head Start for all low-income mothers and their children.

- **Continue and expand funding towards the promulgation and evaluation of parenting programs that empower and encourage vulnerable mothers** – i.e., the Administration for Children's Service's (ACS) pilots for mothers in preventive services.

- **Create and designate funding streams geared to equip the staff members of domestic violence prevention programs to use proven mother-child bonding/nurturing strategies** to help children recover from the trauma of exposure to family abuse.

- **Ensure that all programs reaching new low-income mothers include funding towards identifying and addressing post-partum depression.**

V. THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB IN THE WORLD: Supporting Girls While Their Mothers Work

"Why do low-wage mothers have to choose between supporting their families and … supporting their families?"

– Panel Member, Committee for Hispanic Families and Children Childcare Conference

As previously noted, a solid majority of NYC's Latina, immigrant and – particularly – black mothers are both the main (or sole) wage earners and the main (or sole) caregivers for their households.[22] Their lives are shaped by the non-stop struggle to meet the conflicting demands of their families and their employers. And, ultimately, it is their children who suffer the most from that relentless – and woefully under-supported – struggle.

The sections below provide an overview of the workplace issues, the pre-school and out-of-school childcare gaps – and even the City tax code issues – that undermine low-wage mothers' ability to concomitantly raise and support their young daughters. They describe the areas in which positive change seems both most necessary and most possible and offer recommendations for improving the situations of the girls by better addressing and supporting the situations of their working mothers.

THE DEMANDS OF LOW-WAGE WORK[23]

Black, Latina and immigrant working mothers represent the backbone of NYC's low-wage workforce and the bedrock of its economy. As cashiers and office cleaners, stock clerks and restaurant workers they provide the foundation on which the city's business and commercial sectors rest. As nannies, childcare providers, home health aides and housekeepers they furnish the support system on which the city's higher-paid working parents absolutely depend.[24]

Black, Latina and immigrant working mothers represent the backbone of NYC's low-wage workforce and the bedrock of its economy… and yet these critically-important low-wage mothers can count on scant support or protection.

And yet all these critically important low-wage mothers can count on receiving scant support or protections. Their salaries are often too low to consistently cover basic rent and food costs – let

[22] Nationally 75% of black children under the age of six live in households in which all residential parents are in the workforce. For non-black children, the rate is closer to 63%. See Malik, Raheed and Jamil Hagler, "Black Families Work More, Earn Less and Face Difficult Child Care Choices," ***Center for American Progress***, August 5, 2016.

[23] The information in this section is largely taken from A Better Balance, ***Investing in Our Families: The Case for Paid Family Leave in New York and the Nation***, NYC, 2015 and from Berger, Lawrence M. and Sarah A. Font, "The Role of the Family and Family-Centered Programs and Policies," ***The Future of Children***, Volume 25, No. 1, Princeton, New Jersey, Spring 2015.

[24] According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research and The New York Women's Foundation, ***Economic Status of Women in New York State***, 2008. The positions most frequently held by black New York mothers include: home health aide, nurse, clerk, retail worker and childcare worker. For Latina women, they are: stock clerk, childcare worker and housekeeper. In the newer South Asian, South-east Asian and Chinese communities, they include: nail salon worker, restaurant worker and domestic worker. Except for nursing, those positions invariably pay less than $35,000 a year.

alone market-rate childcare – in this exorbitantly expensive city.[25] Their assigned work schedules are generally both too unpredictable to permit reliable childcare planning and too rigid to accommodate the occasional family event or emergency.

"When the lady I work for phones me at six o'clock to say she's tied up in a meeting and will I please stay with her kids till she gets home – and, by the way, will I please give them dinner and a bath – she's not really *asking me*," explains a nanny who lives in Flatbush and works on the Upper West Side. "She knows I can't say no. She knows I can't afford to lose the job that pays the rent. And so I'm stuck leaving my own three-year-old with my twelve year-old for those extra two hours and praying for the best."

After years of legislative battles, New York State has finally passed a *Paid Family Leave Act* that guarantees ongoing paychecks and a "job to return to" for mothers taking time off to be with a newborn or newly-adopted child. It is a major and hard-won victory for which the advocates – many of them supported by The New York Women's Foundation – deserve tremendous credit.[26]

The struggle is far from over, however. It remains to be seen whether such a measure will be truly enforceable in those hard-to-monitor situations (like domestic service) in which so many low-wage mothers are employed. And – watershed victory though it is – it still does little to address those mothers' equally pressing (and far more common) need for greater predictability in their work schedules and reasonable accommodation for vital family events.

"What is the most important thing we can do for the young daughters of low-wage mothers?" asks Betsy McAlister Groves, LICSW, faculty member at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and founding director of the Child Witness to Violence Project at Boston Medical Center. "Well besides offering those mothers a living wage, we can guarantee them more reasonable flex time and more predictable hours. Women in high-paid jobs can generally negotiate for those conditions. We need to make sure that low-wage women can do the same. Because they aren't 'privileges' for any working mother. They are necessities."

THE CONTOURS OF NYC'S SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE AND AFTER-SCHOOL SYSTEMS[27]

Perhaps the strongest and most consistent opinions voiced by the advocates consulted for this report related to the need for comprehensive, easily-accessible, well-paid, full-day, pre-school and out-of-school childcare coverage for the young daughters of low-wage working mothers. Almost unanimously, the experts averred that ensuring every low-income little girl's access to high-quality care during the four years before she starts school – and at all those times at which school is not in session – would do more for those girls' future success than any other single policy or programmatic action.

The following sections provide a brief analysis of NYC's current subsidized childcare and after-school systems and offer recommendations for improving

[25] According to the City's Public Advocate's Office, op. cit., the average annual full-time market-rate childcare cost for an infant is $16,250; for a toddler it averages $11,648.

[26] NYWF grantee partner, ***A Better Balance***, has been a consistent leader in this advocacy campaign.

