

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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February 20, 2025

Start: 10:15 AM

Recess: 1:25 PM

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Rita C. Joseph,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Eric Dinowitz
- James F. Gennaro
- Jennifer Gutiérrez
- Shahana K. Hanif
- Kamillah Hanks
- Crystal Hudson
- Shekar Krishnan
- Linda Lee
- Farah N. Louis
- Mercedes Narcisse
- Kevin Riley
- Pierina Ana Sanchez
- Lynn C. Schulman
- Althea V. Stevens

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Aaron Sanders
Grand Street Settlement

Estephanie Garcia
Nuestros Ninos

Ingrid Matias Chungata
Nuestros Ninos

Simone Hawkins
Deputy Chancellor, Department of Education

Daniel Hildreth
Department of Education

John Hammer
Department of Education

Cora Liu
Capital Planning, SCA

Antonio Reynoso
Brooklyn Borough President

Paula Inhargue
United Neighborhood Houses

Gregory Brender
Daycare Council of New York

Mabel Sardury
CSA

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Sharon Brown

Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Robert Ramos

President, Local 205, DC 37

Diana Diaz

Committee for Hispanic Children and Families

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Testing, testing. This is a
3 sound check for the New York City Committee on
4 Education recorded in the Committee Room by Sergeant
5 Ben Leevy on February 20, 2025.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to
7 today's New York City Council Hearing from the
8 Committee on Education. At this point, I'd like to
9 remind everyone to please silence all electronic
10 devices. At no point going forward is anyone to
11 approach the dais. If you want to sign up to
12 testify, feel free to fill out a public testimony
13 slip at the desk at the back with the Sergeant at
14 Arms.

15 Chair, we're ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: [GAVEL] Good morning and
17 welcome to today's hearing on Early Childhood Care
18 Center Closures. I'm Rita Joseph, Chair of the
19 Education Committee. Thank you to everyone who has
20 signed up to testify. We're looking forward to
21 hearing your testimony.

22 On January 14, 2025, a day after Mayor Adams
23 released his Preliminary FY 2026 Preliminary Budget,
24 New York City Public Schools informed five early
25 childcare centers serving low income families that

1
2 their leases were being terminated and their programs
3 will not be renewed for the upcoming school year.
4 This abrupt announcement less than 24 hours before
5 applications opened for the upcoming school year,
6 left families and providers scrambling for answers,
7 which raises serious concerns about transparency and
8 stability in the city's early childhood education and
9 early childcare system.

10 These five centers, all five children daycares,
11 six in South Jamaica, Young Minds Day Care in Bedford
12 Stuyvesant, Friends of Crown Heights 29 in Crown
13 Heights, Bushwick Childcare Center in Bushwick and
14 Nuestros Ninos in South Williamsburg, serve nearly
15 300 children. Families rely on them for affordable
16 high quality early childcare, which benefits
17 children, parents, and communities at large.

18 Following public backlash, as well as pressures
19 from Public Advocate, the City Comptroller and
20 several Council Members, New York City Public Schools
21 since reversed course and on February 14, 2025, it
22 was reported that providers of all five centers were
23 granted contract extensions through June 2026.

24 While this temporary extension provides some
25 relief, it does not address larger issues that led to

1 the situation in the first place. New York City
2 public school officials cited several reasons for the
3 shutdowns, including new rent rates at almost double
4 the price, low enrollment and similarly program
5 available nearby. However, several questions remain.
6 For instance, Nuestros Ninos reportedly has around 80
7 percent enrollment with 96 students but Mayor Adams
8 justifies closure by stating that only four children
9 were registered. How does New York City Public
10 Schools count enrollment and why is there such a
11 stock discrepancy?
12

13 Advocates have reported that New York City Public
14 Schools delay in approving providers contracts
15 contribute to these inconsistencies. Creating
16 administrative challenges that undermine stabilities
17 for providers. Additionally, several providers have
18 expressed that the city fails to make timely payments
19 that have severely impacted their operations.
20 Despite multiple attempts to obtain guidance from New
21 York City Public Schools and repeat invoice
22 submissions, providers continue to face a lack of
23 support in navigating the invoicing process.

24 Further, compounding financial strain and
25 administrative difficulties, this issue was also

1
2 raised at our 2023 hearing on 3K funding cuts and
3 delayed reimbursement at early childhood providers as
4 well as 2022 hearing on early childhood programs in
5 New York City.

6 Why do these persistent payment delays continue
7 to plague our early childcare system? Why the one
8 year contract extension announced last week provide
9 short term relief for families and providers. It
10 does not fully resolve the uncertainty surrounding
11 these programs. Having the building leases been
12 reviewed or will providers operate on a month to
13 month lease agreement. More importantly, what plans
14 are in place to ensure that the sustainability of
15 these centers and other similarly situated centers
16 beyond June 2026. The future of early childhood
17 education and early childcare should not be
18 determined behind closed doors. At today's hearing,
19 the Committee seeking to understand the decision
20 making process that led to the proposed closures of
21 these centers.

22 Today's hearing will also provide an opportunity
23 to learn from these events and develop long term
24 solutions to prevent future disruption, ensuring
25 stability in early childcare for families and

1
2 providers. Thank you to the members of the Education
3 Committee who has joined us today. I would also like
4 to thank Committee Staff Nadia Jean-Francois, Chloe
5 Rivera, Andrew Lawless and Grace Amato as well as my
6 own staff Juvanie Piquant and Joelle Diserve(SP?) for
7 their work on today's hearing.

8 I also want to acknowledge my other colleagues
9 who are present Council Member Hudson, Council Member
10 Narcisse. Finally, I would like to remind everyone
11 who wish to testify in person today that you must
12 fill out a witness slip which is located on the desk
13 of the Sergeant at Arms.

14 Near the entrance of this room, please fill out
15 the slip even if you're already registered in advance
16 that you will be testifying in person today. Also
17 note that we will not be voting on any legislation
18 today. To allow as many people as possible to
19 testify, testimonies will be limited to three minutes
20 per person whether you're testifying in person or in
21 Zoom.

22 I'm going to ask my colleagues to limit their
23 questions and comments to five minutes. Witnesses
24 who are here in person will testify for those who are
25 signed into Zoom webinar. I will now call the first

1 public panel. The impacted providers before turning
2 to the Administration. I will now turn it over to
3 Nadia, uhm, Estephanie Garcia, and Ingrid Chungata,
4 are you here? I'd also like to acknowledge Council
5 Member Riley on Zoom and Council Member Sanchez.
6

7 I will now turn it over to Committee Counsel
8 Nadia Francois to administer the oath.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Go ahead, you may begin your
10 testimony.

11 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Sorry, okay so good
12 morning Chairperson Joseph, members of the Education
13 Committee and the esteemed guests. My name is Ingrid
14 Matias Chungata and I am the Executive Director of
15 Nuestros Ninos. A loving institution that has been a
16 pillar of the Williamsburg community for over 52
17 years. I come before you as an advocate for 96
18 children and families. 97 of whom are children of
19 color who now face a devastating loss of the early
20 childhood program. We have one year extension due to
21 a sudden and unjustified decision made without any
22 prior notice or opportunity for dialogue.

23 With less than 24 hours' notice before families
24 were set to register their children for the next
25 school year, on my school portal we were blind

1
2 sighted with the news that our lease will not be
3 renewed, no conversations, no due process, no regard
4 for the impact of our children, family and staff.

5 The decision was made based on three points that were
6 never given the chance to discuss, address, or given
7 correct information on.

8 Under enrolled, which we were able to disapprove
9 because we were in fact meeting enrollment
10 requirement and the administration that had the
11 database on the portal, that we had no budget
12 approved and there was a miscommunication on that
13 end. Oversaturated seats in our district and
14 according to the Administration, an unreasonable
15 increase in rent. When we finally had a conversation
16 with the Administration, we were told that this was
17 not about the quality of early child program Nuestros
18 Ninos but rather the cause of our space. Let me be
19 clear, reducing the future of our children through a
20 financial equation is deeply misguided and sends a
21 wrong message to both the families and educators.
22 Quality early childhood education should be a
23 priority to all of us. If it's not, what does that
24 say about the city's commitment to preparing our
25 children for a bright and successful academic future.

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2 If quality is not factored in these decisions,
3 what does that say about our value as a city? We
4 should be expanding and improving early childhood
5 program, not shutting down schools that have been
6 doing the work for over five decades. If we truly
7 invest in early childhood quality education, we
8 wouldn't see the persisting achievement gaps that
9 leave so many of our Brown and Black children
10 struggling in state math and English language art
11 exams.

12 Nuestros Ninos is not just another program. We
13 are one of the last remaining Latino led early child
14 programs in Williamsburg, serving children and
15 families who have historically been marginalized and
16 underserved. If we were forced to close within one
17 year, our children would be displaced. Educators who
18 have dedicated their lives to fostering early
19 childhood education would lose their jobs and
20 families, so many of whom relied on our culturally
21 responsive programming would be left without limit on
22 no viable options for their children.

23 The consequence of this decision are severe,
24 unjustified and avoidable. We ask that the City
25 Council to urge the Department of Education, the

1
2 Mayor's Office to reverse the decision and renew our
3 lease. Our children deserve better. Black and Brown
4 children deserve better. They deserve a city that
5 prioritizes their education and values the programs
6 that help set them on a path to success. We cannot
7 stand by and watch a trusted community rooted
8 institution led by people of color disappear. We ask
9 you to take action to protect our children's future.
10 We ask you to call on the Administration to do what
11 is right and negotiate the renewal of our lease. We
12 ask you to save Nuestros Ninos and to protect our
13 children's future. Gracias, thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Uhm, is Aaron
15 Sanders, are you here? You can come up to the panel.
16 Turn on your mic.

17 ESTEPHANIE GARCIA: Good morning. My name is
18 Estephanie Garcia and I am here as a mother, a life
19 long New Yorker and a product of this city's public
20 school system from Head Start to Hunter College. I
21 grew up in Williamsburg Brooklyn and I have seen
22 first hand how vital community based organizations
23 are, especially for working families and those
24 experiencing financial hardships. The truth is
25 income instability can happen to anyone. I was

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2 earning over \$100,000 a year living paycheck to
3 paycheck like so many New Yorkers. When I lost my
4 job in June of 2024, my biggest concern was ensuring
5 my son had access to quality early childhood
6 education and care. I was relieved to know that my
7 two year old would be the third generation in my
8 family to attend Nuestros Ninos, a bilingual
9 [INAUDIBLE 00:12:10] inspired program that provides
10 not just education but nourishment, stability, and a
11 sense of community and culture. Everyday my son and
12 95 other children receive two home cooked organic
13 meals and two healthy snacks in a warm, culturally
14 responsive environment that feels like home. The
15 Southfork Nuestros location, which is now facing
16 closure after just having a release renewed for one
17 more year, that also provides meals for the two other
18 locations that we have, a total of 156 students.
19 That is over 600 meals a day but here is the problem
20 Nuestros Ninos has been operating with our budget
21 allocations since July 2024. Think about that. No
22 funding, yet they continue to show up for our
23 children. If this is what they can provide with no
24 money, imagine what they can achieve with proper
25 support from the DOE and the Mayor's Office.

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2 We cannot wait for the house to be burning before
3 we act. Affordable early childhood education should
4 not be a luxury and yet, the New York City Department
5 of Education has failed to communicate, failed to
6 plan and failed to prioritize the families that rely
7 on these programs. We didn't hear the news from the
8 DOE, instead we learn the shocking news through
9 parents that Nuestros Ninos lease was not being
10 renewed. Parents discovered this when they tried to
11 enroll their children in the 3K program in January.
12 Only to find out that Nuestros Ninos was missing from
13 the application portal. The DOE failed to conduct
14 even the most basic investigation and to why the
15 database inaccurately reported low enrollment
16 numbers. Instead, they chose to abandon over 150
17 families and 80 staff members, leaving them to
18 scramble for affordable care options and jobs in a
19 city that seems to have forgotten its own people.

20 This careless decision has thrown countless lives
21 into chaos all because the DOE refused to take
22 responsibility for their own errors and this is not
23 just about one school. This is about accountability.
24 The DOE is responsible for \$39 billion, one third of
25 the city's budget, yet they routinely show up

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2 unprepared to hearings like this one, have incorrect
3 data in their databases and make rash decisions.

4 It's a running joke at this point. How can we trust
5 an agency that is this disorganized to make the best
6 decisions for our children? Chancellor Samone
7 Hawkins wrote in her op ed in AM New York, "as a
8 lifelong New Yorker who has attended our city's
9 public schools and sent my daughter to an early
10 childhood education center, I know first hand the
11 impacts of affordable childcare. Well where's that
12 understanding now?

13 She once ran 14 childcare programs herself, so
14 she should know exactly how strained Nuestros Ninos
15 is but it seems like once she started making over
16 \$250,000 a year, she forgot what it's like to be a
17 struggling parent in New York City. So, I ask, where
18 is the DOE's accountability? To the families who
19 rely on these programs, to the children who will one
20 day be the future of this city, to the City Council
21 and to the community based organizations they
22 contract with.

23 Nuestros Ninos is the only extended two day - the
24 only extended day 2K program in Williamsburg and
25 Greenpoint. It is one of the last remaining spaces

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2 that truly serves this community. One that has been
3 deeply effected by gentrification and displacement.
4 Losing it is not just about closing a school, it is
5 about erasing history, a legacy, breaking a support
6 system, and failing the next generation. We need
7 answers. We need funding and most importantly, we
8 need a commitment from the city to keep Nuestros
9 Ninos open because childcare should not be a
10 privilege, it is a necessity. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Uhm, I'd also
12 like to recognize Council Member Stevens, Louis, Lee
13 and Hanif. Mr. Sanders.

14 AARON SANDERS: Thank you Chair Joseph and
15 Members of the New York City Council Committee on
16 Education for convening this important hearing and
17 for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding
18 the pending site closure of Bushwick Child and Family
19 Center operated by Grand Street Settlement.

20 We also want to thank our local Council Member
21 Sandy Nurse for her tireless support of families in
22 the district who rely on affordable childcare.
23 Council Member Jennifer Gutiérrez for her support as
24 a champion for childcare, Brooklyn Borough President
25 Antonio Reynoso, State Senator Salazar, Assembly

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2 Member Devilla, and Congress Member Valesquez and
3 finally, we want to thank DOE Deputy Chancellor
4 Samone Hawkins for collaborating with Grand Street to
5 help us reach a solution that will best serve the
6 families in Bushwick. In this hearing, we're calling
7 on the Adams Administration and the New York City
8 Department of Education to extend our lease at the
9 Bushwick Child and Family Center located at 319
10 Stanhope Street or find an alternative space in
11 Bushwick to ensure uninterrupted services for our
12 preschoolers.

13 Grand Street Settlement is 109 year old
14 multiservice settlement house that operates a network
15 of centered based childcare and educational programs
16 across Manhattan and Brooklyn. Our programs serve
17 working families and their children, many of whom
18 live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles to
19 education, health and economic prosperity. Grand
20 Street focuses on early childhood education because
21 it is an early life investment that improves
22 children's opportunity to achieve optimal health,
23 education and social development. And it equips
24 parents and support them with lifelong learning as
25 they continue to guide their children's success

1 through school and beyond. Grand Street excels at
2 meeting rigorous quality standards for hundreds of
3 New York children and families but we're at risk of
4 losing a much needed childcare facility. The
5 Administrations decision to close Bushwick child and
6 family center along with Nuestros Ninos, Friends of
7 Crown Heights, and Fort Greene Council, diversly
8 impacts early childhood education and it historically
9 underserves communities like Bushwick and
10 Williamsburg. We recently hosted Governor Kathy
11 Hochul and she noted the positive impacts our center
12 has had on children and families in Bushwick.
13

14 Since it's inception in 2012, the Bushwick Child
15 and Family Center has been a respected community
16 pillar. The site is fully enrolled with 69 out of 70
17 children and seats currently and one student is stuck
18 in the DOE's enrollment portal.

19 These prime closures will have devastating
20 ramifications for working families in Brooklyn who
21 are allowing affordable childcare options.
22 Essentially 70 children and their families in our
23 programs will have to scramble to find new childcare.
24 Some will be unable to find affordable childcare
25 options, potentially impacting their employment or

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2 forcing them to pay thousands of dollars in
3 childcare.

4 The city's median tuition expense for childcare
5 is \$24,000 a year. This is an untenable alternative
6 for families as nearly 20 percent of all Brooklyn
7 residents live at the poverty line, according to
8 United States census data. According to a recent
9 report from Robinhood, families in which a parent
10 face childcare related work barriers were 1.5 times
11 more likely than other families to experience
12 hardship a year later.

13 The data underscores the need for subsidized
14 childcare options in a community like Bushwick and
15 Williamsburg but the research also suggests that we
16 should develop additional childcare centers rather
17 than dissolve brick and mortar sites that have been
18 historical safe havens for our families. Site
19 closures will also have a devastating impact on
20 community members. If our childcare facilities
21 close, 20 of our dedicated staff members will may
22 lose their careers. These are dedicated early
23 childhood educators who provide robust care for
24 children.

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2 In closing, we encourage the Adams Administration
3 to work with us to find a solution that maintains the
4 vital childcare services that we provide for our
5 families in Bushwick. On behalf of 70 families in
6 Grand Street, thank you for the opportunity to
7 testify.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Well, thank you for your
9 testimony. I have a couple questions for you. Have
10 you encountered difficulties in submitting invoices
11 and getting your rosters approved?

12 AARON SANDERS: Not as of recent.

13 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: We're still waiting for
14 our budgets to be registered to be able to submit
15 invoices, so we haven't -

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how long have you been
17 waiting?

18 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Officially back and
19 forth since September.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Since September?

21 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How much money does DOE owe
23 you in unpaid invoices?

24 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I wouldn't say unpaid
25 invoices because we haven't been able to submit

1
2 invoices. Uhm, I would say from July to the present,
3 if we do about one million dollars of service that
4 have been provided and assuming that's been able to
5 foot the bill.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you have not been paid
7 ever since? Do you find that you find support if
8 something is wrong in submitting your invoices? Who
9 do you reach out to?

10 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: So we have a contact, a
11 financial analyst that I send emails. They sit on
12 inboxes, don't get a response. I have to go to the
13 next level.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How often does it? How long
15 do you have to wait for a response?

16 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Uhm, weeks.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: A week?

18 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Weeks.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You mentioned that you first
20 learned about the closures from families in your
21 program. What if any communication support did you
22 receive from New York City Public Schools?

23 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Since the notice?

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When you heard about the
25 closing. You said you heard it from families.

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2 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: So, I heard it from my
3 Chair who heard it from elected officials.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, okay so it wasn't
5 first hand source? It was a secondary hand -
6 secondary source, okay. And once you found out and
7 you reached out to New York City Public Schools, what
8 were you told?

9 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Uh I didn't reach out.
10 The elected officials reach out and set up a meeting
11 and we would put a room together, assume that we were
12 informed of the three main points that were used to
13 make the decision.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what was the reasoning
15 behind them closing the locations?

16 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: So, one was under
17 enrollment, oversaturation of seats in our community
18 and our lease coming up for renewal.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oversaturation, okay. Uhm,
20 does New York City Public School communicate what's
21 the plan for your program beyond June of 2026?

22 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Uh, no.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you have no idea?

