



Final Report

Santa Cruz County

Early Care, Education, and After-School Care Strategic Plan – 2023

*Prepared for*

Santa Cruz County Childhood Advisory Council,  
Santa Cruz County Office of Education

*Prepared by*

Brion Economics, Inc.

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**SANTA CRUZ**  
COUNTY OFFICE OF  
**EDUCATION**  
DR. FARIS SABBABH • SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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- **Melanie Tursic**, Clerical Assistant, Santa Cruz Childhood Advisory Council, Santa Cruz County Office of Education
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## Santa Cruz County School Districts

Bonny Doon Unified Elementary  
Happy Valley Elementary  
Live Oak School District  
Mountain Elementary  
Pacific Elementary  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District  
San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District  
Santa Cruz City School  
Scotts Valley Unified School District  
Soquel Union Elementary School District

## Survey Respondents

We want to thank all the individuals who responded to the online survey prepared this spring as part of this Strategic Plan update. A list of those respondents who wanted to be included in the Strategic Plan is provided in **Appendix C**.

# I. Introduction and Background

This Early Care, Education, and After-School Care Strategic Plan - 2023 is an update of the similarly named Master Plan completed in 2018. The Strategic Plan (herein) covers the period 2023 to 2028, or five years. It sets forth new goals, strategies, and action items for the County based on new data, analysis, and findings of a countywide survey prepared for this effort. An overarching goal of this Strategic Plan is to create a multi-faceted collaboration engaging as many organizations, agencies, and individuals as possible with an interest in child care, either directly or indirectly.

## 1. Mission, Vision, and Purpose

“These are all of our children; we will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become.”  
- James Baldwin

The Santa Cruz County Childhood Advisory Council (CAC) is a clear and consistent voice for the early care and education of our children (from birth to age 13). Our ongoing message is designed to shape public policy so that the needs of young children come first. Our role as a council is to make the case that providing safe and nurturing early learning environments for children from birth through age 13 is critical to the overall health of our community. Based on solid data, as well as our collective experience as early care educators, we want the public and policymakers at all levels to know what we know - that investing in the early care and education of our children yields life-long benefits.

Our **mission** is to present a unified voice for an early care and education system that meets the needs of all children and families in Santa Cruz County.

Our **vision** is that every child in Santa Cruz County has access to quality, affordable early care, education, and after-school programs.

Our **strategies** for achieving this vision are deeply rooted in decades of neuroscience and economic research that prove that rich experiences in a child’s earliest years ensure healthy brain development, prepare children for school, and can help close the education achievement gap.

Appointed by the County Board of Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools, the Local Planning Council’s (LPC) purpose is to ensure that there is relevant input on federal and state resources apportioned to counties. The Santa Cruz County Childhood Advisory Council (CAC) members are comprised of parents, community members, educators, and early care and education professionals. The Council convenes to assess trends in early care, education, and after-school needs, set local priorities for the use of state and federal child care funds, advocate on behalf of children and the early care education profession, and influence policy decisions regarding quality early care, education, and after-school programs.

## 2. Benefits of Early Care and Education

Every child deserves to be happy and healthy and to have equal opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential. Yet not all children are provided with the chance to build a strong foundation for lifelong health and well-being. Lack of access to affordable, high-quality early care and education for many of our families, in particular low- and middle-income families, means that our children are entering the school system with significant readiness gaps, contributing to achievement gaps.

Systemic inequities limit children's optimal development and learning. Scientists and economists agree that investing early produces the greatest benefits to children, families, and society and improves life outcomes related to health, education, employment, and social behaviors. Investing early will positively impact public safety and community well-being. What is often socially fair and just is also economically efficient.

"High-quality early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry is critical to positive child development and has the potential to generate economic returns, which benefit not only children and their families but society at large. Despite the great promise of early care and education, it has been financed in such a way that high-quality early care and education have only been available to a fraction of the families needing and desiring it and does little to further develop the early-care-and-education (ECE) workforce."<sup>1</sup>

The Children's Network and the Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments are key partners that focus on the well-being and health of children and families. Branching out and building more relationships with industry leaders and large business owners will be important in the coming years. Child care allows parents to go to work and helps create a stable labor force. High-quality child care leads to better success for children throughout life and reduces social service costs later in children's life.

"[I]t's time to start treating child care as essential infrastructure—just as worthy of funding as roads and fiber optic cables. In the long term, this will help create more productive and inclusive post-pandemic economies." - Melinda French Gates<sup>2</sup>

Investment in child care means more income for families—for quality food, education, and savings. It means more jobs and inclusive economic growth. It means better futures for children and more productive working adults. In sum? Everyone wins.<sup>3</sup> Some of the economic benefits of early care and learning reported by the Obama Administration include<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> La Rue Allen and Emily P. Backes, Editors, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24984/transforming-the-financing-of-early-care-and-education>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/investing-in-child-care-good-for-economic-growth>

<sup>3</sup> Yamini Atmavilas, Senior Program Officer, Gender Equality, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/investing-in-child-care-good-for-economic-growth>

<sup>4</sup> [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the\\_economics\\_of\\_early\\_childhood\\_investments.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the_economics_of_early_childhood_investments.pdf)

- **High-quality early education for all would narrow the achievement gap.** Dozens of preschool programs have been rigorously examined since the 1960s. Overall, across all studies and time periods, early childhood education increases cognitive and achievement scores by 0.35 standard deviations on average, or nearly half the Black-White difference in the kindergarten achievement gap.
- **Early childhood education can boost children’s earnings later in life.** Long-term analyses suggest that early childhood education can increase earnings in adulthood by 1.3 to 3.5 percent. These earnings gains alone are bigger than the costs of such programs.
- **Earning gains from increased enrollment in early childhood education would provide benefits that outweigh the costs of the program.** Researchers estimate the gain in income for recent statewide programs over a child’s career to be \$9,166 to \$30,851, after taking out the cost of the program.
- **Parents recognize the importance of early childhood investments, and, despite working longer hours for pay, both mothers and fathers are also spending more time interacting with their children.**
- **Early childhood education programs can strengthen parents’ attachment to the labor force** and increase their earning potential by providing a safe and nurturing environment that furthers the education and development that parents are providing at home.
- **Early childhood education can lower involvement with the criminal justice system.** Research shows that by improving cognitive and socio-emotional development, investments in early childhood education may reduce involvement with the criminal justice system.
- **Early childhood interventions can reduce the need for remedial education.** Research shows that benefits in children’s development may also reduce the need for special education placements and remedial education, thereby lowering public school expenditures.

“The estimated benefits to society from investing in early childhood education are large and go beyond the estimated increase in earnings for children as they become adults.”<sup>5</sup>

The benefits and issues outlined above are central to this Strategic Plan. The interrelatedness of accessibility, affordability, sustainability, workforce, educational attainment, parents’ ability to work, and employers’ ability to find and maintain a stable workforce are all important. There is an urgent need to shift to a new cultural norm of collective responsibility. This five-year Strategic Plan builds on previous plans and outlines the goals, objectives, and action strategies focused on accessible and affordable care, quality care, and sustainable systems and workforce. These strategies will generate lasting results to move us towards well-being for all children and a prosperous community.

We invite each of you to join us in advancing our future generations - the future of humankind.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Plan Organization, Approach, and Qualifications

The 2023 Strategic Plan is organized into five main chapters, including this Introduction, 2. Current Needs Assessment, Data, and Conditions, 3. Child Care Stakeholder Survey, 4. Strategic Plan Focus Areas, of which there are four, and 5. Call to Action. Several new topics have been added to this Strategic Plan, including a slight reorganization of prior focus areas. This plan builds on the prior 2018 Master Plan and incorporates much of the language of that plan when still relevant and pertinent. Existing goals, strategies, and action items were reviewed and expanded for this update. New goals, strategies, and action items were added as needed, and some were removed as they were no longer relevant, had been completed, or were not pertinent to current conditions.

**Note that “child care” is synonymous with early care, education, and after-school care, early care, and education, or early learning and care throughout this report, and these phrases are used interchangeably depending on the topic and study cited.**

A Child Care Stakeholder Survey was conducted for this effort in April of 2023. The survey targeted over 800 individuals with an interest in child care from a variety of perspectives (see **Chapter 3**).

A current child care supply and demand analysis was also conducted for this effort, both for the County as a whole and the four regions: San Lorenzo Valley, North County, Mid-County, and South County. This analysis is summarized in the Strategic Plan, and detailed analysis tables are included in **Appendix B**.

The report includes two other Appendices, **Appendix A**: Demographic and Other Supporting Data, and the results of the Stakeholder Survey in **Appendix C**. **Appendix D** includes state definitions of child care providers including center-based care, family child care homes (FCCH), and license-exempt providers, and the licensing requirements for each. These appendices are available under separate cover for those who want to dive deeper into the analysis, data, and findings of the analyses conducted for this effort.

The four regions used in this analysis are the same as those defined by DataShare Santa Cruz County<sup>6</sup> (see **Exhibit I-1**). However, for this effort, most of the data is for children and families within the boundaries of Santa Cruz County unless otherwise noted. Two zip codes in Santa Cruz County extend beyond the boundaries of the County (i.e., 95033 and 95076), and data were adjusted accordingly where possible.

Data for this effort was collected from a number of sources and is the most current data available. Data includes information provided by Diane Munoz, the Childhood Advisory Council’s Community Organizer, the County’s Child Development Resource Center, American Institutes Research (AIR) – Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (ELNAT), the American Community Survey (ACS) from the US Census Bureau, the California Department of Finance, and other studies and data as cited throughout the document. With the exception of the Stakeholder Survey and a survey of subsidized child care providers, no new original research was conducted for this effort. Much of the data was collected at the zip code level and aggregated into the four regions, as shown below.

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.datasharescc.org/>.

The Childhood Advisory Council is willing to disrupt the status quo and engage in open discourse to achieve these results!

**Chart I-1**

Region Name	Zip Codes	Notes
San Lorenzo Valley	95005, 95006, 95007, 95018, 95033	excluding portion of 95033 in Los Gatos
North County	95017, 95041, 95060, 95062, 95064, 95065, 95066	
Mid-County	95003, 95010, 95073	
South County	95019, 95076, 95077	excludes 95012, which is in Castroville, Monterey Co.

**Exhibit I-1**



## II. Current Needs Assessment, Data, and Conditions

This chapter presents a wide variety of information and data that helps to shape the current conditions related to the child care industry, children and families, and the issues facing providers and the child care workforce. The lack of child care negatively and proportionately impacts families of lower incomes and people of color, generally. Hence equity, diversity, and inclusion are key considerations of this plan. The study tracks data and information for children in three age groups:

- Infants/Toddlers – 0 up to 24 months old
- Preschool – 2 to 4 years old
- School Age – 5 to 12 years old (up to 13 years old)

The first section presents a snapshot of key data points from the 2018 Master Plan, and how they have changed since 2018. The second section presents key current data and information on how many children there are by age group location, ethnicity, their families' household income data, labor force participation rates, current costs of child care, estimates of subsidized care, etc. These data tell the story of how children and the child care industry are faring, and what challenges exist. The third section presents an overall analysis of the supply and demand conditions countywide by the four regions discussed above and estimates the shortages of child care spaces by age group. The fourth section presents a summary of the Stakeholder Survey conducted for this effort. Comments and quotes from the survey have been included throughout the plan when relevant and illuminating. Two new topics are included in this new plan, Transitional Kindergarten (TK) – Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) and Transportation and Access as the last two sections of the plan. TK and UPK are creating major shifts in the field and industry, and the full benefit and impact of these new programs throughout the State have yet to be fully understood and experienced. All of this information and data are used to share the key focus areas that follow this chapter.

### 1. Snapshot of Change Since the 2018 Master Plan<sup>7</sup>

#### Population and Children

- In 2016, the total population in the County was 276,945; as of 2020, the total population was 270,861, according to the CA Department of Finance (DOF). As of 2023, there are an estimated 277,087 residents, or a .05% increase since 2016.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2016, there were 29,935 children 0 to 9 years old in the County.<sup>9</sup> As of 2023, there are an estimated 28,078 children 0 to 9 years old, or a 6.2% reduction since 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> This section contrasts data provided in the 2018 plan with current data. Some data cited in the prior Master Plan is from 2016 or earlier, as noted.

<sup>8</sup> California Department of Finance, E-5 Report, and P-2B Report by year. See Table A-1 and Table A-2, Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the 2018 Master Plan, reported data on children 0 to 9 years old.

- As of 2020, there are 40,225 children 0 to 12 years old in the County. By 2023, there are an estimated 38,032 children, ages 0 to 12 years old, or 5.5% less than 2020 estimates.<sup>10</sup>

### Supply of Child Care Spaces

- As of 2016, the County had almost 7,000 child care spaces serving children 0 to 5 years old. As of 2023, there are about 5,900 child care spaces for this age group, or a reduction of about 16% over the last 7 years. This likely includes closures that occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

### Ethnicity of Children

- In 2016, 54% of children were Hispanic/Latino in the County, and 38% were White. There has been little change in the distribution of children by ethnicity since 2016, with the exception that 5% are considered multi-racial in 2020 compared to 4% in 2016.<sup>12</sup>

### Children Under Federal Poverty Level

- In 2016, there were 5,987 children living in poverty in the County. As of 2020, there were 6,265, or 16% of children ages 0 to 12 years old, living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level, and 1,508, or 4% of children 0 to 12 years old, living at or below 50% of the federal poverty level.<sup>13</sup>

### Housing Affordability

- In the prior Master Plan, family households earning the county median income spent 41% of their income on rent for a 2-bedroom apartment. In 2020, of households that rent in the County, 23% spent from 30 to 50% of their income on rent, and another 29% spent more than 50% of their income on rent.<sup>14</sup> In total, 52% of households spend more than 30% of their income on rent in the County as of 2020.
- In contrast, of those that own their own homes (with and without a mortgage), these households spend on average 22% of their income on housing.<sup>15</sup>
- The following charts summarize the costs of child care from the Santa Cruz Portfolio for 2020.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Current data is not comparable. 2020 estimates are from California Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool/AIR as of 2020, and 2023 data is from the California Department of Finance, Projections P-2B. See Table A-1 and A-6, Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup> See Early Care and Education Needs Assessment: June 2016 to 2021, prepared by ASR for the County Office of Education. Note both the 2016 and 2021 Needs Assessments do not provide the total supply of child care spaces for children ages 0 to 12 years old. For 2023 supply data, see Table B-8, Appendix B.

<sup>12</sup> Data reported in the 2018 Master Plan was from the 2016 US Census Bureau. Current data is from the 2020 American Community Survey – Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool. See Table A-8, Appendix A.

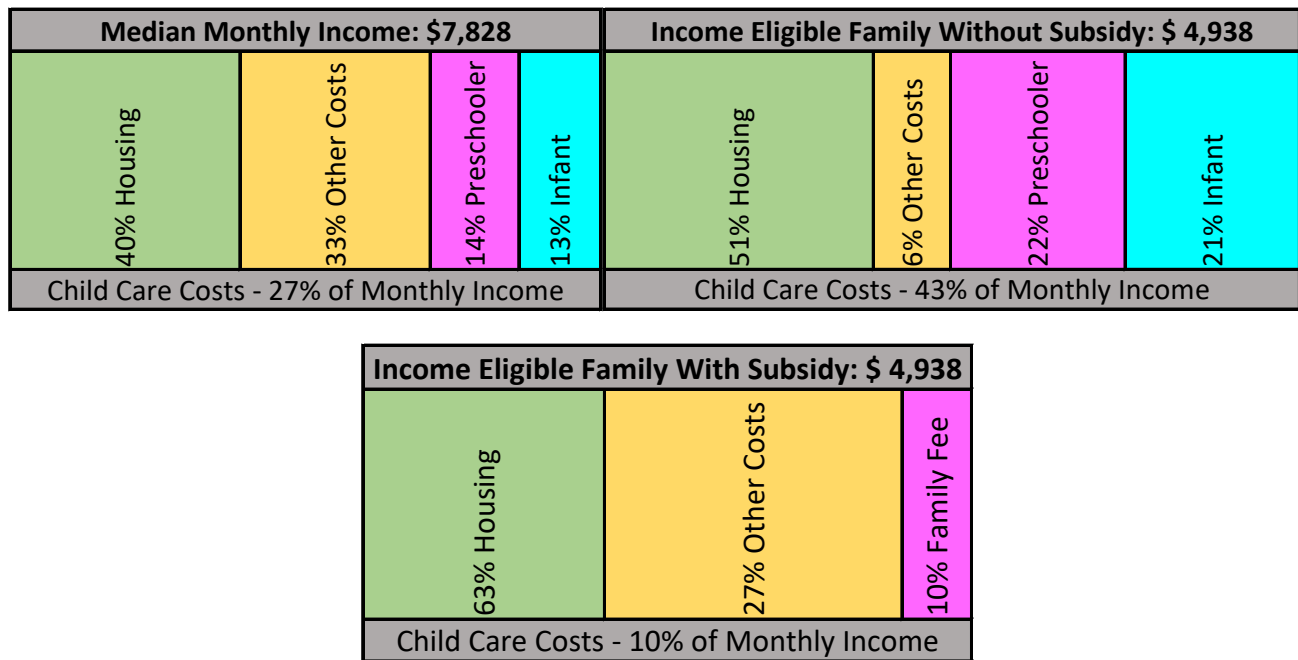
<sup>13</sup> Number of children living at 100% and 50% under the Federal Poverty Level (five-year estimates, from American Community Survey. Total is the sum of all zip code data, California Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool as of 2020. See Table A-9, Appendix A.

