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Let's Fill the Unfilled NYC-DOE 3K and UPK Seats in all 32 School Districts

School District	3K					UPK				Poverty Index %	
	3K Total Students	Total Seats	3K % Filled	3K Seats Unfilled		UPK Total Students	Total Seats	UPK % Filled	UPK Seats Unfilled		
1	347	642	54	295		524	936	56	412		62.6%
2	837	1443	58	606		2,093	3431	61	1338		52.4%
3	394	730	54	336		923	1709	54	786		48.2%
4	522	985	53	463		604	1342	45	738		80.2%
5	507	1056	48	549		696	1289	54	593		79.8%
6	1,190	1889	63	699		1,362	1974	69	612		80.8%
7	736	1099	67	363		934	1531	61	597		91.5%
8	879	1204	73	325		1,605	2261	71	656		82.0%
9	1,334	2565	52	1231		1,899	3219	59	1320		90.6%
10	1,634	2553	64	919		2,767	4392	63	1625		80.7%
11	1,122	1626	69	504		2,380	3260	73	880		78.2%
12	608	844	72	236		872	1211	72	339		90.9%
13	551	835	66	284		994	1420	70	426		59.9%
14	635	1095	58	460		1,128	2014	56	886		69.5%
15	895	1178	76	283		2,132	2881	74	749		54.0%
16	412	777	53	365		521	898	58	377		80.6%
17	1,117	1643	68	526		1,513	2131	71	618		76.7%
18	813	1290	63	477		1,072	1675	64	603		73.6%
19	1,058	1679	63	621		1,440	2149	67	709		84.9%
20	1,880	2321	81	441		3,347	4523	74	1176		73.2%
21	1,583	1841	86	258		2,660	3694	72	1034		69.4%
22	1,393	1741	80	348		2,434	3121	78	687		66.5%
23	476	1107	43	631		616	1162	53	546		88.6%
24	1,489	1885	79	396		3,263	3885	84	622		73.8%
25	1,625	2031	80	406		2,514	3182	79	668		66.5%
26	912	1126	81	214		1,490	1935	77	445		56.5%
27	1,943	2776	70	833		2,593	3324	78	731		74.1%
28	1,647	2353	70	706		2,744	3611	76	867		63.8%
29	1,222	1797	68	575		1,838	2451	75	613		69.8%
30	1,452	1862	78	410		2,572	3384	76	812		66.4%
31	2,597	3167	82	570		3,743	4206	89	463		57.8%
32	777	1143	68	366		972	1495	65	523		81.3%
Total	34587	50282		15696		56,245	79697		23452		

Source: New York City Department of Education Demographic Snapshot 2021-22. Demographic Snapshot includes both District, NYCECE and Charter school 3K and UPK seats. NYC-DOE 3K and UPK Mapping showing percentage filled in each school district.

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1xWH8_OAnu5AF0cvmgkPYIRVaRzPINMA&ll=40.608809646242214%2C-73.94460845920656&z=13 Map link was provided by NYC-DOE press officer Nathaniel Styer.

Analysis, Findings and Observations

The NYC-DOE funded 3K and UPK preschool programs are now taking applications for fall 2023. Parents have until March 10 to submit an application for a seat for their child. Around 39,000 seats are currently not filled. This is HUGE NEWS! There shouldn't be any empty seats! What's missing-and needed-is a robust community outreach campaign informing parents of this wonderful and free program for their children.

1. **What the Table tells us:** the table shows the current distribution of filled and unfilled 3K and UPK seats by the 32 school districts and reveals how some of the City's poorest neighborhoods are not taking advantage of one of the best income support-child development programs there is¹.
2. **30% of 3K-UPK seats not filled:** [NYC-DOE 3K and UPK](#) offers all families free high quality child care. According to data from NYC-DOE, out of a total of 129,000 3K-UPK seats, there are currently around 15,600 3K and 23,450 UPK seats available but unfilled, adding up to a total of 39,000 unfilled seats; or 30% of available seats are not filled.
3. **The geographic distribution of unfilled seats varies widely for both 3K and UPK.** Nine school districts have less than 60% filled for 3K seats. Eight school districts have less than 60% filled for UPK seats. The most filled 3K seats is in School District 21 (Southeast Brooklyn) having 86% 3K seats filled and least filled is in School District 23 (Brownsville) having only 43% of its 3K seats currently filled. The most filled UPK seats is in School District 31 (Staten Island) having 89% UPK seats filled and School District 4 (East Harlem) having only 45% of its UPK seats currently filled.
4. **Thousands of seats remain empty despite being located in high poverty neighborhoods.** All 32 NYC-DOE school districts have significant numbers of poverty households with a range of 91% in District 7 to 48% in District 3. Eleven school districts have a Poverty Index² of 80% or higher. There was a total of 6,219 unfilled 3K seats and 8,042 unfilled UPK seats in these eleven school districts. Public policy common sense says there should be only a few empty seats across the City and certainly the fewest in neighborhoods where 80% of the residents are poor. The six School Districts (2, 3, 13, 15, 26 and 31) with lowest poverty numbers also had plenty of unfilled seats: a total of 2,293 unfilled 3K seats and 4,207 unfilled UPK seats.