24 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: No.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, what has been the
3 response from the families that you served?

4 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: It was a relief to be
5 able to apply for an additional year but the families
6 that have two year olds that they know that the
7 following year, they wouldn't have a program to
8 attend. So, it's disheartening for our community.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Absolutely. Is there any
10 other providers within that area?

11 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: So, we have three other
12 sites. In two sites in Williamsburg but no program
13 that service the model that we do and our 2K program,
14 it's the only one around.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yup, 2K programs are very
16 rare. Most folks don't know about early learn. Is
17 there another bilingual program? You talked about it
18 being bilingual, culturally responsive. Is there
19 another bilingual program within that area?

20 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Besides Nuestros Ninos,
21 no.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, you serve a unique niche
23 by serving two year olds one. Second, nutritious
24 meals and bilingual education.

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2 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: We also have a retro
3 inspired philosophy, which is if families were to pay
4 for that outside of our program, it would be
5 thousands of dollars.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, childcare is very
7 expensive in New York City. \$23,000 I think that's
8 what you quoted Mr. Sanders. Anything you want to
9 add on?

10 AARON SANDERS: It's my understanding -

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Speak into the mic please.

12 AARON SANDERS: My apologies. It's my
13 understanding right now that the Department of
14 Education and the School Construction Authority is in
15 conversation with the property manager to best find a
16 solution to either extend the lease for us.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay and did they give you a
18 timeline?

19 AARON SANDERS: Not that I'm aware of.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But you are in conversation?

21 AARON SANDERS: Yeah, so our executive team is
22 yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Could there have been
24 a better way of communicating this? Could this have
25

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2 have happened prior for us to being in the situation
3 that we're in. And also having, moving forward,
4 we're going to have monthly meetings. I think that
5 it's key also in programs that have been identified
6 as low enrollment in order for to be blind sighted
7 the way that we were because if that's the case,
8 having that conversation even a couple of months
9 ahead of time, we would be like okay, we could build
10 on this but nothing was done. Now it's being done
11 and I'm grateful for that opportunity that my team is
12 grateful. So, I have to thank the Deputy Chancellor
13 Hawkins for that and her team for putting that
14 together.

15 AARON SANDERS: I want to echo that sentiment.
16 We're grateful for the DOE for consuming the
17 negotiations and discussions. Like Nuestros Ninos,
18 we've been in communication with the families at an
19 open house and invited elected officials and
20 community stakeholders, just to see the value of the
21 Bushwick Child and Family Center and we're keeping
22 them updated as these negotiations happen. But we
23 are thankful that this hearing was convened and that
24 the vitality of the community center is being
25 considered.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This Council on the record
3 is committed to early childhood. We are committed
4 from day one. The minute I walked in here I was
5 committed to making sure we stabilize the sector.
6 This is such an important sector and this is how you
7 invest in the future of New York City is to invest in
8 the earliest learners and that's research proven.
9 That if you invest in young people as early as
10 possible, the future will be brighter even when we
11 talk about other economic disadvantages that you talk
12 about most of your constituents come from NYCHA.
13 You're removing that barrier, right? That barrier-
14 bringing that barrier down by investing in early
15 childhood.

16 I'm going to now turn the question over to
17 Council Member Narcisse.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Thank you
19 Chair. I'm listening to you and from the business
20 aspect, if you don't get the money that - you give
21 the service, if you don't get the money, the staff
22 cannot get paid and then we cannot continue whatever
23 we're doing. That's the bottom line. The same thing
24 for Department of Education. If they don't receive
25 money from the federal, from the state, from the

1
2 city, they cannot function. So, I don't know what
3 makes them think that you can function without the
4 money, the contract that we agree on to give you.
5 I'm going to say from a business perspective, from
6 being in the business world, I want to say I am so
7 sorry because you're doing work that it is changing
8 the fabric of New York City. That means we address
9 the inequity in education because most of the time,
10 the places that we are not able to function to
11 educate our children happen to be in the community
12 where you're serving.

13 So, having said that, if that budget cut not
14 reverse, what does our early childhood look like in
15 New York City? Your thought?

16 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Well, we see the data.
17 We know when New York City's Public School Children
18 are - when the exams comes out, state exam, we know
19 that we're not doing what we need to do so as the
20 Chairwoman said, we need to invest in early child.
21 We know that a child's brain develops from zero to
22 five at 90 percent. So, we're not investing in those
23 early years, then what is expected for those children
24 as they go on?

25

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2 So, this is the foundation. So, I hate to use
3 the word quality versus quantity but I think that's
4 what we are faced on and I think when we're looking
5 in New York City and we're looking at the
6 disproportioned rates of our children lagging
7 academically third and fourth grade where our
8 children are not reading or doing math at a grade
9 level, and that we're more than 50 percent of our
10 children are not, that is disheartening.

11 As a mother of four, that is disheartening that
12 we're not investing in early childhood. I come from
13 the business world before. I did early childhood. I
14 worked to put my children through quality early
15 childhood program and I understand the benefits of
16 that. And that's why I'm so passionate about the
17 work that I do and the commitment that I have done
18 for Nuestros Ninos in the year and a half that I've
19 been there. And I'm committed to provide those
20 children those Brown and Black children with the best
21 education that they can. That it's not going to cost
22 their parents \$50,000, \$60,000 so that they could get
23 it for free. And if our city cannot do that, then I
24 don't know what we're doing as citizens.

1 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: How is your payroll?

2 Because if you're not getting money, you're not
3 getting paid and those educators, how are they
4 getting paid?
5

6 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: So, we have payroll
7 tomorrow.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And then where's the
9 money?

10 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I begged. I put a loan
11 out.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I didn't want to take
13 you there but I have to take you there because I know
14 I have been there where the money is not coming and
15 you cannot make payroll, so.

16 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I'm sorry.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: That's okay. That's
18 okay. So, they want to know that it's real when you
19 cannot do it. Go ahead.

20 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I clean our accounts.
21 There's nothing. We have nothing. 52 years of
22 savings of having a cushion, it's all gone. There's
23 nothing but I needed to make sure that my staff got
24 paid tomorrow. So my HR called me this morning. She
25 goes, Ingrid, are we going to be able to process

1
2 payroll? And I said, give me a minute and I took
3 everything. I mean it's barely nothing there but my
4 staff had to get paid tomorrow and that's why I do
5 this and there's no way that I could go home and just
6 think that they were not being able to have money.
7 Especially you know it's the end of the month. It's
8 the first time in Nuestros Ninos history that we had
9 to apply for a loan through the city. I sent them an
10 email yesterday. I responded, I'm still to hear from
11 anyone.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And your bank is not
13 giving you a loan?

14 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I applied for a loan
15 through the bank but that takes weeks, that takes
16 months but also, we are using money that we are not
17 getting interest of. So, it's like we're giving the
18 City of New York a free loan. You know I do fund
19 raising since I started Nuestros Ninos, I had two
20 successful Gala and that was to implement a Regio
21 program but that has all gone to the day to day of
22 the organization.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And I don't even have
24 to ask you how you sleep because when you cannot make
25

1
2 payroll knowing you have staff waiting for you, I
3 know it's a lot of stress.

4 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: I don't sleep. I have
5 lost 15 pounds through this process because it's so
6 unheard of that a decision like that could be made
7 and a call cannot be made prior to get the data
8 straight. To figure out what's going on and I felt
9 as uh - I've been doing this work for over 20 years
10 and I work in corporate. I know what it is to work
11 for someone that doesn't care about you and the
12 reason why I made the transition to nonprofit was
13 because I thought that this was a community where
14 we're all working for the same goal.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And you're doing
16 amazing work because you're preparing the future of
17 New York City and as I can share relate with you, I
18 have four children and I know when you invest in
19 early childhood, you invest for the future. It's a
20 game changer when you do that and statistic has been
21 proven that we need early childhood and I want to say
22 thank you. Thank you to you for the work you're
23 doing and as a mom, I know how difficult. If you can
24 share briefly the colleagues, the friends that you
25 have that are having the struggle, to know that my

1
2 child, I need to go to work and I don't have no place
3 to put that child. You have a story.

4 ESTEPHANIE GARCIA: On top of the fact that it
5 does cost an average of \$24,000 a year to send my son
6 to school, before I had Nuestros Ninos when I was
7 employed, I was paying about \$25,000 a year to have
8 my child be taken care of and that was still
9 considered affordable and in the two years that in
10 the four months that my son has been at Nuestros
11 Ninos, he's picked up two languages. He's formed
12 sentences. He's only two years old. Like, people
13 see him and they're like so impressed by him because
14 he's curious, he's active, and all of that comes from
15 Nuestros Ninos. Like, he's able to have a
16 conversation with older family members in his family
17 because they only speak Spanish. He's able to
18 communicate with them. He translated something for
19 me the other day and he's a two year old so, and I am
20 also a product of these programs. I went to a Head
21 Start and I went on to become a functional member of
22 society. And I'm still best friends with a person
23 that I met at two years old at my Head Start program.
24 I'm now 37 years old. This is how important these
25 programs are to the community. It's not just about

1 education; it's also about building a community.

2 It's also about building a support system. It's also
3 about having friends and learning something that you
4 wouldn't be learning at home.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So thank you.

7 ESTEPHANIE GARCIA: Yes and I also want to
8 mention that also for my mental health, it's very
9 important for my son and I to have space and for me
10 to feel supported. I already don't feel supported by
11 the city. I already don't feel supported by my job.
12 I don't have enough support from my family just
13 because they also have to work. So, if I didn't have
14 Nuestros Ninos, I don't know where I would be right
15 now but I know for sure that my son, my relationship
16 with my son would probably be strained.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: There are good things.
18 We have 34 women and we have educators that have the
19 life experience, so we're going to do whatever we can
20 to push.

21 ESTEPHANIE GARCIA: And the wonderful 80 staff
22 members at Nuestros Ninos who have also - who are
23 also extremely dedicated to the organization, to the
24 school and to the families of the school.
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Thank you.
3 Thank you Chair.

4 ESTEPHANIE GARCIA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Uhm, just
6 another reminder, thank you for that and anyone who
7 knows, I've always said this, I f you're foundation
8 is strong, you're top are going to strong and saw the
9 reading scores. So, by the time they leave you.
10 They come and they take that test, they will be
11 strong. So, continue to make investments but this
12 Council, 31 women were committed to early childhood.

13 INGRID MATIAS CHUNGATA: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you and thank you for
15 your testimony.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now turn
17 to the Administration. I will now administer the
18 oath. In accordance with the rules of the Council, I
19 will administer the affirmation to the witnesses from
20 the Mayoral Administration. I will call on each of
21 you individually for a response. Please raise your
22 right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
23 whole truth and nothing but the truth before this
24 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
25 questions? Deputy Chancellor Simone Hawkins?

1

SIMONE HAWKINS: I do. Was that on? I do.

2

3

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Cora Liu?

4

CORA LIU: I do.

5

6

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And then Daniel Hildreth, if you could raise your right hand. Can you I do?

7

DANIEL HILDRETH: I do.

8

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: John Hammer?

9

JOHN HAMMER: I do.

10

11

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin your testimony.

12

13

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SIMONE HAWKINS: Good morning. Good morning, Chair Joseph and members of the City Council Committee on Education. My name is Simone Hawkins, I serve as Deputy Chancellor for the Early Childhood Education division at New York City Public Schools.

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I am joined today by my colleagues from the School Construction Authority, and others from New York City Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and for your continued partnership in ensuring that all of New York City's children have access to the high-quality early childhood education they need and deserve.

24

25

Like previously mentioned, the child's earliest experiences are foundational to their lifelong

1
2 outcomes. Research has consistently shown that the
3 way a child is nurtured in their earliest years
4 impacts whether they will successfully complete high
5 school or struggle throughout their school years. I
6 do know this firsthand, because the nurturing and
7 love I received in my early years in East New York,
8 Brooklyn set me on the path to where I am today.

9 As a lifelong New Yorker, I have experienced this
10 system from multiple perspectives: as a student in
11 our city's public schools, as a provider overseeing
12 fourteen child care programs, and as a parent
13 enrolling my daughter in an early childhood center.
14 These experiences are directly tied to why I sit
15 before you today as Deputy Chancellor.

16 New York City is the largest and most diverse
17 city in the country, which is reflected in the
18 families we serve. The early childhood system we
19 manage must have the versatility to meet the wide-
20 ranging needs of communities from the South Shore of
21 Staten Island to Wakefield in the Bronx, from the
22 Upper West Side to Brownsville. Our work must be
23 tailored to the distinctive characteristics of
24 different neighborhoods, establishing what
25 communities truly need and ensuring that we are

1
2 delivering on those priorities as effectively as
3 possible.

4 We at New York City Public Schools have the
5 capacity to serve approximately 140,000 children in
6 early childhood with a commitment to ensure that
7 every single one of those children is placed in the
8 best possible learning environment. Today, more
9 families are accepting offers than ever, growing from
10 9,500 offers in 2019 to over 43,000 offers in 2024.
11 Record growth of 350 percent over five years.

12 Huge thanks to the joint efforts of Mayor Adams's
13 Administration and the Council, our investments in
14 early childhood are bearing fruit. As outlined in
15 the Ten-Point Plan, with support from the Council's
16 \$5 million investment in outreach efforts, we are
17 this month engaging families and communities through
18 enrollment sprints in every borough. In addition, we
19 are actively working to open almost 300 more special
20 education seats over and above the 456 seats we
21 opened at the beginning of the school year.
22 Moreover, we have established and convened the Child
23 Care Advisory Group and convened biweekly meetings
24 with the Administration and City Council to ensure
25 continued dialogue.

1
2 I'd like to thank the Speaker, Chair Joseph, and
3 Council Member Gutierrez for your continued support
4 in this regard. We could not achieve these
5 accomplishments without your collaboration, and we
6 firmly believe we are well positioned to do so much
7 more for our youngest learners and families. While
8 we are making advances to improve services to our
9 communities, it is important to recognize the
10 limitations of our current system and the challenges
11 we face.

12 When I stepped into this role in August, it was
13 clear that the system needed to evolve to better meet
14 current needs and remain adaptable for the future.
15 Your conversations with constituents, as well as some
16 of your own personal experiences to find an early
17 care and education seat, have laid bare that reality.
18 Our current capacity challenge is one of the clearest
19 examples. Across our early childhood system, 30,000
20 seats currently sit vacant, even as some
21 neighborhoods struggle with waitlists because demand
22 exceeds available seats. This is a legacy of the
23 system's rapid expansion fueled by temporary stimulus
24 dollars that are no longer available, in addition to
25 inflexible contracts that leave us with a

1 configuration that does not align with where families
2 live, work, and seek care.

3
4 This challenge is further compounded by the
5 properties we manage, many of which were transitioned
6 to us from the Administration for Children's
7 Services, also known as ACS, when early childhood
8 education was consolidated, specifically the
9 contracted care system under New York City Public
10 School during expansion efforts. And the result? An
11 oversaturation of seats and properties in some
12 neighborhoods, leading to unhealthy competition,
13 inefficient use of resources, and millions of dollars
14 in misuse annually.

15 Many of these properties remain underutilized or
16 even vacant, yet they require considerable city tax-
17 levy funding to maintain. Some have long-term leases
18 up to 20 years with no provisions for early
19 termination, meaning the city continues to make rent
20 payments and carries the implicit costs of sustaining
21 them. Adding to those challenges, our contract
22 mechanisms do not support or incentivize optimizing
23 seat placements. While there are necessary fixed
24 costs in operating early childhood programs, we
25 currently subsidize too many under enrolled programs.

1
2 Whether a program serves one child or three-fourths
3 of its full capacity, current contract terms provide
4 for it to draw down on 75 percent of its contract
5 value. This is not a sustainable or equitable way to
6 manage public dollars or ensure that children and
7 families receive the highest quality care possible.

8 I want to be very clear; we are committed to
9 serving as responsible stewards of this system, and
10 that means making difficult but necessary decisions.
11 While our recent decisions regarding five leased
12 properties were difficult and we were happy to work
13 with the providers, landlords, and community members
14 to come to a resolution for next school year to
15 sustain these contracts, even greater challenges lie
16 ahead.

17 We do not yet know what federal policy shifts or
18 funding reductions may come from the federal level
19 for programs like Head Start and other federal early
20 childhood education initiatives. We want to ensure
21 that our families do not lose access to the critical
22 and formative programs needed to give them the bright
23 start they deserve. Unlike these recent lease
24 decisions, where no children faced losing access to
25 care due to available capacity in the community,

1
2 potential loss of federal funding would require us to
3 make even tougher choices in the future, including
4 reducing seats in neighborhoods where no alternative
5 options exist.

6 If and when that moment comes, we will need the
7 support of the Council to mitigate the impact on
8 families who rely on these programs. This
9 underscores why we are actively working to realign
10 resources where they are most needed, ensuring that
11 families in every neighborhood have access to quality
12 early childhood programs while also reducing
13 inefficiencies that undermine the long-term health of
14 the system.

15 To that effect, we have made significant strides
16 in improving transparency in invoicing and payments,
17 reducing the average invoice approval time to under
18 two weeks, and are working across agencies, including
19 with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, to
20 streamline clearance background checks for program
21 staff in partnership with the Mayor's Chief
22 Efficiency Officer.

23 I want to emphasize that we are committed to
24 engaging this body in solutions that work best. We
25 welcome collaboration with the Council, our provider

1
2 community, and families to ensure that any shifts in
3 our system are done thoughtfully, with children's
4 best interests at the center of our decision-making.
5 I thank the Council for the opportunity to speak
6 today and look forward to your questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, what is New
8 York City Public Schools reason for potentially
9 closing the five early childcare sites?

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, thank you for that question
11 Chair. So, initially I would like to kind of lay out
12 the kind of the structure of the system. Under New
13 York City Public Schools, we support about 4,000
14 sites across about 1,000 vendors. The majority of
15 those sites are managed by our CBO partners. It is
16 the exception, not the standard for these providers
17 to be occupying a city owned or lease space. And so,
18 as I mentioned in my testimony, we inherited about 86
19 sites, city leased and owned from ACS during the
20 transition.

21 Around 60 of those sites are leased and these
22 five sites clearly are occupying a cohort of those
23 60. We also have about another 20 that we opened and
24 acquired during the expansion under de Blasio. Some
25 of those are vacant and we are paying rent on them,

1
2 others are underutilized. And so, it was very clear
3 from the onset when I started in this role that it
4 was my charge to stabilize and optimize the system.
5 And so, I looked at every corner of this current
6 portfolio to see where we can make that possible with
7 the least harm to providers and families. And so,
8 our decision was really primarily built on looking at
9 any leases that expired already or set to expire by
10 2026.

11 These five sites qualified for that based on
12 their termination dates and their leases. Looking at
13 those three factors and those considerations that
14 were mentioned around community saturation, meaning
15 are there other programs in the community that can
16 absorb the capacity of these sites. The site
17 utilization over three years, not just the current
18 fiscal year but also looking at two prior fiscal
19 years based on their capacity and enrollment records
20 and the lease data, right? The terms, the length of
21 that lease and the cost both current and potential.
22 And so, waiting those differently, each of the five
23 sites have a very different and unique story, we made
24 a decision not to renew the leases for the upcoming
25 school year.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have a list? Can you
3 submit a list to the New York City Council of all the
4 leases that's set to expire in the next two years?