[27] The information summarized in this section is based on dozens of interviews, plus the following documents: Villanueva, Madeleine; ***Unleashing the Economic Power of Family Child Care Providers***; Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.; NYC: 2015; NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Child Care Facts and Figures, OCFS website, 2015; Citizens Committee for New York Children, ***2014 Keeping Track of New York City's Children***, NYC 2014; Hurley, Kendra and Abigail Kramer, with Myra Rosenbaum and Alison Miller, Big ***Dreams for New York City's Youngest Children: The Future of Early Care and Education***. Center for New York City Affairs, The New School; Summer, 2014; and Center for Children's Initiatives, ***CCI Primer 2011: Key Facts about Early Care and Education in New York City***; NYC; 2011; the New York City Public Advocate's Office, ***Policy Report: Child Care in New York City, Part II: Investing in Child Care***; NYC, November 2015; and the DYCD and Administration for Children's Services (ACS) websites.

them. A more detailed description of the childcare system (which is so complicated that no expert could explain it cogently in a single attempt) is offered in Appendix D.

THE SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE SYSTEM

SCOPE AND NATURE

The City currently provides subsidized childcare to low-income mothers in two main ways:

- Distributing approximately 70,000 *childcare vouchers* to women who are on – or at risk for seeking – public assistance (PA).

- Funding and regulating 36,000 subsidized *"EarlyLearn"* direct childcare service slots for other low-wage working mothers.

Descriptions of each of those strategies follow below.

CHILDCARE VOUCHERS

The key funding source for NYC's childcare voucher system is the 1996 Federal Personal Responsibility Act, a piece of legislation whose core purpose was (and remains) minimizing the use of public assistance (PA). The City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) channels the support provided through that Act into providing vouchers to NYC's approximately 57,500 PA recipients so they can access the childcare services needed to either fulfill their mandated work requirements or seek permanent employment. The funds that remain after that initial distribution are then turned over to the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to offer what are known as "non-mandated" vouchers to some 12,500 women deemed at risk for requesting PA.[28]

Voucher recipients can use their vouchers either to gain access to *EarlyLearn* direct service slots or to purchase services from other approved providers. Most recipients choose approved non-EarlyLearn sources of care – often family childcare providers offering services within their own homes.[29] When asked why they make that choice, most voucher recipients respond that the main criteria for selecting a provider include: "ease of access" and "convenience," and that non-*EarlyLearn* providers are almost invariably both easier to access and more conveniently-located than are providers working within the official *EarlyLearn* system.

DIRECT SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE SERVICES – EARLYLEARN

The approximately 36,000 *EarlyLearn* direct service slots are supported through a funding pool drawn from various national and local sources (i.e., the Child Development Block Grant, City tax levies, several City Council grants, and Department of Education (DOE) and *Head Start* funds).

[28] The "non-mandated" vouchers distributed by ACS have historically been given to mothers in the homeless shelter system, parenting girls in the foster care system, and mothers in certain low-income neighborhoods. The formula used to select those neighborhoods – which has been in place since the Giuliani Administration – has consistently resulted in a majority of vouchers going to two Brooklyn communities: Boro Park and Williamsburg. Some advocates have been urging re-evaluation of that formula to ensure that it equitably supports mothers in need across the city. See, particularly, Hurley, Kendra and Abigail Kramer, with Myra Rosenbaum and Alison Miller. ***Big Dreams for New York City's Youngest Children: The Future of Early Care and Education***. Center for New York City Affairs, The New School; summer 2014; and NYC Public Advocate's Office, ***Policy Report: Child Care in New York City, Part II: Investing in Child Care***, op. cit.

[29] There are three main types of family childcare providers: (1) "legally-exempt" providers – who are permitted to care for only two children in addition to their own children; and (2) "registered" and "licensed" providers – who are permitted to care for, respectively, six or twelve total children apiece. None of the city's 45,000 "legally-exempt" providers are part of the *EarlyLearn* system, though they are considered to be part of the overall publicly-subsidized childcare universe since they are eligible to receive subsidized food and to accept government-issued vouchers. 1,400 of the city's approximately 8,000 "registered" and "licensed" providers are included within the *EarlyLearn* system, though all 8,000 – like all "legally-exempt" providers – are counted within the overall publicly-subsidized care universe since they are eligible to receive subsidized food and to accept government-issued vouchers. All "legally-exempt" providers receive initial training from a single highly-regarded Bronx-based (and NYWF-supported) organization called WHEDCO. All "registered" and "licensed" providers receive initial training from the five member organizations of the State-funded Childcare Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Consortium (i.e., the *Center for Children's Initiatives; the Child Development Support Corporation;* the *Chinese-American Planning Council;* the *Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.;* and the *Day Care Council of New York, Inc.*). Family childcare providers working within the *EarlyLearn* system are able to access additional support and training through their "networks;" and all family childcare providers – regardless of official status – can purchase additional courses and support from a range of training organizations including WHEDCO; BOCNET (also a NYWF grantee-partner); the CUNY Professional Development Institute (PDI); the FirstStepNYC Early Education Leadership Institute; the Bank Street College of Education; and the five CCR&R Consortium members.

Approximately 80 percent of those slots are located within 350 neighborhood centers run by 132 ACS-contracted nonprofit organizations. The remaining 20 percent are located within the homes of 1,400 "licensed" or "registered" *EarlyLearn* family childcare providers.

EarlyLearn center staff are paid, supervised, trained and given ongoing support by the organizations holding the 132 ACS *EarlyLearn* contracts. *EarlyLearn* family childcare providers are paid, monitored, and given ongoing support by 28 networks headed by ACS-contracted nonprofits (most of which are the same nonprofits that hold center-based contracts).

Voucher-receiving families obtain *EarlyLearn* slots for free, as do families eligible for *Head Start*. Families with incomes at or below 275 percent of FPL obtain services by paying fees on a sliding scale basis. Information on participating providers is offered by the five State-funded Childcare Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Consortium members cited in Footnote 29 below.

SYSTEM STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

The experts' views on *EarlyLearn*'s strengths and weaknesses were strikingly consistent.

In terms of strengths, they overwhelmingly concurred that most providers do remarkable things with extraordinarily constrained funding. In particular, they averred that most providers – both center- and family-childcare-based – are deeply committed to:

- **Providing holistic care**, i.e., supporting all aspects – cognitive, social-emotional, creative, and physical – of the development of the children in their programs.

- **Arranging services in ways that allow families to access a full ten hours of care** regardless of how those families enter the system.

- **Treating parents with respect** and welcoming their participation in activities, as appropriate.