¹ All seats, including DOE schools, DOE PreK Centers and NYC-Early Education Centers (NYCEEC) are included in the chart. The percentage figure for each school district for both 3K and UPK was posted on twitter by NYC-DOE Press Officer Nathaniel Styer. The last column shows the percentage of students residing in a poverty household by school district. The 3K and UPK enrolled students are from NYC-DOE Demographic Snapshot figures for school year 2021-22. Another 8,000 3K seats were added for school year 2022-23.

² NYC DOE "Poverty" counts are based on the number of students with families who have qualified for free or reduced price lunch, or are eligible for Human Resources Administration (HRA) benefits.

5. **Why 3K and UPK seats are not filled:** An excellent article in [Politico](#) (12-23-2022)³ cited multiple factors (including more user-friendly registration process, fear of COVID-19) that will require stronger collaboration between NYC-ECE providers and the NYC-DOE to solve. Right now the urgency has to focus on publicizing what a great opportunity is available with free and high quality professional preschool education/child care.
6. **All 3K and UPK centers offer a free breakfast, lunch and snack**⁴. Children receive a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack every day and parents don't have to pay out of pocket for the cost of meals. An annual savings of around \$1,500 per child. 39,000 unfilled seats means an estimated \$49 million in Federal dollars not getting spent on children nutrition.
7. **UPK means all families including middle income:** In middle income neighborhoods parents are paying around \$20,000+ annually for childcare (covering a longer day than UPK 6.2 hrs). Getting a free 3K or UPK seat means a huge savings especially as many families are struggling to make ends meet due to recent inflation. The NYC-DOE 3K and UPK programs are much more than providing free childcare to parents. Every 3K and UPK class must follow an evidenced based child development age-appropriate plan. A detailed description of the 3K and UPK child development policies and practices program design can be found in the [NYC DOE Birth-to-Five Policy Handbook](#).
8. **Food insecurity has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels:** Millions of New Yorker's continue to struggle with food insecurity. "In the first half of 2022, New Yorkers visited food pantries and soup kitchens about 3.5 million times per month, on average, according to City Harvest. That's up 68% from the first half of 2019"⁵. **Not one family with a three or four year old should be paying out of pocket for childcare when high quality and free childcare is readily available in every NYC neighborhood.** This is especially true for families struggling with food insecurity. It makes no sense.
9. **The COVID-19 Pandemic definitely contributed to thousands of unfilled seats.** Between 2020 and 2022, UPK student enrollment dropped from 67,589 to 56,045⁶. However, since summer 2022, every [child 6 months or older](#) is eligible for the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine (Pfizer and Moderna)⁷. Parent fear of their child getting a case of COVID-19 should be much less now.
10. **There is a big overlap between school districts with high poverty, large numbers of unfilled 3K and UPK seats and the City's [Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity](#) (TRIE) 33 neighborhoods.** TRIE was created in late 2020. "The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted New York City's communities of color disproportionately. The Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity (TRIE) is committed to closing the gap

³ <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/23/why-new-yorks-neediest-families-arent-using-free-pre-k-and-3k-00075204>

⁴ For the NYCEEC's, a free nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack is covered by the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) participation. Programs operating inside a DOE school building are covered through the Office of School Food and Nutrition Services.

⁵ <https://gothamist.com/news/traffic-at-nycs-pantries-and-soup-kitchens-remains-high-this-year-68-above-pre-pandemic-levels>

⁶ Mayor's Management Report 2022

⁷ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/covid/covid-19-vaccine-6-months-4-years.pdf>

and creating substantive change”⁸. What’s clear from the NYC-DOE data is that 3K and UPK is another compelling example of how these neighborhoods were more heavily impacted.

11. **Reverse the drop in total NYC-DOE district schools enrollment:** During the three years of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the NYC-DOE District Schools lost around 100,000 students. One of the best ways to increase enrollment is for families to start early with the 3K and UPK programs.
12. **More granular NYC-DOE data will help focus outreach efforts on the communities that need 3K and UPK the most:** The DOE data is sorted by school district boundaries. While some school districts cover a small area, others are three or four times as large. According to a Report from Class Size Matters, prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, 55% of all seats were in a NYCEEC and 44% in DOE district schools and PreK centers⁹. To fill 39,000 seats for school year 2023-24, publicity must include both types of programs. NYC-DOE should provide data showing where the unfilled seats are located by provider.¹⁰

39,000 unfilled seats!!!! With six weeks left to submit an application, a lot can be done to change the numbers to where they should be- full capacity in every neighborhood.

13. **The word is not getting out:** A massive community outreach effort can get the word out and get the enrollment numbers back to where they should be- **full capacity**. We did a search of “3K”, “UPK” and “PreK” on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, shockingly we found only a few postings alerting families of the open window to apply for a 3K or UPK seat for school year 2023-24 before the NYC-DOE March 10 deadline.



14. **Let’s get the word out:** Over the next six weeks, there is a final opportunity to help parents find and fill the unfilled seats. All hands on deck: our elected officials, community based organizations, houses of worship, district, charter and nonpublic elementary schools, community boards, immigrant press and many others can use their outreach systems to tell parents about the availability of 3K and UPK seats. Publicity should also be available in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Yiddish and Ukrainian.



It’s not complicated. The key is outreach, outreach and more outreach!

⁸ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/trie/about/goal.page>

⁹ <https://3zn338.a2cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/PreK-report-12.17.18-final-final.pdf>

¹⁰ The school district % of filled 3K and UPK seats data was obtained from a twitter exchange between Class Size Matters Executive Director Leonie Haimson and NYC-DOE Press Officer Nathaniel Styer.