<sup>14</sup> US Census - 2020 American Community Survey data; see <https://api.census.gov>

<sup>15</sup> US Census - 2020 American Community Survey data; see <https://api.census.gov>

<sup>16</sup> See Santa Cruz County Portfolio 2020 prepared by the California Resource and Referral Agency.

Chart II-1



### Cost of Care - California and Santa Cruz as of 2023<sup>17</sup>

- In Santa Cruz County, the average cost of center-based infant care increased from \$15,045 per year in 2015 to \$22,214 per year as of 2023, or a 48% increase.
- Center-based preschool care increased from \$10,950 per year in 2015 to \$18,460 per year as of 2023, or a 69% increase. Inflation over this timeframe was 28%.

### Quality Counts<sup>18</sup>

- Santa Cruz County has created a local Quality Counts program as one strategy to assess and improve the quality of care among all participating providers, called Quality Counts Santa Cruz County. Quality Counts supports, rates, and rewards early care and education in Santa Cruz County and is modeled after a statewide effort called Quality California Counts (QCC).
- In 2018, there were 72 providers in the Quality Counts program. As of 2023, there are 106 programs in Quality Counts, or a 47% increase overall. Of these, 39 child care centers are participating and have been rated; the remaining are participating and have not been rated yet. Of the total Family Child Care Home providers participating in the program, 33 have been rated as of 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Current data for California is not available for contrast. Data provided by Santa Cruz Office of Education, March 2023. See Table A-15, Appendix A.

<sup>18</sup> From Vicki Boriack, Senior Program Officer, First 5 Santa Cruz County, March 2023.

- Of the total, 57% are Family Child Care Homes, and 43% are center-based providers. There are nine providers at Tier 3, 57 providers at Tier 4, and five providers at Tier 5, the highest ranking.
- Overall, 31% of current providers in the County are participating in the Quality Counts program.

**Chart II-2**

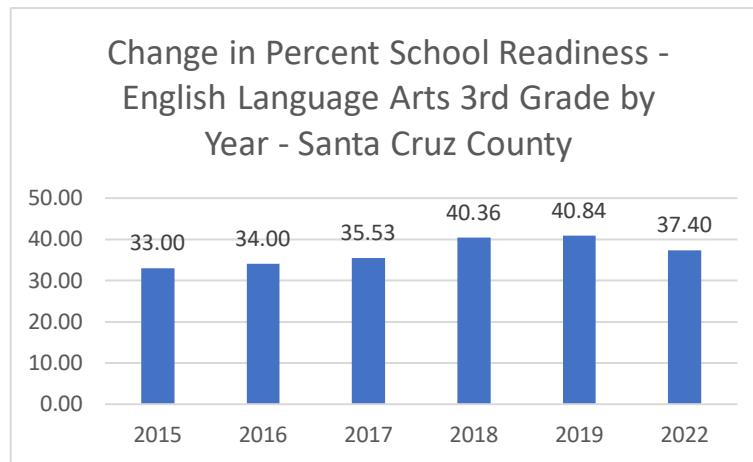
Quality Counts Participation - 2023						
Type of Provider	Number of Participant Providers - 2023	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5
Child Care Centers Participating and Rated	39	0	0	0	33	5
<b>Total Centers Participating</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
Family Child Care Sites Participating and Rated	33	0	0	9	24	0
<b>Total FCCHs Participating</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Sites in Quality Counts</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>5</b>
Percent Rated	68%	0%	0%	8%	54%	5%
<b>Total Providers Sites</b>	<b>343</b>					
<b>Percent Participation</b>	<b>31%</b>					

### 3rd Grade Reading & Math Levels<sup>19</sup>

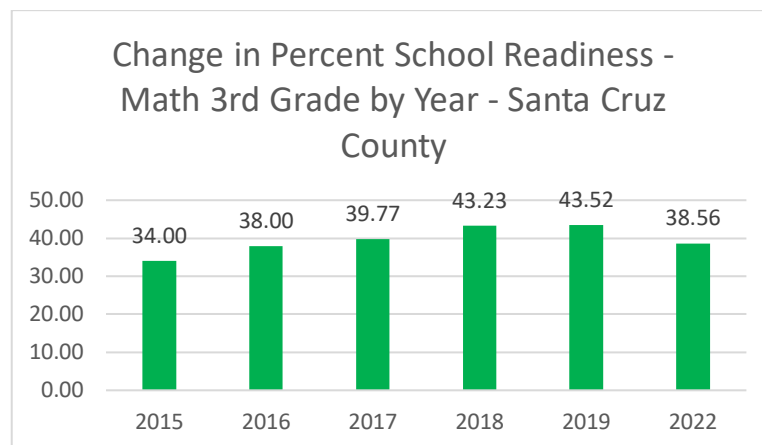
- In 2022, 37% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders met state standards for English/Language Arts students, slightly up from the 2017 figure of 36% but down from a high of 41% in 2019. In 2022, Math test score levels of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders countywide were slightly less than in 2017; 39% met state standards. This is a reduction compared to the recent high of 44% in 2019 (see **Exhibits II-1 and II-2**). These data show the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has resulted in learning losses in both math and language arts.

<sup>19</sup> See <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cn51wYRV1LgQFQM0lm4NSGZgxK5nFAo67mynLweWWyg/edit#gid=0>  
From Miguel Rocha, Santa Cruz County Office of Education, March 8, 2023. Note: Data is not available for 2020 and 2021, or during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Exhibit II-1**



**Exhibit II-2**



### Child Care Worker Wages<sup>20</sup>

- Based on 2022 wage data, the average Preschool teacher wage in Santa Cruz County is \$42,114, up from \$28,570 in 2017. Preschool teachers wages are less than half (48%) that of Elementary School teachers who earn \$87,769 on average. The average wage gap between Preschool teachers and Elementary School teachers has increased by 4% since 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Data from Occupational Employment (May 2021) & Wage (2022 - 1st Quarter) Data, from CA Economic Development Department for Santa Cruz County-Watsonville CA area, as viewed February 22, 2023. See Table A-11, Appendix A.

## 2. Demographic Data Highlights and Current Conditions

This section summarizes various data pertaining to population, children, families, ethnicity, child care costs, etc. It represents a snapshot of key factors either used in the analysis of supply and demand, or data points that highlight some of the differences between the regions in the County. All the data presented is the most current data available. Detailed data, including sources, summarized in this section are included in **Appendix A**.<sup>21</sup>

### Current Population and Children<sup>22</sup>

- Population data for the study is from a combination of the Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (ELNAT) and from the American Community Survey for 2020. ELNAT provides estimates of children by age by zip code, which is required to conduct the Zip Code Priorities analysis and the Supply and Demand Analysis by region for this study. This is the most current data available for children by age by zip code.
- As shown below, children 0 to 12 years old are about 15% of the total population in the County. This factor varies by region, with 19.5% for South County on the high end and 11.6% at the low end in North County. North County and South County have about the same number of children. In total, there are about 40,000 children 0 to 12 years old in the County as of 2020 (see **Table A-6, Appendix A** for more detail).

**Chart II-3**

Current Population by Age and Region						
Region	0 up to 2 Years	2 to 4 Years	5 to 12 Years	0 to 12 Years	Total Population	of Total Population
San Lorenzo Valley	776	1,330	3,505	5,611	29,966	18.7%
North County	1,976	3,151	8,916	14,043	120,564	11.6%
Mid-County	767	1,227	3,444	5,438	45,427	12.0%
South County	2,166	3,693	9,274	15,133	77,516	19.5%
<b>Total Santa Cruz Co.</b>	<b>5,685</b>	<b>9,401</b>	<b>25,139</b>	<b>40,225</b>	<b>273,473</b>	<b>14.7%</b>
<b>Percent Distribution</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

### Labor Force Participation Rates<sup>23</sup>

- Child care demand is calculated by determining the number of children by age group with working parents by applying labor force participation rates (LFPRs). LFPRs for families with children under six years old or ages six to 17 years old are applied to the number of children by age group. This allows the calculation of

<sup>21</sup> Appendix A includes data that is used to establish the approach for the supply and demand analysis and evaluate the best data sources used for the study, as well as the zip codes and geographic boundaries used. Not all tables are discussed in this section.

<sup>22</sup> See Table A-6, Appendix A.

<sup>23</sup> See Table A-7, Appendix A.

the number of children with working parents in each of these age groups, including either two parents working or one parent working, based on US Census data.

- The weighted average LFPR in Santa Cruz County for children under 6 years old is 70.8% and 71.4% for families with children 6 to 17 years old. The rates by region and age group vary, as shown below.

**Chart II-4**

<b>Weighted Average Labor Force Participation Rates by Region - 2021</b>		
<b>Region</b>	<b>LFPRs Under 6 Years Old</b>	<b>LFPRs 6 to 17 Years Old</b>
<b>San Lorenzo Valley</b>	62.1%	69.1%
<b>North County</b>	73.0%	74.4%
<b>Mid-County</b>	60.9%	73.5%
<b>South County</b>	72.1%	67.4%
<b>Total Santa Cruz County</b>	<b>70.3%</b>	<b>70.9%</b>

### Ethnicity of Children<sup>24</sup>

- The ethnicity of children by age group is summarized below. As shown, 54% of children 0 to 12 years old are Hispanic, followed by 38% White, Two or more races at 4.6%, and the remaining ethnicities total 3.2% of the total. The distribution of ethnicity by age group varies somewhat more.

**Chart II5**

<b>Ethnicity of Children by Age Group - 2020</b>					
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Infants/Toddlers 0 up to 2 Years</b>	<b>Preschool 2 to 4 Years</b>	<b>School Age 5 to 12 Years</b>	<b>Total 0 to 12 Years</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
White	1,934	3,505	9,996	15,435	38.4%
Hispanic	3,195	5,431	13,014	21,640	53.8%
Asian	86	69	659	814	2.0%
Black or African American	61	46	194	301	0.7%
Filipino	42	5	55	102	0.3%
American Indian	1	2	4	7	0.0%
Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Two or more races	351	332	1,168	1,851	4.6%
Other race/ethnicity	14	16	49	79	0.2%
<b>All Ethnicities, Total County</b>	<b>5,684</b>	<b>9,406</b>	<b>25,139</b>	<b>40,229</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>24</sup> See Table A-8, Appendix A.

## Subsidized Care and Children Under Federal Poverty Level<sup>25</sup>

- Overall, about 56% of children 0 to 12 years old qualify for subsidized care as of 2023, based on being at or below 85% of the State Median Income (SMI). An estimated 10,078 children are enrolled in subsidized care as of 2023, or 25% of total children. There is a shortfall of approximately 12,600 subsidized spaces for children 0 to 12 years old, or 45% of the current need is not being met.<sup>26</sup> About 16% of children 0 to 12 years old live under the Federal Poverty Level (\$27,750 annual income for a family of 4), and almost 4% live under 50% of the Federal Poverty Level, which for a family of 4 is \$13,875 as of 2023.

**Chart II-6**

Unmet Need for Subsidized Care and Children under Poverty Level - 2023			
Item	Total Children, 0 to 12 Years	Percent of Children	Notes
Estimated Children	40,225		
Need for Subsidized Spaces - 85% of SMI	22,699	56.4%	Percent of Total Children
Enrollment in Subsidized Care	10,078	25.1%	Percent of Total Children Served
<b>Unmet Need for Subsidized Care</b>	<b>(12,621)</b>	<b>-55.6%</b>	<b>Unmet Need as % of Eligible</b>
Children Under 100% of Federal Poverty Level	6,265	15.6%	Percent of Total Children
Children Under 50% of Federal Poverty Level	1,508	3.7%	Percent of Total Children

## Families with Children Below the Federal Poverty Level<sup>27</sup>

- Overall, there are about 2,300 families with children in Santa Cruz County living under the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or almost 4% of families with children. About 65% of them live in South County where about 7% of families with children live below the FPL, or 1,494 families. San Lorenzo Valley has the fewest families living below the FPL, or 78 in total or less than 1%.

“More financial support for parents that would enable them to select programs that are right for them, not solely based on affordability or ease of care.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

<sup>25</sup> See Table A-9, Appendix A.

<sup>26</sup> Note that the 2023 Zip Code Priorities analysis provides a more detailed assessment of the need for subsidized care.

<sup>27</sup> See Table A-14, Appendix A.

Chart II-7

Families with Children Below Poverty Level - 2022		
Region	No. of Families	% of Total Families with Children
San Lorenzo Valley	78	0.88%
North County	672	2.86%
Mid-County	367	3.17%
South County	1,494	6.84%
<b>Santa Cruz County</b>	<b>2,292</b>	<b>3.85%</b>
<b>State of California</b>	<b>599,291</b>	<b>6.52%</b>

### Children Requiring Non-Traditional Child Care Hours<sup>28</sup>

- Almost 1,600 children, or 4%, need non-traditional hours for child care, according to data from ELNAT. Of these, about 1,000 are below 85% of SMI or 2.5% of total children 0 to 12 years old.

Chart II-8

Children Requiring Non-Traditional Child Care Hours		
Item	Children 0 to 12 Years	Percent of Total
Total Children	40,225	100%
Number of children needing non-traditional hours of care	1,578	3.9%
Number of children needing non-traditional hours care and in families earning under 85% state median income (SMI)	1,010	2.5%

### Household Income Data<sup>29</sup>

- The average and median household income by region is shown below. South County average and median incomes are much less than other regions' average and median incomes, at 76% and 78% respectively. The average household income in the County is about \$148,000, and the median income countywide is \$102,000. These incomes are higher than the State average and median income, as shown.
- San Lorenzo Valley has the highest average and median income in the County, followed by Mid-County, then North County.

<sup>28</sup> See Table A-10, Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> See Table A-13, Appendix A.

Chart II-9

Household Income by Region - 2022				
Region	Average Household Income	Income as % of County	Median Household Income	Income as % of County
San Lorenzo Valley	\$193,067	131%	\$146,051	143%
North County	\$153,601	104%	\$103,933	102%
Mid-County	\$158,339	107%	\$116,836	115%
South County	\$112,036	76%	\$79,674	78%
<b>Santa Cruz County</b>	<b>\$147,733</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$102,032</b>	<b>100%</b>
State of California	\$129,700	88%	\$89,481	88%

### Household Income Disparities<sup>30</sup>

- Females, single head of household, with children have the lowest household income compared to families with children, married couples with children, or males, single head of household, with children, at about 50% of the County median household income.
- White households (not Hispanic or Latino) have a median household income (\$100,259) that is 42% higher than Hispanic/Latino households (\$70,679).
- A 4-person household has a median household income (\$133,799), which is 57% more than a 6-person household (\$85,347).
- A male householder living alone has a median income (\$49,421), which is 32% higher than a female householder living alone (\$37,412).

Chart II-10

Median Household Income Disparities - 2020			
Household Status	Average Household Income	Percent of County Median Income	Number of Households
County Median Income	\$89,986	100%	96,275
Families with children	\$104,095	116%	23,946
Married couples with children	\$131,941	147%	17,123
Single Female Head of Household with children	\$43,672	49%	4,268
Male Single Head of Household with children	\$72,625	81%	2,555

<sup>30</sup> See Table A-12, Appendix A. Data is from 2022 from the US Census, American Community Survey.