In terms of weaknesses, the experts consistently noted a few key systemic issues limiting the ability of consumers to access services – and of providers to operate with ease. They stressed:

- **The financial and logistical barriers facing consumers seeking to qualify for, pay for and locate available slots:**

  - The income-eligibility cut-off point for families is so low (275 percent of FPL) that a majority of low-wage working families are automatically eliminated.

  - The sliding scale fees charged to families, while significantly lower than the fees charged for market-rate childcare, remain too high for many eligible households.[30]

  - Application procedures are so complicated that many families are discouraged from applying.

  - There is no centralized system providing consumers with real-time information regarding where open slots are located.

  - Processing delays are so long that by the time families are approved the slots they'd hoped for are often taken.

According to some calculations, this potent combination of financial and logistical barriers results in the exclusion of as many as 200,000 truly low-income children from the official subsidized childcare system.[31] According to the Public Advocate's

[30] A single mother with one child who earns $30,000 a year, for example, ends up paying a full 16% of her income for a slot (ACS website).
[31] See Villanueva, Madeleine; ***Unleashing the Economic Power of Family Child Care Providers***; Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.; NYC: 2015.

Office, the current system serves *only 12 percent of the children of income-eligible families.*[32]

- **The demands made upon – and the overall lack of support given to – providers:** The stringent new requirements mandated by the 2012 *EarlyLearn* reforms – coupled with the dearth of funding provided towards meeting those requirements – resulted in the exodus of many of the City's smaller community providers, while placing huge ongoing financial pressures on all the (generally larger and more established) providers that managed to remain in the system. Current providers also suffer from the fact that – thanks to all the issues barring potential consumers from accessing services – many of their slots go unfilled and unreimbursed, thereby further reducing the income they receive towards overall operations. The Public Advocate's Office reports that *40 percent of all current publicly-subsidized childcare centers operate at a deficit.*[33]

"Our funding is so limited that we are unable to make repairs as quickly as we would like, purchase all the equipment that we need, or pay our staff members the salaries that they deserve," explains Maria Contreras-Collier, Executive Director of the Cypress Hills Child Care Corporation. "All our staff members – from the teachers to the cooks to the maintenance workers – give their 'all' to the children in our program. And yet, some of them earn so little that they can't even cover their *own* childcare needs. Quality costs money! Entering the early education field shouldn't mean taking a vow of poverty!"

Further exacerbating the problem is the fact that teachers in the *EarlyLearn* system earn significantly less than teachers in the City's newly-minted UPK system – even when they have exactly the same credentials as the UPK teachers. In addition, UPK teachers who work in *EarlyLearn* centers earn less than UPK teachers who work in schools – even when they have the same credentials.[34] Unsurprisingly, since the launch of UPK, the *EarlyLearn* system has lost a whole cohort of its top professionals to DOE.

"It is incredible to think that low-wage working families struggle to access slots at the same time that providers struggle to fill them," concludes one advocate. "The system needs far better planning and marketing capacities. Families need more reasonable eligibility requirements, easier application processes and more reasonable sliding scale fees. And providers need more reasonable budgets. By the second year of the UPK launch, the City had created a system that enabled parents to easily locate and enroll their children in the most convenient sites. And it had put the whole thing within financial reach of every participating provider and every family in the city. Why can't we do the same for childcare?"

NYC CHILD CARE TAX CREDIT ELIGIBILITY

Finally, a word needs to be said about NYC's seriously limited childcare tax credit policies. Currently, only families earning less than $30,000 a year qualify for tax relief – and only for any children who are under the age of three. Tens of thousands of truly low-wage families are thereby excluded from critically-needed assistance. It is clear that strong advocacy is also needed towards making this potentially hugely useful source of relief available to many more struggling families.[35]

[32] NYC Public Advocate's Office, ***Policy Report: Child Care in New York City, Part II: Investing in Child Care***, op. cit.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Advocates in the field calculate that over a 20-year period, a teacher in the EarlyLearn system will earn $500,000 less than a teacher with the same qualifications and experience in the DOE system.
[35] See NYC Public Advocate's Office, ***Policy Report: Child Care in New York City, Part II: Investing in Child Care***, op. cit.

"You Can't Pick this Stuff Up in a Crash Course"

"In our experience, Chinese-American mothers generally prefer to leave their very young children with licensed family care providers rather than in centers," explains Sumon Chin, Director of the Asian Child Care Resource & Referral Program (ACCR&R) – one of the five State-funded Childcare Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Consortium members. "They like it that family care is so 'homelike' and so convenient. And that licensed family providers so often share their backgrounds and speak their language. And that – thanks to the in-depth bi-lingual training and high-quality curricula that ACCR&R offers – our providers not only comply with all the relevant laws and regulations, they also truly support children's overall development, education, health and safety."

When asked for suggestions regarding where new childcare investments should be directed, a surprising number of advocates said the same thing: "Into better supporting family childcare providers!"

The advocates made a few key points. Like Sumon Chin, they noted the strong advantages of a service delivery model that is generally so convenient, so well-suited to the needs of very young children and so supportive of the cultural strengths of those children's families. They praised the generally high-quality level of care that they provide. And they remarked that – beyond being a vital resource for already-working mothers – becoming a family childcare provider can be an excellent strategy for community mothers who want to pursue a career in early childhood education while continuing to care for their own young children.

But they also stressed that most providers face considerable challenges.

"Family providers do incredible work," asserts Jocelyn Rodriguez, Director of the Early Care and Education Institute at the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families. "They keep mixed-age groups of children fed, happy, healthy, interested and educated ten long hours a day. They tend to bruised knees and settle quarrels while also doing all their own cooking (three meals a day plus snacks); managing all their own marketing and bookkeeping; setting up before the kids come and cleaning up after they have left. And yet – despite all their efforts – they enjoy no lunch breaks, no health benefits, no guaranteed vacations and outrageously low pay. And – unless they happen to be members of good provider networks or to have strong ties to a CCR&R Consortium member – they typically receive very little reinforcement. It can be really tough and isolating to be a family childcare provider – and our society offers very little support to all those incredibly hard-working and vitally-needed professionals."