5 SIMONE HAWKINS: Happy to.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. You do have
7 several, a matter of fact, I have one in my district
8 that's sitting empty, which I had suggested should
9 become a preschool special education site. There's a
10 need for it and one of the things that and I
11 complained and I'm sure everybody else can echo this,
12 New York City Public Schools sometimes are not great
13 communicators. The site popped up in my district.
14 I've been asking about that site forever. No one has
15 said a word to me as to what's happening but the
16 community constantly reached out say what's happening
17 with this space and no one in New York City Public
18 Schools has ever asked me and I made several
19 suggestions that there's a need for preschool special
20 education, currently about 700 kids are still at home
21 with no special education seats, legally mandated
22 seats and no one is reaching out.

23 So, maybe off the record, we will recircle and
24 have that conversation and I had reached out to New
25 York City Public Schools to see if that site can

1
2 become a preschool special education. The need is
3 there and again, whatever you guys are calling it,
4 process claims, Carter cases, we're continue to
5 balloon because we have never, ever provided legally
6 mandated seats for our New York City students.

7 So, as you heard earlier, several sites have
8 claimed there was little or no communication, no
9 warning about the potential issues that would lead to
10 their closures. In particular, there was resistance
11 to the claim that these sites were under enrolled,
12 including the Nuestros Ninos, which claimed they had
13 80 percent enrollment with 96 students, while you
14 claim they only had four students.

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: Sorry, did I miss your question
16 Chair? I'm sorry.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You sure did.

18 SIMONE HAWKINS: I did. I'm sorry, will you
19 please restate it?

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Earlier the providers said
21 you only claimed that they four students, while they
22 had 96 students enrolled and that was one of the
23 driving factors in closing their sites.

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: Correct and so I just want to
25 address something you said previously. So, you did

1
2 raise the issue of the vacant siting in your district
3 and I recall responding to that diligently and also
4 addressing that I think this issue has come up with a
5 few other Council Members about vacant sites in their
6 communities.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yup.

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: And I have equally been
9 responsive and so I hope that has been demonstrated
10 through and through and I look forward to continuing
11 the conversations about what we can do with the
12 Flatbush site.

13 Uhm, and so, we rely like many of us on our
14 systems of record. And so, vendor portal PreK is our
15 system of record for our CBO partners. It is their
16 responsibility and their requirement to enter
17 enrollment records into the system. It is the same
18 responsibility for our public school or district
19 school rather, principals who are required to do so
20 in ACS. And so, we looked at our system, we saw that
21 four kids were included and entered into the system
22 and right after our conversations in January started
23 with these programs, the entering of the enrollment
24 records increased dramatically.

1
2 And so again, I want to remind the Council that
3 although that claim has come up, we do rely on the
4 records. It is a responsibility of the provider but
5 we also looked at prior enrollments from prior years.
6 And so, the decision was not reliant solely on FY25
7 but we looked at years prior and it did not meet our
8 standard of full enrollment which is at 95 percent.
9 And so, we looked at that year over year for all five
10 locations and all but one consistently was
11 significantly under 95 percent.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And when you see these
13 things, is there a team that reaches out to the
14 provider and say, yeah I'm not seeing your numbers.
15 You're giving me this number but that's not what I'm
16 seeing in the system. Is there support provided for
17 providers when there's a discrepancy?

18 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, we wouldn't know it was a
19 discrepancy unless it was reported to us by a
20 provider. Again, this is our system of record, so we
21 rely on the provider to enter accurate data into the
22 system in which we are looking. Again, we are
23 managing over 3,000 sites and programs. And so, in
24 the case that we do not see enrollments at 95
25 percent, there are a host of supports provided to

1
2 programs and again, these are independent businesses
3 right? So, we respect that things are happening in
4 community. I think one thing we learned in
5 conversation recently with many of the providers and
6 one of the things I raised in my testimony, is that
7 they don't necessarily have the right configurations
8 for the communities that they're serving today. We
9 would know that. The needs assessment and the
10 assessment of demand in community is done by the
11 provider. I had to do that when I was serving across
12 in supporting those 14 sites. They are steeped in
13 community, something we keep hearing and so, if at
14 any point they're seeing that maybe whatever they
15 were awarded initially five years ago, a year ago,
16 because all of the contracts are different on
17 different terms, we do look to them and encourage
18 them to reach out to us to have those conversations.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how long when you see
20 the input, how long does it show up on your end?

21 SIMONE HAWKINS: Hmm, sorry, so if enrollment
22 data is entered today, we usually give it about a 24
23 hour turnaround for us to see it live in our system
24 on our end.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: But Grand Settlement doesn't
3 meet none of the criteria's that you talked about, so
4 why are they on the chopping block?

5 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, Grand Street did have
6 enrollment below the 95 percent two years ago and at
7 the point and time in which we pulled the data for
8 FY25, they were also below. But again, as I
9 mentioned, each of the three considerations were
10 weighed differently. That particular lease issue is
11 the one that really elevated them for consideration
12 for nonrenewal. That lease had been expired since
13 2019. The projected increases for that lease were
14 exorbitant and we wanted to ensure that we can
15 negotiate something that was sustainable for the city
16 in the long term.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you are in negotiations
18 with the landlords currently?

19 CORA LIU: We have been in conversations with the
20 landlords and were able to convince the landlords to
21 allow the program to stay until the end of School
22 Year 2025-2026 and while continuously working with
23 our partners at Early Childhood to figure out the
24 next steps.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And speak into the mic
3 because we couldn't hear you. So, how many staff
4 would have been laid off at each of these sites if
5 they were closed and how many students would have
6 been impacted?

7 SIMONE HAWKINS: Give me on second Chair. I'm
8 sorry, I do have that data for you. So, uhm we have
9 about it's my understanding we have about 200
10 students who would have been impacted across these
11 sites. Again, the capacity is almost 500. They have
12 been below capacity across all five of the sites and
13 many of the children that are currently enrolled,
14 about half of the currently enrolled population are
15 transitioning into kindergarten. And so, they
16 wouldn't have been impacted by the nonrenewal of
17 these leases.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, can you give them to me
19 per site, All My Children?

20 SIMONE HAWKINS: Sure, give me one second if you
21 don't mind. I'm so sorry. We have a very long
22 document here. Uhm, okay so as for All My Children,
23 they would have nine toddlers, ten 3K children, I'm
24 sorry 18 3K children. It's for a total of 27 and
25 I'll go back to staff next.

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CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And Young Minds?

SIMONE HAWKINS: That will be 8 toddlers and 19
3K children for a total of 27.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Friends?

SIMONE HAWKINS: 13 3K children.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Grand Street?

SIMONE HAWKINS: 12 - 27 3K children, excuse me.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Nuestros Ninos has been
operating since 1973.

SIMONE HAWKINS: Sorry Chair, I didn't give you
the numbers for Nuestros Ninos.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Oh, Nuestros Ninos, yes.

SIMONE HAWKINS: 19 toddlers and 43 K for a total
of 59.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you repeat that?

SIMONE HAWKINS: 19 toddlers and 43 K for a total
of 59.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And the staff that would
have been laid off?

SIMONE HAWKINS: And the staff; you are quicker
than I am. I'm sorry. If I can get back to you on
that because I am not finding that data but I do know
I have it so apologies for that.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Earlier Nuestros Ninos
3 talked about they've been operating since 1973,
4 served a large Latin X student population inclusive
5 setting. If this center closes after contract
6 expiration June 2026, would New York City Public
7 School be able to enroll these students and
8 comparable programs that speak their culture through
9 language and food?

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah and so, one thing I want to
11 mention is some of these contracts actually are
12 renewed on an annual basis and others are on the five
13 year track for the birth to five. And so, those
14 contracts are set to expire in June 2026.

15 If not for an extension, we would need to
16 resolicit through an open and fair competitive
17 process, not just those seats but also these sites.
18 And so, it's important to know that around planning
19 for the sustainability of the system. And so, in
20 regards to culture relevancy and responsiveness in
21 community, you know one thing we did mention to
22 Nuestros Ninos specifically, they are more than just
23 a site. They are community and they actually have
24 two more sites within that community that are walking
25

1
2 distance and have open seats available to communities
3 if they wanted to serve them.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do they also have bilingual
5 programs?

6 SIMONE HAWKINS: At the other two sites?

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes.

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: That I can't speak to. I would
9 have to verify if they are certified bilingual.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah because I want to
11 target that particular niche of students. I'm going
12 to turn it over quickly to Council Member Hudson.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much Chair.
14 I have several questions, so I'm going to try to stay
15 within my five minutes here but we've heard from the
16 Administration at Fort Greene Council that they're
17 still awaiting over \$500,000 in reimbursements from
18 childcare services rendered in 2020. What has caused
19 this five year delay in processing this
20 reimbursement?

21 SIMONE HAWKINS: Am I still on mute? Okay, this
22 document is fun you all. Okay, thank you for that
23 question and so, for Fort Greene Council, we have
24 been working with that provider for quite some time
25 around their FY25 payments. And so, just a little

1 context, again and sorry if I'm giving too much
2 background but it's important to understand process.
3 So, if a providers does not have a registered
4 contract, although we can work with them to
5 preapprove their budget, they cannot - it's begin to
6 invoice us because we need a finally approved budget
7 against a registered contract. So, that does cause
8 some delay.

9
10 And so, in the instances where we don't have a
11 registered contract, again, we have to work closely
12 with the provider around potentially getting a bridge
13 loan which is no interest to them. And then again
14 working with them to get a preapproved budget. When
15 their contract is registered, they can finally submit
16 a finally approved budget, begin invoices us and so
17 we've been working with the provider for quite some
18 time on budget revisions. And so, the budget was
19 approved on January 7th finally, and then the vendor
20 submitted July through November invoices between that
21 time and January 28th, also some in February and then
22 payments were processed in late January.

23 So, I'm not aware of any -

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Sorry, so the payments
25 were processed in late January.

1
2 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yes, yes Council Member. They
3 were processed between January 28, 2025 as they
4 started submitting them on a rolling basis. The last
5 invoice submitted for FY24 was for the June service
6 month. That service month requires a little bit more
7 of an in depth submission because it requires a
8 little bit more reporting. And so, we received -
9 that was submitted on September 20, 2024 and so if
10 there's any outstanding payments, I'm happy to reach
11 out but to our records, we don't have any additional
12 at this time.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay and then what would
14 cause a contract to not be registered?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: A host of things and so that is
16 a process that's done internally across several
17 divisions within the agency and also externally. We
18 have the support of the Comptrollers Office, who also
19 assists in that process. And so, sometimes it can be
20 a background check that we find on the provider or
21 vender that can cause some delays. We also look to
22 the provider to provide us with some information like
23 the budget. It's different from their operating
24 budget. It's their contract budget that needs to go
25 with the registration packet and so, in some

1 instances, that can take a little bit of time as we
2 negotiate that. So there are different inputs that
3 can cause delays with contract registration.
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, do you have a plan
6 for preventing some more payment delays for providers
7 from happening in the future?

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yes we have lots of hopes and
9 dreams.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Or what if the registered
11 contracts or not?

12 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, and so one of the things
13 we're doing with the help of the Administration as
14 well is really trying to streamline the process for
15 contract registrations that is something we do need
16 to improve on holistically and I think that's
17 something that we've acknowledged openly. When we do
18 have a registered contract, we are working internally
19 to build staff capacity within my division. We want
20 to make sure that we have as high caseloads for our
21 operation analysts so they cannot only provide more
22 direct customer service, but they can also process
23 any requests more quickly. And then systems, I think
24 one of the pinpoints that have come up and I'll be
25 again, the first to admit, some of our systems are

1
2 very, they run parallel to one another, which
3 requires our providers to do a lot more data entry
4 than we would like and also it limits our ability to
5 do reporting.

6 And so right now we're looking on releasing a new
7 information management system. We hope that will
8 help more proactive communication from providers but
9 it will also allow us to see things on the backend
10 more quickly.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay thanks and Chair, I
12 just have a couple more questions. I'm running out
13 of time here but New York City Public School
14 Officials have told many of our early childhood
15 education sites that were slated to be eliminated but
16 then granted temporary one year extensions. That
17 they must achieve a 95 percent enrollment over the
18 next year. Can you share how many DOE funded early
19 childhood education sites are at 95 percent capacity
20 or greater.

21 SIMONE HAWKINS: Can I get back to you on that
22 one Council Member. I can definitely provide that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay and then when you
24 get us that, can you also share for those that are
25 not at 95 percent, are they also at risk for closure

1
2 ahead of or following the termination of their five
3 year contract? That would be helpful to know.

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: We'll get back to you but one
5 thing I want to say about that last question. I
6 think one of our learnings from this experience is
7 the very thing that the Chair mentioned around
8 communication. And so, if we are to get there again,
9 which I do not anticipate happening any time soon, we
10 will be sure to communicate that as proactively as
11 possible.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay thank you. And then
13 you've also told the five nearly terminated sites -
14 Chair, may I continue? Thank you. That you would
15 assist them in establishing a recruitment plan. Yet
16 many of these providers did not have the capacity or
17 expertise to compile these plans, especially given
18 hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid
19 reimbursements from the city that restricts
20 recruitment and hiring operations. Other than
21 suggesting the inclusion of components, how are you
22 working with these providers to make these plans and
23 what tangible resources is DOE providing?

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, so I do think many of
25 these providers and including Fort Greene Council, I

1
2 remember them during my time at the Council under
3 Tish James. They have been in community for a really
4 long time and so, if there's anyone who could put
5 boots on the ground and recruit families, I do think
6 it's definitely those veterans who have been doing
7 this work. They know where to look for children,
8 they know where to connect with families and many of
9 them throughout this time have said very clearly that
10 the community needs them and they have seats that
11 families want. And so, in addition to helping them
12 draft that based on their expertise and knowledge, we
13 are going to supplement that with our expertise and
14 knowledge and say, these are some of the approaches
15 and strategies that we've done and supported
16 providers across community.

17 And in our conversations too, some of our
18 providers have shared that they just don't have the
19 seats that meet community need. And so, where we can
20 reconfigure seats, we will do that so they can
21 maximize enrollment as much as possible.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. Thank you
23 Chair.

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: You're welcome.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Council Member
3 Hudson. So in your testimony, you stated that New
4 York ECE system has a capacity to serve about 140,000
5 kids. There are 30,000 vacancies currently in the
6 system. Can you provide a breakdown on capacity,
7 enrollment, and vacancies by each seat type, age
8 group including PreK, 3K, infant and toddler?

9 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yes, we can provide that to the
10 Council.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You'll provide it to the
12 Council; you don't have it. Are there any programs
13 not including in the 140,000 capacity number such as
14 Promise NYC or Head Start?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: Promise NYC is not within the
16 New York City Public Schools portfolio and Head Start
17 is including in that 140,000 capacity.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You mentioned that the
19 providers did not meet your threshold 95 percent,
20 just to piggy off of Council Member Hudson. Having a
21 fuller moment but as you also testified there are
22 30,000 vacancies in the system. This would imply
23 that many programs are not meeting the full
24 enrollment standard. Can you clarify what New York
25 City Public Schools position on what should happen

1
2 with sites that are not full enrollment? That's the
3 piggyback off of Council Member Hudson's question.

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, so I would encourage that
5 if folks are under enrolled significantly or even
6 slightly, they know why the most and the best. And
7 so, if they know it's because their current seat
8 configurations are not meeting the needs of families
9 in their communities, I encourage them to reach out
10 to us so we can have some real honest conversations
11 about what we can do to support, a modification of
12 their slot.

13 Now I want to say this very clearly, it is not a
14 blanket yes in which we can do that. We have to
15 follow procurement rules. We have to look at what
16 they apply for when they applied originally and then
17 we have to look at what the existing saturation
18 levels are in community. If we know that there's
19 already underutilization in school day, school year
20 seats for four year old's, we're not going to add
21 more school day, school year seats for four year olds
22 in that community. It's not helping the other
23 providers and it won't help them. And so, we really
24 encourage them to reach out but again, I want to
25 remind the Council that the motivations behind this

1
2 was not strictly around enrollment levels, which we
3 looked at for three years. It was around the lease
4 termination dates. And so providers who have city
5 leased properties that might be approaching
6 termination, we will be reaching out to have
7 conversations.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Not right before. See when
9 we talked about communication -

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: Correct, correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It should be happening,
12 ongoing, alerting them. Uhm, since reversing your
13 decision of opening the website to allow families to
14 apply, what can you tell us about what you've seen?
15 Have you engaged every tool on your disposal to
16 ensure that these centers aren't losing the chance
17 for a filled seat since they're not getting an
18 extension?

19 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yes, and so in addition to
20 opening up the portal as quickly as possible, we
21 actually, my team specifically called every enrolled
22 family to have conversations and let them know that
23 the schools were now accessible in the system. Walk
24 them through the 3K and PreK application process
25 through my schools and those parents who are

1 matriculating to kindergarten in the fall, sometimes
2 they stay with our EDY providers over the summer.

3 And so, letting them know that they should reach out
4 to the provider, kind of talk through that process.

5 And then with thanks to my colleagues and the Office
6 of Student Enrollment, they also did a mass blast to
7 all of my schools registrants within the respective
8 districts, letting them know that the schools are
9 accessible in the system.
10

11 And this week, after we finalize the
12 translations, we'll be sending out a letter to
13 families letting them know as well.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay.

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm sorry Chair, I failed to
16 note that we also invited the providers to the
17 enrollment fairs that are open in each of the
18 boroughs. Brooklyn occurred last Saturday at the
19 Brooklyn Children's Museum. I was personally there
20 and saw many of our Brooklyn based providers there
21 specifically those who are involved in this
22 situation. And so, that is another option extended
23 to them.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Through the enrollment and
25 outreach program. How many remaining private sites

1
2 will New York City Public Schools be assessing in the
3 out years and what have you learned from this year's
4 proposal to improve communication since advocates
5 emphasize the lack of communication?

6 SIMONE HAWKINS: Do you want to speak to the
7 number of terminations and I'll speak to the next
8 one?

9 CORA LIU: Sure, we do have as Deputy Chancellor
10 Hawkins mentioned, we inherited about 86 ACS sites,
11 about 60 of enroll in these sites. We have caught up
12 and extended uses for all of them. So, we have
13 caught up. We are now working to plan ahead, not
14 just six months but maybe it was a longer timeframe
15 so now we can plan better and communicate sooner.
16 Those 60 sites will have future expiration date and
17 some of them going out to 2040.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have a number of how
19 many sites that have upcoming expiring leases in the
20 two years? Off the top of your head, do you know how
21 many sites?

22 CORA LIU: I think we have about six. Three of
23 which of the five sites we're talking about today.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: About six sites, okay. Can
25 SCA share the timeline of conversation with

1
2 landlords? They say it starts six months before but
3 we still don't know if they spoke to them on time.
4 Two times I even got a response. What about the
5 timelines for Nuestros Ninos specifically?

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, all of the five, one
7 site doesn't expire until 2028, so we haven't been
8 able to reach out to the landlords. Three other
9 sites have expiration date outside of the six month
10 window, so we haven't reached out to the landlords
11 until recently when we were trying to make sure they
12 can give us guarantee to stay until the end of 2025
13 and 2026 school year.