### Average Cost of Child Care<sup>31</sup>

- Center-based full-time infant/toddler care is almost \$2,000 per month on average; preschool care is about \$1,500 per month; and school-age care is about \$800 per month. Family Child Care Home (FCCH) full-time care is about \$1,500 per month for infant/toddler care, \$1,300 per month for preschool care, and \$850 per month for school-age care. Given the household incomes discussed above, this is a significant cost to families with children, particularly if they have more than one child.

**Chart II-11**

<b>Average Cost of Care by Age Group and Facility Type - March 2023</b>			
<b>Type of Care</b>	<b>Infants/Toddlers</b>	<b>Preschool</b>	<b>School Age</b>
<b>Center-Based Care</b>			
Center Full-Time Average Market Rate - Monthly	\$1,851	\$1,538	\$758
Center Part-Time Average Market Rate - Monthly	\$1,335	\$962	\$509
<b>Family Child Care Homes</b>			
FCCH Full-Time Average Market Rate - Monthly	\$1,447	\$1,308	\$850
FCCH Part-Time Average Market Rate - Monthly	\$1,041	\$788	\$610
<b>License-Exempt Centers</b>			
License-Exempt Center Part-Time Market Rate - Monthly	na	\$260	\$590

"It [COVID-19 pandemic] really clarified that child care is essential to a healthy economy and for single-earner homes as well as double-earner homes in Santa Cruz County to get back to work. However, if the cost of childcare is more expensive than [what] you earn at work - why not stay home with your kids? So [the] high cost of childcare is prohibitive to parents joining the workforce and following their passions outside of the home."

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

### State Maximum Reimbursement Rates by Type of Care<sup>32</sup>

- State maximum reimbursement rates by type of care and age group for Title 5 providers are shown below. The State recently increased reimbursement rates, but these rates are often still below the true cost of care.

<sup>31</sup> See Table A-15, Appendix A.

<sup>32</sup> See Table A-16, Appendix A.

Chart II-12

Monthly and Daily Maximum Reimbursement Rates - 2022			
Type of Care	Infants	Preschool	School-Age
<b>Center Based Providers</b>	<b>Monthly Rates</b>		
Center-Based Care			
Center Full-Time Max. Reimbursement	\$1,683	\$1,205	\$1,069
Center Part-Time Max. Reimbursement	\$1,141	\$772	\$498
<b>FCCH Providers</b>			
FCCH Full-Time Max. Reimbursement	\$1,132	\$1,003	\$759
FCCH Part-Time Max. Reimbursement	\$760	\$677	\$584

### Self-Sufficiency by Household Type and Size<sup>33</sup>

- The chart below summarizes the typical household expenses by household type and size for Santa Cruz County with a focus on single-parent and two-parent households with children. The analysis shows the living wage needed to support these expenses on an hourly, monthly, and annual basis. Child care costs as a percentage of monthly income are shown.
- Even with a “living wage,” child care costs equal to 26% of monthly income. For families that make less than a “living wage,” child care costs can consume a large portion of their household income.

Chart II-13

Self-Sufficiency by Household Type and Size - Santa Cruz County					
Item	1 Adult No Children	1 Adult, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler	1 Adult, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler, 1 School Age	2 Adults, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler	2 Adults, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler, 1 School Age
<b>HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES</b>					
Rent	\$2,198	\$2,897	\$3,785	\$2,897	\$3,785
Child Care	\$0	\$3,000	\$3,941	\$3,000	\$3,941
Other Household Expenses	\$2,149	\$5,404	\$7,245	\$5,724	\$7,390
<b>Total Household Expenses</b>	<b>\$4,347</b>	<b>\$11,301</b>	<b>\$14,970</b>	<b>\$11,621</b>	<b>\$15,116</b>
<b>SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD</b>					
Hourly Wage (per adult)	\$24.70	\$64.21	\$85.06	\$33.01	\$42.94
Monthly Wage	\$4,347	\$11,301	\$14,970	\$11,621	\$15,116
Annual Wage	\$52,163	\$135,615	\$179,645	\$139,452	\$181,390
Emergency Savings (Monthly)	\$151	\$732	\$1,147	\$288	\$419
<b>Child Care as % of Monthly Income</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>26%</b>

<sup>33</sup> See Table A-17, Appendix A.

### Quality Counts Participation<sup>34</sup>

- Currently, there are 46 child care centers and 60 Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) participating in the County's Quality Counts Program, or a total of 106. As of 2023, 39 centers have been rated, seven are unrated; 33 FCCHs have been rated, and 27 are unrated. This represents 31% of total providers in 2023. About 8% are rated Tier 3, 54% at Tier 4, and 5% at Tier 5, the highest rating level.

**Chart II-14**

Quality Counts Participation - 2023						
Type of Provider	Number of Participant Providers - 2023	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5
Child Care Centers Participating and Rated	39	0	0	0	33	5
<b>Total Centers Participating</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
Family Child Care Sites Participating and Rated	33	0	0	9	24	0
<b>Total FCCHs Participating</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Sites in Quality Counts</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>5</b>
Percent Rated	68%	0%	0%	8%	54%	5%
<b>Total Providers Sites</b>	<b>343</b>					
<b>Percent Participation</b>	<b>31%</b>					

### Transitional Kindergarten<sup>35</sup>

- Currently, there are 544 4-year-olds in Transitional Kindergarten (TK) in the County. This represents about 17% of the total 4-year-olds in the County, which are 3,275 children. The following chart summarizes the number of 4-year-olds in TK by region. Some of these 4-year-olds would normally be in community-based preschools for this analysis and have been moved into School Age care for this analysis.

“Have a more collaborative environment in the preschool community and help parents understand what their choices are more. Help parents to know what they should look for in quality provision.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

<sup>34</sup> See Table A-19, Appendix A.

<sup>35</sup> Data was collected by the Childhood Advisory Council Staff during March 2023 from local school districts. The percent of 4-year-olds by region is the average for each region; for Pajaro Valley USD, TK students are allocated to each school site equally as individual school site data is not available. See Table A-21, Appendix A.

Chart II-15

Santa Cruz County TK Enrollment by Region			
Area	Enrolled number of TK 2022/2023	No. of 4-Year-Olds	Percent in TK in 22/23
San Lorenzo Valley	76	483	15.7%
North County	247	1,043	23.7%
Mid-County	100	410	24.4%
South County	121	1,339	9.0%
<b>Santa Cruz County</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>3,275</b>	<b>16.6%</b>

### 3. Child Care Supply and Demand - 2023

This section summarizes the 2023 supply and demand for child care in the County as a whole and by the four regions, San Lorenzo Valley, North County, Mid-County, and South County. The detailed analysis is included in **Appendix B**. The demographic estimates are from the Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool, and American Community Survey, and the supply data is from the Santa Cruz County Child Development Resources Center and includes other local data as needed.

#### Santa Cruz County Supply and Demand

- **Total Children:** As of 2023, there are an estimated 273,473 people in Santa Cruz County, of which 40,225 are children ages 0 to 12 years old, or 14.7% of the total population.

Chart II-16

Current Santa Cruz County Demographics	2023	% Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>273,473</b>	<b>100%</b>
Children by Age Group		
Infant/Toddler	5,685	2.1%
Preschool	9,401	3.4%
School Age	25,139	9.2%
<b>Total Children 0 to 12 Years Old</b>	<b>40,225</b>	<b>14.7%</b>

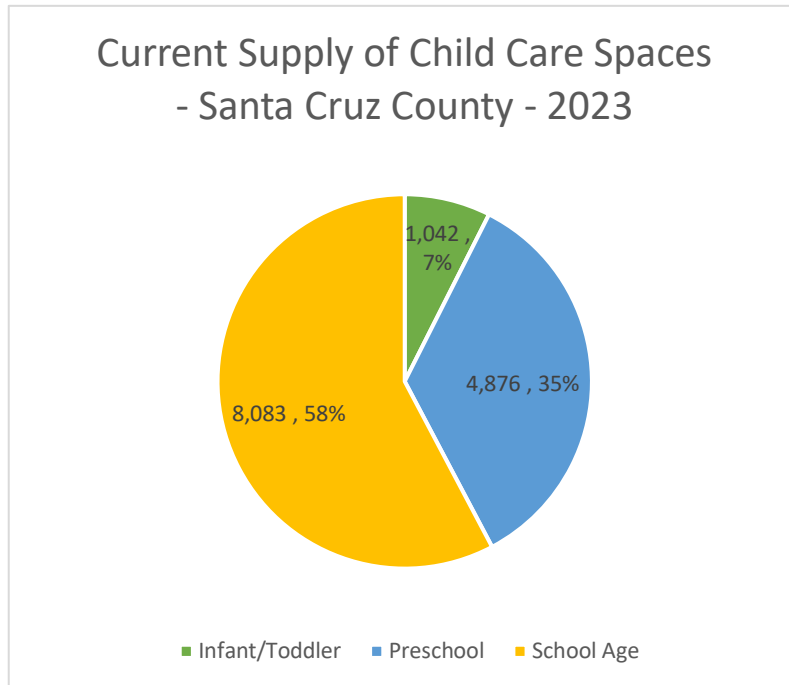
- **Child Care Supply as of 2023:** There are approximately 14,000 child care spaces in Santa Cruz County for children from 0 to 12 years old. Of these, about 2,858, or 20%, are associated with Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs), 37%, or about 5,114 spaces, are associated with licensed child care centers, and 6,029 spaces are associated with license-exempt providers or 43% of all supply. School Age supply includes Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP) spaces. By age

group, 7% of spaces serve children under 2 years old or Infants/Toddlers, 35% Preschool children, and 58% School Age children (see below and **Exhibits II-3 and II-4**).

**Chart II-17**

2023 Child Care Supply - Santa Cruz County					
Age Group	FCCH	Center-Based	License Exempt	Totals	% of Spaces
<b>Spaces</b>					
Infant/Toddler	636	383	23	1,042	7%
Preschool	1,272	3,511	93	4,876	35%
School Age	950	1,220	5,913	8,083	58%
<b>Total Spaces</b>	<b>2,858</b>	<b>5,114</b>	<b>6,029</b>	<b>14,001</b>	<b>100%</b>
% Distribution	20%	37%	43%	100%	
<b>No. of Providers</b>	237	106	31	374	

**Exhibit II-3**



- Total Demand for Child Care in 2023:** The total demand for licensed child care spaces as of 2022 equals about 28,700. The breakdown is 14% Infants/Toddlers, 22% Preschool, and 64% School Age. It should be noted that not all children will need licensed or license-exempt child care; this analysis uses Labor Force Participation Rates to calculate demand. Some 4-year-olds are included in School Age care because they are in Transitional Kindergarten (TK).

Chart II-18

Santa Cruz County - Demand, Shortage or Surplus of Spaces and % of Demand Met				
Age Group	Total Spaces Needed	% of Demand	(Shortage) or Surplus - 2023	% of Demand Met - 2023
Infant/Toddler	4,013	14%	(2,971)	26%
Preschool	6,258	22%	(1,382)	78%
School Age	18,408	64%	(10,325)	44%
<b>Total Demand</b>	<b>28,678</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(14,677)</b>	<b>49%</b>

- **Infant/Toddler Care Shortage or Unmet Need - 2023:** In Santa Cruz County, there is currently a shortage of 2,971 Infant/Toddler (birth up to 2 years old) spaces with only 26% of demand currently met.<sup>36</sup> The shortage varies by location, as discussed below.
- **Preschool Shortage or Unmet Need – 2023:** For Preschool children (2 to 4 years old), there is a shortage of 1,382 spaces, with 78% of demand being met.<sup>37</sup> This is in part due to some 4-year-olds attending TK.
- **School Age Shortage or Unmet Need - 2023:** For School Age children (ages 5 to 12 years old), there is a shortage of 10,325 spaces in Santa Cruz County. Approximately 44% of total demand is met with the existing supply of School Age spaces.<sup>38</sup>
- **Total Shortage or Unmet Need - 2023:** Table II-1 summarizes the supply and demand analysis for the County and each region. Overall, there is a shortage of about 14,700 spaces across all age groups in the County, or, 51% of children that need a child care space do not have one, and 49% of demand for child care for all ages is being met. It is important to note that spaces in one age group cannot serve other age groups and that spaces in one geographic community do not mean it is feasible for families in neighboring communities to utilize them. But this measure is an important overall indicator of whether the child care needs of children and parents are being met (see Exhibit II-5).

<sup>36</sup> Demand for, or shortage of, spaces refer to licensed and license-exempt spaces.

<sup>37</sup> Demand for, or shortage of, spaces refer to licensed and license-exempt spaces.

<sup>38</sup> Demand for, or shortage of, spaces refer to licensed and license-exempt spaces.

