

What Will It Take to Fulfill the Promise of 2-K?

Executive Summary

On June 16, 2026, the [Straus Institute for Thriving Children and Families](#) at Bank Street College, the [New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute](#) at the City University of New York (CUNY), and the [Trust for Learning](#) co-convened a daylong policy and research forum titled **What Will It Take to Fulfill the Promise of 2-K?** Convening national and local policymakers, researchers, higher education leaders, and early childhood practitioners, the event provided a structured, nonpartisan space to address the opportunities and challenges surrounding New York City's expansion of public child care for two-year-olds (2-K).

Key Takeaways

Bridging Policy and Practice: Successful 2-K implementation depends on elevating the real-world experiences of educators, family child care providers, and parents, alongside research and high-level policy design.

Systemic Investment: Delivering on the promise of universal care for toddlers requires aligning funding structures with the true cost of quality care, investing directly in the workforce, and expanding higher education pipelines.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Building an equitable early childhood system requires sustained dialogue across municipal agencies, higher education institutions, philanthropic partners, and community-based organizations.



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Session Highlights and Themes

Quality and True Cost of Care for Toddlers

The forum opened with an examination of the unique developmental needs of two-year-olds and the financial support required to provide high-quality care. Panelists detailed how high-quality toddler care relies heavily on ideal learning environments and stable, relationship-driven caregiving, contrasting these requirements with providers' current fiscal realities.

Demographics, Cultural Responsiveness, and Inclusion

Demographic insights presented by New America framed discussions on who New York City's two-year-olds are and what their families want. Subsequent panel discussions highlighted strategies for delivering culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate care that actively engages families and integrates Early Intervention support. Intersection with related programs, especially Early Intervention, was also underscored as a priority for 2-K.

Implementation Challenges and National Models

City and state leaders examined the practical hurdles of large-scale public child care expansion. Drawing on cross-regional perspectives — including insights from leadership in Washington, D.C., and New Mexico — panelists evaluated mixed-delivery systems, facility capacity, outreach tactics, and policy mechanisms designed to ensure equitable access.

Workforce Development and Higher Education Pathways

The final panel focused on the early childhood workforce. Higher education leaders and program directors discussed innovative career pathways, the recognition of diverse credentials, business and operational support for providers, and systemic strategies to recruit, compensate, and retain qualified educators.

Companion Briefs

The findings and recommendations highlighted in this summary are further examined in a [series of companion briefs](#) addressing specific themes that emerged during the forum discussions.

- Brief #1: Relationships Are the Beating Heart of a Flourishing 2-K Program
- Brief #2: A Strong 2-K System Requires a Strong Workforce
- Brief #3: Professional Development and Higher Education for Infant-Toddler Educators
- Brief #4: Guiding Principles for a 2-K Research Agenda

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