"Family child care is not just 'any old' small business," concludes a Brooklyn-based care provider affiliated with the Cypress Hills Childcare Corporation (CHCCC), one of the most respected of the ACS family childcare provider networks. "It is an act of love. Women like me enter the field because children light up our lives. Because guiding and educating little children is the most important work in the world. But make no mistake – it's also really hard work. Little children are complicated. Their parents are complicated. I could never do what I do if I couldn't call on the wonderful people at CHCCC for guidance and help whenever I get stuck. You can't pick this stuff up in a crash course. We need all the help we can get."

SCOPE AND NATURE OF NEW YORK'S SUBSIDIZED AFTER-SCHOOL SYSTEM

The need for full-time childcare is clearly greatest in the years before a working mother's children enter public school. But the need for care does not end at that point. The young grade-school children of working mothers cannot fend for themselves once the school day is out at 2:20 p.m. – or during all the vacation days worked into the school calendar.

"What is a working mother to do," asks one advocate, "when the last school bell sounds? And over Christmas vacation? And during the summer? What is a mother to do with the five-year-old daughter whose needs, energies, curiosity and mischief don't let up just because school isn't in session?"

The City agency in charge of subsidized after-school and summertime programs is the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Through its Comprehensive After-School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC) program, the Department brings hundreds of nonprofit youth development agencies and schools together to create an array of free programs that collectively serve some 97,000 young people from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., every day during the school year.[36] Through its 80 Beacon programs, it offers thousands of 6- to 18-year-olds and their families an impressive range of afternoon and evening activities. And, for many years, it opened up summer camp options to many low-income families – particularly the low-income families of middle-schoolers.

The advocates give DYCD high marks for the quality of the arts, sports, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs that it offers. They praised the agency for providing meaningful coverage at a time when many parents cannot be there for their children – and for filling in for many of the critical creative, cognitive and physical development activities that have been slashed from the normal school day in so many public schools.

At the same time, they stressed that the available services actually reach only a small number of the city's young lowest-income children. The agency's main focus is middle school; there are relatively few programs operating within the City's grade schools. Beacon programs do not serve 4- to 5-year-olds. And, thus far, DYCD has refused to even consider extending service provision to the whole new cohort of four-year-olds whom the City has proactively recruited out of ACS-funded childcare services and into the public schools.

"After-school care is absolutely vital for both young children and their families," asserts Nancy Wackstein, former Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) and currently Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships at Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service. "Parents work. Kids need arts and sports and science enrichment. And yet many schools offer nothing after 2:20 p.m. All those subway ads talking about UPK's 'full-day' programming? Most working parents would disagree with DOE's definition of 'full-day.' Schools are reduced to cobbling together after-school services with parent volunteers and bake sales. And I'm, like, 'Really? BAKE SALES?' When will we get to the point where we don't have to hold a bake sale for a societal necessity?"

Absent adequate options for after-school and vacation services, low-wage working mothers of our city's youngest children are often forced to adopt strategies that are far from ideal— leave their daughters with untrained neighbors, unsupervised childcare workers, or older sisters.

As noted in The New York Women's Foundation ***Voices from the Field*** report on "Girls and Young Women," thousands of very young low-income

[36] DYCD website.
[37] See: Leicher, Susan; ***Blueprint for Investing in Girls and Young Women***; NYWF; http://www.nywf.org/voices-from-the-field/2015

children are left in the hands of teenage and pre-teen siblings from the moment that school lets out till the time their exhausted mothers return home.[37] And, in turn, those older sisters (and it is almost always sisters, not brothers) lose the chance to invest in their own enrichment and development. They lose the chance to see a future for themselves that goes beyond filling the same under-appreciated, under-supported caregiving functions as their mothers and grandmothers before them.

And so the cycle continues.

Women's Work

The experts interviewed for this report were asked to suggest reasons why the United States has failed to do what so many other "advanced" countries have done, namely provide universal, high-quality childcare and out-of-school care for all working mothers, or – at the very least – robustly-funded subsidized childcare for all mothers who cannot afford full market-rate care. They were also asked for their specific ideas regarding why childcare workers are so poorly paid, and for their hypotheses regarding why the powerful working women of this country have not fought harder for a service that would so clearly promote the strength of all women.

The theories they offered were sobering reminders of the way in which our society continues to view the role, the work and the contributions of women, and – particularly – of low-income women of color and immigrant women. They included:

- **The persistence of the "Mad Men" gender lens.** On some very basic level, Americans continue to cling to the notion that the proper work-family arrangement is "fathers earning the income and mothers staying home and taking care of the kids." Despite the fact that mothers (particularly mothers of color) have worked outside the home for centuries – and that nearly two-thirds of all mothers of young children currently work full time – the belief persists that if a mother holds a paying job, she is either being selfish or has somehow "mismanaged" things. And that therefore creating and paying for any substitute care arrangement *is solely up to that individual mother*. It is not the responsibility of the society that so clearly benefits from that mother's labors.

- **The persistence of the "Welfare-to-Work" lens.** Despite the incontrovertible evidence that most low-income mothers of color work for a living, key policy makers still clearly think "welfare mother" when they think of that population. The City's subsidized childcare system, thus, continues to be primarily fueled through a federal funding stream whose core purpose is requiring Public Assistance recipients to "earn their subsidies" – rather than through a robust allocation culled from all the families and businesses that depend on the labors of low-wage (predominantly black, Latina and Asian) female workers.

- **The persistent overall under-valuation of care and caregivers.** Despite all the studies demonstrating that early care is essential to young children's lifelong learning and resilience, that "care" and "learning" are inseparable for young children, and that caring for young children is one of the most important and most difficult of all tasks – the public at large still seems to believe that it is essentially instinctive and insignificant work. Work unworthy of solid remuneration, respect or support. Women's work.

- **The triumph of convenience over sisterhood.** The last major battle for well-paid, well-regulated universal subsidized childcare was waged by feminists in 1971. The effort to bolster the situations of all working women – and to elevate and better recognize the entire childcare profession – was essentially lost the moment that large numbers of Baby Boom working mothers began assuming positions paying enough to allow them to hire (generally non-white or immigrant) nannies to provide home-based support at the lowest wages the market would bear.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND INVESTMENT

The experts concur: the single most powerful step that the public sector could take to radically improve the odds for the largest number of New York's lowest-income girls would be to put in place workplace policies and subsidized childcare programs permitting low-wage working mothers to provide their children with solid, reliable, first-rate, well-paid care while they earn the money to support those children.

