



Testimony of Grand St. Settlement
To the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Children and Families
On the Childcare Crisis in New York State

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Thank you Senator Brisport and members of the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Children and Families for convening this important hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Grand St. Settlement (Grand Street) is a multi-service Settlement House that operates a network of 28 early childcare and education programs across Manhattan and Brooklyn. Our programs serve predominantly immigrant and BIPOC New Yorkers, many of whom live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles to education, health, and economic prosperity. Grand Street has chosen to focus recent expansion on early childhood education because it is an early-life investment that enables children to achieve optimal health, educational and social development, and it equips parents to become life-long teachers, continuing to guide their children's success through school and beyond.

Even as Grand Street excels at meeting rigorous quality standards for hundreds of New York children and families, we likewise face challenges that impede on or delay our ability to provide vital care to our communities. Among the greatest challenges faced by Grand Street is early childhood teacher retention. The structure of educational contracting in New York City has created an environment where early childhood educators often begin their professional careers within a community-based setting like Grand Street and benefit from our wealth of intentional professional development and mentorship. Once they gain experience, however, Grand Street often loses teachers to school-based settings, which the Department of Education funds at a higher salary rate. School-based positions also operate on a 10-month schedule and offer shorter days; most of Grand Street's programs operate year-round and offer an extended, 8 AM to 6 PM schedule to help working families.

These conditions also impact our ability to fill staffing vacancies in our Early Childhood Services program, which interferes with day-to-day program operations. Grand Street currently has 30 open positions within Early Childhood Services. As a result, non-classroom staff like family advocates and program assistants find themselves needing to pitch in to support the classroom setting, stretching capacity in their primary roles, as well.

In response, Grand Street urges New York to prioritize wage increases for community-based early childhood educators on par with increases for comparable positions in public schools. Not only would

this affect teacher retention and staff vacancy rates, it would also send a clear message to community-based early childhood workers that they are respected and acknowledged as high-quality educators.

Grand Street also continues to encounter systems-related challenges that affect the implementation of our Early Childhood Services program. For example, the Department of Education's Centralized Enrollment System has made it needlessly cumbersome and time-consuming to enroll children in our programs. Our team has repeatedly experienced glitches with the system, like not being able to upload documents, not being able transition children from 3K to Pre-K, and delays in approving children in the system which consequently lead to delays in our attendance record keeping. Similarly, and as has been experienced by our peer organizations in the early childhood care and education space, Grand Street continues to face delays in payment on our contracts with the Department of Education.

In response, Grand Street calls for the simplification of the Department of Education's enrollment and billing systems, which have considerable bearing on our ability to provide reliable services. With regard to enrollment in particular, allow for community-based early childcare and education providers like Grand Street to manage their own enrollment processes.

Grand St. Settlement continues to navigate field-wide challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and affecting myriad areas of our work, from staffing shortages to instability in program attendance. However, the great need for quality early childhood programs can be clearly seen in the immediate success of our newest centers—particularly our two early childhood centers in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Those centers were at full enrollment with a wait list all year, with an extremely high demand from local community families. Addressing the aforementioned issue areas will enable Grand Street to continue serving this demand with quality care.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Please feel free to email me at wchin-ma@grandsettlement.org with any questions.