14 The only site which we have been having ongoing
15 conversation negotiation with is Grand Street. The
16 lease expired a couple years ago. We have been in
17 conversation with the landlord for the past three or
18 four years. There are times the landlord was not as
19 responsive and in conversations, the landlord has
20 asked for a large amount of increase. So, we were
21 going back and forth trying to get to a great amount
22 and that's in between, still happening. So, recently
23 we were able to convince him to allow us to stay for
24 until the end of the school year.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So the conversations are
3 starting six months before the lease is expired?

4 CORA LIU: Typically.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Not three months or a month
6 before and surprising providers.

7 CORA LIU: Correct.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Earlier, DC Hawkins, you
9 talked about having these type of seats. Is it easy
10 to modify these contracts?

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: No, not necessarily.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How long does it take? In
13 case I have a contract and I say you know what, I
14 can't serve this population, what can I do with the
15 contract and how long can I turn that around?

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah so it depends, and so for
17 instance you know some of the - just kind of focusing
18 on the five. Some of them are on old early learn
19 contracts and again, mentioning that those are
20 renewed on an annual basis. Others recompeted for
21 the birth to five contract and are on those and on
22 the five year track. And so, really depending upon
23 the terms and conditions in each of those contracts,
24 we are limited with how and which seats we can
25 provide at those sites. Specifically with city

1
2 leased sites, we are required to provide an EDY
3 options. And so, fully eradicating that in those
4 sites is not an option and as we know our communities
5 are changing and many families may want school day,
6 school year. That's not an option under the current
7 contract.

8 Also, we have folks who did apply but did not get
9 awarded and so, you know in the sake of equity and a
10 fair procurement process, if we said as a result we
11 didn't extend an award to a certain provider because
12 there's either no need or fund availability, turn
13 around and provide that to an existing contract,
14 we're opening up the city to potential liability.
15 And so, when these requests come in we have to look
16 at it one by one to assess where they were and kind
17 of an award pipeline, what they have currently and
18 then what the community might need based on our data.

19 I'm sorry, it can take depending - sorry to
20 answer your question, depending on the details of
21 that, it can take from a few weeks to maybe a few
22 months to make a decision.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Council Member
24 Stevens.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hello, good afternoon.
3 Oh, good morning.

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: How are you?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Uhm, so I just have a
6 couple questions and one, I wanted to also make a
7 statement. I know Chair Joseph talked about there
8 being an empty site in her district. I also have an
9 empty site that DOE has been paying for and it's been
10 empty for a number of years and we've reached out.
11 There's been people who actually said that they would
12 love to turn it into a 3K center and have not been
13 getting any response. So, definitely want to make
14 sure that we are optimizing the space.

15 And then another thing I wanted to just kind of
16 highlight because I know the talk has also been that
17 you know when you said we'll be looking at the seats
18 and over saturation. Obviously, we want to make sure
19 districts are not oversaturated but I also want to be
20 careful about when we're talking about seats in
21 certain districts because just because they're not
22 full doesn't mean that it's oversaturated. We have
23 not been doing a good job as recruitment and I know
24 that's been a plan that's been in the works for the
25 last year to ramp up recruitment and what that looks

1
2 like and to support some of these nonprofits but I
3 think sometimes when we're saying you know certain
4 seats aren't full and things like that, I want to
5 make clear that certain districts might have more
6 seats but less interaction because we're not doing
7 the work and not saying we're going to remove them.

8 But I wanted to start here because one of my pet
9 peeves is that I often feel like we have city
10 agencies doing similar work and they kind of don't
11 talk. ACS has a voucher program that is working and
12 so, have we done any evaluation to see where those
13 vouchers are being used and is that having any impact
14 on 3K because I feel like this is a question that no
15 one has been talking about and really not really been
16 comparing and you know when we're talking about
17 fixing the system, we got to start looking from
18 within. So, has any of that work been done to be
19 working with ACS to see where their vouchers are
20 being used and where those communities are at and
21 then looking at the overlap with 3K?

22 SIMONE HAWKINS: I appreciate that question very
23 much. And so, I agree around that coherence and
24 coordination across agencies. I think we've made
25 great progress and strides in talking to one another,

1
2 we have a ways to go for sure. And so, I work very
3 closely as well as my team with ACS, also with HRA,
4 we are all supporting what we kind of call the
5 childcare eligibility system, maybe through contract
6 of care vouchers and we are having those
7 conversations Council Member. We have to do I think
8 a bit of work on data sharing.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, if you guys are
10 having the conversation, do we have any data that can
11 look at where these things are overlapping? And
12 don't worry, I'm not just asking this from you, I'm
13 also asking this on our side as well because we've
14 been talking about 3K for the last three years and
15 I'm sick of talking at it and I would like us just to
16 be talking about how do we fix the solution? Because
17 if we have a program where it seems to be working a
18 lot better and more equitable, then how do we figure
19 out to use those best practices and also seeing how
20 like, is that also effecting this program? Because
21 where it keeps talking about expanding and putting
22 more money into it but we're not talking about fixing
23 it. And you know, I know there's also a whole other
24 list of things that we never talk about in these
25 hearings as far as the DOH and how that is a huge

1
2 part of the system. No one ever talks about how that
3 needs to be fixed around getting these sites up and
4 running. And even moving sites is even hard because
5 they also have to get certified and get SCR
6 clearances, not only for the space but for the
7 teachers. And the last time we did a DOH hearing,
8 only 75 inspectors do that for across the city.

9 And so, those things are things that we also have
10 to talk about that's never part of the conversation.
11 And so I really want to make sure that we're bringing
12 that sort of forefront too. How are we also working
13 with some of these other agencies that effect the
14 system so much, that hinders the expansion from
15 happening? Could you talk a little bit about that?

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, so we're working to
17 improve our coordination across all agencies. I
18 agree that it's going to take all of us to improve
19 this system. There's not a one stop solution to fix
20 this. We have to look at our current contracts. To
21 your point, we have to look at where parents are
22 choosing to go and that changes year over year,
23 right? I know personally that some parents prefer a
24 voucher because they feel safer having their infant
25 with a family member for instance. But as we get

1
2 into our PreK years, they want to get their foot into
3 that district school, and so they're potentially
4 eyeing that district school or Charter school, right?

5 And so, I think as we are engaging across the
6 agencies, we have to also center parent needs and
7 choices and I think we are and we are looking into
8 ways to do that more effectively. That should guide
9 any decisions we make as we reimagine what the system
10 should and will look like. And so, we have to talk
11 about resource constraints. The best way to blend
12 and braid funding so we can maximize those supports.
13 We have to look at the regulations as you mentioned
14 from our Health Department partners but also those
15 from the New York State Office of Children and Family
16 Services who serve as the primary and sole regulator
17 of our family childcare space.

18 And so, coordination must be improved. We are
19 having those conversations. I will not sit here and
20 over promise and under deliver that we have data
21 ready and available that does that kind of deep
22 analytical -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I would just advise and
24 here's the thing right, ASC, I've also been pushing
25 their side. That is something that needs to happen.

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SIMONE HAWKINS: I agree.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Like you know, data for me is important and this is DOE, you're always talking about data right? And so, if we don't have the data to actually look at the information and take a deep dive to think about how to move forward, I think that that is one of the first things we should be doing. That should have been one of the first things that was done when the expansion happened but I can't you know blame people, I wasn't here, whatever. You weren't here, whatever but that should have been part of the conversation around this expansion and for the last three years, that's something that has not been brought to the forefront or have not even been talked about and I think that it's at a point where we actually need to step back and do some real deep diving around evaluating of all the programs that we have.

Like you said, ACS, HRA, all of these other programs and how that is also effecting the system because it's not part of the conversation and I think it's effecting where it is and whether we do need to - whether we should expand because on the other side, ACS has been expanding their program and voucher

1
2 system for the last three years at the same time 3K
3 has been expanding but no one is kind of bringing
4 that sort of forefront. And so, I just wanted to
5 make sure that we start pushing the conversation and
6 a way of more solutions around what is in the system
7 because a lot of it keeps falling under DOE but some
8 of - I think that there's some other outlining
9 factors and also thinking about the other piece
10 around even DOH being a person and a provider who
11 worked in the system understanding that sometimes
12 classrooms are closed for the littlest thing and so,
13 your enrollment is effected often because a teacher
14 might be out so now - people who are certified. So,
15 that's another thing.

16 And my last question, sorry Chair. I have an ab
17 Highbridge Advisor Council who is in my district. I
18 know they were closed not because of losing the
19 contract, they were closed because of some
20 administrator issues on the provider side. Do you
21 have any updates around the last bit? I know the
22 last time we spoke we spoke a little bit about how
23 you were back paying some of the staff on one end but
24 we're still trying to figure out was that ever
25 resolved because I never got a follow up.

1
2 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, uhm, we are not able to
3 provide back pay to the actual independent family
4 childcare providers. We are not in contact with them
5 directly. We were in contract with Highbridge
6 through their network contract and payment was
7 already remitted to Highbridge for those providers.
8 However, we worked really closely with the UFT and
9 others. I personally with my team and ACS. We are
10 really trying to improve our coordination.

11 Met with the providers, hosted a meeting and
12 really extended them some options. And so, those who
13 wanted to explore the voucher out, ACS was able to
14 transition them into that and in some instances back
15 date the kids to a certain date so they can get
16 payment. And then we were able to reaffiliate those
17 with you know who were interested with a new network.
18 And so, we worked really closely. I really want to
19 give a shout out to our UFT partners for helping to
20 convene that conversation so that they can get paid
21 moving forward.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, thank you for that
23 update and I would have loved to have the update not
24 here and I wouldn't have to have it on record. So,
25 please make sure that you're kind of connecting with

1
2 us. But the last thing I was going to say, have you
3 guys done anything to ensure that something like that
4 wouldn't be able to happen again? Because I think
5 that that's just as important of how we use these
6 things as learning tools and so, have guys
7 implemented anything to ensure this doesn't happen
8 again? And just for those who don't know, there was
9 a provider who did not submit payment to their staff
10 and they went out of business and so, there was staff
11 who were not paid for months and so, they've been
12 working really hard to figure out how to pay them.

13 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, it was an awful situation.
14 So, this actually occurred at the start of me joining
15 in my role and we immediately started to evaluate
16 what we can do to mitigate these. And so, for one,
17 you know we have a very detailed invoicing process
18 but we don't want to overexert or ask for more data
19 and backup. We do ask for payroll information,
20 usually at least twice a year because we don't want
21 to be document heavy and to contribute to any delays
22 in payments.

23 And then also, obviously just having a different
24 pulse and check in with our providers to make sure
25 that they are being diligent in their expectations of

1
2 the contract. Lastly, creating more spaces to
3 connect with the family childcare providers directly
4 outside of the network is something we are
5 considering.

6 Clearly our contract is with the network. We
7 want to respect that relationship but this situation
8 clearly demonstrated a need for us to connect
9 directly with the family childcare providers. And if
10 we create that space, we are hopeful that things will
11 come up that we won't normally see in the system and
12 so, we're hoping to implement some of those
13 strategies in the future. It was very awful and I'm
14 so sorry that happened. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Council Member Hudson.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much and
17 sorry, I want to revisit my first question because I
18 think the numbers you provided were for 2024, not
19 2020.

20 SIMONE HAWKINS: For the invoices Council Member?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yes for Fort Greene
22 Council. So, there's still awaiting over \$500,000 in
23 reimbursement from childcare services rendered in
24 2020.

25 SIMONE HAWKINS: 2020?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yeah and that's what I'm
3 trying to get to the bottom of. They have told my
4 team that there were initial email correspondences
5 with promises made, invoice amount with submission
6 history and reimbursement approval from DOE in the
7 Mayor's portal. There was a submission to the
8 Mayor's Office requesting help with this situation in
9 December 2024 and there's been subsequent back and
10 forth correspondences within the invoices showing a
11 log between Fort Greene Council and the DOE
12 representative.

13 SIMONE HAWKINS: Oh, my team is saying that was
14 related to the Family Childcare Network. It's a
15 different contract and that at that time was part of
16 a different system. It was HHS Accelerator, now
17 we're in Passport and so my team has been working
18 diligently with them. As you know we're in FY25 and
19 so we have to do a lot more work to go as far back as
20 2020, especially when the systems are different but
21 we have been in conversation with them about that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Is it the change in
23 systems that caused the nonpayment?

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: I have to look into the details
25 of what caused the nonpayment going back to 2020.

1
2 That I don't have details on for you but I can
3 definitely round back but we are working with them to
4 get them payment.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, so what exactly
6 does working with them to get payment mean though?

7 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, we've been in continued
8 contact with them, letting them know what we have to
9 do. We have to reach out to MOCS, we have to reach
10 out to other agencies to support since the
11 information was submitted in the system we no longer
12 have access to. And so, we have to some how in some
13 way be able to pull out that information so we can
14 remit payment in a totally different system.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, it's an
16 Administrative operational type of issue. Do you
17 know if there are other centers that are facing
18 similar challenges that where money got backed up
19 from the previous platform you used?

20 SIMONE HAWKINS: I don't want to misspeak. No,
21 not in this particular situation and only for our
22 Family Childcare Networks are they in a different
23 system from our CBO's. So, I'm personally not aware
24 of other programs in this situation.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, uhm, they've you
3 know continued to incur expenses for childcare
4 services and today over \$1.2 million remains unpaid,
5 which is obviously limited cash flow and negatively
6 affected the overall condition and growth of this
7 daycare center. So, I would love to work directly
8 with you and your teams to figure out the fastest way
9 to get this paid from 2020.

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: Absolutely, absolutely. I will
11 work with my team on this issue to make sure we are
12 definitely dotting every I and crossing every T and
13 so, I would love to connect with you about that site
14 and any other sites in your district.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: The same question, how many
17 providers are still stuck in that old system? How
18 many are still stuck there do you know?

19 SIMONE HAWKINS: I do not know. I do not know.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Can you get that information
21 to us and how much is owed to those providers, right?
22 This was 2020, none of us were here. This is wild.

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: I agree.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: This is wild.
25

1
2 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so again, we have to - we
3 will investigate that but also every situation is
4 different, right?

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We understand that.

6 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so, it's my understanding,
7 this is not to point the finger. We need to do
8 better at communicating and working with providers so
9 they can do what they need to do in the back office
10 but in some cases, we also do not get information so
11 we can do the part that we need to do to move the
12 process forward.

13 And so again, having improved systems, having
14 more staff. We need to improve customer service. We
15 need to be able to proactively connect with programs
16 and say hey, we didn't get that invoice from about
17 two months ago, what's going on? And so, I will be
18 also my experience as a provider, also having an
19 operations background, that is not the ministry of
20 everyone doing this work. Some of them come in
21 wanting to take care of children and that's it and we
22 are clear about that. But there is a huge
23 administrative part to this work. And so, as we
24 together cocreate what the future of this system will
25 look like, I really do invite you to have any

1
2 suggestions around how we could support providers in
3 the long term who are struggling with the admin part
4 of the work because it is, it is causing some tension
5 and I do want to figure out a holistic solution to
6 this problem.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many vacancies do you
8 have?

9 SIMONE HAWKINS: For our operation analysts uhm,
10 one second Chair. I do have that data. Current
11 vacancies right now is 15. We have vacancies of 12
12 analysts. Those are operations analysts. They are
13 kind of the first level of approval and support for
14 our providers and three supervisors whose also
15 support with the approval chain and process.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: When will you be filling up
17 those positions?

18 SIMONE HAWKINS: We are working diligently.
19 They're posted, they're out, we're trying to work
20 with folks both through the civil service process.
21 In some cases, we have to pull folks from lists so
22 we're going through that process now. So, we're
23 moving as quickly as possible.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay thank you. I'd like to
3 recognize Council Member Shekar and pass it on to
4 Council Member Lee.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi everyone. Good morning.
6 So, I have a lot of questions about the procurement
7 contracting process and I say this with you know
8 having run nonprofit organizations for 15 years in
9 New York City and having to deal with DFTA. You
10 know, DOHMH, DYCD and all of a lot of the other
11 agencies and I have to say, I'm getting a little
12 heated, not at you guys personally but because it's
13 almost bringing like, I always joke around saying I'm
14 a recovering you know nonprofit executive because
15 it's a lot and I just want to say to the nonprofit
16 providers that are in the room, I hear you and I feel
17 your frustration because having to deal with all of
18 these contracts and each agency has its own rules,
19 it's very frustrating. And so, I regret that I wore
20 a turtle neck because I'm getting a little hot right
21 now but like, uhm, whew yeah but uhm you know I just
22 wanted to go into a little bit, you know and not in
23 any particular order but shoot out some of my
24 questions. So, if I'm understanding correctly, you
25 guys are not on the passport system because I know it

1
2 went from VENDEX to HHS and now it's Passport and
3 then you guys are on a separate system?

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: We are in Passport for our
5 Family Childcare Network contracts and then we are
6 Vender Portal for the other contracted programs.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay so for the other -
8 wait, I'm sorry what was it?

9 SIMONE HAWKINS: Vender Portal.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Vender Portal okay. So, how
11 is that linked to Passport? So, if I'm a provider
12 that's doing multiple contracting programs, how am I
13 able to see transparently where things are at in
14 terms of payments, you know where the delays are?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, those systems are not
16 linked. And so, if I may Ingrid use you as an
17 example, if you don't mind. Nuestros Ninos has both
18 a CBO, contracted center based contract which is
19 processed through Vender Portal. So, they would go
20 through there to assess their enrollments, their
21 invoices, their attendance through that system for
22 that specific program. For their Family Childcare
23 Network contracts, they would go through Passport to
24 assess those. Those systems do not speak to one

1
2 another, they are separate and they manage different
3 contracts.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right, so how do we get them
5 to speak to each other?

6 SIMONE HAWKINS: That is not our intention,
7 right? And so, we do not in New York City Public
8 Schools manage Passport. That is managed by a
9 separate agency. Our hope is to have all of our
10 contracts in one centralized system. So, we're
11 working to develop that now.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: For DOE or you mean DOE or
13 the city entirely?

14 SIMONE HAWKINS: Just for New York City Public
15 Schools division of Early Childhood Education.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: What was the rationale for
17 separating out?

18 SIMONE HAWKINS: That I cannot answer. I mean
19 that's how it's been organized for many, many years.
20 I think even when I was a provider, so I can't speak
21 to why that happened.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and the reason why I
23 bring this up is because I understand that for each
24 of these portals and systems and contracts, I have to
25 say as someone who is running an organization with

1 multiple contracts, it gets very, very cumbersome
2 with the paperwork and all of the different things,
3 and so, I know you're trying to make it as less
4 cumbersome as possible but especially with different
5 systems and different contracts and multiple
6 contracts, it adds up and it is a lot. I cannot tell
7 you how much time I spent just doing paperwork alone,
8 applying for these contracts and keeping track of
9 every single one and that's everything from like the
10 \$5,000 to \$10,000 to like the \$100,000, \$200,000 plus
11 contract levels.
12

13 And so, in terms of your contracts that you have
14 through DOE, what's the percentage of advance that
15 you give them?

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, it varies and so, I believe,
17 I don't want to misspeak. I believe we give 35
18 percent for our school day school year seats and then
19 25 percent for our EDY.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, is there any room to
21 increase those amounts? Because I know other
22 agencies have moved to do that as well.