**Exhibit II-4**

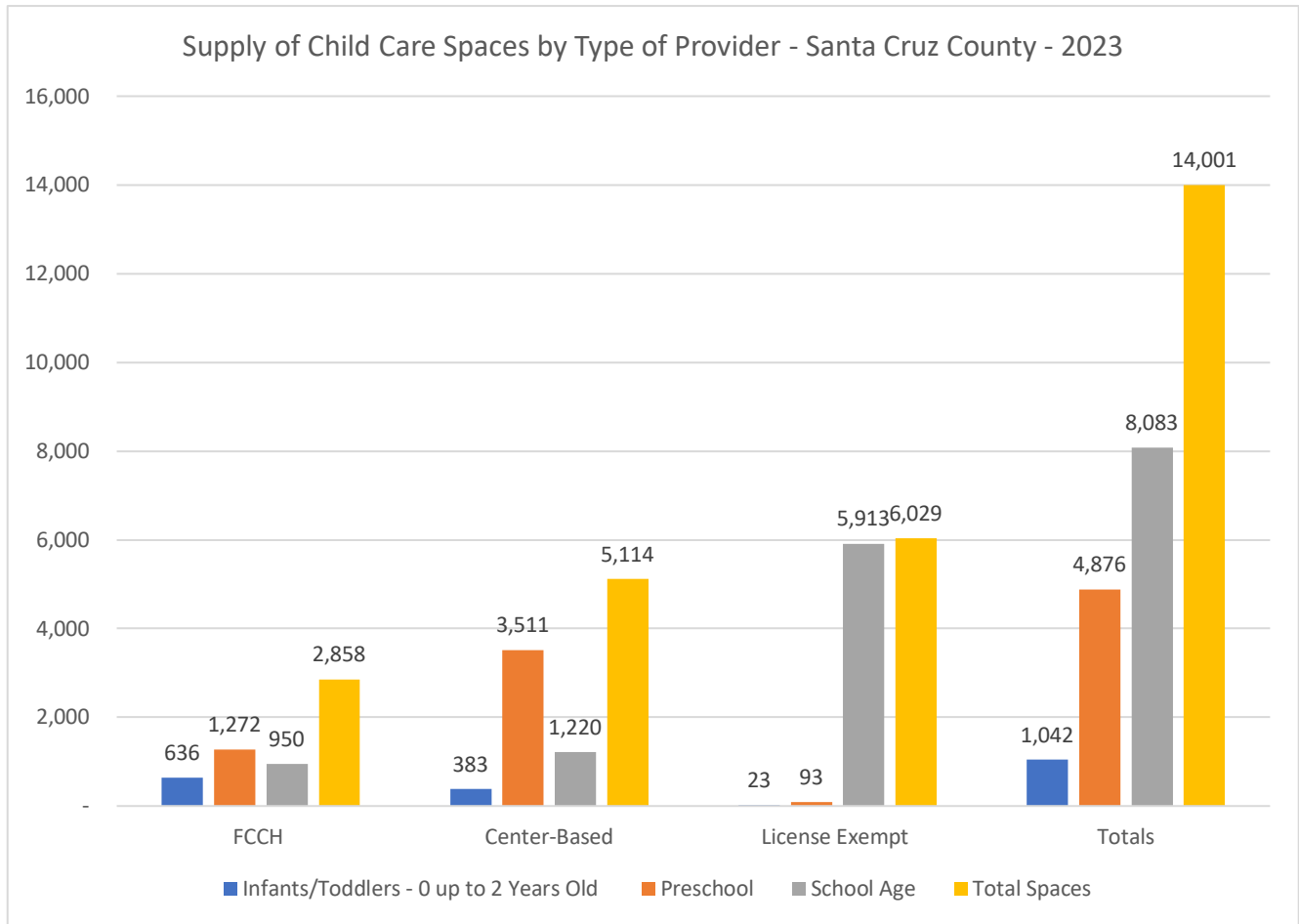


Exhibit II-5

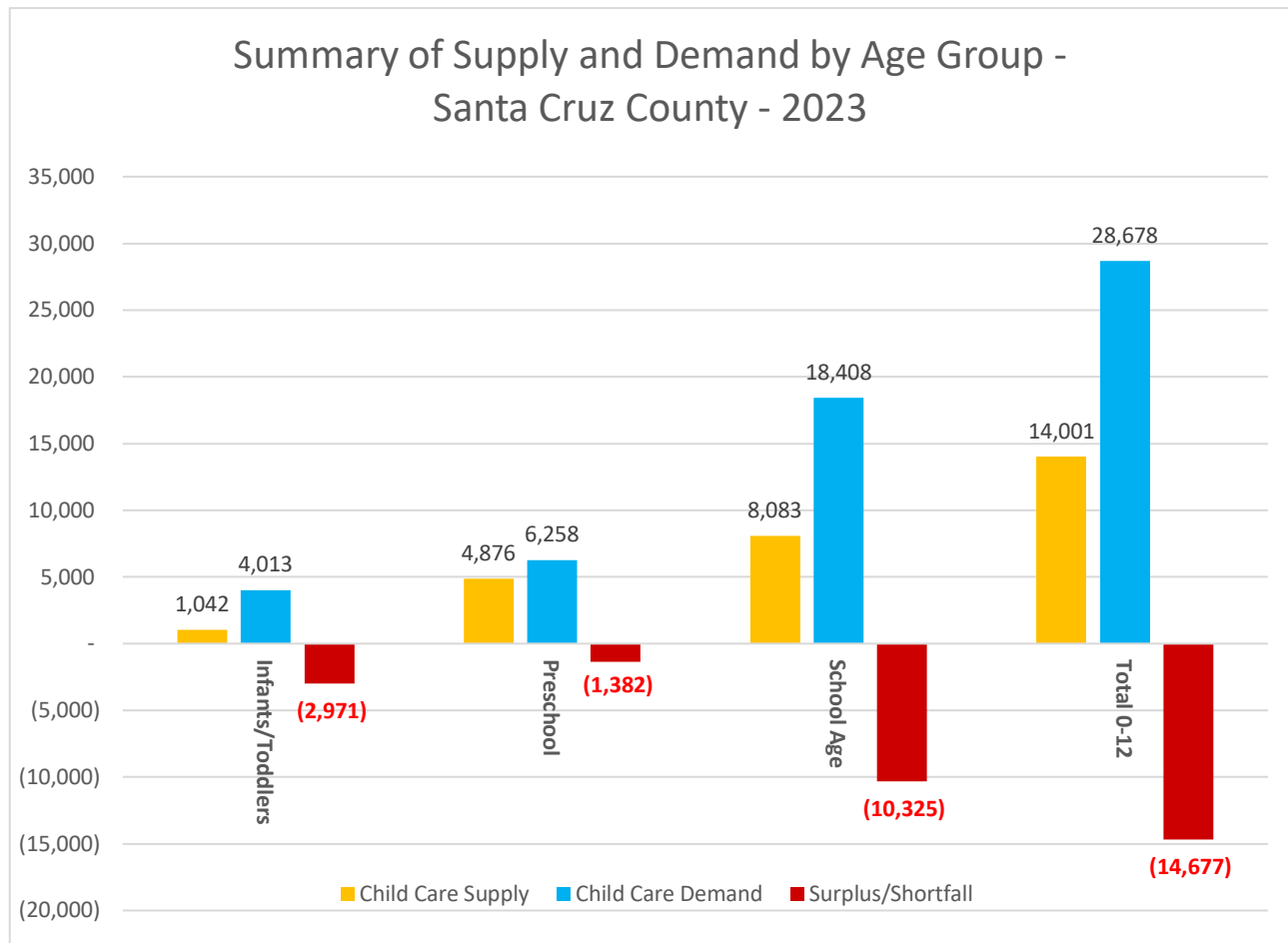


Table II-1

Summary of Countywide Supply and Demand of Child Care and Unmet Need - 2023

Santa Cruz County Child Care Strategic Plan - 2023

Item	Infants/Toddlers 0 to 24 Months	Preschool 2 to 4 Years	School Age 5 to 12 Years	Total 0 to 12 Years
<b>COUNTYWIDE DEMAND AND SUPPLY - 2023</b>				
Total Child Care Demand	4,013	6,258	18,408	28,678
Percent Distribution	14%	22%	64%	100%
Total Supply of Spaces	1,042	4,876	8,083	14,001
Percent Distribution	7%	35%	58%	100%
<b>Surplus (Shortfall)</b>	<b>(2,971)</b>	<b>(1,382)</b>	<b>(10,325)</b>	<b>(14,677)</b>
Percent Distribution	20%	9%	70%	100%
<b>Percent of Demand Met</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>SAN LORENZO VALLEY DEMAND AND SUPPLY - 2023</b>				
Total Child Care Demand	541	875	2,656	4,071
Percent Distribution	13%	21%	65%	100%
Total Supply of Spaces	53	211	230	494
Percent Distribution	11%	43%	47%	100%
<b>Surplus (Shortfall)</b>	<b>(488)</b>	<b>(664)</b>	<b>(2,426)</b>	<b>(3,577)</b>
Percent Distribution	14%	19%	68%	100%
<b>Percent of Demand Met</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>NORTH COUNTY DEMAND AND SUPPLY - 2023</b>				
Total Child Care Demand	1,443	2,120	6,814	10,377
Percent Distribution	14%	20%	66%	100%
Total Supply of Spaces	330	1,859	2,434	4,623
Percent Distribution	7%	40%	53%	100%
<b>Surplus (Shortfall)</b>	<b>(1,113)</b>	<b>(261)</b>	<b>(4,380)</b>	<b>(5,754)</b>
Percent Distribution	19%	5%	76%	100%
<b>Percent of Demand Met</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>MID-COUNTY DEMAND AND SUPPLY - 2023</b>				
Total Child Care Demand	467	686	2,606	3,759
Percent Distribution	12%	18%	69%	100%
Total Supply of Spaces	86	698	475	1,259
Percent Distribution	7%	55%	38%	100%
<b>Surplus (Shortfall)</b>	<b>(381)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>(2,131)</b>	<b>(2,500)</b>
Percent Distribution	15%	0%	85%	100%
<b>Percent of Demand Met</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>102%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>SOUTH COUNTY DEMAND AND SUPPLY - 2023</b>				
Total Child Care Demand	1,562	2,577	6,331	10,471
Percent Distribution	15%	25%	60%	100%
Total Supply of Spaces	573	2,108	4,944	7,625
Percent Distribution	8%	28%	65%	100%
<b>Surplus (Shortfall)</b>	<b>(989)</b>	<b>(469)</b>	<b>(1,387)</b>	<b>(2,846)</b>
Percent Distribution	35%	16%	49%	100%
<b>Percent of Demand Met</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>73%</b>

Note: a red negative number represent a shortage. A negative red percent represents a surplus.

Source: Brion Economics, Inc.

The following sections summarize the supply and demand for child care by region. More detail for each region is provided in **Appendix B**.

## San Lorenzo Valley Supply and Demand

Chart II-19

San Lorenzo Valley Region Demographics	2023	% Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>29,966</b>	<b>100%</b>
Children by Age Group		
Infant/Toddler	776	2.6%
Preschool	1,330	4.4%
School Age	3,505	11.7%
<b>Total Children 0 to 12 Years Old</b>	<b>5,611</b>	<b>18.7%</b>

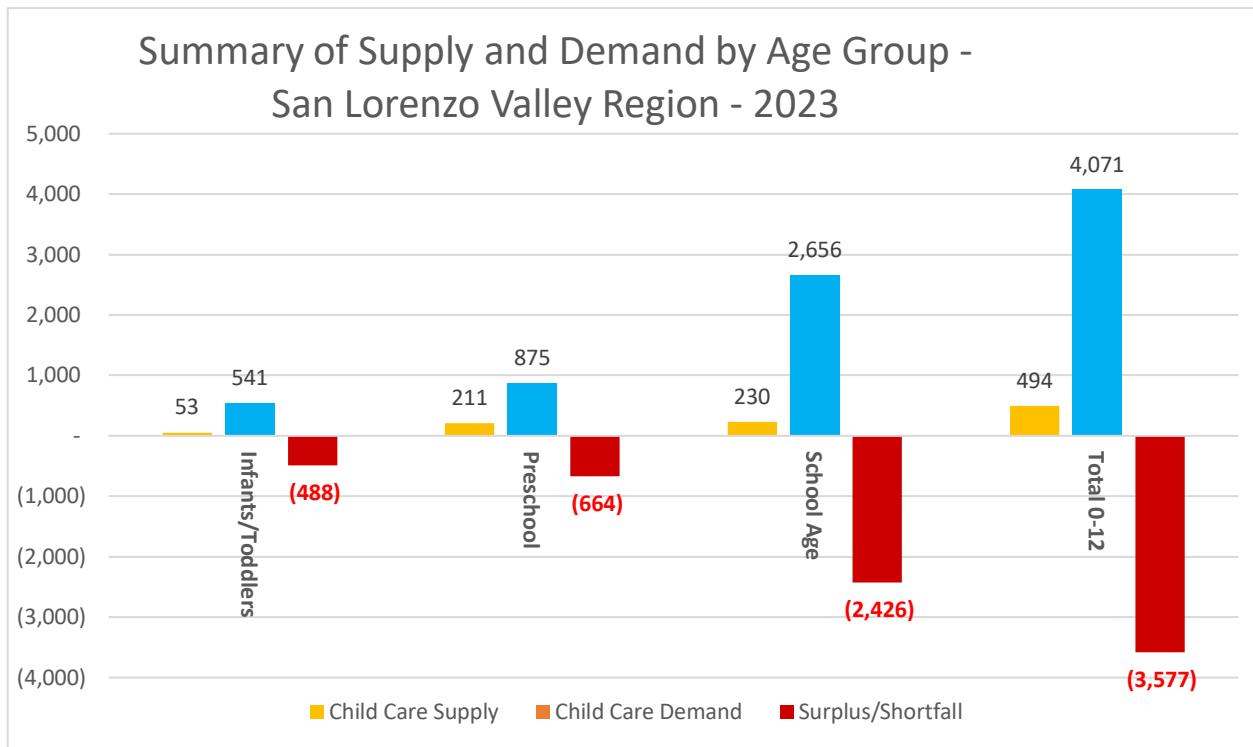
Chart II-20

2023 Child Care Supply - San Lorenzo Valley Region					
Age Group	FCCH	Center-Based	License Exempt	Totals	% of Spaces
<b>Spaces</b>					
Infant/Toddler	24	29	-	53	11%
Preschool	48	163	-	211	43%
School Age	30	51	149	230	47%
<b>Total Supply</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>100%</b>
% Distribution	21%	49%	30%	100%	
<b>No. of Providers</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	

Chart II-21

2023 Demand and Surplus (Shortage) - San Lorenzo Valley Region				
Age Group	Total Spaces Needed	% Distribution	(Shortage) or Surplus - 2023	% of Demand Met - 2023
Infant/Toddler	541	13%	(488)	10%
Preschool	875	21%	(664)	24%
School Age	2,656	65%	(2,426)	9%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,071</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(3,577)</b>	<b>12%</b>

**Exhibit II-6**



## North County Supply and Demand

**Chart II-22**

North County Region Demographics	2023	% Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>120,564</b>	<b>100%</b>
Children by Age Group		
Infant/Toddler	1,976	14.1%
Preschool	3,151	22.4%
School Age	8,916	63.5%
<b>Total Children 0 to 12 Years Old</b>	<b>14,043</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

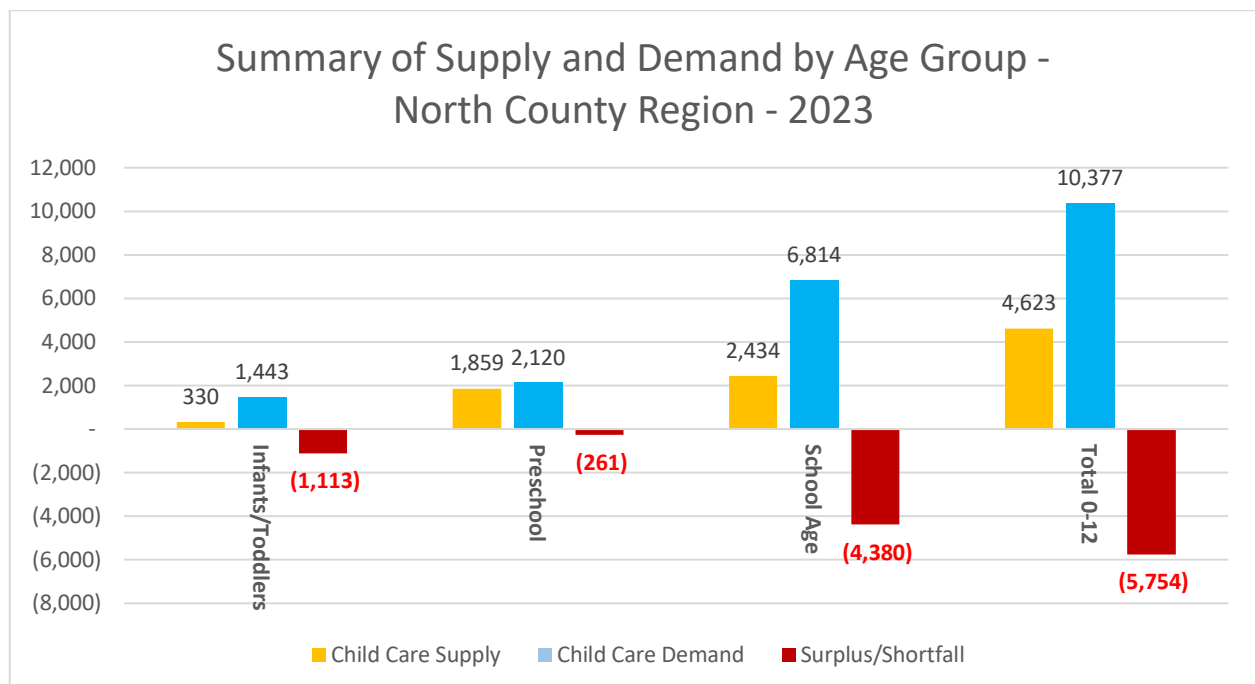
Chart II-23

2023 Child Care Supply - North County Region					
Age Group	FCCH	Center-Based	License Exempt	Totals	% of Spaces
<b>Spaces</b>					
Infant/Toddler	124	193	13	330	7%
Preschool	248	1,555	56	1,859	40%
School Age	164	833	1,437	2,434	53%
<b>Total Supply</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>2,581</b>	<b>1,506</b>	<b>4,623</b>	<b>100%</b>
% Distribution	12%	56%	33%	100%	
<b>No. of Providers</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>117</b>	

Chart II-24

2023 Demand and Surplus (Shortage) - North County Region				
Age Group	Total Spaces Needed	% Distribution	(Shortage) or Surplus - 2023	% of Demand Met - 2023
Infant/Toddler	1,443	14%	(1,113)	23%
Preschool	2,120	20%	(261)	88%
School Age	6,814	66%	(4,380)	36%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,377</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(5,754)</b>	<b>45%</b>

Exhibit II-7



## Mid-County Supply and Demand

Chart II-25

Mid-County Region Demographics	2023	% Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>45,427</b>	<b>100%</b>
Children by Age Group		
Infant/Toddler	767	14.1%
Preschool	1,227	22.6%
School Age	3,444	63.3%
<b>Total Children 0 to 12 Years Old</b>	<b>5,438</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