Nothing less than a complete overhaul of those policies and services will do. And no other single effort would do more to help the city's low-income families, low-income communities and overall economy.

The particular recommendations offered by those experts included:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC/NONPROFIT SECTOR:

- Strongly support advocacy efforts promoting fair workplace practices and funding towards universal childcare at both the national and the local level.
- Support individual childcare organizations seeking to enrich and expand services.
- Strongly support the efforts of nonprofits offering training to center-based and family child care providers both within and outside of the EarlyLearn network.
- Invest strongly into creating youth development-school partnerships offering universal after-school services for students in grades Pre-K-2 in low-income neighborhoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR:

- **Rigorously monitor and enforce the Paid Family Leave Act** and continue passing the vital additional legislative measures that will allow low-wage working parents to provide adequate care for their young children, i.e.:
  - Ensuring reasonable flex-time accommodations for low-wage working parents.
  - Protecting against sudden or frequent changes in those parents' schedules.
- **Re-examine the way that childcare vouchers** are distributed to ensure that they are reaching those who need them most in the most equitable and strategic manner.
- **Create a new City agency whose sole focus is Early Childhood** (preferably defined as birth through age eight) and move all childcare services into that new agency.
- **Invest robustly into the newly-located *EarlyLearn* system.** In particular:
  - Carry out a thorough needs assessments to determine where the demand lies and what specific service needs are not being met (i.e., night-time care, care for 0-3- year-olds) in what parts of the city.
  - Create a comprehensive, citywide marketing and enrollment process similar to that utilized by UPK.
  - Raise compensation for all those who work in the system – childcare teachers, center workers and family child care providers, and ensure that all the teachers earn on a level comparable to Pre-K teachers in the public school system.

  - Strongly increase family provider networks' capacities to provide training and other supports to the individual providers in those networks and make robust funding available to the other organizations that could offer training to non-ACS family child care providers

  - Make it easier for eligible families to access the system by substantially raising the income-eligibility cut-off point, simplifying the application procedures, improving the information available regarding empty slots in real time, and reducing sliding-scale fees.

- **Expand eligibility for the New York City Child Care Tax Credit to families making up to $65,000 a year.**

- **Invest robustly into after-school programs for children in K-2 – and create after-school options for children in public school-based Pre-K** so mothers can put in a full workday without having to compromise on the quality of care they can arrange for their children.

VI. THE BEST ALLIES: Promoting Girls' Learning

"When we walk into the classroom the teachers welcome us! We're learning how to help our kids learn! We're learning how to give them the education we've dreamt about!"
– Parent in the NYC ReadNYC program

The research is clear: in the first eight years of life, nurturing and learning are irrevocably intertwined. Children do best when schools and families collaborate; parents are helped to read, play and talk with their children in ways that turn everyday events into learning opportunities; teachers are trained to tend to children's holistic needs; and teachers and parents are helped to view one another as full partners in supporting children's learning.[38]

The research is clear: in the first eight years of life, nurturing and learning are irrevocably intertwined.

As previously noted, many early education programs – *Head Start* is the main one – have made strong parental participation and developmentally-sensitive teaching techniques key tenets of their practice. In fact, much of the *EarlyLearn* reform effort was shaped by the goal of spreading the *Head Start* approach across the entire subsidized childcare system.

Nonetheless, as previously noted, not only are *EarlyLearn* or *Head Start* services out of the reach of most low-income parents, the entire goal of strong parental engagement, vibrant parent-teacher collaboration and nurturing pedagogical approaches tends to evaporate once low-income children reach public Kindergarten.

And thus, most low-income little girls reach third grade at a serious disadvantage.

PROMOTING STRONG PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILY-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

"At our school, we believe that educating a child has to be a partnership between the family and the school system," explains the Parent Leader of a Brooklyn grade school specifically founded on the principle of parental collaboration. "We believe that parents know their children better than anyone else and that they have enormous skills and knowledge to contribute. No one would argue that it's easy to create schools in which parents are true partners. It takes us constant effort – meetings and outreach, training and persistence – to engage the parents of this neighborhood. Most of our parents don't speak English, most have grueling work schedules and many are undocumented and therefore wary of official government institutions. A lot of schools shy away from putting in all the work that's required – and some schools are actually afraid of their students' parents. But those schools are losing the chance to enlist the help of the best allies they could possibly have."

"A lot of schools shy away from putting in all the work that's required to engage parents – and some schools are actually afraid of their

[38] See particularly, Henderson, Anne T., Karen L. Mapp, Vivian Johnson and Don Davies, ***Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships***; The New Press, New York 2007 and Koplow, Leslie, ***Politics Aside: Our Children and Their Teachers in Score-Driven Times***; Outskirts Press, Colorado, 2014.

students' parents. But those schools are losing the chance to enlist the help of the best allies they could possibly have."

Across the board, the experts concurred that it is not easy for schools to create meaningful roles for large numbers of parents with widely varying work schedules and potentially challenging language issues. It is hard to create programs that equip parents to be full supporters of their children's educations. It is easier to ask parents to just "leave their children in the school yard" than to allow them the kind of (potentially disruptive) open-door access that prevails in most childcare centers.

Nonetheless, those experts consistently stressed that most low-income schools simply don't make parental engagement a priority goal. They do not make the necessary investment or they give up too easily.

And a few advocates went so far as to suggest that in certain schools and in certain policy forums, the lack of commitment may go beyond resistance to taking on an admittedly tough logistical challenge. It may actually be undergirded by the belief that, rather than being potentially beneficial contributors to their children's educations, low-income parents are a liability whose influence needs to be mitigated.

