



Latino Families in NYC Face Additional Barriers in Early Care and Education

Searching for accessible, affordable and quality early care and education programs in New York City is like searching for a needle in a haystack. It is expected that with recent child care voucher eliminations, the search will be much harder. In June 2009, many families in NYC were faced with the elimination of specific child care vouchers that provided crucial support and early education for parents and their children. Nationally, the enrollment of Latino children in early care and education programs has been traditionally much lower than other major racial/ethnic groups and thus reducing vouchers has the potential of furthering the enrollment gap for many Latino children.¹ Research shows that quality early care and education programs, such as formal child care services, benefit a child's educational and social development.² The same study reveals that quality early care and education programs provide positive long term educational and social outcomes.

For Latino youth this a time of educational crisis; high school dropout rates are high and college attendance and retention rates are low. Decreasing family resources, such as vouchers, will only further widen the achievement gap for NYC large under five Latino population.³ By diminishing resources for families, we are depriving our children of the cognitive and social benefits of quality early care and education. In addition, these cuts are an added obstacle for many Latino families who lack access to information and face linguistic and socio-economic barriers when seeking quality early care and education.

Child Care Voucher Information and Elimination

A child care voucher is a written authorization that permits eligible families to get subsidized child care services.⁴ New York City's Administration for Children Services (ACS) provides vouchers that allow eligible families the opportunity to go outside ACS-funded programs, and select a child care provider or program of their choice that accepts vouchers.

ACS has identified 9 priority categories for their child care vouchers. As of June 2009 Priority 8 and 9 vouchers were eliminated and Priority 7 vouchers will only be funded until January 2010. Priority 8 vouchers served children whose parents were ill, incapacitated or have a necessary absence, and Priority 9 served children whose parents were looking for work. Priority 7 vouchers are for Non-ACS Social Services, that is, families who are not involved with ACS but have been referred by a social service agency.

With NYC's high unemployment rate at 10.3% and the increasing poverty rate at 14.3% (27.8% for Latino families), more families are turning to government agencies for help.⁵ ⁶ Yet, as clearly illustrated by the elimination of these vouchers, government agencies are ill equipped to serve the needs of many Latino families in search of quality care. Overall,

it is estimated that there are nearly 40,000 families on the waiting list for child care vouchers in New York City; an estimation that was made prior to the recent economic climate and voucher elimination.⁷ As families are added to the voucher waiting list; job interviews will be delayed or canceled due to lack of child care, sick parents will bring their children to treatment centers, and more importantly a teachable moment will be lost to a young child who is not enrolled in a quality early education program.

Are there still options?

ACS' response has been to send parents to the Human Resource Administration's Job Centers; an already overcrowded system that will not solve the issues in early care and education, but rather refer them to another government agency. Therefore, CHCF recommends that ACS look into other options. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), under the Emergency Child Care Stimulus Regulation {section 415.9(j)(2) of Title 18 and section 415.0(j)(3)}, has adjusted the NYS Child Care Market Rates to reflect the federally mandated bi-annual cost of care survey. In addition, OCFS will continue to implement the changes to the New York State Child Care Block Grant that addresses the expanded need for child care services for families affected by the extensive loss of jobs and reduction in employment opportunities resulting from the national economic downturn.⁸ The regulations should benefit the neediest of families by allowing social service districts the option to provide appropriate child care while the parent or caretaker seeks employment. Furthermore, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has published options for parents in certain types of emergencies, such as the Family Crisis Center and Crisis Nursery, which helps with emergency child care and has other services.⁹

CHCF's Recommendations:

1. Creating priority voucher programs that provide targeted funding for families impacted by the voucher elimination. The source of funding for these programs should come from the Child Care Stimulus money allocated by the Emergency Regulation 415.9(j)(2). The child care stimulus money was received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for the purpose of supporting quality child care, especially for families whose caretaker is actively trying to rejoin the workforce.
2. ACS should increase its coordination with other city agencies, such as the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, to provide child care services to children whose parents are ill or disabled.
3. New York City should initiate and follow-up on research about the unmet needs of Latino families within Early Care and Education.

¹ Capizzano, J. Adams, G., and Ost, J. (2006) *Caring for Children of Color: The Child Care Patterns of White, Black, and Hispanic Children under 5*. Washington DC: Urban Institute.

² Takanishi, R. & Bogard, K.L., *Effective Educational Programs for Young Children: What We Need to Know*. *Child Development Perspectives*. In press. As cited in Matthews, H. & Jang, D. (2007) *The Challenge of Change: Learning from Child Care and Early Education Experiences of Immigrant Families*. Center for Law and Social Policy

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. American Community Survey Report 2006

⁴ New York City Administration for Children Services. (2005) *Rethinking Child Care: An integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in New York City*.

⁵ New York State Department of Labor. Press Release, October 2009

⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. American Community Survey, Data set 2006-2008: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families, New York County, NY.

⁷ Child Care Inc., 2008 CCI Primer: Key Facts About Early Care and Education in New York City.

⁸ The Office of Children and Families Services Website: <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/legal/Regulatory/er/>; Accessed October 15, 2009

⁹ Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Health Bulletin, Volume 6, Number 7; "Healthy Parenting."