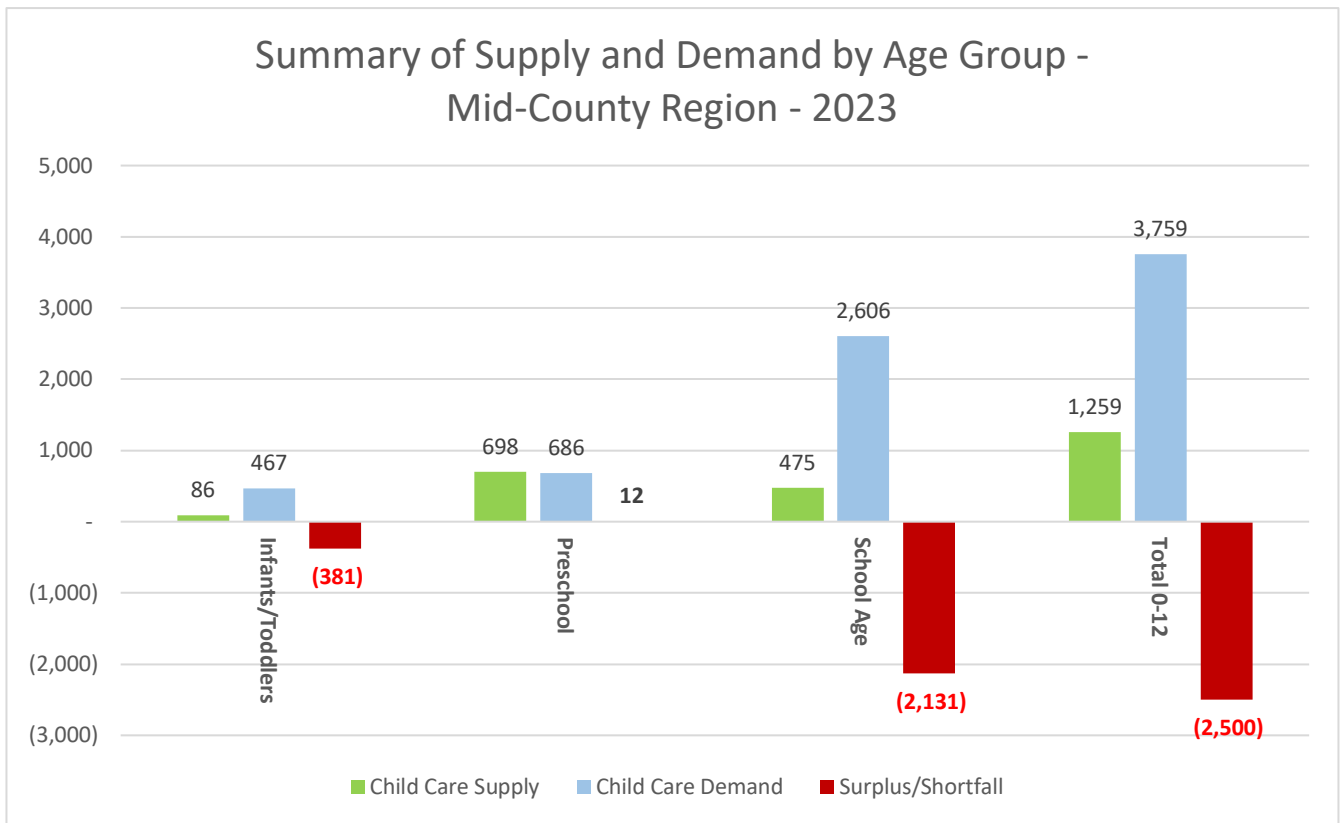
Chart II-26

2023 Child Care Supply - Mid-County Region					
Age Group	FCCH	Center-Based	License Exempt	Totals	% of Spaces
<b>Spaces</b>					
Infant/Toddler	26	60	-	86	7%
Preschool	52	630	16	698	55%
School Age	38	336	101	475	38%
<b>Total Supply</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>1,026</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>1,259</b>	<b>100%</b>
% Distribution	9%	81%	9%	100%	
<b>No. of Providers</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	

Chart II-27

2023 Demand and Surplus (Shortage) - Mid-County Region				
Age Group	Total Spaces Needed	% of Demand	(Shortage) or Surplus - 2023	% of Demand Met - 2023
Infant/Toddler	467	12%	(381)	18%
Preschool	686	18%	12	102%
School Age	2,606	69%	(2,131)	18%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,759</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(2,500)</b>	<b>33%</b>

**Exhibit II-8**



## South County Supply and Demand

**Chart II-28**

South County Region Demographics	2023	% Distribution
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>77,516</b>	100%
Children by Age Group		
Infant/Toddler	2,166	14%
Preschool	3,693	24%
School Age	9,274	61%
<b>Total Children 0 to 12 Years Old</b>	<b>15,133</b>	<b>100%</b>

Chart II-29

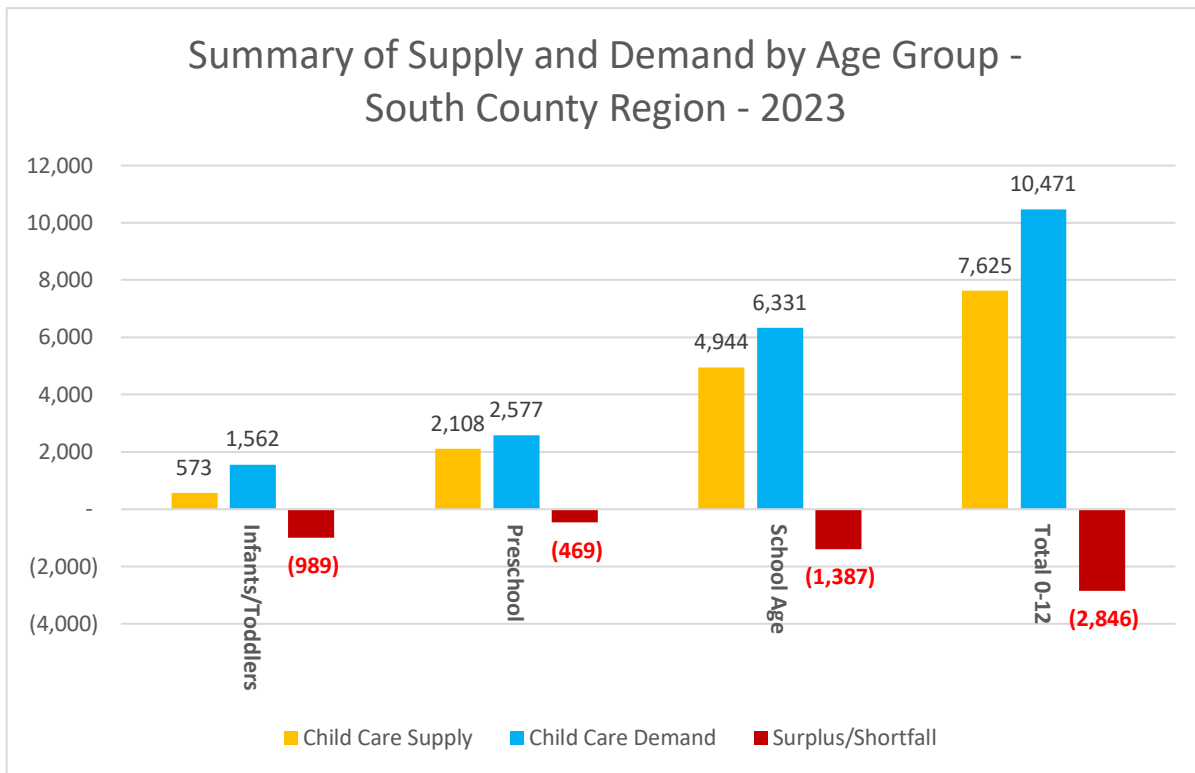
2023 Child Care Supply - South County Region					
Age Group	FCCH	Center-Based	License Exempt	Totals	% of Spaces
<b>Spaces</b>					
Infant/Toddler	462	101	10	573	8%
Preschool	924	1,163	21	2,108	28%
School Age	718	-	4,226	4,944	65%
<b>Total Supply</b>	<b>2,104</b>	<b>1,264</b>	<b>4,257</b>	<b>7,625</b>	<b>100%</b>
% Distribution	28%	17%	56%	100%	
<b>No. of Providers</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>204</b>	

Chart II-30

2023 Demand and Surplus (Shortage) - South County Region				
Age Group	Total Spaces Needed	% of Demand	(Shortage) or Surplus - 2023	% of Demand Met - 2023
Infant/Toddler	1,562	15%	(989)	37%
Preschool	2,577	25%	(469)	82%
School Age	6,331	60%	(1,387)	78%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,471</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(2,846)</b>	<b>73%</b>



Exhibit II-9



## 4. Subsidized Child Care Needs - 2023

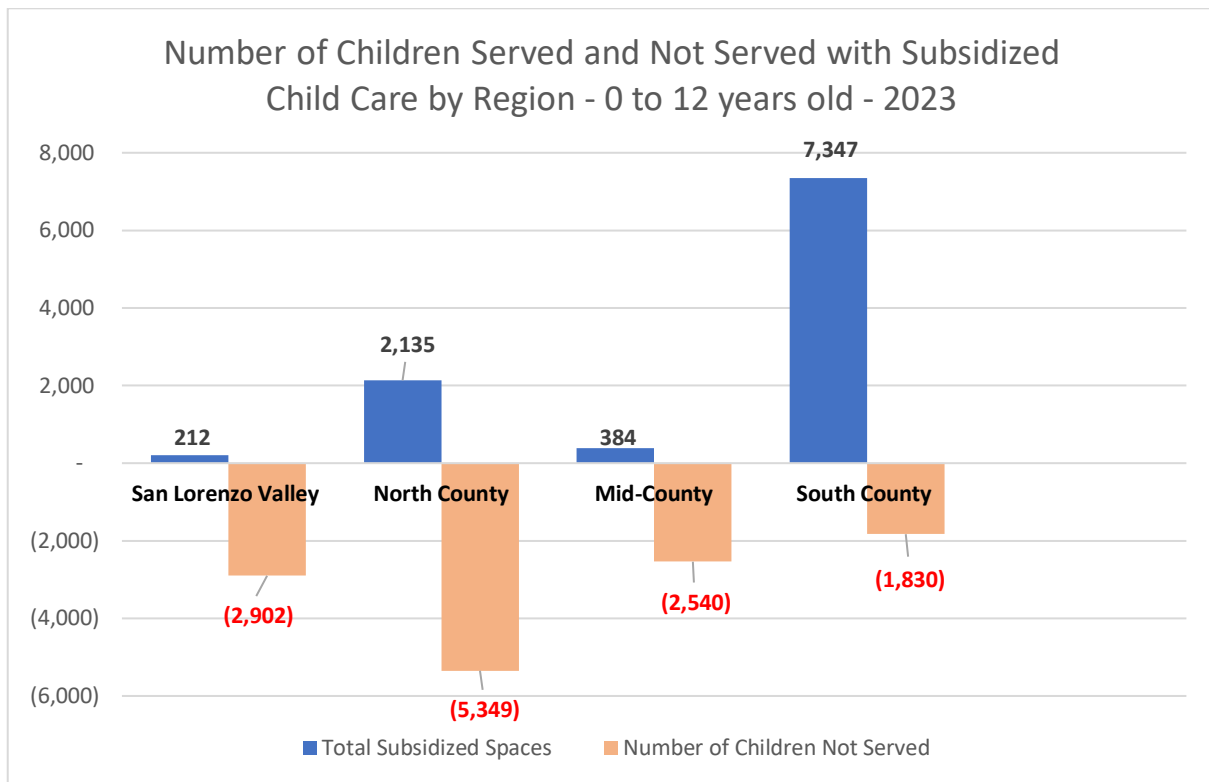
The CAC is required to prepare a Zip Code Priorities analysis each year for submittal to the State. The analysis estimates the need for subsidized care compared to the availability of subsidized spaces by age group and zip code. The following chart summarizes the results of this analysis for 2023 by Region and the County as a whole. As shown, there are about 23,000 children eligible for subsidized care and about 10,100 subsidized spaces available in the County. Overall, 45% of the children eligible for subsidized child care have a space available. This rate varies by age group as well. For Infants/Toddlers, only 15% of children eligible have a space available. For Preschool, 59% of children have a space available or almost two-thirds. For School Age children, 51% of children have a subsidized space available. This analysis is to help the State allocate funding for additional subsidized care by zip code. Each age group by zip code is given a priority of 1 to 3, with 1 being the highest priority.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See Table A-21, Appendix A.

Chart II-31

Summary of Zip Code Analysis by Age and Region - 2023							
Region	Number of Children Eligible for Subsidized Care	Available Subsidized Child Care Spaces			Total Subsidized Spaces	Number of Children Not Served	% of Eligible Children Not Served
		Infants - Toddlers	Preschool	School-Age			
San Lorenzo Valley	3,114	8	116	88	212	(2,902)	93%
North County	7,484	74	841	1,220	2,135	(5,349)	71%
Mid-County	2,924	36	221	127	384	(2,540)	87%
South County	9,177	717	1,863	4,767	7,347	(1,830)	20%
Total County	22,699	835	3,041	6,202	10,078	(12,621)	56%

Exhibit II-10



**Exhibit II-10** compares the number of subsidized spaces to the unmet need for spaces. **Exhibit II-11** provides a map by zip code of the shortages.<sup>40</sup>

Subsidized care is provided by a number of programs and public agencies, each with its own income-qualifying requirements or limitations, ages, times of the year, hours per day, etc., including:

<sup>40</sup> Note a few zip codes have a slight surplus of spaces relative to need.

- California State Preschool Program (CSPP), serving children 3 to 5 years old full day, part day, and in Family Child Care Homes;
- General Child Care and Development (CCTR) Expansion, generally serving Infants and Toddlers, and School Age children, but 0 to 12 years old overall;
- Early Head Start, serving children 0 to 3 years old;
- Head Start, serving children 3 to 5 years old;
- Migrant Early Head Start and Head Start, serving the same age groups but migrant children;
- Migrant Family Child Care Homes, serving children 3 to 5 years old;
- Migrant CSPP, serving children 3 to 5 years old;
- CalWORKs Stages 1, 2, and 3, serving children 0 to 12 years old;
- Alternative Payment (AP) Voucher Program, serving children 0 to 12 years old;
- Early Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP), serving school-age children, 4 to 12 years old;
- After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program, providing after-school programs for school-age children, 4 to 12 years old;
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, providing funding for after-school programs for school-age children, 4 to 12 years old; and
- Other miscellaneous programs and funding support for families.

**Exhibit II-12** summarizes the number of subsidized spaces by type of program. This array of subsidized programs is complex and challenging for many families to understand and access. Often families with the greatest need do not qualify, as they are over the income limits given the cost of living in Santa Cruz County. The State has recently increased the income limits for state-run programs to 85% of State Median Income (SMI) and there is some expectation that it will increase to 100% of SMI.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Table A-22, Appendix A.