"A chief driver for the whole UPK movement," remarked one advocate, "was a study by this University of Chicago Economics Professor, James Heckman, that calculated that the 'poor parenting practices' of low-income parents are costing society as much as $48,000 per kid in terms of later remedial and criminal justice services. And that the ROI for getting those kids away from those 'poor practices' just one year earlier could be as high as 7:1. Look – UPK is clearly a very good thing. Heckman's report was very useful in that sense. But it also helped reinforce a wide-spread and pernicious perception that the best thing we can do for low-income kids – and for our wallets – is to get those kids into school and away from their parents as quickly as possible. Which, of course, is exactly backwards. If we really want to help those kids, we have to help their parents be part of the solution."[39]

Whatever the underlying reasons, the consensus was that most elementary schools in low-income areas fail to direct enough planning, resources and determination towards achieving and sustaining effective parental engagement.

PROMOTING NURTURING EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

A wide range of advocates noted that, in recent years, public elementary schools in low-income areas have systematically eliminated many of the best-practice nurturing, holistic hands-on teaching approaches that tend to prevail in the lower grades in higher-income areas.

The advocates note that in K-2 classrooms in low-income neighborhoods there is generally little emphasis on social-emotional learning, little room for imaginative play, and no time for recess. Blocks and sandboxes, costume corners and paint sets have all but disappeared. In the rush to prepare students for the standardized tests, many schools are quashing those students' natural curiosity, adventurousness and love of learning.

"When a teacher's agenda becomes having five-year-olds sit… silently …filling in bubbles with pencil marks for long periods… [those children] inevitably become disruptive… [and] begin to feel that maybe school is not such a good place to be," writes Lesley Koplow, Director of Emotionally Responsive Practice at Bank Street College.[40]

[39] The most complete presentation of Heckman's views can be found in: Heckman, James J.; "The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education;" ***American Educator***, spring 2011.
[40] Koplow, Leslie, ***op. cit.***

When DOE first began planning for Universal Pre-K, it organized a series of Summer Institutes designed to help the incoming cohort of teachers and administrators better understand and support their new, very young students' holistic developmental needs. They hired the best teacher training providers in the city and had them offer intensive workshops on how to address the common social-emotional issues of four-year-olds and the potentially acute issues of very low-income four-year-olds—as well as how to use imaginative, hands-on, action-driven pedagogical approaches and how to work constructively with parents.

Those training sessions led some advocates to begin hoping that those vital messages and approaches might begin trickling up beyond the Pre-K level, that DOE might begin rolling back the increasingly narrow teaching strategies that it has been promoting in so many low-income K-2 classrooms, and that it might once again begin supporting the more holistic methods typically used in higher-income areas.

Thus far, however, there is little indication that DOE is poised to follow that path. And it is clear that – if it does finally decide to do so – it will take considerable concentrated effort. For the idea that young children need more than test-cramming has been absent from DOE's K-2 agenda for so long that it now actually comes as news to many of those in charge of those grades.

"I was leading a UPK workshop for principals," recalls Sherry Cleary, Executive Director of the New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, "in which I told them that Pre-K students need to go outside and play for a full period, every single day. That running around doesn't just promote young children's physical health – that it actually helps them process what they are learning. And one of the principals looked up at me with what I can only describe as genuine surprise and asked: 'If Pre-K children need to go outdoors and play every day, then … does that mean that Kindergarten children need it too?'"

The city's best professional development organizations, a range of determined citywide initiatives and individual nonprofits, and a core group of sterling public schools, have been working diligently to bring back best early education strategies and roll back the practice of "seat drilling" for very young children. They are committed to helping parents become strong co-educators – and to helping teachers attend to all their youngest students' deeply-intertwined and equally-important social, emotional, physical and creative needs. The most promising of these efforts include:

- **Learning Leaders** This citywide educational non-profit prepares the parents of students in the public schools to provide in-school supports ranging from tutoring to lunch-time assistance. Each year for the past twenty years, it has trained and placed more than 4,000 parents (primarily low-income black and Latina mothers) into some 300 (primarily elementary) schools – with impressive results. A set of rigorous studies confirm that the parent volunteers feel empowered; the teachers deeply value those parents' contributions; and – most importantly – the children of those parents show consistent, significant improvements in their schoolwork, standardized test scores, attendance and overall behavior.

- **East Side House Settlement** – East Side House Settlement, a community-based organization serving the Bronx and Northern Manhattan, believes that engaging and supporting families is essential to student success. In partnership with the United Way of New York City, it has launched the Read-NYC initiative in the Mott Haven community (one of the city's lowest-performing school districts) with the goal of doubling the number of third grade students reading at grade level by the year 2020. As part of this project, it operates a summer literacy program that combines training

for participating teachers with literacy-focused activities for students and holistic supports (e.g., ESL classes, child development workshops, social service referrals) for parents. Thus far, the across-the-board response has been impressive. The students are progressing, the teachers love the training and the parents voice strong gratitude for the tools and vote of confidence that they are receiving.

"For a long time, my daughter spoke very little," recounts a mother enrolled in one of the program's ESL classes. "I thought she'd never learn to talk – let alone read. But the program leaders kept saying: 'Just keep talking to her, just keep reading to her! Do it in Spanish if you can't do it in English – it's all good!' And guess what? She talks all the time now. She asks me: 'Mami, how do you say this in English?' And sometimes when I tell her, she giggles and says: 'No, you say it like this!'" Her teachers tell me that learning two languages at once is good for her – that it makes her smarter. They are teaching me English, but they also respect my language. They respect me!"

- **The Thurgood Marshall Elementary School** in West Harlem has parlayed support from The After-School Corporation (TASC) and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to create a full-day school/after-school program promoting strong parent-teacher teamwork on both the academic and the social-emotional fronts. Teachers are equipped to take steps ensuring that their students always feel secure, safe and properly heard. And students' families are helped to be full participants in their children's educations – including being expected to donate at least 20 hours a year of volunteer labor towards supporting the school.

"We provide adult Math and Literacy classes so our parents can better understand and support what their children are learning – and child development seminars so that our teachers can better understand and support student's challenges," explains the principal, Dawn de Costa. "I can't tell you what it does for students' morale (and performance) to have teachers who care about more than test scores – and parents who are welcomed in as full members of the school community."

All these enlightened initiatives, nonetheless, remain the exception. Despite the fact that parental involvement and support – and imaginative and nurturing teaching – are clearly the key to success, those critical principles have yet to be widely adopted.

