

OPINION

Adams' childcare plan is racial justice in action

By Jennifer Jones Austin

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Mayor Eric Adams releases “Accessible, Equitable, High-quality, Affordable: A Blueprint for Child Care & Early Childhood Education in New York City,” outlining essential steps to provide high-quality, equitable, and accessible child care for thousands of New York City families. Union Settlement Union Carver Center, Manhattan. Tuesday, June 28, 2022. Credit: Ed Reed/Mayoral Photography Office. (Ed Reed/NYC Mayor's Office)

Two years ago, the murder of George Floyd and the grossly disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Brown people and communities compelled the city and much of the nation to acknowledge what has long been the seemingly inextricable link between racism and inequity in America. We marched and we promised that we would not look away. We would act.

At that time, concrete solutions were scarce, and I questioned how far we, as a society, were willing to go to achieve transformative change. But Mayor Adams' announcement of an ambitious blueprint to reimagine how we as a city can begin to unravel the endemic societal and structural underpinnings that perpetuate inequity, racism and poverty beginning with the youngest among us — children ages 0-5 years old — represents a solid step forward.

At its core, the blueprint is a bold plan to invest money in childcare for more than 41,000 children from families with limited financial means as early as infancy. Research shows that when high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare and early childhood education are available to all children, the results can be profound. Children can develop the educational and social-emotional foundation they need to succeed in school and in life, and their families can be strengthened, too.

The facts speak for themselves. More than half of New York City families with children under age 4 cannot afford childcare. Since the start of the pandemic, one in four parents have had to turn down a job, change jobs or take leave due to childcare needs. More often than not, working women are the ones most effected. [A New York City woman making a median income of \\$57,000 a year, who leaves the workforce to care for her child from birth to age 3, will lose more than \\$480,000 over her lifetime.](#)

When we fail to address childcare needs, the feedback loop of inequity, racism and intractable poverty is reinforced, especially for women and children of color. As the city recovers, families and communities, many of whom were struggling before the pandemic, will continue to struggle. And, ultimately, our city's economy will suffer. Investing in all of our children and families is a prerequisite for a fair, inclusive and sustainable economic recovery for New York City.

Concrete policies within the blueprint such as cutting bureaucratic red tape for parents and providers, doubling outreach for eligible families in high-needs communities and making accessibility, including for undocumented immigrants, a priority are hugely positive steps forward.

Equally important is the promise to lobby Albany to expand eligibility for childcare supports and thereby significantly increase the number of children who can benefit from high-quality, accessible care and education. As we at FPWA showed in our 2021 Self-Sufficiency Standard report and our research on benefits cliffs in New York State, many families that don't earn enough income to pay for childcare or early childhood education aren't eligible for federal and state financial supports because they earn more than long outdated poverty guidelines allow. And childcare is outrageously expensive in New York City. [In 2020, for parents with children younger than 3, the average cost for home-based care was more than \\$10,000 a year, and center-based care was about \\$19,000 annually.](#) The lack of affordable childcare and the constraints around who is eligible for financial supports are harming parents' ability to work and threatening their children's futures.

The mayor's blueprint also addresses the needs of another crucial segment of the equation: childcare providers. These providers can offer high-quality childcare services if they can recruit and retain the best caregivers. Yet many providers, including many of FPWA's nonprofit member organizations, work on razor-thin margins and have difficulty paying competitive living wages to their dedicated, professional staffs, many of whom are women of color. The blueprint outlines steps to make sure that providers are compensated fairly and that their employees can access opportunities for further professional training and career development.

What's most encouraging to me about this plan is that it attempts to tackle root causes that perpetuate poverty, inequity and racism in our city. When we acknowledge that the pandemic's devastating fallout put a magnifying glass on what was already a crisis for children and families, we have the opportunity to assess how we got here and find a new way forward.

When we concentrate our efforts on the circumstances that conspire to thwart a person's prospects from the first day of their life onward, we begin to level the playing field and bend the curve toward justice and fairness. Now, we must seize the moment and focus on our most precious resource, our children, and build a better economic future for them, and for us all.

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