### Exhibit II-11

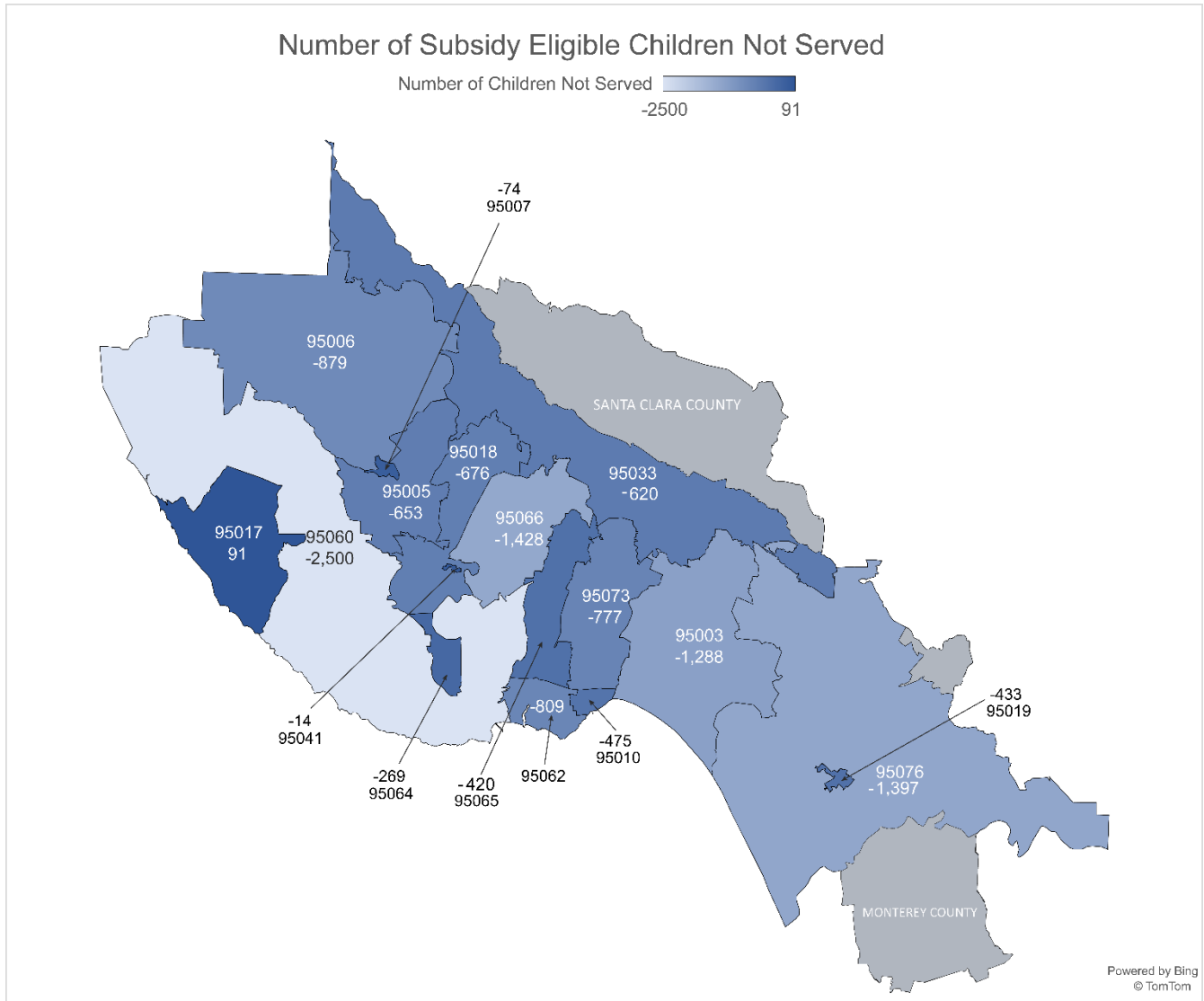
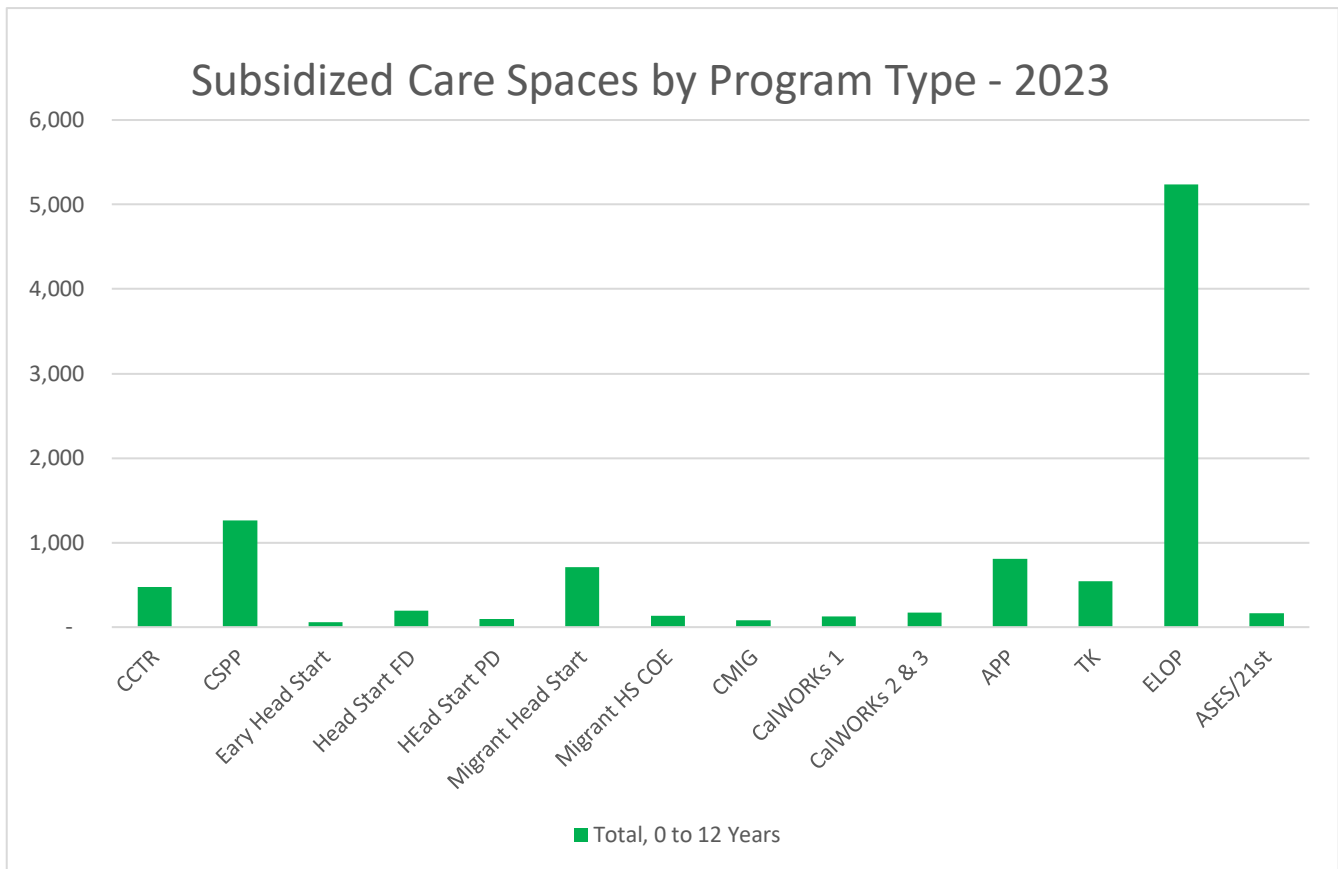


Exhibit II-12



## 5. Transitional Kindergarten - Universal Prekindergarten

Several changes in the delivery of early care and education have taken place in recent years, and they are having a large impact on the early care and education industry. The State’s implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) in the last couple of years has shifted many 4-year-olds from private or state-funded programs, leaving existing preschools with fewer children to serve. From many parents’ perspectives, this is a blessing as there is now free “preschool” available for their 4-year-olds. But for many working parents, 6 hours of care per day is not enough. Thus, wrap-around care is needed to support these families. **Universal Preschool wrap-around care is now a pressing need in the County.**

### What is Transitional Kindergarten?

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is the first year in a 2-year Kindergarten program and began its rollout in California in the 2021-2022 school year. It is a free program for all eligible children, regardless of income, and classes take place at neighborhood elementary schools. TK is a parental choice, and it is not required to attend Kindergarten if the parents prefer their child(ren) to remain in subsidized care or other preschool/child care programs. Children with birthdays between September 2 and December 2 were able to start attending TK

through the first round of Implementation grants and Facilities grants. The Districts were also given grants for teachers to begin receiving the additional required training, which was extended into 2023 when more robust expansion began by including children with birthdays from Sept. 2 through February 2. Class sizes were limited to 24 students with a 12:1 student-to-teacher ratio, and 2023 is also the last year for teachers to complete the necessary training requirements. By the end of the 2023 school year, children with birthdays Sept. 2 through April 2 will be eligible for enrollment, class size will decrease to a 10:1 student-to-teacher ratio depending on funding, and all teachers must possess the credentials and specified ECE training. In the 2024-2025 school year, TK will expand to include children with birthdays from Sept. 2 through June 2, and by the 2025-2026 school year, all children who turn age 4 by September 1<sup>st</sup> would be eligible to enroll.<sup>42</sup>

Enrollment and eligibility are determined at the local school level. Parents need to contact their local schools or school district to inquire about TK enrollment and start the process. Not all elementary schools offer TK, but those receiving state funding are required to offer TK. Districts that are considered “basic aid” schools and do not receive state funding are not required to offer TK. Parents can choose whether to enroll their child(ren) in a half-day (3-hour) or full-day (6-hour) program. As Kindergarten has become more rigorous than it once was, TK is considered a stepping stone to provide the intellectual and social stimulation that a developing child’s brain needs.<sup>43</sup>

Parents of 4-year-old children may choose to enroll their child in any available TK program, CSPP, Head Start, private preschool, or any other prekindergarten program for which the family is eligible. TK is not mandatory for children; however, it is the only option that will be universally available and free of cost for all families with children who turn 4 years old by September 1st starting in the 2025–26 school year.<sup>44</sup> It’s important to note that Some parents may continue to choose community-based programs and CSPP programs for their 4-year-olds.

### Current TK Participation

In Santa Cruz County as of Spring 2023, 544 4-year-olds are enrolled in TK, which represents about 17% of all estimated 4-year-olds in the County. North County has the largest number of 4-year-olds in TK at 1,043 or 45% of the total. About 24% of these are in TK. South County has the lowest percentage of 4-year-olds in TK at 10.1%. San Lorenzo Valley has about 16% of 4-year-olds in TK.

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<sup>42</sup> TK Policy Map. <https://TKcalifornia.org> . <https://tkcalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/tk-policy-map.pdf> Viewed April 2023.

<sup>43</sup> D’Souza, Karen (2022, December 12). *10 things California parents should know about transitional kindergarten* | Quick Guide. EdSource.com. <https://edsource.org/2022/10-things-california-parents-should-know-about-transitional-kindergarten/682477>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/kinderfaq.asp#universal>

## Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery System

The State Department of Education recently created a grant program for UPK planning. The purpose of this grant program is to expand access universally to preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-old children across the state through a mixed-delivery system. The program funds Local Planning Councils (LPCs) and Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies to support the mixed delivery system of Universal Prekindergarten (UPK). The grant focus is to support the relationship building between the Local Education Agencies (LEAs), the County Office of Education (COE), the LPC, and the R&R. The grantee will partner with the LEA and COE to align plans for the expansion of UPK.

Santa Cruz County's mixed-delivery system offers a variety of early learning and care settings to allow parents and guardians an authentic choice to meet the needs of their families. Working families may choose Transitional Kindergarten or preschool for their children in different types of settings. The local UPK Mixed-Delivery Workgroup will identify program types available to families and how to develop relationships with schools offering before and after-school care and/or preschool care options. The UPK Mixed-Delivery Work Group will develop clear access and information about before and after-school options, and preschool options, based upon input from a select local UPK workgroup. The UPK local plan will align with the ELOP and P&I grants approved by CDE for Santa Cruz County Office of Education in 2021-2022.<sup>45</sup>

## TK and UPK Challenges:

There are several challenges facing most school districts and counties in California. With only 13 months' notice before the first phase of the TK rollout began, school districts scrambled to find credentialed teachers, aides, staff, and support, as well as additional classrooms to meet the requirements of this mandate. The COVID-19 Pandemic saw an exodus from the teaching profession, and this left school districts to face the big challenge of staffing this new program. Districts moved teachers who were doing other jobs into the roles required for TK. Now, districts are worried about having enough credentialed teachers during the next few years of the expansion, and this has created a domino effect of pulling these people from other child care programs whose teachers are ideal candidates for higher-paying positions with the school districts. All of the districts are competing for the same pool of teachers, and this creates an undue burden on other child care programs to be able to meet their requirements and demand for child care spaces.

"It would be nice to have the State of California allow preschools to receive the monies to cover TK in our settings and not just have the elementary school and their after-school programs get all those funds." – 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

By the 2025-2026 school year, 500,000 California 4-year-olds will be eligible for TK and more than 300,000 are likely to be enrolled according to the Learning Policy Institute. The Institute estimates California will need 12,000 to 16,000 Transitional Kindergarten teachers and between 16,000 and 20,000 assistants for those classrooms. There are several ways to become eligible to teach Transitional Kindergarten. A teacher with a multiple-subject credential with 24 units of early childhood development completed by August or a child

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<sup>45</sup> See <https://childhoodadvisorycouncil.org/upk-mixed-delivery-workgroup/>

development permit is qualified. There is also a temporary waiver available to teach for those with preschool experience, a Bachelor's degree, and early childhood development credits. In addition, the State is developing a new credential approved by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The PK-3 Early Childhood Education (ECE) credential will cover Transitional Kindergarten through third grade. School districts across the State are in different phases of the expansion with San Diego Unified opening to all 4-year-olds this school year, but most districts are moving slowly through the rollout due to shortages in qualified teachers and staff.<sup>46</sup>

The need for new TK teachers is putting pressure on private and state-run preschool programs and Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs). There is currently a shortage of child care teachers due to the lower wages associated with the field. Many providers report not being able to open all their classrooms due to a lack of staff. The pay differentials between preschool teachers and TK teachers are significant, at almost double the salary of the average preschool teacher. The movement of 4-year-olds out of the Preschool age category, which is generally 2.5 years old to 4 years old and can include 5-year-olds, may result in the need for Preschool providers to focus on children ages 2 and 3 years old overall, which have higher teacher-to-student ratios. In many counties, there is now a surplus of preschool spaces as 4-year-olds move into TK programs in their communities. As noted above, currently, only 16.8% of 4-year-olds in the County are participating in TK. Not all school sites have implemented TK programs in the County.

For working parents, TK does not offer enough hours per day to make the program work for them. This is particularly true for single working parents. The UPK wrap-around program should be able to help in this regard but will also take time to implement.



<sup>46</sup> Aguilera, Elizabeth (2022 November 2). *Schools scramble to find teachers as California expands transitional kindergarten*. CalMatters.org. <https://calmatters.org/early-childhood-education/2022/11/california-transitional-kindergarten/>

## 6. Transportation and Access

Access to child care is often constrained by the lack of public transportation for those parents who do not have a personal vehicle, or the family only has one vehicle which is not available during the time child care is needed due to one parent using it to get to work. Some parts of Santa Cruz County lack regular bus service. The co-location of child care near transportation hubs and bus stops would help remedy this situation.

Santa Cruz Metro (SCM) runs 24 routes and maintains four transit stations, runs fixed-route and paratransit services throughout Santa Cruz County, and also offers commuter service via Highway 17 Express route.<sup>47</sup> SCM has recently experienced a shortage of bus operators and decreased its winter schedule suspending a few routes as well as some early morning and late evening routes. This suspension was due to be lifted on March 15, 2023, and the spring schedule includes additional routes to improve the riders' commute needs to address these shortages. SCM also reduced the number of buses running during "off-peak" hours. The Paratransit services are reserved for the elderly and disabled and require an eligibility assessment, and some services run free of charge.<sup>48</sup> SCM also offers School Term service (ST) that serves school students in San Lorenzo Valley, Pajaro Valley, and UCSC students. Some routes run only during the school term, and others run the full calendar year, including weekends and holidays. Some routes to and from Watsonville (Route 69W) run throughout the year, weekends may see slightly longer route times, and several other routes have been suspended. The Watsonville Circulator runs every day from Noon to 7:45 pm connecting riders to the downtown transit center and primary medical and retail destinations in Watsonville as well as providing a critical link to other local and intercity bus lines. Riders can also receive real-time route updates, maps, and notifications through [rt.scmtd.com/en/rt/scmetro.org](https://www.scmtd.com/en/rt/scmetro.org). One primary goal of SCM is to develop 175 affordable housing units at METRO-owned transit centers over the next decade. Ideally, this project would include a child care center.

A great example of co-locating child care near transit is the Via del Mar apartments. The City of Watsonville leased the Via del Mar site from the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District and then sought MidPen, a local affordable housing developer, to develop the affordable housing community with 40 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments for farmworker families earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income. Via del Mar includes a Head Start child care center for residents and their neighbors, operated by the Head Start Program. It is also within walking distance to downtown and public transportation, shopping, social services, library, schools, and other educational facilities and cultural venues.

Youth Cruz Free Fares begin on March 1<sup>st</sup> where all students K-12<sup>th</sup> grade can ride any of the 24 routes for free (except Hwy 17 Express). Eliminating the fares for students will increase access and encourage ridership as an economical and eco-friendly way to get to school, work, home, the beach, or meet friends. Interactive route maps can be found on the SCM website, which also has real-time updates and route information.<sup>49</sup> Student IDs or METRO Youth Cruz IDs are required for all students in grades 9-12. Younger students may need to give their school name and grade to the bus driver or present their METRO Youth Cruz Free ID, which is free to obtain but

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<sup>47</sup> Santa Cruz Metro website <https://www.scmtd.com/en/> Viewed April 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Santa Cruz Access website <https://www.scaccessguide.com/transportation> Viewed April 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Maps are found here <https://www.scmtd.com/en/routes/schedule/map>.

has a nominal replacement fee. This pilot program will run for one year, after which METRO and its partners will review the program's success and determine the next steps.<sup>50</sup>

The Monterey-Salinas Transit System (MSTS) has begun offering free fares to the residents of Pajaro who can board the bus at any community stop and ride for free through June 30<sup>th</sup> to assist in evacuations and other transit needs while the community rebuilds from the floods. The Surf! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit project passengers will have express service to and from work during Peak Fitness and Physical Therapy commute times, bypassing the Highway 1 corridor when most heavily congested. The MSTS has 34 fixed routes and covers 159 square miles of service area. Each route is mapped on <https://mst.org/regional/> and costs either \$1.00 or \$2.00 depending on the rider's eligibility for discounted fares. The MST Final Network plan illustrates the need for additional bus lines and routes to serve the people living in poverty so as to provide access where there are inadequate transportation options.<sup>51</sup> As part of their EcoSmart College Pass, students at the three Monterey County Colleges can ride for free as can staff and faculty of CSUMB.<sup>52</sup>

Coordinating transportation services with the location of child care centers is a critical part of increasing many families' access to care. Lower-income families and students rely on public transportation for getting to work, shopping, and accessing public services. This issue is discussed further in **Chapter 4, Section D, Child Care Collaborations**.