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, we have done that in the
24 past intermittently, I remember that from personal
25 experience. We would have to consider the

1
2 recruitment schedule associated with that and we have
3 seen by increasing the advance, it has led to the
4 providers owing the city money because they weren't
5 incentivized to submit invoices, nor were we able to
6 recollect on the advance. And so, it also interfered
7 with their cash flow.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: But in the advance, can't
9 you also require that certain things be done by a
10 timeline? So, in other words, with that there should
11 be some more outcomes and guidelines perhaps to
12 alleviate that issue because I almost feel like it's
13 a catch 22 because in sometimes the situations are is
14 that because they don't advance, they cannot do the
15 recruitment. So, I think it can go both ways.

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, I'm open to having the
17 conversation. I think there's been some situations
18 in the past did not yield really good outcomes for
19 the city. When we increased the advance, I think we
20 actually went as high as 40 percent if I'm
21 remembering correctly and it really put a lot of the
22 programs in a difficult spot. And so, I'm happy to
23 explore that further with you and others to really
24 see what's feasible or what's not.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and to the Chair's
3 point as well as what Council Member Stevens was
4 saying, because just going through your testimony, I
5 know that you outlined a lot of the issues like need
6 to evolve. The system needs to evolve to better meet
7 current needs, inflexible contracts, you know the
8 reach agreeing of seats and you know leading to
9 unhealthy competition, inefficient use of resources.
10 So, when I read - I'm sorry, is it okay if I finish?
11 So, when I read all of these things, my question is
12 we're looking to you all to guide us in terms of
13 like, so if you don't have the power to change the
14 inflexible contracts, who does, right? And is there
15 a way to reevaluate even though were in the middle of
16 an RFP contracting process? Is there a way to
17 reevaluate or do white papers to do new RFP's with
18 slightly different scopes, right? Because I know
19 that with this program, like you're saying, if it's
20 inflexible, what is that solution? How do we get to
21 a possible new RFP that we do through white papers
22 through getting feedback and then administer that?

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, that's the solution,
24 right? I think you know we have all signed an
25 agreement or contract and we are all bound by the

1
2 parameters of those agreements. We want to respect
3 that agreement too. And so, where we can be nimble,
4 we want to be nimble but we are also very much
5 restricted by what can and can't happen right? This
6 was a fair solicitation. We want to respect people
7 who applied with the understanding these were the
8 terms. And so, as we go into understanding where we
9 can be as flexible as possible, we are exploring
10 those Council Member and extending those
11 opportunities to our providers but really where we
12 have the most opportunity is as we reimagine the
13 future and we are engaging in conversation with
14 providers and even families around what they envision
15 that to be so we can cocreate something together.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, I mean hopefully that
17 can be done almost on parallel track. So in other
18 words, we don't want this contract to end and then
19 for us to start that process after. So, hopefully
20 that's something and then just really two quick
21 questions is, for the federal dollars that are
22 potentially going to be cut, what percentage of that
23 is passthrough money to you guys right? Because I
24 know that even though the city has its money, a lot
25 of that embedded is federal dollars and so, do you

1
2 know the total amount or percentage that we're
3 talking about here?

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, so the passthrough is
5 specifically our CCDBG funds. It's passed through
6 from the feds, the states through ACS to us and it's
7 about \$6 million. Oh, I'm misspeaking, it is about
8 \$127 million.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, that's a lot.

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: It is.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: And uhm, what is the sort of
12 plan to in case that goes away, what is the
13 alternative solution that we're thinking, that you
14 guys are thinking about?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, you know there are a lot of
16 priorities across the city, CCDBG doesn't only touch
17 early childhood here in the city. And so, as we all
18 you know really address these uncertain times and
19 start to do some scenario planning, we're doing that
20 in conjunction with the Administration. We're doing
21 that in conjunction with OMB and so, it's hard for us
22 to plan without having details but we are considering
23 the possibilities where we can't absorb, where we can
24 but I can't really get into any specifics without
25

1
2 having more details about what will be presented to
3 us unfortunately.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah, we're all going to be
5 in that one together so, thank you Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Council Member
7 Shekar.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
9 for hosting this important hearing and the reason for
10 it is because as you're hearing, we're all and I'm
11 especially extremely concerned about this
12 Administrations approach to early childhood
13 education. The comments that Mayor Adams has made
14 versus the reality on the ground, the large demand
15 for early childhood education. And I want to talk
16 about one center in particular but before doing that,
17 just a couple of questions of the statistics to
18 really highlight this disparity and I know you all
19 with the charge that you've been given are doing the
20 best that you all can but are you aware that from
21 2023 to - uh 2021 to 2024, there's been a 27 percent
22 increase in the number of 3K applications? Were you
23 aware of that?

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: I am aware that there has been a
25 significant increase in 3K applications.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And are you also aware
3 that in the first four months of 2025 versus the
4 first four months of 2024, ACS reported an 82 percent
5 increase in the average number of children using low
6 income childcare vouchers. Were you aware of that
7 jump?

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: I was not aware of that specific
9 number but I am aware that there was also an
10 increase.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And are you also aware
12 that while the Mayor was saying that every child who
13 wanted a 3K or PreK seat would get it? Are you aware
14 that between 2021 and 2024, the percentage of
15 families who applied on time and received a 3K offer
16 increased only by two percent, even though the number
17 of applicants increased by 10,000?

18 SIMONE HAWKINS: I am aware of that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And you're also aware
20 that of January 30, 2025, I think you all testified
21 that about 450 students were still awaiting early
22 childhood education, special education seats?

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: We are also aware of that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: So, when I see these
25 numbers and we hear how much the demand for early

1
2 childhood education is growing so rapidly, the need
3 for special education early childhood seats too, I am
4 shocked at the way the Mayor has really made it a
5 point to cut from 3K to talk about how every child
6 will get a seat but the demand continues to rise so
7 much. And I think you would agree that early
8 childhood education is one of the best investments we
9 could make right? Not just for children and families
10 but also for the workforce too, right?

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: I agree.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And I see it as an
13 incredibly important economic engine for our city but
14 again, there's a sharp disparity between this
15 Administrations approach to early childhood education
16 knowing it's importance and knowing what the data
17 says about the demand.

18 I want to focus in particular on one -

19 SIMONE HAWKINS: If I - may I?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Sure.

21 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so, I do appreciate those
22 stats and I think what you've demonstrated there is
23 the exact thing we're trying to solve for. And so,
24 the Mayor has been very clear on his commitment and
25 this is a commitment that must be supported at all

1
2 levels of government and it's not only ours to own
3 and bear at the local level. And so, working closely
4 with our federal government and state partners to get
5 the resources to properly sustain the system, it is a
6 very, very dynamic ecosystem that requires all of our
7 support.

8 And one thing around 3K growth, that is a need
9 that has changed within the five year span of a
10 contract that doesn't allow for that level of
11 flexibility. And so, although we see very clearly
12 and I think I articulated this in my opening remarks,
13 that there is a need for 3K. I will go as far to say
14 there is even a higher need for infant toddler care,
15 which we are not meeting right now in this city, and
16 we are unable to do so if we only focus on expanding.
17 Optimizing, I'm sorry, optimizing is a bidirectional
18 process. We can only within the confines of our
19 resources and systems, increase in places that need
20 the care, it may be 3K or otherwise by really
21 evaluating spaces that are underutilized to shift
22 those resources. And we've been committed in doing
23 so. And so, as much as possible, we would like to
24 move forward in that direction so we can meet the
25 demands of community.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And we agree and I know
3 you agree on the importance of the of these
4 investments and it is a joint approach but how this
5 administration approaches that question I think
6 really matters. And so, one daycare that I want to
7 focus on in particular is Nuestros Ninos. Are you
8 aware that Nuestros Ninos faced a similar battle for
9 its closure about maybe six or seven years ago?

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm aware that there was an open
11 competitive process for the location in which it was
12 awarded to another vendor and because of the
13 pandemic, they were not required to vacate the
14 premise.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: So, I know about that
16 because I was involved in that fight. Nuestros Ninos
17 was a client of mine. A lot of the parents that send
18 their children to that daycare center were clients of
19 mine who were doing that so they could go to work to
20 pay their rent. I worked in that community for 13
21 years before becoming a City Council Member and I
22 know intimately that struggle where we faced with
23 Nuestros Ninos the same exact issue. They were about
24 to close, we filed litigation, the de Blasio
25 Administration opened up the site again, the PreK

1
2 seats went up. And why that shocks me is because I
3 know personally how much of a high need community
4 that is where to ensure that so many of the children
5 in a very gentrified neighborhood like Williamsburg,
6 the children get the services they need, the parents
7 can have childcare. How essential Nuestros Ninos's
8 site is, especially that one on South 4th Street.

9 SIMONE HAWKINS: Uhm, hmm.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: So, my questions were
11 one, is it true that they were notified of the
12 planned closure of the site just a day or 24 hours
13 before the applications went online earlier this
14 year?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so, we notified the
16 providers around 24 to 48 hours prior to the opening
17 of the application in January, correct.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And that's what I mean,
19 that to me is shocking for a neighborhood center that
20 is so essential for providing services for families
21 for more than 50 years, low income families in
22 Williamsburg that are being displaced from their own
23 community to give them 24 hours of notice of closure
24 for an essential childcare center is really shocking
25 to me. And so, one question I have and this goes to

1 the approach on how we're looking at early childhood
2 education. One question I have is before a decision
3 was made to notify them of closure, knowing the
4 statistics, knowing how important this daycare center
5 is to its community, what steps were taken by the
6 city to work with them to make sure all their seats
7 were filled? To make sure there was as much
8 marketing and outreach done as possible to this
9 community? Because the data shows a very different
10 perspective of how important a childcare center like
11 Nuestros Ninos is?
12

13 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, I think there are many
14 important centers throughout this district and I
15 value the work that Nuestros Ninos does and again I
16 am required to manage a system that is comprised of
17 almost 4,000 programs and many of which, 1,700 about
18 are CBOs. And so, there are other providers in and
19 around that community who are also trying to survive
20 and so, as we talk about any of these programs, I
21 think it would be in our interest to talk about all
22 of the providers who are doing the best they can
23 every day. And so, I will admit in this space, like
24 I did in others, that the communication absolutely
25 should have been better. What we were hoping for

1
2 right is least harm in regards to allowing the
3 programs to operate until the end of the school year.
4 So, although the notification came right before the
5 application, they were not closing immediately. The
6 closures or the end of the program was at the
7 conclusion of this school year and what we were
8 hoping to avoid Council Member is what happened in
9 some spaces, where some staff left. And that would
10 really prohibit them from serving children and
11 families at least until June 30th.

12 And so, again I will admit that the communication
13 around that was not the best and I will take full
14 ownership of that. And so, moving forward, if we are
15 to talk about enrollment or if we are to talk about
16 city leased properties, we, my team and I will be the
17 first to be more proactive in how and when we
18 communicate with programs.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And I appreciate that
20 but I think you know it's again a larger problem of
21 how this Administration is approaching early
22 childhood education and I know that there are many
23 centers but this is all of them and every communities
24 needs are unique. This is a flagship daycare center
25 within the south side of Williamsburg and we can't

1 just gloss over and it's frankly and you know I
2 appreciate you're taking responsibility but speaking
3 more broadly as an Administration, we can't just
4 gloss over this communication issues for a 50 plus
5 year daycare center that's being told they're going
6 to close, as if that's a mistake and we can just move
7 on. That's not acceptable to the community, to all
8 of us as elected officials and again, it's very
9 revealing about the approach here.
10

11 Now, I know that since then as you mentioned,
12 they've been given an extension to stay open.
13 There's negotiations with the landlord going on. Are
14 those negotiations for a month to month tenancy for
15 this site?

16 CORA LIU: No, those are not. Our current lease
17 is with analysis to stay month by month but the
18 landlord would have the right to evict us, which is
19 why we reach out to the landlords to start a
20 negotiation to have their commitment we can stay
21 until the end of the school year, and we are working
22 to execute those lease extensions as soon as
23 possible.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And what is the lease
25 term you all are looking for? Are you looking for a

1
2 longer lease term than month to month for a renewal
3 for the future?

4 CORA LIU: For those four sites, we're looking to
5 extend the lease up until the end of 2025-2026 school
6 year.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: That's very concerning
8 to me but my final two questions are, have you all
9 exhausted all your options to keep this daycare
10 center open before notifying them 24 hours before
11 that they were going to close?

12 SIMONE HAWKINS: So again, we have to manage a
13 system, right? We are talking about sustaining for
14 the children of today but also the children of the
15 future, right? And so, we cannot continue to expand
16 or support lease costs that are growing year over
17 year without doing some housekeeping and cleaning to
18 make sure that we are being as effective and
19 efficient as possible, right? We are all clear about
20 the stimulus cliff that we experience with 3K. We
21 are all clear about the changing needs of community
22 and we have to be responsive and responsible with the
23 taxpayer dollars.

24 I'm a steward of those tax dollars and I cannot
25 in good conscious continue to sign 20 year leases for

1 contracts that run a year or five years at best. And
2 so, we need to really come up with a system that is
3 sustainable and makes sense for communities while
4 allowing us to infuse some flexibility. Things
5 change and we can't continue to do that if we lock
6 ourselves in to these high value leases.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Understood but let's
9 look at that as a system and that's my final question
10 is, how much is Nuestros Ninos owed as an example in
11 outstanding contract payments at this point?

12 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so, Nuestros Ninos, again
13 that contract is on an annual basis. They are and
14 I'm sorry for the feedback everyone. Uhm and so,
15 right now they are going through the contract
16 registration process. Their budget for this
17 particular site, they have three sites, this
18 particular site is pending. It's already preapproved
19 in our system, which is a great thing. And so, once
20 the contract is registered, we will be able to allow
21 them to begin invoicing on their current year
22 expenses.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: But don't they have a
24 backlog of payments they're owed already? Kind of
25 like the similar situation -

1
2 SIMONE HAWKINS: Not that I'm aware of, no.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Okay well I think you
4 know it's - let's look into that. I want to make
5 sure they're being paid on their contracts. My
6 understanding was otherwise but regardless, I don't
7 think we can be closing. Really there's a problem of
8 paying late for early childhood centers on contracts
9 and it's a major issue and it really impacts their
10 operations. Really we know the demand for early
11 childhood education in the city and it's rising and
12 it's rising rapidly, especially in low income
13 communities. And we know how important childcare is
14 for families, for parents, for mothers in the
15 workforce and how much of an economic driver it can
16 and should be for our city. Given all of those
17 things, to go after and close childcare centers in
18 this critical moment is simply unacceptable to me and
19 to many of our colleagues in this Council. And I
20 would want to see a very different approach from the
21 Department of Education and I really hope that
22 centers like Nuestros Ninos and many others continue
23 to stay open so we can meet that need. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Council Member. I
25 have a really quick question. Earlier you mentioned

1 about saturations of neighborhood. Have you done an
2 assessment to address the saturation of neighborhoods
3 prior to determining these closures? Because we're
4 all about data right? Data drives our policy. As a
5 former educator, my data drove how I taught my kids
6 in schools. How is the data driving your assessment
7 on how saturation? Just to piggyback off of Council
8 Member Shekar's - uhm and again, Nuestros Ninos is
9 not the only one. When I first got here, Sheltering
10 Arms closed after 50 years because New York City
11 Public Schools couldn't pay them. And again, we're
12 displacing working families and we know every dollar
13 we put on early childhood, you get a return of eight
14 dollars. So, the investment is very, very important.

16 So, I just want to know what is your ideas around
17 assessing these saturation with neighborhoods and how
18 do we continue to shift? Because I was watching the
19 Mayor on when he went up to Albany for Ten Cup. He
20 said there's 30,000 vacant seats. How are we going
21 to shift those seats in neighborhoods that need them
22 and pull them? That's what I mean when I talk about
23 assessment.

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, so one of the
25 considerations we mentioned Chair was around

1
2 community saturation. So, we looked at these
3 communities specifically, not just stratify by the
4 community school district but also the zip code and
5 we said how many of these programs exist? How many
6 of these programs exist with the same age range and
7 seat type and what is their utilization rates?

8 And in each instance, we found that these
9 communities can absorb the capacity, not just the
10 enrollment, the capacity of each of these sites
11 because there is significant under enrollment in many
12 of these communities because of that unhealthy
13 competition. It is not as easy to pick up a seat out
14 of one of these sites, maybe 30,000 seats of three
15 and move them to another community because of those
16 contracts, because of the way we currently fund
17 right?

18 As I mentioned, if a provider has one kid but
19 they have the expenses up to 75 percent of their
20 annual life contract, they are able to draw down on
21 that. And by removing vacant seats from any sites
22 capacity, we are ultimately diminishing and
23 decreasing their annual lives value and contract
24 value that they will be paid. And so, these
25

1
2 contracts are organized on a per pupil basis, so less
3 kids, less money.

4 And so, if we're talking about making sure that
5 programs are viable, we are not going to succeed in
6 making them viable if we move seats specifically.

7 And so, we have to look at a multiprong approach. We
8 have to look at the current contracts. We have to
9 look at what we can modify and configure within the
10 sites. I know some of the sites mentioned like I
11 said earlier, they just don't have the right seat
12 types. We have to look at the recruitment
13 strategies. I understand what we are saying about
14 you know New York City Public Schools providing
15 support and we're committed to do that but we also
16 know these are independent businesses. Some of them,
17 they operate other programs outside of early learn or
18 early childhood right?

19 And so, we look to them to lead their business
20 strategy as I did in the programs I ran, may it be
21 for early childhood or runaway homeless youth, right?
22 And so we look to them to really guide what they need
23 for their business and their communities and we are
24 there to support them as much as possible based on
25 the information we have. But it is not that easy to

1
2 just shift seats without frankly destabilizing some
3 of these businesses.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We've already destabilized a
5 lot in early childhood. Uhm, I just want to - the
6 question was not answered. How are you assessing
7 neighborhoods in order for this not to happen again?
8 We cannot hear another five closures. We cannot
9 afford a childcare deserts in communities that need
10 them. So, what is the assessment plan? That's what
11 I would like to hear.

12 SIMONE HAWKINS: The assessment plan is to
13 continue doing what we did. We're looking at site
14 data. We're looking at current contracts, maybe
15 leases and otherwise. We're looking at community
16 saturation. And so, with all of these plans to
17 stabilize the system, it's going to come with a few
18 hard choices and so, what we hope right in having
19 conversations with providers, with communities, with
20 you all, is that you can cocreate how we make those
21 decisions but not making a decision is not an option.
22 We have to figure out a plan to stabilize the
23 communities that are underutilized, right? We have
24 communities that are in desperate need of care. We
25 still have childcare deserts in this city.

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CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yes we do.

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SIMONE HAWKINS: And so, how do we meet the needs of those communities while we are frankly misusing funds by pumping money into communities that don't have the children? So, we have to cocreate a strategy that makes sense and again, it's going to come with some hard choices but I'm hoping through improved communication, we can do that together.

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CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Communication is the word of the day like Sesame Street right? Communication is the word of the day. Council Member Hanif.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I wanted to follow up on the 450 students awaiting early childhood education, special education seats. How many of those students are still awaiting special education seats?

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SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm going to call up my colleague John. Thank you, you were ready.