And so the need for determined advocacy continues on both those vital fronts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND INVESTMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC/NONPROFIT SECTOR:

- **Support individual schools seeking to promote broad parent-teacher collaboration.**

- **Support nonprofit organizations working to build strong community-school-parent collaborations** and supporting parents' ability to be full educational partners with their schools and their children.

- **Fund efforts to re-focus K-2 teacher training on holistic early childhood development.**

- **Seek out, convene and bring together other nonprofits serving immigrant and other low-income communities with local schools and childcare centers to create early education programs that support parents as first teachers.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR:

- **Continue and expand funding enabling EarlyLearn sites to support/engage parents.**

- **Launch programs** offering non-working immigrant/isolated parents support towards promoting their children's early learning.

- **Mandate and provide robust support towards public elementary school efforts to engage parents.**

- **Invest substantially into creating and implementing curricula and training efforts** promoting age-appropriate, imaginative hands-on learning and social-emotional development throughout the K-2 years.

VII. CONCLUSION

The experts agree. If we want the low-income little girls of our city to be healthy, stable, equipped to succeed in school and resilient in the face of challenge, we need to more robustly reinforce the mothers, paid caregivers and teachers who are responsible for their upbringing.

In particular, we need to provide:

- Better overall neighborhood resources (i.e., inviting playgrounds, well-stocked libraries, robust sources of nutritious food, welcoming parenting and infant-toddler classes, good sources of pediatric care) supporting the ability of low-income mothers and grandmothers to handle the basic challenges of child-raising.

- Encouraging and non-judgmental specialized services helping vulnerable mothers to better protect and heal themselves and their daughters from the impact of past and present trauma.

- Fairer wages and better workplace protections for low-wage mothers.

- Comprehensive, high-quality, easily-accessible subsidized childcare and out-of-school care options for low-wage working mothers.

- Robust training and support and fair salaries for all paid childcare workers.

- Services reinforcing the interactive bond between nurturing and learning, i.e.:

    - Services strengthening low-income mothers' ability to be their daughters' first teachers – both within and outside of the school system.

    - Services strengthening the ability of K-2 teachers in low-income public schools to provide nurturing, holistic pedagogical approaches.

    - Services promoting parent-teacher teamwork in childcare programs and in the public school system.

We must move from offering "boutique solutions" to guaranteeing a solid foundation of support for those raising the next generation of our city's children.

While providing those supports will not totally eliminate all the core poverty-related factors that impede the success of so many of New York's little girls, it will go a long way towards helping them to deal more effectively with the detrimental impact of those factors. It will help them to enjoy better health and to do better in school. It will help them begin finally breaking out of what is often a generation-spanning cycle of abuse and neglect.

And – perhaps most importantly – it will give them a different idea of what lies ahead for them.

The adult women who care for those little girls are more than just their main providers and teachers and guides. They are also their main role models. The way that society views and treats and supports those women is viscerally absorbed by those little girls – inexorably shaping the way they think about their own future roles and potential.

We owe those capable, compassionate, bold little girls the vision of a society that more fully respects, recognizes and supports the work and contributions of the women who are raising and guiding them – and of the women that they will grow up to be.

Baby Superwomen

The early childhood literature generally speaks in blanket terms of "young children" – as if gender had little to do with the first eight years of a child's development. As if very young boys and girls had exactly the same prospects, issues, strengths, proclivities and needs.

The providers in the field, however, provide a very different picture of the disparate developmental trajectories of the two genders. They aver that boys and girls face very distinct expectations from their very earliest years;, and that those distinct expectations are particularly strong in low-income immigrant and non-white families.

In particular, they note that from their very first breaths, low-income little girls are fed the message that it is their job to be both the central pillars and the primary caregivers for their families.

"Some of the nurturing behaviors that we see in so many of the little girls that we serve may be innate," remarks one of the after-school providers quoted at the outset of this report. "But I suspect that most of them are imbibed. It's what those girls see all around them. It's what is expected of them. They see their mothers, their aunts, their grandmothers, their older sisters pushed into the role of principal caregivers both at home and – all too often – in their professional lives. And they see them treated with little respect, little support and no regard as to what they might actually prefer to be doing."

"Mothers in my community tend to make huge caregiving demands on even their littlest girls," explains the director of an immigrant domestic violence prevention program. "They expect those girls to pitch in on the home front from the moment they can carry a plate onto a table. And they expect them to provide the comfort and nurturing that they, the mothers, need. They turn to their sons to be the new 'man of the house' – to make the decisions, to wield the power. But they turn to their daughters to assuage the pain of the battering."

Is it a necessarily bad thing for girls to develop caregiving skills so early in life? No one interviewed actually said so directly. Every advocate stressed, however, that clear problems can arise when girls' many gifts, contributions and strengths are so narrowly defined – and so taken for granted – at such a young age.

"Little black girls – they're tough," concludes Benita Miller, Executive Director of the New York City Children's Cabinet, quoted before. "They're 'baby superwomen.' Well, they have to be. Their lives are tough. They have a lot to take care of. It's not terrible to be strong, of course. I just wish they didn't have to be so strong, all the time. We owe them better. We owe them the right to play and have fun. The right to think that they don't have to grow up to be one of those women who do everything for everyone and get nothing in return."

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APPENDIX B: Bibliography

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APPENDIX C: Programs Visited

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Early Care and Education Institute
110 William Street, Suite 1802
New York, New York 10038

Cypress Hills Child Care Development Corporation
Child Care Center
Family Care Provider Center
3295 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, New York 11208

DOE UPK Summer Institute
Queens College
65-30 Kissena Boulevard
Flushing, Queens 11317

East Side House Settlement
Child Care Center and
ReadNYC Program
337 Alexander Avenue
Bronx, New York 10038

Grand Street Settlement
Child Care Center
80 Pitt Street
New York, New York 10002

Infant and Toddler Parents' Program
Dominican Sisters Family Health
454 E. 149th Street
Bronx, New York 10454

NIA/P.S. 186 ExpandEd After School Program
7601 19th Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11214

Northside Center for Child Development
1301 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10029

P.S. 59 – The Harbor View School
300 Richmond Terrace
Staten Island, New York 10301

P.S. 261
314 Pacific Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201

P.S. 179-ReadNYC
468 E. 140th Street
Bronx, New York 10454

SCO FirstSteps NYC
Thatford Street
Brooklyn, New York 11212

SCO
Morris Koppelman Early Childhood Education Center
69-71 Saratoga Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11233

SPARKS
1454 43rd Street
Brooklyn, New York 11219

Thurgood Marshall Elementary School
276 West 151st Street
New York, New York 10039

Union Settlement Association
Child Care Center
237 East 104th Street
New York, New York 10029

United Community Centers, Inc.
Morris L. Eisenstein Learning Center
613 New Lots Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11207

APPENDIX D:
NYC's Subsidized Child Care Systems

SCOPE AND NATURE

The City provides subsidized childcare through two main strategies: (1) distributing childcare vouchers to women who are on – or at risk of seeking – public assistance; and (2) offering a complex mix of subsidized direct childcare services to a group of low-wage working mothers meeting strict income and employment eligibility criteria.