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<sup>50</sup> Santa Cruz Metro Youth Cruz Free website <https://www.scmttd.com/en/youthcruzfree> Viewed April 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Walker, Jarret, and Associates. Monterey-Salinas Transit Final Network Plan (2022 February) *Key Choices in Redesigning the Network: Equality vs. Equity* pg. 15. <https://mst.org/wp-content/media/MST-Final-Network-Plan-Feb-2022.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Sedoryk, Carl, Reinheimer, Lisa, et.al., *Monterey-Salinas Transit Annual Report* (2022) pg. 15 <https://mst.org/2022-annual-report/>

### III. Child Care Stakeholder Survey

#### 1. Purpose of Survey and Contributors

In preparation for this updated Strategic Plan, the County sent an online Child Care Stakeholder Survey to approximately 900 stakeholders soliciting their input concerning early education, child care, and after-school care in Santa Cruz County. The goal was to collect input from a wide variety of different stakeholders, collect a diverse set of views and perspectives on the topic and provide a voice to people operating in this field.

A total of 883 stakeholders from different groups were invited to answer the survey from April 4 to April 24, 2023. These included local elected officials, agency staff of relevant public agencies, child care providers, faith-based organizations, local businesses, non-profit staff, early care educators, and developers of non-profit housing options. **Table III-1** shows the number of contacts, responses received, and response rates per stakeholder group. The overall response rate of the survey was 17.63%.

**Table III-1**  
**Summary of Stakeholder Survey Responses by Type**  
**Santa Cruz Child Care Strategic Plan**

Type of Contact	No. of contacts by Type	No. of Contacts Reached	Total Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Local Elected Officials and City/County/School District Staff	133	126	15	11.9%
Large Employers and Local Businesses (in Santa Cruz County)	16	14	-	0.0%
Developers and Non-Profit Housing Developers	14	14	-	0.0%
Child Care Providers (i.e., licensed and license-exempt providers)	95	94	27	28.7%
Public Agencies and Nonprofit Staff	52	50	15	30.0%
Faith-Based Organizations	27	23	5	21.7%
Workforce Development Board	48	48	15	31.3%
Family Child Care Homes	237	237	59	24.9%
South County Triage Workgroup	50	50	4	8.0%
Early Educators and Children's Network	211	211	13	6.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>17.6%</b>

Notes: Survey was conducted from April 4 to 24, 2023.

Percentage of survey takers who completed the whole survey: 76%

Average time to complete the survey: 11 minutes

Prepared by Brion Economics, Inc.

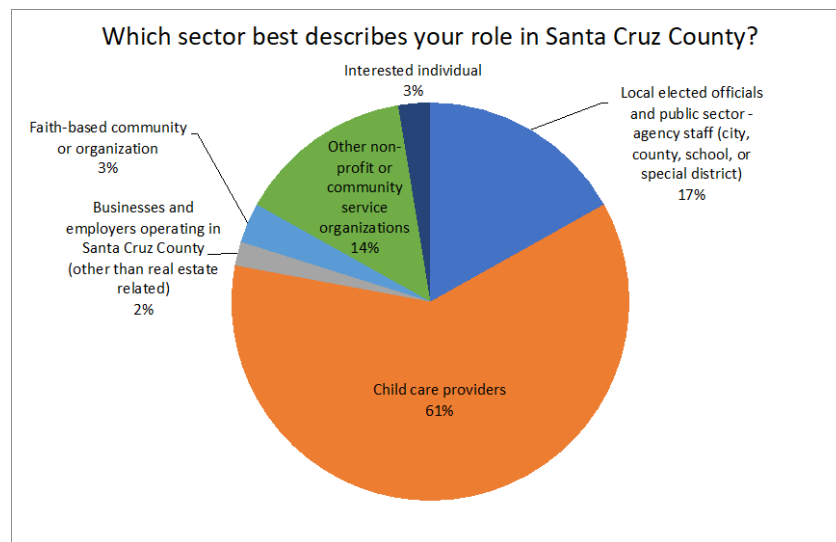
**Exhibit III-1** shows the percentage of the different stakeholder groups from the 154 responses based on their responses in the survey. The largest group of respondents were child care providers, with 61%, followed by local elected officials and agency staff at 17%, and non-profit and community-service organizations at 14%. There were no responses from real estate developers or the non-profit housing sector.

## 2. Summary of Survey Findings

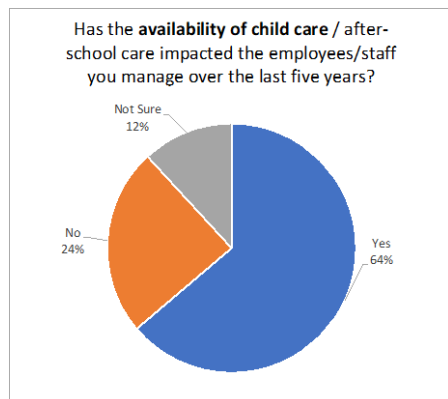
The survey included a total of 45 different questions and used skip logic to ask specific questions to local officials and child care providers. The questions covered topics ranging from views on and experiences with child care, potential sites for new childcare facilities, interest in engaging in further local coalition building, and potential new strategies to address the shortage in child care in the County.

When asked about whether the availability, cost, or location of child care has been a barrier to the ability to work for employees and staff, availability and cost emerged as more relevant factors compared to the location of child care facilities, as shown in **Exhibits III-2 to III-4**. About 64% reported that their employees had been impacted by the availability of child care in the last five years, compared to 54% by the cost of care, and 38% by the location of child care.

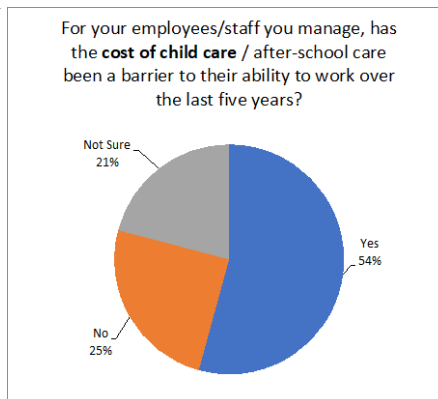
**Exhibit III-1**



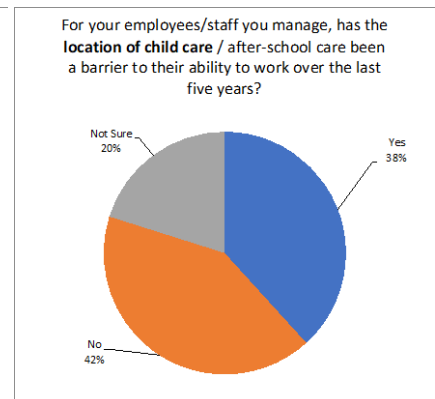
**Exhibit III-2**



**Exhibit III-3**



**Exhibit III-4**



- About 42% of respondents stated that the availability of child care had impacted their ability to work in the last five years.
- About 34% indicated that the cost of child care has been a barrier to them personally in the last five years.
- About 23% indicated that the location of child care has been a barrier to them personally in the last five years.

Among stakeholders, the quality of care ranks as the highest priority in early care and education (72.7% chose the most important). Affordability, availability, low wages in child care, and the lack of child care workforce closely follow, reaching between 63.2% and 66.9%. The least important issues to stakeholders are the lack of different languages spoken in child care (28.6%), the lack of care during non-traditional hours (31.5%), and the lack of sick care (40.6%) (see **Exhibit III-5**).

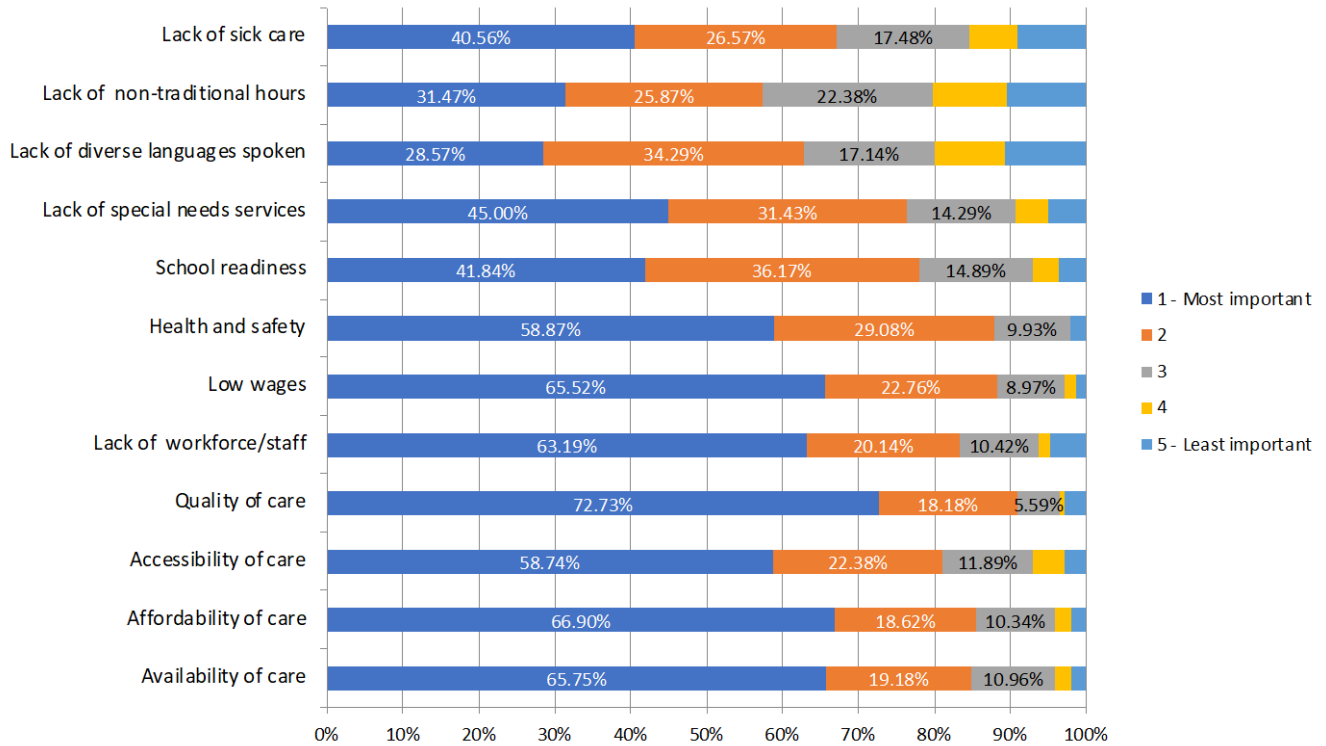
Following the COVID-19 Pandemic, issues regarding the child care workforce (low wages and lack of workforce) have gained more importance for the stakeholders surveyed. Quality of care, accessibility, availability, and affordability rank closely together afterward. Questions of different languages being offered, non-traditional hours, and school readiness changed less in importance due to the pandemic (see **Exhibit III-6**).

Bearing in mind the shortage of child care in the County, child care providers were surveyed about their capacities, and whether they would like to expand. Of survey respondents, 48 (43%) confirmed that they are interested in expanding their child care program or facility, and another 31 (28%) were not sure. Providers were mostly interested in offering new spaces for Infants/Toddlers (56%) and Preschool-age children (48%), and, adding up all respondents, there was an interest in adding a minimum of 750 additional spaces. Additionally, 5 other respondents who do not currently provide child care answered that it was likely their business, agency, or organization would consider incorporating space for a child care program on-site in the near future.

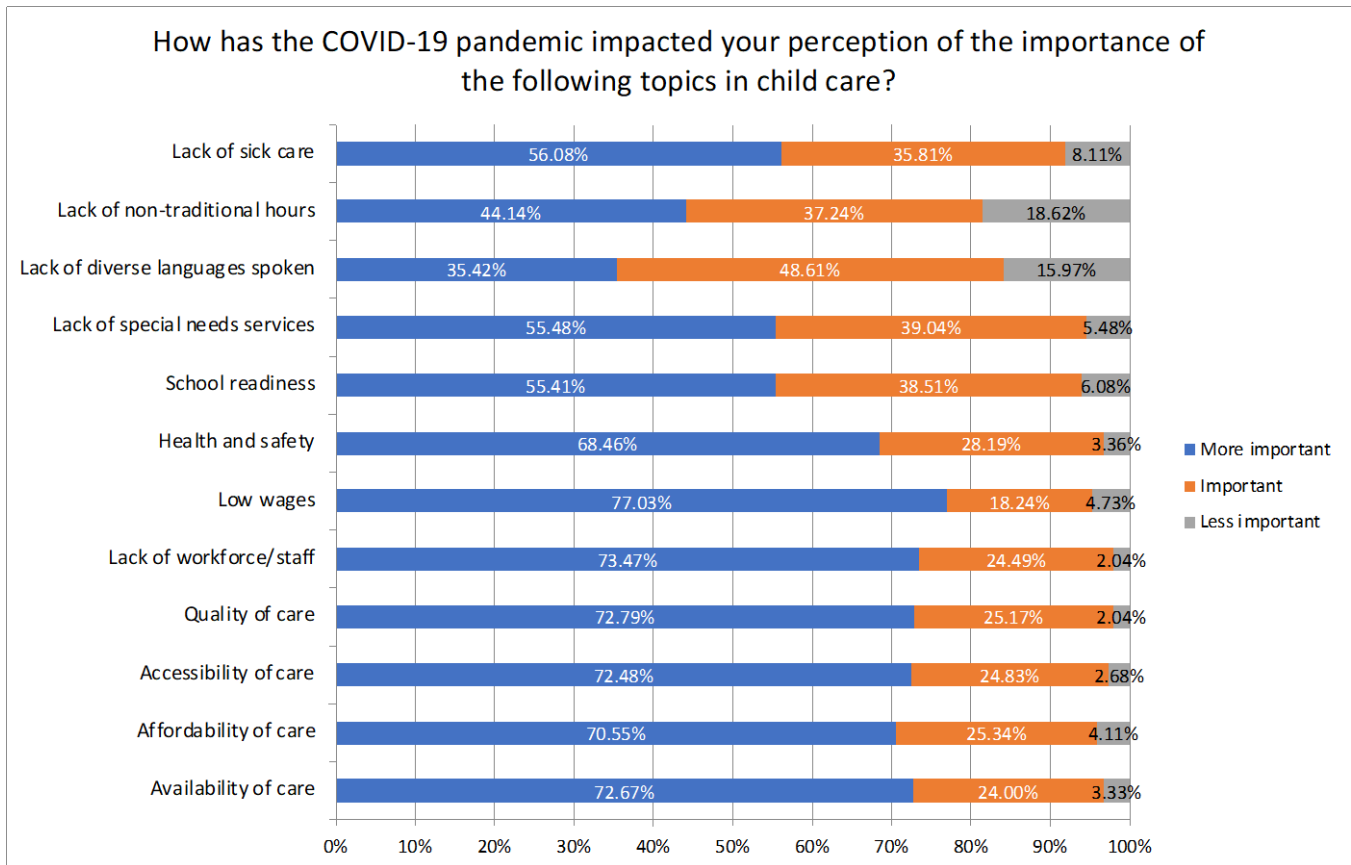
Further, respondents were questioned on any planned projects they are aware of that could include child care facilities or other potential sites for new child care facilities in the County. Five respondents already have planned projects that could include child care and a minimum of 7 potential sites were identified.

### Exhibit III-5

Rank the following issues regarding early care, education, and after-school care in terms of the importance to your life or that of your employees/staff.