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JOHN HAMMER: Thank you for that question Council Member. So, you know as of the end of January, there were 360 students that were awaiting a self-contained special class seat and there were an additional 90 students who were waiting an integrated seat.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, as of - so that means
3 as of today 360 are still awaiting?

4 JOHN HAMMER: Yup, that's the data that we have
5 available here today. I can - I'm happy to -

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But what's happening to
7 ensure that these students access special education
8 seats?

9 JOHN HAMMER: We're opening some additional
10 classes this year. So, there was an investment of
11 \$55 million to open additional special class seats
12 across our city. There were 456 seats opened in
13 September and we're working to open another 284 seats
14 this month and in the weeks to come to ensure
15 students get access to these seats.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And do you anticipate that
17 all of the students who are now not receiving their
18 care will be in a seat?

19 JOHN HAMMER: We're going to - we're going to do
20 the best that we can with the resources that we have
21 available to us. We're going to work with families
22 to arrange partial services in the form of special
23 education itinerary teacher services, speech,
24 occupational therapy services as students require to
25 do the best that we can to serve all students.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, I mean this is
3 really disheartening because our students with
4 disabilities, developmental issues, shouldn't be
5 getting abandoned like this year after year. I want
6 to build on the issues of the delayed payments for
7 our providers. It was really infuriating and of
8 course sad to hear from Ingrid that she had to take
9 out a loan and the savings of Nuestros Ninos is
10 basically depleted.

11 That shouldn't be what a 50 year old providers
12 have to do. So I you know I echo my colleague Shekar
13 Krishnan's views on this but what are the new
14 policies you're putting in place to address these
15 issues moving forward? And I have providers in my
16 district who are like at the brink. They're waiting
17 for the reimbursement and it feels like they can't
18 plan for the future because they feel that their
19 closure is coming up.

20 So, I'd like to know what is being developed
21 around new policies and then what is the targeted
22 repayment timeline for providers?

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm going to probably ask for
24 more information on that last bit but some of the
25 work that we're doing and thank you for that because

1 a lot of work must be done around our payment
2 processes in general.

3
4 And so again, some of that is very much
5 contingent around the structure of our contracts.
6 I've heard from some providers, specifically those
7 who used to be under Early Learn Now with us around
8 shifting how they are reimbursed. I think that also
9 is a point of tension in communities that we do have
10 this base plus model. It works for some. It doesn't
11 work for others but it doesn't recognize fixed cost
12 as compared to variable costs. And so, looking at
13 that as we reimagine the system is something we
14 should consider, systems as I mentioned. And so, the
15 current system that we use specifically for our
16 CBO's, uhm, it's a little dated and it can definitely
17 use an evolution of sorts, and so we are looking
18 right now to release a new system that we hope will
19 improve not just our turnaround time on payments but
20 also allow providers to see where they are in the
21 queue.

22 Sometimes not knowing is half the battle right or
23 knowing is half the battle. If I don't know if I'm
24 going to get money tomorrow or next week, that adds
25 to the anxiety that many of our providers have and we

1 want to alleviate that. We also need to build
2 internal capacity within my team, so we can improve
3 our communication and how we proactively partner with
4 providers around payments and how quickly we issue
5 and remit those payments. And then lastly as
6 something I mentioned earlier, you know being able to
7 provide some back office to support separately to our
8 provider community. We are clear and we are aware of
9 the Admin responsibility related to these contracts.
10 Some have the ability to do it, others don't and so,
11 nonetheless, folks need to get paid on time. And so
12 we're figuring out ways that we can provide that in
13 the future to individual providers who need it. And
14 so, if there are ever any issues around payment,
15 providers are encouraged to reach out. Reach out to
16 me, I have said that in many spaces. My team doesn't
17 like when I say that but I invite that if it's
18 helpful and also, we have to do better just frankly
19 at this streamlining process through and through.
20

21 And so, we have bridge loans. I'm sad that
22 Ingrid wasn't aware of our bridge loan process.
23 That's something she could have explored and we often
24 offer that to programs who are in a contract
25 registration process. I am sad to hear that she is

1
2 going through that and I'm sorry Ingrid that that's
3 your experience.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Can you just share why she
5 didn't know about that loan? How are these loans
6 being - what's the engagement around outreach?

7 SIMONE HAWKINS: I cannot speak to why she didn't
8 know but we often you know the provider reaches out
9 letting us know that they're having cash flow issues.
10 You know reaches out to us around contract
11 registration issues. We do inform them about that
12 possibility.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay so the onus is
14 falling on the provider. Glad to hear that there's
15 going to be a new data system. I mean, we are in a
16 moment of uptick in childcare needs and so many more
17 families are in New York City and we can expect so
18 many more families to be in our city that has so much
19 protections for our people. An archaic system should
20 not be what we're using at this time and I look
21 forward to learning more about how that's going to
22 work out.

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: Absolutely.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then how large is your
25 team?

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2 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, I have a powerful team of
3 about 550 staff but the finance team, I will get you
4 that specific number. I do know the actual
5 operations team that supports payments directly is
6 around a team of 65, full headcount not actually -

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What's uh at what point
8 would you feel that your team is maximized? At how
9 many staff members?

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, it's really looking at the
11 caseloads right. We really hope for our always
12 specifically to have caseloads around 30 per person.
13 They're about double that right now, and so that will
14 require us to hire at least another 20 always.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, uhm I understand
16 that DOE added 1,500 3K seats in areas with long wait
17 lists for last year's 3K application process and by
18 August, all families who applied to 3K on time
19 received an offer. Some of those constituents were
20 in my district and claimed that the seats they
21 secured were all locations far from their homes. And
22 we know that 16 percent of families did not receive a
23 seat at any of their ranked sites. Could you confirm
24 how many of the added seats are occupied this school
25 year?

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2 SIMONE HAWKINS: Uhm let me - I might have to get
3 back to you on the 1,500 specifically. That number I
4 might have to get back to you on.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then how many total
6 seats is the DOE planning for the upcoming school
7 year and what adjustments are being made to ensure
8 equitable accurate distributions of seats? So that
9 every child that applies to a 3K seat has access to
10 one.

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so we are anticipating I
12 believe around the same number of seats as last year,
13 which I think is around 50,000 3K seats specifically.
14 We are committed to the same option for families who
15 apply by the deadline that they will get an offer.
16 And so, we are continuing forward in those efforts.
17 It's important to note though that when we do look at
18 offer data versus actual enrollments, it's
19 significantly less. And so, all the families are
20 applying for 3K. Families are not necessarily
21 enrolling in 3K, even when they are given an offer.
22 Even when they are given an offer based on their
23 preferences. And so we are diving into that data now
24 to best understand kind of the causal factors of
25 that. We are aware that some of the offers were a

1 distance away from the families preferred location
2 and again, that's at the clucks of why we're trying
3 to right, reconfigure seat placements, so we can
4 better meet the needs of families.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah I think improving the
7 placements is crucial and making sure that families
8 have access in close proximity and not feel that
9 well, because I have to travel an hour, I'm going to
10 not enroll in any childcare programs. So looking
11 forward to some incredibly needed reforms to make
12 sure that we hold all of our families fully. Thank
13 you.

14 SIMONE HAWKINS: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. So, on February
16 14, 2025 there was a report that providers of all
17 five - uhm no, we talked about that. So how did you
18 arrive at the decision to extend these contracts and
19 keeping the school open till 2026?

20 SIMONE HAWKINS: We heard clearly from community.
21 We heard clearly from you all that these are
22 community staples and that we really need to for one,
23 create a figurative table and pull everyone to it to
24 have these conversations and so, we did just that.
25 And so we had meetings with each of the providers to

1
2 really talk through some viable options. We all
3 agreed. We didn't just decide to do this, this was
4 an agreement and I'm happy and I'm hopeful for the
5 year to come.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So if let's say we decide to
7 close this year, the contract expires. What's the
8 changes of you helping them find a more suitable
9 location? That's just a scenario.

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, yeah, yeah so again,
11 contracts expire, so we have to talk about a
12 resolicitation of the system. That would include
13 these sites. Again, we have providers across
14 thousands of locations. We have only about 87 leased
15 properties, some of them vacant. We are not in the
16 business of real estate or helping independent
17 businesses find spaces. That is actually inequitable
18 as based on the majority of our providers who have
19 found their own spaces. However, we will continue to
20 work with them while they are occupying these spaces
21 to make sure that they are successful and as we have
22 conversations around a future solicitation of the
23 system or even an extension, we will explore those
24 options with the providers.

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2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And we know that you're not
3 renewing, you're doing a month to month negotiation
4 with the landlord, is that correct?

5 CORA LIU: We actually have been able to extend a
6 lease until the end of the school year so that we're
7 not doing month by month negotiation with the
8 landlord.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So its been extended for a
10 full year. It's not a month to month and what
11 happens after that year?

12 CORA LIU: Well we'll work with the DOE team to
13 figure out the next steps.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Hmm, what kind of lease
15 agreement applied to all, to the other four
16 buildings? What type of lease do you have for the
17 other four buildings?

18 CORA LIU: So all of the five again, a lot of
19 them has near expiration 2028, so we're all set. The
20 other four would extend in the term the same way
21 until the end of the school year.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So what are the total
23 numbers of centered based early childhood education
24 contracts for FY25?

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2 SIMONE HAWKINS: So the number of contracts we
3 have for FY25 it's about 1,505 I believe is our
4 contract number.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many have been
6 registered already?

7 SIMONE HAWKINS: That I may have to get back to
8 you on Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many budgets have
10 been approved?

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: That I too will have to get back
12 to you on.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how many classrooms,
14 rosters have been approved?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: So we don't approve rosters. We
16 approve individual child records and so, individual
17 so sites are uhm and actually I'm trying to get you
18 your contract number but and let me get back to your
19 contract number. 1461 contracts are registered and
20 there are 90 FY25 contract actions pending
21 registration. So, I wanted to get back to you on
22 that one. I'll get back to you on the budget number
23 and so we approve individual child records for our
24 CBO's, not rosters. Again, they are funded on a
25 child's per child basis, not per classroom.

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CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay. Whew this is a lot.

SIMONE HAWKINS: Yes it is.

CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: We've been doing this since
- I've been doing this early childhood dance since I
got here in 2022, two hearings on payments delayed,
contracts not being - we have to get this right. It
can't be the same fight every year, every chance we
get, we've been doing this so that's why we meet
every two weeks to improve the sector to make sure
the workforce is there, make sure the seats are
available for our students but I'm finding that
sometimes I feel that I'm running in circles as the
Chair and it's a little frustrating for me, my
Committee, my staff and the providers and New York
City families who these things should be
nonnegotiable for us. These are the nonnegotiables
we have to come up with nonnegotiables and I'm sure
educators can understand that. Just like we have
nonnegotiables, we have to have nonnegotiables in
early childhood where the work has to be done, the
system has to be improved but it's been three years
and I'm not listening to anymore excuse that we just
got here. We've been here from day one and we've
been fighting for providers and we find that it's the

1 same providers are not being paid. I think Nuestros
2 Ninos earlier mentioned on the record, they are owed
3 \$1 million in back pay to pay their staff, to pay
4 rent, keep food on the table for each and every one
5 of these families and I'm sure every single one of
6 them are women. So, how do we do that? And always
7 encourage to take bridge loans when we should be
8 fixing the system. Is there interest charged on a
9 bridge loan?
10

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: No and there's 1,094 budgets
12 approved. I wanted to get back to you on your staff.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. How long does it
14 take when someone applies for a bridge loan to get
15 approved?

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: That I do not know. I can get
17 back to you on the process. It's not from what I
18 understand incredible lengthy. It's something we do
19 prioritize. Again, we work across agencies for that
20 and that is a process. We actually have staff
21 dedicated to managing. And so, I can get back to you
22 on the average time for processing.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And what is the chain of
24 command for addressing invoicing including providers
25 who contact first? How does the escalation work?

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2 How does it work when we escalate? Now you owe her
3 \$1 million, when does she get to see that payment?

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, I would like to correct
5 that. We do not owe Nuestros Ninos \$1 million. She
6 has not invoiced us yet because her contract is not
7 registered.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how long is it going to
9 take for her to register that?

10 SIMONE HAWKINS: So, I believe she's in the final
11 stages of her contract registration process and again
12 for this particular site, the budgets already pre-
13 approved, which is great.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how much is that?

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: The entire budget?

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Hmm, hmm.

17 SIMONE HAWKINS: Let me let you know her entire
18 budget amount and just to answer your question around
19 how much I believe the budget for - it's \$1.5 million
20 I believe is the annualized but again that's
21 contingent upon enrollment and because it's also EDY,
22 it's contingent upon attendance. And so we cannot
23 verify how much is owned until we are invoiced
24 because that needs to be based on the actual
25

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2 enrollment and the expenses for that particular
3 month.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, if your department had
5 no vacancies for analysts, supervisors and other
6 staff to work on the intake, you would have enough
7 staff adding uhm, how much faster can things move?

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah I mean right now, I
9 mentioned caseloads are doubled than what we
10 anticipate right? And so, it would move at half the
11 time currently and right now we are around two weeks
12 in turning around payments. Again, this is a lengthy
13 process and we need to streamline process. That's
14 something that's going to take coordination across
15 agencies and again, we have a procurement process
16 that we must follow which I do think it provides
17 fairness and equity to systems and to individuals but
18 I do think it's worth evaluating holistically.

19 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: If there's a mistake in an
20 invoice and they resubmit the invoice, how long does
21 that take?

22 SIMONE HAWKINS: So it depends what the mistake
23 is Chair. And so it depends if it's a mistake in
24 kind of reporting one of the budget items or payment
25 items or it's a mistake in the enrollment. That will

1
2 require us to go back and open up the system in a
3 different way to allow them to make modifications.
4 Those types of issues, again assuming they were
5 already paid, it would just be adjusted in the next
6 invoice.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many staff does it take
8 to process payments?

9 SIMONE HAWKINS: On average, about four to five
10 staff to process payments.

11 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So now you have a vacancy.
12 How many -each of your staffers, what's the caseload
13 that they carry now?

14 SIMONE HAWKINS: They carry around 60, 60
15 programs.

16 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you said your headcount
17 to make sure that the system would run efficiently is
18 what? What would you need?

19 SIMONE HAWKINS: Yeah, we would need about, I
20 believe, 60 staff.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you're currently at
22 what?

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: We are at 30- let me confirm
24 that right now. Also what I have in front of my mind
25 is the actual headcount that we have. Sorry Chair,

1
2 I'm trying to confirm the numbers for you. Oh we
3 have 28 analysts currently.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How many?

5 SIMONE HAWKINS: 28.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you need how many, 60?

7 SIMONE HAWKINS: 60 would be ideal.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So providers are going to be
9 waiting a long time you all hmm. Other than SCA and
10 New York City Public School, what other agency hold
11 leases?

12 CORA LIU: We're responsible for all the leases
13 under New York City Public School.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: All the leases fall in your
15 - are there any other sites risk of closure in the
16 same way that these five sites are?

17 CORA LIU: There's none currently under
18 cancellation but as you mentioned before, [INAUDIBLE
19 02:15:20] was expiration date in the next two years.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay I think Council Member
21 Shekar had a follow up question.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I just want to make the
23 point, I think the Chair actually already made it too
24 that Nuestros Ninos, I know they testified earlier, I
25 know about their difficulties and was owed on

1
2 February 5th, the payment of \$100K was made to
3 Nuestros Ninos but there's still backpay of about
4 roughly \$900,000 left to pay them.

5 SIMONE HAWKINS: No, that payment was associated
6 with the two sites that has a registered contract.
7 The site that we are focusing on here, South Forth is
8 still pending contract registration.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: But the site that's
10 owed that money, have they gotten that money?

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm sorry, there's no site
12 within Nuestros Ninos that is owed any back pay from
13 us.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: So, that \$1 million,
15 the payment that was made in February about \$100,000
16 leaving another \$900K or so, that's been paid.

17 SIMONE HAWKINS: So again I think we're working
18 off of the bases making you know thinking that we owe
19 them \$1 million, which is how you're getting to the
20 net \$900K. So, the providers are billing us on a
21 monthly basis for their programs. And so again not
22 verifying that they got a payment in February for
23 \$100,000 but if it was, most likely was based off of
24 a prior invoice. And so, I am not aware of based on
25 my current data that there is any owed payments.

1
2 However, the contract for this particular South 4th
3 Street site has not been registered. So to Nuestros
4 Nino's point, they have not been able to invoice us
5 yet and as a result, has not been able to get any
6 payment.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: I see, okay and two
8 question I have for you. One is, when was the last
9 time Nuestros Ninos was actually paid on their
10 contract? Do you know when that was?

11 SIMONE HAWKINS: For the South 4th Street site?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Yeah.

13 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so I believe they were paid;
14 I can confirm in FY24 because the contract right now
15 is for FY25. And so let me confirm with my team, I
16 believe the FY24 payment for Nuestros Ninos was for
17 their June invoice and let me confirm when that was
18 paid. Council Member, let me get back to you on that
19 if you don't mind. I just want to give you an exact
20 date for that FY24 payment.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And you said the
22 contract hadn't been registered yet. What was the
23 reason for the delay in registration?

24 SIMONE HAWKINS: I don't have the specifics on
25 the kind of the steps in the queue that will cause a

1
2 specific delay but it is a process unfortunately for
3 the contract to go through the different levels of
4 review. And so, I can get back to you on what
5 potentially caused the delay. It is also unfortunate
6 that it took this long and so I acknowledge that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: So, it's on the
8 Administration side and they're not able to collect -
9 they are not able to invoice and get paid on their
10 contract because it hasn't been registered but the
11 registration is pending for awhile because the
12 contract is sitting because of the bureaucratic
13 delays in the registration process.

14 SIMONE HAWKINS: I'm not going to attribute them
15 to any bureaucratic delays. Again, there are
16 different components that require vendor input as
17 well as the Administration. I don't want to say that
18 it was done with us because I don't know but it is a
19 lengthy process in general. And so again, just
20 trying to create some efficiencies, that's an area
21 that we can look into. I do want to say for June
22 2024 that invoice was submitted to us just December
23 16th of last year and it was paid on January 23rd.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Got it okay, well, I
25 know you can't say it but I will say it I mean having

1
2 come from a nonprofit organization before and leading
3 one, that the registration process is very arduous
4 and bureaucratic and it results in massive delays for
5 all kinds of nonprofits but I think even for early
6 childhood education centers, that creates a major
7 issue given the services they provide.

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: We agree. We agree and I think
9 the Administration also recognizes that I believe
10 they started a taskforce specifically for nonprofits
11 to help expedite this process and so, you would not
12 have me disagree with that statement Council Member.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank you
14 Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. Uhm, does New
16 York City Public School have funding to open
17 Preschool Special Education beyond the 284 that
18 they're currently planning to open? If not, have you
19 put in new needs requests through OMB?

20 JOHN HAMMER: So, we do not currently have
21 funding to expand preschool special classes beyond
22 the \$55 million. We're working closely with OMB and
23 City Hall on need for additional seats and services.

24 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did you put in for new
25 needs?

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2 JOHN HAMMER: We're regularly working alongside
3 our partners. I know one of the things that we're
4 very focused on right now is the \$55 million being
5 baselined to ensure that we can continue to sustain
6 these seats that we've opened this school year and
7 that's a major priority for us.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you for that. Are you
9 also providing related services as these students
10 wait to be seated in special education seats?