CHILDCARE VOUCHERS

- The Human Resources Administration (HRA) uses monies from a federal block grant authorized under the 1996 "Personal Responsibility (Welfare Reform) Act" to provide childcare vouchers to mothers receiving Public Assistance (PA) so they can either meet their mandated work requirements or obtain paid employment. In 2014, approximately 57,000 women received those "mandated" vouchers.

- Once every qualified PA recipient has received her voucher, HRA turns the remaining grant monies over to the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to distribute vouchers to a few other groups deemed to be at risk. In 2014, ACS gave those "non-mandated" vouchers to 12,500 women. Some of those "non-mandated" vouchers went to parenting girls in the foster care system or to mothers in the homeless shelter system; a significant percentage of the remaining vouchers have historically been distributed to women in a few select communities of the city.

The recipients of both "mandated" and " non-mandated" vouchers are permitted to use them to purchase childcare services either from providers within the City's *EarlyLearn* system (described below) or from approved providers working outside that system (e.g., friends, neighbors and family members; or a variety of for-profit or non-profit childcare centers).

Most voucher recipients tend to use out-of-system providers, either because they wish to keep the funding provided by those vouchers within "the family and the community" or for reasons of convenience – or both.

DIRECT SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE/ EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES – "EARLYLEARN"

Besides distributing non-mandated vouchers, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) also supports a complex, multi-layered range of direct childcare services, grouped under the single overall umbrella title of: "*EarlyLearn*." In particular, it uses a blend of Child Development Block Grant monies, tax levy monies, City Council and Department of Education (DOE) and *Head Start* monies to fund and regulate 35,256 childcare slots through the following means:

- **Center-based Care.** Approximately 80 percent of all *EarlyLearn* slots are provided within 350 neighborhood facilities run by 132 ACS-contracted nonprofit organizations, under three main program headings:

    - **Pre-Kindergarten** (Pre-K) services, which are open to any family of a four year-old, for free, between 8:00 a.m. and 2:20 p.m.[41]

[41] Pre-K is technically part of the school system and its staff members are paid by DOE but because of space limitations in the public schools, roughly 60% of the classrooms of that system are located within ***EarlyLearn*** centers.

- ***Head Start*** services, which are open to families of pre-schoolers living at or below the Federal Poverty Line (FPL), for free, generally from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

- ***Core childcare services***, which are available from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., under three different payment arrangements:

  - Voucher-receiving families can obtain slots for free.

  - Families with incomes at or below 275% of the FPL can obtain services by paying fees on a sliding-scale basis.

  - Families earning above that income level can obtain services at market rates.

Before 2012, the three main childcare program models (i.e., Pre-K, *Head Start*, and core *Child Care*) operated fairly independently of one another and followed different curricula. Since 2012, they all utilize the same basic curriculum, and there is a great deal more inter-program fluidity built into the system. In particular, families whose children are enrolled in *Pre-K* or *Head Start* services can obtain extended care by moving their children into those centers' "core" childcare programs at those centers when the *Pre-K* and *Head Start* day ends, generally for a small fee.

Most centers serve children 2.5 to four years old. A limited number also serve groups of infants and toddlers.

ACS contracted agencies are responsible for the training and supervision of all center staff members. Some centers and some individual staff members may also seek additional training from institutions such as the CUNY Professional Development Institute (PDI), the FirstStepNYC Early Education Leadership Institute, the Bank Street College of Education, or one of the five State-funded Childcare Resource and Referral Consortium members that offer a range of supportive services to both consumers and providers of subsidized childcare.[42]

- **Family Child Care Providers.** The remaining 20 percent of *EarlyLearn* slots are provided by 1,400 "licensed" or "registered" community residents known as "family child care providers." Family child care providers offer ten hours a day of basic childcare to small groups of children within their own homes.[43] They are paid, monitored, trained and supported by 28 "networks" headed by ACS-contracted nonprofits (many are the same nonprofits that hold "center-based" contracts). While the individual providers in the family child care networks do not generally possess teaching degrees, they follow curricula similar to those used by the teachers in the center-based side of the system – and most go far above and beyond those curricula in terms of offering children rich and nurturing learning experiences.

Finally, there are two groups of family child care providers – 6,500 "licensed" or "registered" family child care providers and 45,000 "legally-exempt" providers – whose slots are not officially counted within the *EarlyLearn* system but who are considered part of the City's overall "subsidized childcare" system because they are eligible for food subsidies and permitted to accept vouchers as payment for their services.

As previously noted, a majority of voucher recipients tend to utilize "Non-*EarlyLearn*" rather than *EarlyLearn* family child care providers for reasons of both familiarity and convenience.

[42] The five CCR&R Consortium members are: the ***Center for Children's Initiatives***; the ***Child Development Support Corporation***; the ***Chinese-American Planning Council***; the ***Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.***; and the ***Day Care Council of New York, Inc.***
[43] Licensed family child care providers are permitted to serve twelve children at a time; registered providers are permitted to serve six.

Non-*EarlyLearn* "licensed" and "registered" family child care providers receive initial training and support from the members of the "Child Care Resource and Referral Consortium" (CCR&R). They are permitted to care for the same number of children as their counterparts in the *EarlyLearn* system.

Legally-exempt providers receive initial training from a dedicated Bronx-based (and NYWF-supported) nonprofit – WHEDCO – and are permitted to offer childcare services to two children in addition to their own, at any given time.

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