

Summary of the Gaps in Public Funding for Child Care

Data obtained directly from partner agencies and from the Early Childhood Systems Map

Despite the fact that many families cannot afford child care tuition, the majority of early learning programs in our county do not receive public funding and rely on families paying tuition for child care services. The available state and federally funded early learning programs primarily target low- to moderate- income or systems-involved families in Contra Costa County.

Some funding streams award contracts directly to fund early learning programs (such as state preschool, known as CSPP, or transitional kwWorks), which require that families select an early learning program to enroll in for which they are issued a voucher to attend for a certain number of hours according to their needs. Families may utilize more than one funding stream, such as having their child attend a contracted early learning program for part day preschool and then having a subsidy voucher for their child to attend a separate program for afterschool care, as long as funds are not used to cover the same hours.

The purpose of this brief is to estimate the unmet need in our County while also characterizing the nature of the challenges families experience when accessing these programs. The table below shows the various publicly funded early learning programs serving children ages 0-5, many of which only low-income families are eligible for.

Based on this data gathered from partners, the unmet need is about **14,095 children** ages 0 to 5 whose families are low-income and are not being served by publicly funded child care programs.

Total Number of Children 0-5 In Low-Income Families Served through Publicly Funded Programs & Estimate of Unmet Need

Administrators of Public Funding For Child Care

	Other	CocoKids	Employment & Human Services Department - CSB & CalWORKS	Total	Where to learn more in the Systems Map
California Alternative Payment Program (CAPP)		2,217	758	2,975	<i>Systems Map, p. 84</i>
Measure X		266		266	
CalWorks Stage 1			585	585	
CalWorks Stage 2 (C2AP)		103	154	257	
CalWorks Stage 3 (C3AP)		455		455	
BRIDGE/Foster Care*		54		54	
Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN)		62		62	
Early Head Start/Head Start/California State Preschool Program/CCTR**	1,293		2,572	3,865	<i>p. 89, 94</i>
Transitional Kindergarten*** (6,817 total)	2,360			2,360	<i>p. 100</i>

Total Number of Children Served (duplicated counts likely): **10,879**
 Estimate of Children Eligible for Publicly Funded Child Care:**** **24,974** *p. 39, 84*

Estimated Unmet Need 14,095

*Not based on income but must be approved or licensed resource families or relatives/non-relative caregivers.

**Data in this row is from FY23-24. All other data is from FY25-26 or in the system map. Counts include children served by EHSD's Community Services Bureau, the Mexican American Opportunity Fund and The Unity Council and remaining CSPP providers; may be missing some children served by CCTR funds in other programs, though CCTR funding is most often blended with other funds.

***Universally available at no cost to families through school districts countywide. Number of children who are under 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) that are served through TK is estimated based on the proportion of children in Contra Costa County who are under 200% FPL.

****24,974 is the number of children ages 0-5 in households under 200% FPL, which serves as a benchmark underestimate of children who would be income eligible for publicly funded care (p.39, 84).

In addition to the fact that there is significant unmet need for publicly funded child care in Contra Costa County,

families also experience challenges accessing services that meet their needs. Many of these challenges were identified in the Early Childhood Systems Map, which is a strategic tool that captures data on systems families rely on and perspectives from families and service providers about strengths and opportunities in the system. Data from the map is cited below and for more information scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/early-childhood-system-map



⊗ The current supply of child care in the county does not match the needs of families²:

- Insufficient supply in East County and other child care deserts: More programs are needed in child care deserts (see Systems Map, p.86) where the number of licensed slots is not sufficient.
- Care during non-traditional hours is limited: Families need more programs to offer extended and non-traditional hours to match parents' work schedules. For example, only **36%** of providers offer evening, overnight, and weekend hours (which is mainly provided by Family Child Care homes, not child care centers, p.87). Many programs do not offer sufficient afterschool care so families must piece together different care types and funding streams to match their schedules.
- Shortage of infant/toddler slots: There is greater demand for infant/toddler care than the currently available slots, a problem that has been exacerbated by the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK). Because infant/toddler care costs more to provide than the amount of tuition parents can afford, programs typically must enroll preschool-aged children to sustain their business model. TK has drastically reduced the demand for preschool-aged child care, threatening the sustainability of programs that provide the bulk of infant/toddler care. According to the Contra Costa County Comprehensive Countywide Child Care Needs Assessment published in 2017, the unmet need for infant/toddler care was estimated to be **9,970** slots.³

⊗ Available program types and their offerings do not match families' preferences:

- Families want more diverse program offerings: Families report wanting to have more programs that reflect their home culture and language (p.34).
- Families need programs that are better equipped to serve children with disabilities: Families report that providers will push children out of their programs through "exclusionary practices" such as saying "they cannot support their child's needs" (p.34).

⊗ Accessing public financial assistance for child care is burdensome for families:

- Given the amount of documentation and paperwork required, many families are unable to complete the lengthy application and verification process to access financial assistance. Due to the constraints on supply, programs that meet a family's needs may not have vacancies once the paperwork process is complete. Since financial assistance is awarded to families with the lowest income first (and is not first come, first served), some higher income families may never receive assistance. Currently there are **6,000** families that are eligible and waiting for financial assistance for the largest subsidy provider, CocoKids.
- Subsidy programs are only allowed to pay up to a set reimbursement rate for care; therefore, families may be required to pay a co-pay that covers the difference between this rate and the full tuition cost in addition to a set family contribution according to their income level, which many cannot afford.

⊗ Not enough providers participate in subsidy program because reimbursement rates do not cover their costs:

- The state reimbursement rates have not been updated in years and do not reflect the cost of providing care in the Bay Area. While providers may have other reasons for not participating in these programs, the low reimbursement rate is likely the main reason only **59%** of licensed child care programs in our county accept any children with public financial assistance at all (p. 84).

The **Early Learning Leadership Group** is a county-wide group that aims to increase collaboration, share data, identify gaps, improve service delivery, and advocate for policies at the local, state, and federal levels so that the early care and education system meets the needs of all children and their families.

The group has identified four primary advocacy issue areas: Quality, Workforce Development, Access and Affordability, and a Coordinated and Sustainable System.

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Member agencies include:



ENDNOTES:

¹Income-eligibility Guidelines for State Preschool and Subsidy exceed 200% FPL:

- Head Start programs can enroll up to 130% FPL
- Subsidy programs can generally enroll up to 85% of California State Median Income (SMI, p.36), Measure X serve moderate-income families below 85% SMI
- State Preschool Programs can enroll up to 115% of the CA SMI

²Families often seek the care of informal caregivers, like relatives or neighbors, rather than licensed care settings. Some of the primary reasons include preferring a caregiver who shares their culture or language, who can provide more personalized attention, or, who they know personally and feel they can trust. Other families may rely on informal caregivers to provide care when a licensed spot is not available to them- up to a fifth of the children ages 0-5 who receive financial assistance from CocoKids are using informal care.

³Source: https://www.ccoec.k12.ca.us/documents/Divisions--Schools/Departments/Educational-Services/Early-Learning-Programs-ECE--CPIN/Local-Planning-Council-for-Early-Care-and-Education/2017LPCNeedsAssessment_PDF.pdf