11 JOHN HAMMER: We are and uhm we also acknowledge
12 that you know there's a need for related service
13 providers, evaluators. There are you know a kind of
14 a need to look at this and ensure that there are
15 resources across each part of the special education
16 process. We walked a little bit about that at the
17 January hearing and that's another area where we're
18 working closely with City Hall and OMB to secure
19 resources to ensure that children have access to
20 speech occupational therapy and other related
21 services.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: While they wait for seats.
23 Thank you. Was All My Children underenrolled in
24 their toddler seats? Are the toddler seats under
25

1
2 enrolled in that district, considering there were
3 only four toddler sites in that district?

4 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so All My Children has not
5 been under enrolled in their toddler seats
6 specifically. It's been mostly their 3K and PreK
7 seats. As for the District, I'm coming, I'm coming,
8 I'm sorry. Uhm for toddler in District, District 27
9 specifically, although there are four sites, again,
10 there goes the oversaturation. It's 52 percent
11 utilization in the district for toddler seats.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how are we making sure
13 again working with these providers to make sure
14 they're fulfilling these seats.

15 SIMONE HAWKINS: Again, we really look to the
16 providers to reach out to us to let us know what the
17 reasons are for any under enrollment. We are here to
18 serve as a support. Again, they know communities
19 better than us. And also it might be an issue around
20 the seat type. I think what we've said through and
21 through is that communities are changing and frankly
22 our toddler seats are EDY. And so, those are subject
23 to childcare eligibility requirements and there might
24 be families who do not qualify. And so again, we are
25 encouraging our providers to reach out to have

1
2 conversations around potential reconfigurations of
3 seats.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Is there any time and point
5 where you gather all the providers together in one
6 room and have conversations with them, ongoing
7 conversation?

8 SIMONE HAWKINS: That would be a beautiful
9 convening Chair. I don't know if we would have
10 enough physical or virtual space to do that but
11 that's something we can definitely consider.

12 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Even on a monthly basis just
13 to keep up to make sure they know what's the latest,
14 what's happening in due time, the deadlines. All of
15 those things. Remember our key word today is
16 communication.

17 SIMONE HAWKINS: And so we've improved that. And
18 so I think providers can attest to the fact that
19 since me coming back into this division, into this
20 role, we have improved communication significantly.
21 Providers are getting not only just updates around
22 policy matters but things that they can sign up for
23 resources. We are sending those out. We are also
24 hiring someone to specifically support with internal
25 and external communications to support providers

1
2 across all settings, right? I think one of the
3 things we heard from our CBO partners is that there
4 was a gap in communication and communication specific
5 to their world, and so we've improved that
6 significantly.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So I'm not here next year
8 having this same hearing around the same topic. What
9 are SCA's lease requirements that is negotiated on
10 behalf of New York City Public School contracted
11 Early Childhood Education Care program? And this
12 wide determination clause for those contracts and how
13 do landlords of potential sites receive it and how
14 does these impact programs ability to secure those
15 sites?

16 CORA LIU: So, our center needs to always include
17 a termination clause and that is fully disclosed at a
18 time of the negotiation with the landlords. That can
19 vary depending on the sites and the negation, other
20 terms with the landlords. It is a standard practice
21 in our needs negotiation. The landlords are fully
22 aware and have been in full cooperation.

23 When we start, as I mentioned, you know we do
24 start lease negotiations before the expiration date
25 and since we have caught up with all the leases and

1
2 that expire, when we inherit the portfolio, we're now
3 moving forward with a longer timeframe to plan ahead.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And how do you decide when
5 to move forward on a lease renewal? What does that
6 look like? What are the factors that allows you to
7 make that decision to renew the lease?

8 CORA LIU: So again when we inherited portfolio,
9 we have a third of the new sites was expired lease.
10 Our priority at the point was to extend the leases to
11 ensure continuity and stability for the programs.
12 That does not necessarily work with right the new
13 goal of rightsizing the system as well as the need
14 with our seats. So, we're here to support Deputy
15 Chancellor's goal to make sure all the seats are in
16 the right place. We're serving all the providing
17 seats to kids where needed. So, we're having those
18 ongoing conversations much earlier so that we can be
19 planned, aligned in our work negotiating leases.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And does the landlord agree
21 to the property issues? Do they normally fix it,
22 paint it, is that all on you before the providers are
23 moved into those sites?

24 CORA LIU: Well, first of all, all of those sites
25 already have providers as part of our lease

1 negotiation to extend the lease, we do employ a team
2 of architects and engineers to very thoroughly
3 evaluate this condition of the space. So as part of
4 the negotiation, we would provide the landlords a
5 list of scope items for them to complete. We want to
6 make sure those spaces are well capped and they are
7 safe and secure.
8

9 There are also sites where we have engaged,
10 invested in capital dollars to improve the condition
11 of these facilities. So, that's all part of the
12 lease negotiation process and efforts.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And do you have the final
14 say to move forward on a lease renewal or that's a
15 decision both New York City Public Schools and SCA
16 together?

17 CORA LIU: We work together.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You work together. So some
19 of these sites have faced a similar situation with
20 lease negotiations in the past. If the site does not
21 have favorable lease conditions, what is the protocol
22 for finding new properties for CBOs?

23 SIMONE HAWKINS: So again, we don't find
24 properties for programs, right? That is not our
25 norm; however, in you know looking at these five

1 sites, again I mentioned we have vacant properties.
2 We did explore if any of those vacant properties are
3 in the same communities because we would have offered
4 the option to transition there. We have offered that
5 to a program already who was having - who was
6 approaching a lease end date. Those didn't exist in
7 these cases, and so we weren't able to provide that
8 option. And so, we would not normally help an
9 independent business find a site. Again, that's an
10 equitable practice since most of our providers do
11 that on their own.
12

13 In the case that they did find their own separate
14 site, then we would need to have conversations about
15 the impact on their contract. As you might know,
16 rent is something we do subsidize and support through
17 per pupil cost. And so if they were able to
18 transition, again we would have to talk about the
19 details on that. That's something we could consider.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Do you have a broker that
21 does assessments of available properties in
22 neighborhoods so you can find favorable leases for
23 the providers?

24 CORA LIU: Again, it's not our responsibility to
25 provide them the sites. We don't but we're happy to

1
2 provide assistance where we can. Again, we do have a
3 very large portfolio of leases, not just for the
4 Early Childhood Center but for all other leases where
5 we have schools and other programs occupying.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And when leases are up for
7 school buildings, not just early sites, what's the
8 process for that?

9 CORA LIU: It's the same.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: It's the same process. You
11 go and negotiate because I have a school in my
12 district, the lease is about to be up. I just want
13 to know what the process is.

14 CORA LIU: So typically six months or twelve
15 months before a lease expiration comes up, we would
16 start our due diligence, we'll do environmental due
17 diligence, we'll have our architects and engineers to
18 evaluate the sites, we'll start negotiations with the
19 landlords. In very rare cases where if the landlord
20 is not doing a good job, you know being responsible
21 for making the building water tight or doing their
22 share, there are rare cases where we have terminated
23 a lease and consolidated. Again, if the space is not
24 needed and there are other opportunities to place the
25 program in a better setup.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How often have you
3 terminated the lease and how many leases have you
4 terminated for example? Because the landlord was not
5 keeping their end of the bargain?

6 CORA LIU: Not often. I think - I don't have the
7 total number in front of me.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You can send that to me.

9 CORA LIU: There's one we terminated last year
10 for a program in Brooklyn and working with New York
11 City Public School, we're able to reallocate a
12 program to a different location and it's a better
13 setup for the program.

14 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you all.

15 PANEL: Thank you Chair.

16 SIMONE HAWKINS: Thank you Chair. We appreciate
17 your time.

18 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. We'll be
19 following up all of my questions.

20 SIMONE HAWKINS: We'll be prepared.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Hmm, hmm.

22 SIMONE HAWKINS: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Hmm, hmm. I'm now opening
24 the hearing for public testimony. I remind members
25 of the public that this is a government proceeding.

1
2 That decorum shall be observed at all times. As
3 such, members of the public shall remain silent all
4 times. The witness table is reserved for people who
5 wish to testify. No video recording or photography
6 is allowed from the witness table. Further, members
7 of the public may not present audio or video
8 recording as testimony but may submit transcripts as
9 such recording to the Sergeant at Arms for the
10 inclusion in the hearing record.

11 If you wish to speak today in today's hearing,
12 please fill out an appearance card with Sergeant at
13 Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,
14 you'll have three minutes to speak in today's
15 oversight topic DOE's Provision of Early Childhood
16 Care Center Closures. If you have written testimony,
17 additional written testimony you submit for the
18 record, please provide a copy of that testimony to
19 the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written
20 testimonies at testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
21 hours of this hearing and audio and video recordings
22 will not be accepted.

23 I'm calling the first panel Borough President
24 Antonio Reynoso. It's the morning, no good
25 afternoon.

1 ANTONIO REYNOSO: Good afternoon yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: How are you?

3 ANTONIO REYNOSO: I'm doing good. You know I'm
4 deeply troubled. We're about to go through the
5 public portion and it happened in my time in the City
6 Council and it's going to happen now. I don't know
7 of one person from the Department of Education
8 stayed.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Did they leave?

11 ANTONIO REYNOSO: I think the entire team left.
12 Not even a staff member to take notes for public
13 portion. Thank you for that Chair, I really
14 appreciate it and I really don't know where to start
15 but what we've seen here is that we're delaying the
16 inevitable ultimately is what's happening.
17 Throughout this entire process, we asked the
18 Department of Education if there was something that
19 any of these centers could do to ensure their
20 survivability past the new deadline that has been
21 imposed. Should any of these centers have 95 percent
22 enrollment? Should these leases be negotiated to a
23 decent amount? Should the saturation issue be not be
24 something of concern? Did those metrics make it so
25 that we can extend these leases long term and they

1
2 did not say yes. I think what's really happening
3 here is that the Mayor is punting this down till
4 after the elections. Before the closures would have
5 happened June 30th, now they're going to happen after
6 the election and I think he's just trying to bide
7 time considering the childcare closures made a lot of
8 noise and he was in the press every single day having
9 to answer for this. So, I do think it's a political
10 decision. But outside of that, just hearing the DC
11 speak on a lot of issues that are just not factual.

12 I want to be very clear that Grand Streets
13 enrollment, I think they have along let's say 68
14 children. So, if they have one child not enrolled,
15 they go below 95 percent. So, they can have 68
16 children out of 69 and be considered under enrollment
17 in their eyes.

18 The negotiation of the lease for Grand Street
19 Settlement was originally seen as a \$30,000 lease
20 going to increase to an \$80,000 lease. After we
21 called the landlord, the landlord said that he's not
22 asking for \$45 a square foot but what he was actually
23 asking for was \$27 a square foot, which is more than
24 half of the cost of what the Department of Education
25 is saying.

1
2 So, in Grand Streets case, the saturation is no
3 issue. The landlord is willing to negotiate a lease
4 that's well below the market of what the City of New
5 York is looking for and they have 100 percent
6 enrollment and the city is still not willing to
7 extend their lease. When you do that, they lose all
8 credibility.

9 On the other side with Nuestros Ninos, as you
10 heard from the DC, they went into reevaluate the
11 amount of seats they are saying are available in that
12 building. The City of New York, ACS and the
13 Department of Education have different standards for
14 class size when it comes to students or enrollment
15 for students in ACS than they do for DOE.

16 So they're going in and they're going to right
17 size a lot of these capacity, the capacity in these
18 buildings which makes it so that right now Nuestros
19 Ninos is at 76 or 80 percent but tomorrow they could
20 be at 90 percent with the new numbers that they're
21 going to get from capacity within those things -
22 those agencies. And it's just more of the nonsense
23 that they talk about.

24 Nuestros Ninos contract is it's a what comes
25 first, the chicken or the egg? They're submitting

1
2 their documents that need to be approved by the
3 Department of Education so then for them to then
4 apply or submit invoices. And they are playing
5 semantics and saying that they don't owe them \$1
6 million, when they absolutely do. The only reason
7 they don't owe money from last year is that the City
8 of New York made a payment the day after an article
9 came out that Nuestros Ninos was owed money. The
10 next day they got their money and it's because these
11 people are responding to that and energy in the
12 streets and nothing else. They only respond to
13 organizing. They don't respond to anything else and
14 the DC, the Deputy Chancellor has made it very clear
15 that this is about numbers. It's about money, it's
16 not about people. She says they got to keep talking
17 about rightsizing the system and fixing the system.
18 It's all about the money because every single thing
19 we've said, we've clarified across the board.

20 Nuestros Ninos has more than 76 percent
21 enrollment. Their request for, it's not a 20 year
22 lease. She keeps talking about a 20 year lease.
23 That doesn't exit. It's a 10 year request from
24 Nuestros Ninos. It's a 10 year lease extension at 2

25

1
2 or 3 percent, which is standard in lease renewals
3 under the City of New York.

4 With Grand Street, same thing. They are asking
5 for 15, they understand that the negotiations are
6 happening, they start hiring, they come low. They
7 don't even want to negotiate. This landlord in Grand
8 Street hasn't had a contract and hasn't met with SCA
9 since 2017 and SCA is saying that there is
10 communication problems. There isn't. The landlord
11 would have loved a contract back then but SCA was
12 having trouble communication with them.

13 We called him one time and he told us everything
14 we needed to know. So, to me, it looks like the
15 negotiations weren't happening in earnest from SCA
16 side. So, they're just being disingenuous. They're
17 not being honest and I really don't think that we are
18 going to be back here again about these four or five
19 centers. There is no intention for the City of New
20 York to actually solve for this issue and it's going
21 to be a problem. And also, the City of New York
22 believes in universal childcare is something they
23 actually care about with smaller class sizes coming
24 along with the Department of Education alongside the
25 need to expand seats for a potential universal

1
2 childcare. We're not going to have spaces in this
3 community. It's going to be in a community that
4 won't have any opportunities to have universal
5 childcare because we will have no spaces. And then
6 when they talk about sites that are available,
7 Nuestros Ninos is the only site in the Southside of
8 Williamsburg. There is another site about ten blocks
9 away that's the closest thing to. Ten blocks is not
10 a distance that we would have parents have to travel
11 when they could literally walk two blocks to the
12 center. I think it's all made up. We're all wasting
13 time and what we need to do is organize which is why
14 we're going to get back to organizing because we
15 don't think this is sufficient and the Department of
16 Education did nothing here.

17 But I want to thank you because the problem we
18 have is that if we don't keep bringing attention to
19 this issue, really speaking to the facts because
20 that's what we're here to do. We've changed all
21 their facts and the outcomes stayed the same. All
22 their facts have been changed. They said four
23 students in Nuestros Ninos. That has changed,
24 doesn't matter. The lease is not \$80,000 in Grand
25 Street, it's half of that. Doesn't matter.

1
2 Everything we change something, none of it
3 matters because it never mattered. It's about
4 shutting these centers down and that's what the City
5 of New York is trying to do. So, thank you so much
6 for this hearing Chairwoman.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: You're very welcome and you
8 know this Council is steadfast on early childhood.
9 That's the only way we can get families into - back
10 to work and more impacting women. And one of the
11 things we talked about and even when we talk about
12 equity, this becomes an equity issue, right? And if
13 we don't invest in early childhood and as a forever
14 educator, you know that. If we don't invest in our
15 early childhood, the top is not going to be strong.

16 So, we are steadfast. We are with you. I am
17 with you, I have been here on early childhood since I
18 got here and Council Member Stevens said it, for
19 three years this has been our focus. We created a
20 Ten Point roadmap on making sure we get it back.
21 Workforce, infant toddler Early Childhood. We won't
22 stop, right? We won't stop and we support our
23 working families. My forever educators, thank you
24 for all that you do in this space. So, thank you for
25

1
2 always raising and if need be, we'll be back here
3 again.

4 ANTONIO REYNOSO: Alright, thank you so much
5 Chairwoman. I appreciate it.

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you. The next panel
7 is Mabel Sarduy. If I mispronounce your name, please
8 forgive me. Gregory Brender, Paula Inhargue. Am I
9 saying that right? If I didn't, please forgive me,
10 and Sharon Brown.

11 MABEL SARDUY: Good afternoon Chair Jospheh.
12 Thank you for your advocacy around Early Childhood
13 directors as well as the centers. My name is Mabel
14 Monis Sarduy. I am the Director of Political and
15 External Affairs at the CSA.

16 As you know, our membership includes over 160
17 early childhood educational directors who lead CBOs
18 based ECE centers. I am here today on behalf of
19 President Henry Rubio to express the deep concerns
20 our members, their students and their families over
21 the recent announcement of sudden closures of early
22 childhood centers. We stand with the effected
23 families and educators who have called out the city's
24 lack of timely communication, engagement and possible
25 plans to support families.

1
2 The DOE's approach to ECE closures contradicts
3 the city's stated commitment to early childhood
4 education. These centers serve as community anchors
5 and the abrupt closure disrupts lives and upends
6 families. Closures not only create uncertainty for
7 parents who rely on these centers for affordable
8 childcare but also threatens to displace experienced
9 educators, many of whom have dedicated their entire
10 careers to serving the city's youngest learners.

11 Adding to our unions concern is the lack of
12 public transparency and how these closures were
13 decided and the lack of timely communication about
14 possible impacts. When the city announced it would
15 not renew their leases, the DOE failed to provide
16 adequate notice to the directors of these centers.
17 Many did not learn about the closures until the day
18 before the parent portal, enrollment portal opened.

19 The DOE has cited declining enrollment as a
20 reason for the closures but some of these facilities
21 have said that the DOE numbers were wrong. In
22 centers that truly are under enrollment, the city
23 should improve outreach and enrollment efforts. If
24 lease course are the reason for the closures, the
25 city should work with providers to negotiate lease

1
2 renewals, secure alternative locations and/or develop
3 long term solutions to ensure stability well in
4 advance.

5 The DOE must establish a formalized process for
6 handling ECE closures that includes direct engagement
7 with all stakeholders. Since early childhood centers
8 do not control the enrollment process and
9 projections, the city must take responsibility for
10 providing accurate enrollment projection data instead
11 of cutting programs. The city should increase
12 funding to ensure that no family is left without
13 access to affordable and high quality early childhood
14 education.

15 Finally, educators who have lost their jobs due
16 to these closures must be given clear pathways for
17 reassignment, ensuring that the expertise is not
18 lost. We are pleased when the city recently reversed
19 the decision to close Nuestros Ninos and hope is that
20 the city will listen to the other communities
21 involved and commit to reopening the other sites.

22 On behalf of the impacted ECE leaders and their
23 families, we depend on these programs. CSA urges the
24 City Council to take appropriate action to protect
25 our early childhood seats and the valuable staff that

1 support these families across New York City. We must
2 push the city to reevaluate the process for
3 projections, enrollment and expand ECE funding to
4 communities that warrant the need. Thank you.

5
6 GREGORY BRENDER: Thank you so much Chair Joseph
7 for convening this hearing and for always being such
8 an advocate for early childhood education and for New
9 York City's children. I guess I want to start with
10 something you said. You said that we have already
11 destabilized a lot and providers throughout the
12 system and I'm sorry, I didn't introduce myself.

