Child Care Challenges

Chautauqua County

January 2026

Child care is a critical support for families with young children, employers, and New York State's economy. The State made substantial investments in the child care system in the past few years, but this **progress is threatened by significant issues related to cost and capacity.** To address these challenges and ensure families have access to the care they need, **policymakers must make critical investments in the 26-27 NYS Budget** to bolster the child care workforce and stabilize the Child Care Assistance Program.

⚠ Challenge 1: High Costs for Families

Parents can't afford to pay more for child care, but providers can't afford to charge less. For families paying out-of-pocket for care, the statewide average annual cost for center-based **infant care ($14,388) is more than double the cost of SUNY college tuition ($7,070).**

Median Annual Child Care Costs in Chautauqua County

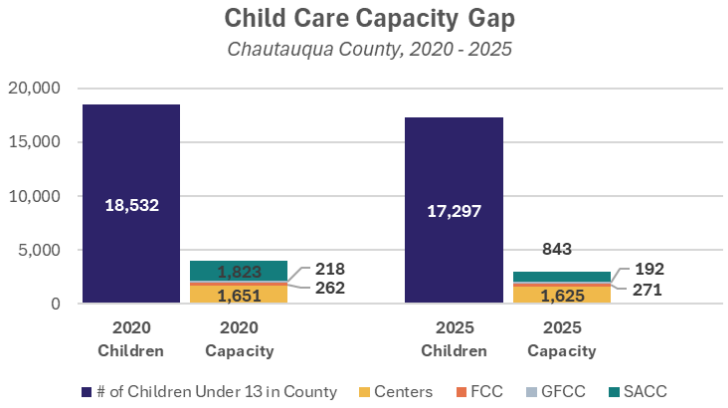
	Center-Based	*Home-Based*
Infant	**$14,244**	**$10,957**
Toddler	**$13,264**	**$10,380**
School Aged	**$11,188**	**$10,092**

⚠ Challenge 2: Child Care Capacity Gap

There is **not enough child care to meet New York families' needs.** Child care programs across the state are struggling with workforce shortages, **leading to decreased capacity and long waitlists for families**, which leads to parents missing out on valuable employment or educational opportunities.

In Chautauqua County

Children under age 6	**7,549**
Children under age 13	**17,297**
Families with children under age 13 and all parents working	**72%**
Child care slots	**2,931**



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Learn more at thechildrensagenda.org

Challenge 3: Child Care Workforce Shortage

Low pay and limited benefits have forced many child care educators to leave the field in order to support their own families. High turnover in the child care workforce increases the cost of care for providers and limits the quality of care for families.

Average child care worker earnings in Western New York

$17.36
hourly

$34,737
annually

97.2%
of jobs in this region pay more than median child care wages

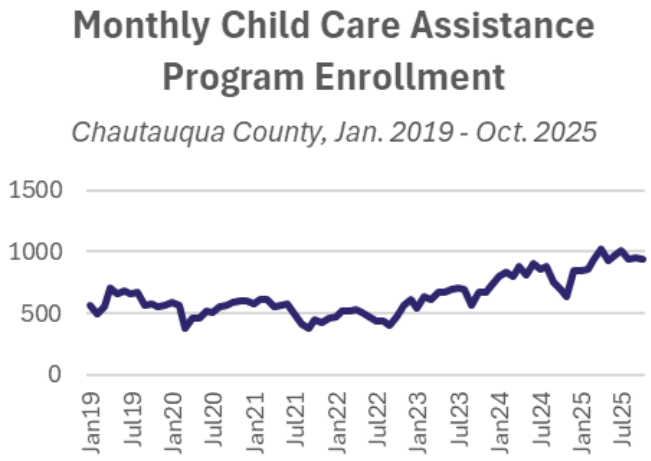
Challenge 4: Insufficient Government Funding

Enrollment in the Child Care Assistance Program steadily declined in the 2010's and fell rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. **New York has taken important steps to expand enrollment and eliminate barriers in response**, including increasing income eligibility to 85% of SMI (2023) and developing an online CCAP application (2024).

With these changes, counties saw significant increases in enrollment in 2025; **however, nearly half of counties were forced to close enrollment and/or establish waitlists** for eligible families between April and December 2025 due to insufficient funding. To ensure every New York family has access to the high-quality care they need to thrive, policymakers must make significant investments in the 26-27 NYS Budget to support the child care workforce and fully fund the Child Care Assistance Program.

In Chautauqua County

Children eligible for CCAP	**53%**
Eligible children enrolled in CCAP	**10%**
Oct. 2025 CCAP enrollment	**947**
CCAP enrollment status as of Dec. 2025	**Open**
Children on CCAP waitlist	**N/A**



What New York Voters Are Saying

A December 2025 statewide voter poll conducted on behalf of The Children's Agenda found that **three in five parents (61%) struggled with the cost** of child care, and **72% of voters believe New York should spend more** to make child care affordable.

For additional county fact sheets, please visit: thechildrensagenda.org/county-level-research/

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