13 I'm Gregory Brender from the Daycare Council of
14 New York. We're the membership organization of Early
15 Childhood programs. Providers are feeling this
16 destabilization. The workforce who work so hard and
17 are so underappreciated for the talent and hard work
18 that they provide every day to ensure that children
19 have the care they need and the education they need
20 are feeling this destabilization and the issues that
21 arise from the lack of communication and the lack of
22 fair processes.

23 I want to echo the concerns from you and your
24 colleagues and from CSA about communications. This
25 process has been emblematic of systems in city

1
2 contracting that don't take into account the humanity
3 of the workforce and the humanity of the people being
4 served by these programs. And the city must develop
5 better processes to treat the nonprofit organizations
6 and small business providers in the early childhood
7 education sector with respect to humanity. And we
8 see this not just in the cuts that are happening to
9 the proposed closures of these five centers but in
10 the budget that we're looking at FY 2026. The FY
11 2026 budget that Mayor Adams has proposed and
12 proposed in front of a sign that said, "making New
13 York City the best place to raise a family" is a
14 parulis budget for early childhood education.

15 There are cuts to - massive cuts of \$112 million
16 to PreK for All but there's not the data to justify
17 the low enrollment that the city claims and there is
18 not a process for even knowing what communities are
19 going to be effected. We need to see these
20 restorations happen, not just at the end of the
21 budget process when programs will have to rush to
22 reopen, but the Mayor needs to take action in his
23 Executive Budget.

24 We're also seeing the elimination of many core
25 programs that the City Council fought for including

1
2 Promise NYC and School Day Plus. And we know that
3 the city really must work since they are citing on
4 under enrollment to close longstanding community
5 based organizations in high needs communities. They
6 need to improve their enrollment procedures.

7 In our written testimony, we have some longer
8 recommendations on how to improve enrollment
9 procedures but I just want to emphasize that the city
10 controls enrollments when providers are blamed for
11 under enrollment when providers are threatened with
12 closure for under enrollment. It's not a process
13 that they can control. Families may be coming to
14 them and saying, "we have family. We want to be in
15 your center." And they are not getting through the
16 system in the right way to be in the centers that
17 they know meet the needs of their families.

18 So, thank you so much for hosting this hearing
19 and for the urgent work we have ahead of us as a city
20 to ensure that not only can we provide early
21 childhood education but that we can support the
22 organizations and the workforce who make early
23 childhood education possible.

24 PAULA INHARGUE: Thank you Chair Joseph and
25 members of the New York City Council Committee on

1
2 Education for convening today's hearing. My name is
3 Paula Inhargue. I'm a Policy Analyst at United
4 Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a policy and social
5 change organization representing neighborhood
6 settlement houses that leads advocacy and partners
7 with our members on a broad range of issues including
8 early childhood education.

9 This decision to close these childcare sites
10 driven by real estate considerations rather than a
11 fair review of the programs quality, threatens vital
12 early childhood education services for hardworking
13 families. The city has also claimed that the
14 decision was made due to low enrollment, but
15 providers have refuted this, making it clear that
16 their programs have students enrolled, some at full
17 or almost full capacity.

18 These closures are part of a troubling trend of
19 cuts to early childhood programs at a time when
20 affordable child care remains out of reach for many
21 families, despite repeated promises from Mayor Adams
22 to make New York City the best place to raise a
23 family.

24 The sudden displacement of children and educators
25 will force parents to scramble for alternatives in an

1
2 already overburdened system and leave staff
3 questioning what their next job will be. This news
4 of center closures came just one day after Mayor
5 Adams' FY26 Preliminary Budget proposal did not
6 include \$197 million currently allocated for the DOE
7 for early childhood education, as well as \$25 million
8 for Promise NYC programming at the Administration for
9 Children's Services, a move that could put thousands
10 of early childhood seats at risk of being eliminated
11 by the summer.

12 As of last week, the city announced it is in
13 negotiations to extend the leases for one year for
14 these providers. However, this merely delays the
15 issue rather than resolving it, leaving families and
16 providers in the same precarious position in the near
17 future. A long-term commitment is necessary to
18 ensure continuity of care and stability for the
19 children, families, and staff who rely on these
20 programs. In order to address this situation, we
21 we urge the City to take immediate action to fully
22 extend these leases and work in partnership with
23 providers to safeguard the future of early childhood
24 education in these communities. Issue clear guidance
25 and protocols around the city's real estate practices

1
2 and preferences in advance of the next early
3 childhood education procurement.

4 If the City no longer wants to be a lease holder
5 of early childhood education centers, it must make
6 that clear and give potential providers the chance to
7 find appropriate space and undergo a leasing and
8 construction process. If the city is still open to
9 leasing spaces, it must negotiate leases that cover
10 the full life of the service contract. The city
11 should also conduct a needs assessment, and share
12 those results publicly, about the state of the early
13 childhood education field in New York City.

14 If these neighborhoods are oversaturated with ECE
15 programs and have fewer eligible children, as the
16 city has stated, it must make that information public
17 so that providers can understand and plan
18 accordingly. This will be crucial ahead of the
19 forthcoming ECE procurement from New York City Public
20 Schools, so that providers are proposing programs
21 that are responsive to community needs. And lastly,
22 the city should restore \$222 million in funding for
23 early childhood education in the FY26 budget. Thank
24 you.

1
2 SHARON BROWN: Hello, my name is Sharon Brown.
3 Before I start, remember Israel Defend Israel release
4 the hostages, let people go.

5 I worked in Early Childhood Care for a little
6 while. I've been in many different industries. The
7 city is not renewing some of them and they may have a
8 reason why they do not. When I was working in the
9 field, I didn't see the things that the children were
10 learning during that time was beneficial to them.
11 We're going to be instituting the Bible back in
12 schools and different things like that and we want it
13 back in the early childcare form also. Prayer and
14 different things like that and bible Judaism and
15 Christianity but we do want the government to, the
16 city to extend the leases but they have to also offer
17 the things that the children need, like prayer and
18 bible and things that make them excel. We don't just
19 want them in programs where they're killing time.
20 You know they're little so they don't know to say,
21 "hey we should be - we can play too but we should be
22 learning things that put us ahead." We can have fun,
23 yes but these programs, if there so easily accessible
24 why is that? Are they detrimental only because they
25 won't have childcare? Meaning someone to babysit.

1
2 They can find reputable people to babysit. What is
3 so special about these programs, these childcare
4 programs that the city has to have it? You know at
5 first I was going to say yeah, you know why cut the
6 programs and that's true but they also have to be
7 excellent. That the city would say, we can't dare
8 cut them because they're so excellent. When the
9 children get out of these programs, they go on to
10 excel and exceed. So, yes, we want to make sure that
11 parents don't experience homelessness and joblessness
12 because they can't find childcare but these programs
13 have to exceed and excel the things that we're used
14 to, the norm.

15 So, I would submit that if they're so easily
16 accessible, then they are not performing at such a
17 level where they are needed. They are needed by the
18 city where the city says, this is too important to
19 cut or they say there's trillions of them out there
20 and they can just find some other ones. Like they
21 can go down the block to the other childcare center.
22 Like, if they're all the same and they don't have
23 something special about them to make them stand out.
24 So, at this point, whoever is representing it should
25 go back -

1 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you Ms. Brown.

2 SHARON BROWN: Into these programs and make them
3 excel. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSPEH: Thank you. Mabel, how many
5 of these ED Executive Directors do you have now and
6 how many do you need? Turn on your mic.

7 MABEL SARDUY: We have 160 early childhood
8 directors currently. I don't have the number for how
9 many we need but we can get that for you.

10 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay is there, I know you
11 mentioned a pay parity issue?

12 MABEL SARDUY: Yes, that's under negotiation.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Okay, thank you. Mr.
14 Brender, there was something I wanted to ask you.
15 You wanted us to restore funding for \$222 million?

16 GREGORY BRENDER: So, yeah, that's based on a
17 bunch of different - that's the cuts to PreK, School
18 Day Plus, Promise NYC, and the restoration of the
19 stimulus funds from preschool special education.

20 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Of course and we're looking
21 for - you want them baselined correct?

22 GREGORY BRENDER: Yeah, all these things are
23 things that really should be baselined. I know that
24 for whatever reason, the Council has put them in and
25

1
2 we're obviously grateful for that but for providers
3 to have the stability to operate programs, to hire
4 staff to ensure contracts are in place, particularly
5 relevant today to ensure leases are in place in the
6 places that are not city leased sites, having them be
7 part of the executive budget and having them be multi
8 year contracts is incredibly important. Especially
9 now with the workforce facing so much instability.

10 You know even when there are situations where you
11 know it's the "budget dance" and we think things are
12 going to be restored, it's an incredible morale
13 problem and respect problem when staff has to be laid
14 off and then rehired at the last minute due to the
15 sort of vagaries of the city budget process. So,
16 that's why it is so important to see baselining of
17 early childhood funding particularly, given the level
18 of infrastructure. These aren't programs that just
19 you know pop up right? These are childcare centers
20 are complex, highly licensed, highly regulated
21 programs so baselining is incredibly important.

22 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And they go through a
23 rigorous process in order to open right?

24 GREGORY BRENDER: It is a very rigorous process
25 and understandably, it's the health and safety of New

1
2 York City's children. But it is an incredibly
3 rigorous process involving multiple city agencies,
4 the Health Department, the Fire Department, if they
5 are a DOE contractor, if they are NYCPS contractors
6 through NYCPS. So, there's a lot of agencies
7 involved and often a lot of different people
8 involved, not just the staff who are permanently
9 running the center but there may be consultants and
10 architects and other folks involved in ensuring
11 spaces is ready and then ensuring that staff is in
12 place. Because as you know the process of clearing
13 people through background checks is not quick or
14 simple either, so when programs open, you need to be
15 fully staffed at every level, Directors, Support
16 Staff, Teachers. And you want to ensure that they
17 have the time to do that in place and they can't
18 necessarily do that you know popping up after sort of
19 having to close and then reopen in a very short
20 amount of time.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And we talked about
22 oversaturation in certain neighborhoods, how can we
23 address that?

24 GREGORY BRENDER: So providers really know what's
25 happening in their neighborhoods and I think giving

1
2 them the flexibility. So, allowing them
3 opportunities to propose aging, changes in age and
4 modality. I think the School Day Plus model that
5 been piloted in the last -

6 CHAIRPERSON JOSPEH: With the Council.

7 GREGORY BRENDER: Through the Council, yes is a
8 great example, because what we've seen is some
9 neighborhoods, they don't necessarily have the
10 demographics to support the extended day, extended
11 year programs because of the income requirements
12 attached to it but their parents are primarily
13 working parents. And I think we're seeing this
14 particularly in some neighborhoods where you have a
15 lot of people who say commute into Manhattan but
16 you're further out in Brooklyn, Queens, or Bronx or
17 Staten Island and you know they need a longer day,
18 simply because they're working parents.

19 And so, allowing providers this flexibility.
20 Allowing them to shape their programs based on how
21 they're discovering community need and recognizing
22 that yes, community needs changes but we need to just
23 continue to stabilize the small businesses and
24 nonprofit organizations that are providing early
25 childhood even as you may see demographic changes as

1
2 neighborhoods experience temporary or even permanent
3 influxes and outfluxes.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Are you in conversation with
5 New York City Public Schools to take a look at the
6 ecosystem and make sure agencies are talking to each
7 other? That's something we don't do. Agencies don't
8 talk to each other.

9 GREGORY BRENDER: Always trying to do that.
10 Always trying to gauge, you know early childhood is
11 engage with so many different city agencies,
12 including now and you know an office for coordinating
13 it. So, always trying to keep those conversations
14 open and really to make sure that this strong
15 community of providers is a key part of it because
16 there are great people. You heard from them today on
17 the ground doing this work and they really need to be
18 in the conversations about what's happening and they
19 also need to get you know they know a lot of what's
20 happening on the ground but DOE and other city
21 agencies also need to share data back with them.
22 Because if there's decisions being made about
23 services that effect families and effect the
24 workforce, those families and that workforce need to
25 know how those decisions are being made and need to

1
2 see the data that supports it or as maybe the case,
3 doesn't support it.

4 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Yeah, because one of the
5 things Council Members Stevens brought up was ACS,
6 how often do they talk to New York City Public
7 Schools as we assess and we move forward and how do
8 we make decisions at that time. So, that's something
9 that I hope to see improve and I told them today
10 communication has to be key in order for us to
11 stabilize that workforce that we talk about all the
12 time.

13 GREGORY BRENDER: Yeah, because the system is
14 very confusing for parents and it's you know - I
15 mean, I understand this system for a living and
16 sometimes I feel like I don't.

17 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And you're confused, right?

18 GREGORY BRENDER: And I can be confused right?
19 So like, finding ways so that a family could you know
20 if they're applying to ACS or if they're applying
21 through HRA, which currently they wouldn't be able to
22 go into the NYCPS contracted programs with that.
23 Like, finding ways to ensure those families can
24 access these programs, which have gone through an RFP
25 process and we know are of quality. We need to have

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2 the city coordinated with itself in order to make
3 that happen and to have a city that makes sure it
4 uses its resources best for families.

5 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Because we know that there
6 are different entry points for families to enter the
7 system. So, they have to be made accessible and
8 that's one of the things I talked a lot about parents
9 who may not have access to technology, cannot open my
10 school account, what is available for those parents
11 as alternatives, right?

12 GREGORY BRENDER: Yup.

13 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, those are the questions
14 I will continue to ask and raise and push New York
15 City Public Schools to do better in making sure that
16 families and providers right? Providers have to be
17 part of this conversation. It cannot be for them, it
18 has to be with them in order for the system to work,
19 the workforce One, to stabilize workforce and to
20 stabilize this whole ecosystem.

21 GREGORY BRENDER: And we're so grateful to you
22 for that. For asking those questions and also making
23 sure that providers can be those points of entries,
24 which I think is just getting more and more important
25 because more and more families are intimidated by

1
2 dealing with government. And so, dealing with a
3 trusted community based organization can often be the
4 most effective point of entry. So, making sure
5 they're empowered to bring families in who want to
6 come into the center, I think is a really important
7 change we can make.

8 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: And one of the things we've
9 always asked as well is to make sure that parents can
10 sign up at their CBOs, right? I should be able to
11 walk in to a CBO and sign my child up for early
12 childhood without having to go through all of this
13 hoop.

14 GREGORY BRENDER: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: So, we will continue to push
16 the envelop to improve the system. By the time I
17 leave, we need to perfect the system as much as
18 possible. Thank you all for your testimony here
19 today.

20 PANEL: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much to our in
22 person panelists. If there's anyone else who wishes
23 to testify in the room, please see the Sergeant at
24 Arms in the back, fill out a witness slip.

1
2 We will now turn to virtual testimony. For
3 virtual panelists, once your name is called, a member
4 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms
5 will set the timer and give you the go ahead to
6 begin. Please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to
7 announce that you may begin before delivering your
8 testimony.

9 First panelist Robert Ramos followed by Diana
10 Diaz.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 ROBERT RAMOS: Hello, good morning. Good morning
13 to Chair Joseph and the fellow Education committee
14 members. My name is Robert Ramos. I am President of
15 Local 205 of DC 37 representing 2,700 day care
16 workers throughout the city and about 350 centers
17 also.

18 The proposed closure of five child care centers
19 Nuestros Ninos, Grand Street Settlement, Friends of
20 Crown Heights, Fort Greene Council and All My
21 Children Daycare, announced by the Administration
22 last month was troubling and disheartening. Workers,
23 directors, along with families, elected officials and
24 union leaders, took to the streets to rally in
25

1 support of these child care centers and the need for
2 them in working class communities.

3 We have had constant issues dealing with the
4 Department of Education, DOE and the city to ensure
5 timely payments, which have been mentioned many times
6 today. This has been an ongoing battle for year
7 after year with the DOE short changing day care
8 centers, causing centers to close, causing daycare
9 workers to not get paid for months at a time.

10 We have even heard today of stories of one of the
11 directors or many directors taking out bridge loans
12 or even coming sometimes out of their own pocket to
13 continue their operations until the city comes
14 through with the payments that they are required.

15 These centers are crucial lifelines to working
16 families by providing safe spaces for children to
17 learn and play. And I like to emphasize learn.

18 These centers are not daycare centers for people just
19 watching children. We are professionals. We have
20 degree's, master's and we are here to teach children,
21 not just watch them play and make sure they're okay.
22 That's just something we have to do but we are here
23 to teach them and we know that children in daycare
24 centers achieve much more when they're in first,
25

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2 second, third grade then children that don't go to
3 daycare centers.

4 For years, the DOE has been trying to close child
5 care centers that are under enrolled, yet the city is
6 the cause of the under enrollment. Many times they
7 redirect children to public school classrooms. You
8 have families that want to go to certain centers and
9 the DOE will tell them, "well that school is closer
10 or that school has spaces. You should go there."

11 And families sometimes do that but that takes away
12 children from us resulting in us having the vacant
13 spaces that then they want to penalize us for.

14 Furthermore, DOE has closed the enrollment
15 portals for these centers that are trying to close,
16 leaving parents with no other alternative. I'm happy
17 to hear that they are kind of reopening them again.
18 But most recently, the city was trying to close these
19 five centers, not for the under enrolled as they say
20 but because of leases, and these centers have been
21 serving the community for decades and children and
22 thousands of children for years. These centers are
23 still owed money, yet the city wants to close them
24 because of leases to save money.

1
2 We were happy to learn that there was a temporary
3 reprieve -

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.
5 Time has expired.

6 ROBERT RAMOS: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: No, he can continue. Go
8 ahead.

9 ROBERT RAMOS: Okay we were happy to learn that
10 there was a temporary reprieve but we need a long
11 term solution and not just a band aid fix, as was
12 mentioned earlier. These workers and families
13 deserve more from the city. The city needs to
14 fulfill its commitments to working families by
15 providing safe and affordable child care centers.

16 We would like to thank Public Advocate Jumaane
17 Williams, Borough President Antonio Reynoso and the
18 various state and city Elected Officials for coming
19 out and rallying in support of my members and the
20 families who use these child care centers. Enough is
21 enough! The city needs to open the enrollment
22 portals and let parents sign up for these centers.
23 And as I said in a press release at the last rally,
24 "The dedication of my members in providing services
25 to our city's children while forgoing the security of

1
2 their next paycheck is a testament to their
3 professionalism and commitment, but it also exposes
4 the DOE's irresponsibility in not providing proper,
5 timely payments. Pay them on time!"

6 Thank you to Chair Joseph, who has been an early
7 childcare champion and for holding this crucial
8 hearing and I will take any questions you may have.

9 CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH: Thank you so much. Uhm, no
10 questions but thank you so much for your testimony.
11 Anyone else on Zoom who wishes to testify, please use
12 the hand raise feature so a member of our staff can
13 unmute you.

14 No hands. When I came into this position in
15 2022, I found that early childhood was an unstable
16 workforce. This is our fourth hearing on early
17 childhood, whether it was around payment, delayed
18 payment, now it's on closures. So, I will continue
19 as the Chair to work with New York City Public
20 Schools to come up with a solution. This cannot be a
21 reoccurring situation for our providers, our
22 families. This destabilizes our workforce, our
23 families in New York City.

24 So, thank you all who testified today and we will
25 continue to work with providers. Thank you. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 28, 2025