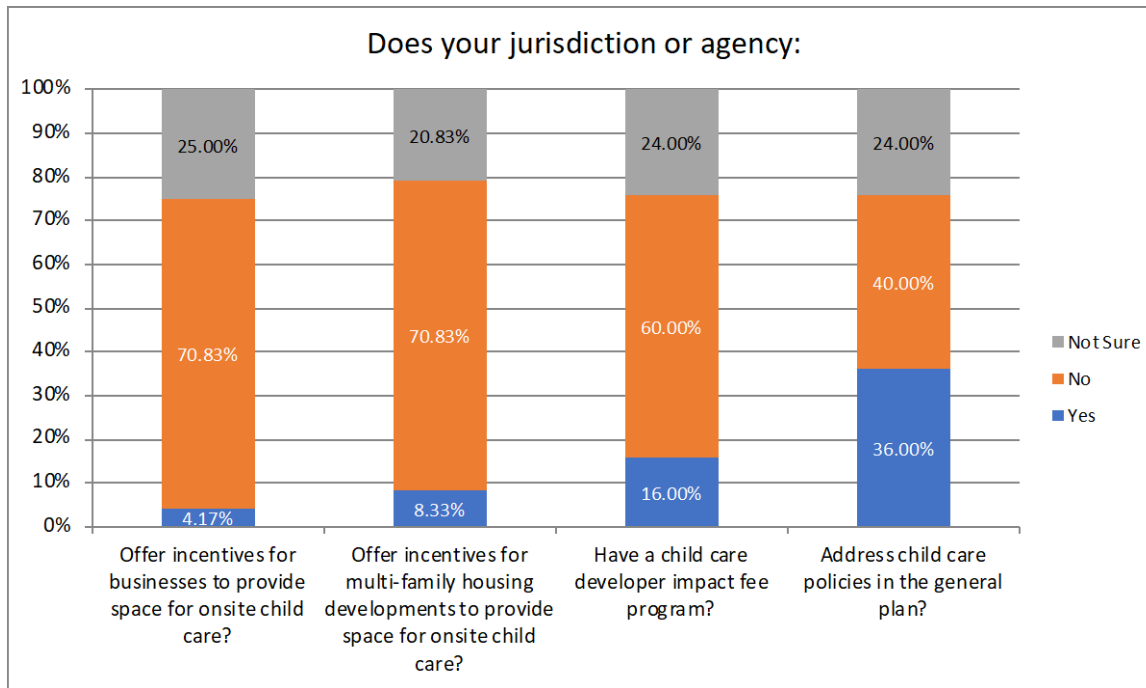
### Exhibit III-6



Local officials were asked about actions their jurisdiction is taking to support the development of new child care facilities (**Exhibit III-7**). Santa Cruz County and City of Santa Cruz both have child care developer impact fee programs to help fund new facility needs associated with new development. The County and City of Santa Cruz also addresses child care in the general plan and offers incentives for multi-family housing to include child care. Watsonville addresses child care issues in the general plan as well. In general, State law requires all local governments to offer incentives for multi-family housing to include on-site child care through the density bonus law. Five officials stated that their jurisdiction would likely participate in a county-wide funding plan for child care.

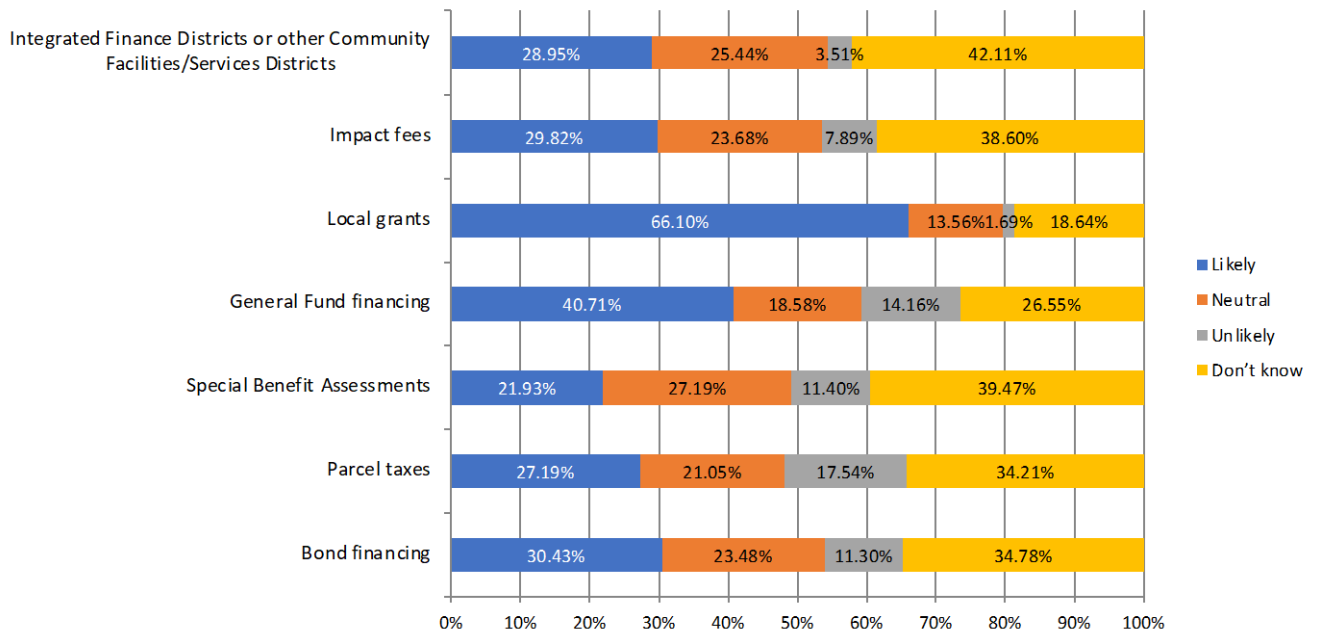
Among all the organizations and stakeholders surveyed, local grants were considered the most likely instrument they would use to support child care, followed at a significant distance by General Fund financing (see **Exhibit III-8**).

**Exhibit III-7**



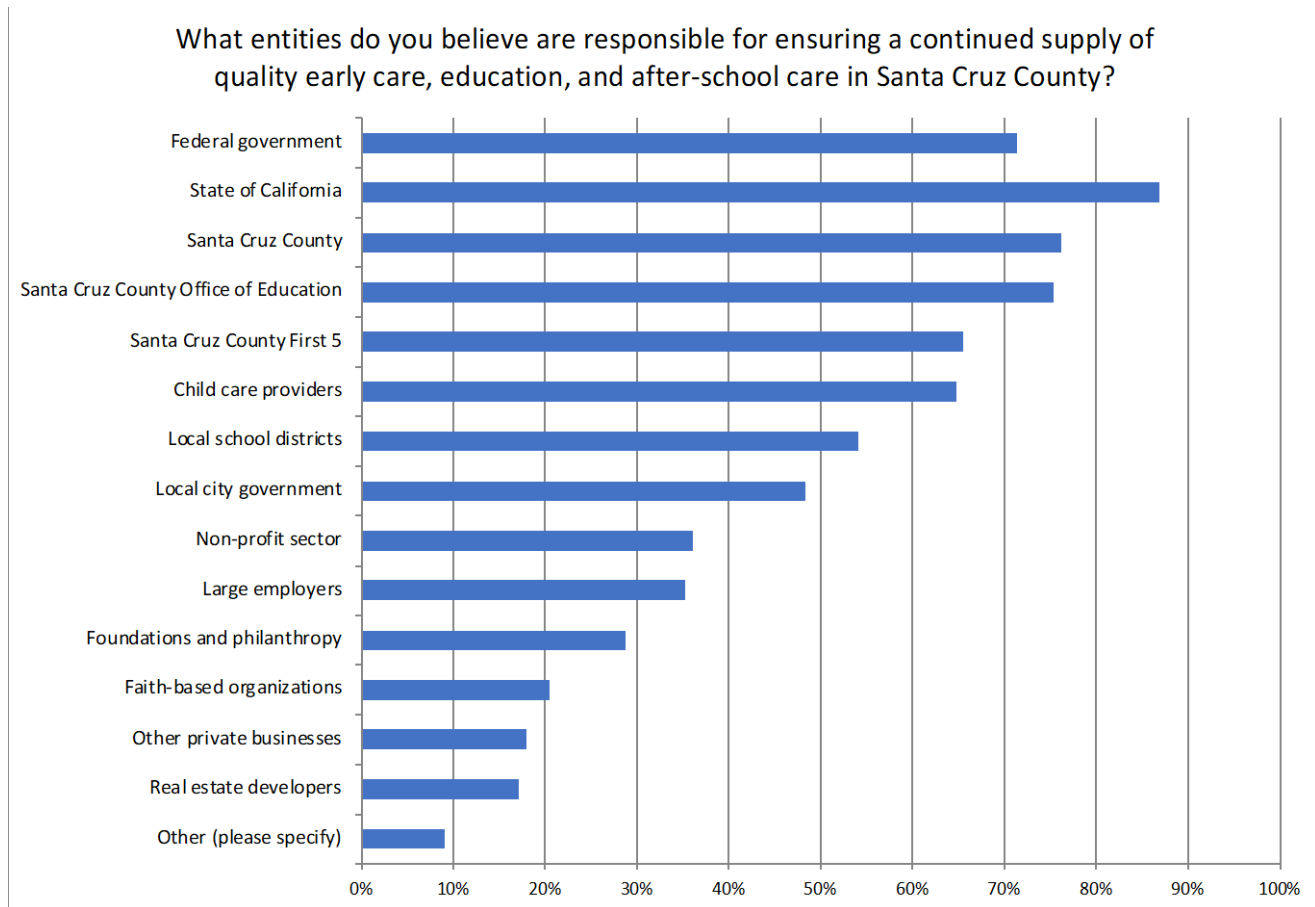
**Exhibit III-8**

How likely, in your opinion, would it be for you or your organization to consider the following local mechanisms to support early care, education, and after-school care?



**Exhibit III-9** shows who respondents deemed responsible for ensuring the supply of child care. Government actors like the State of California, the County, the federal government, local city governments, and school districts rank highest before child care providers themselves. Actors of the private sector, like large employers, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, or foundations, reached much lower rates. As shown, there is a wide range of entities that respondents feel are responsible for providing child care. The range of entities involved in the delivery of child care makes it a complex delivery system, which is often challenging for parents and families to manage.

**Exhibit III-9**



A total of 40 respondents would like to be part of a coalition focused on child care in the county. The collected information from the survey was shared with the County Office of Education and will allow it to build alliances and connections to help meet the need for child care and create collaborative efforts, as discussed in **Chapter 4, Focus Area 4**.

The Stakeholder survey provides many more insights into the status of child care overall, child care providers, and their needs. A full copy of the survey instrument with summary results is provided in **Appendix C**, excluding any confidential information. These survey results will be useful in the implementation of this Strategic Plan over the coming years.

## IV. Strategic Plan Focus Areas

This chapter includes four key focus areas which address a range of issues, challenges, solutions, and aspirations regarding child care in Santa Cruz County. For purposes of setting goals, strategies, and action items, we have separated them into the following sections. However, it is important to recognize that they are all interrelated and connected.

1. **Accessibility and Affordability**, which includes transportation, access for children with special needs, the location of child care, the cost of child care, and access to subsidized care.
2. **Quality, Equity, and Inclusion**, which addresses the quality of child care and how it positively impacts the well-being of children as well as their school readiness and success in school, the availability of child care for all families and children despite their socio-economic status and making sure children and families feel welcome, seen and heard.
3. **Sustainability and Workforce**, including the visibility of child care businesses and programs along with workforce pay, education, and equity issues.
4. **Child Care Collaboration** includes an effort to build a multi-organization coalition of businesses, public sector agencies, non-profits, and funders, all interested in supporting child care in the County.

### Focus Area 1 - Accessibility and Affordability

#### Overview

A core value of the Santa Cruz Childhood Advisory Council is that all children and families have access to quality, affordable child care programs that reflect their socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic needs.

**Goal: The supply of child care spaces and programs in underserved areas will increase by 10% and the shortage of subsidized care will be reduced by 10% over the next five years.**

#### Understanding the Challenges

The social divide continues to expand and economic difficulties impact families across the full spectrum of the population. U.S. residents work more hours, the middle class is shrinking, social mobility is declining, and more children are born into poverty. In fact, in Santa Cruz County, 4% of families with children live below the poverty level, and 16% of children, as of 2020, live under 100% of the federal poverty level.<sup>53</sup>

The cost of child care is often more expensive than rent. This matters. In 2022, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in its *Out of Reach – 2022* report, registered Santa Cruz County as the **second** most

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<sup>53</sup> See Table A-14, Appendix A; data from DataShare Santa Cruz County, and Claritas as of 2022 and Table A-9, Appendix A, data from AIR - ELNAT. Federal poverty level in 2020 for a family of four was \$26,400 per year.

expensive place to live in the country, requiring an average wage of \$60 per hour or \$125,520 per year to afford the average two-bedroom fair market rent in the County.<sup>54</sup>

Decreasing household incomes, coupled with high inflation and the high cost of living in Santa Cruz County, continues to negatively impact the ability of working and low-income earning families to access quality early care and after-school programs.

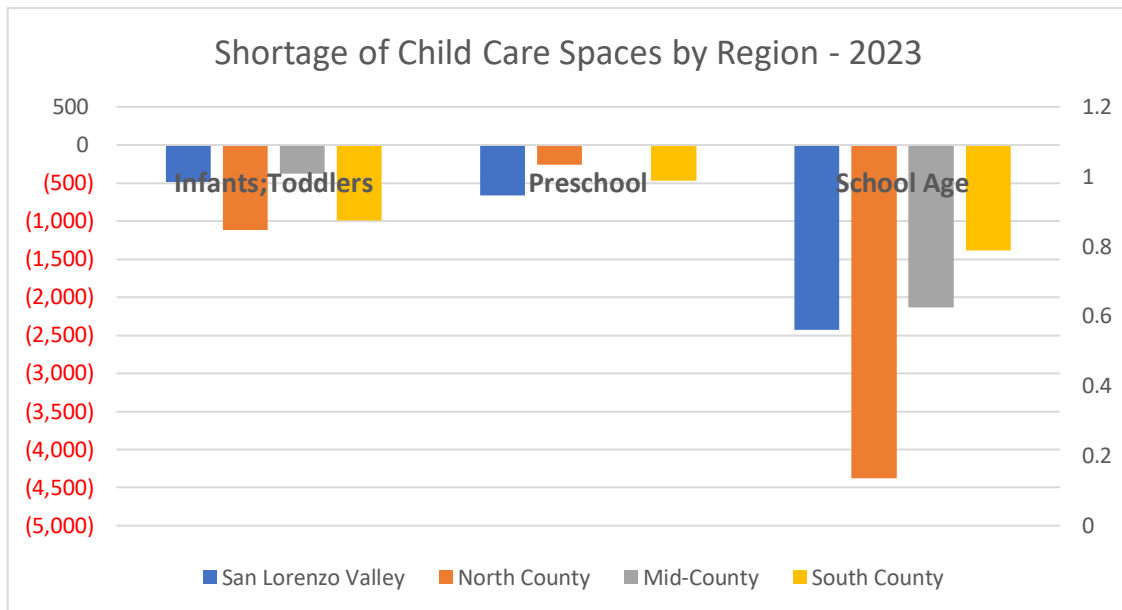
“It is impossible for the average earner to live in Santa Cruz and not work. Child care is essential for working parents. It must be accessible, affordable, and full-day care”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

Additionally, Santa Cruz County does not have enough facility space to accommodate the number of children who need early and after-school care. There is currently a shortage of about 14,000 child care spaces in the County. There is a need for 12,600 additional subsidized spaces in the County. Only about 45% of children needing a subsidized space have one available. These compounding factors significantly impact the health and well-being of our children, families, and community.

**Exhibit IV-1** summarizes the current estimated shortage of child care spaces by age group and region in the County.

**Exhibit IV-1**



<sup>54</sup> See <https://nlihc.org/oor>, Out of Reach 2022, National Low Income Housing Coalition, page 21 of full report PDF.

## Opportunities

The Childhood Advisory Council provides data, analysis, and expertise to inform local policymakers so they can address the need for more adequate funding for early care and education. Santa Cruz County will impact the accessibility and affordability of early care, education, and after-school programs by developing and expanding local policy initiatives that overcome federal and state barriers. Each strategy is grounded in the Childhood Advisory Council’s principle of equity, diversity, and inclusion – recognizing all children deserve to be happy, healthy, and provided opportunities to reach their full potential.

The Childhood Advisory Council sponsors two programs that directly benefit the accessibility and affordability of child care, including the **Individualized County Child Care Subsidy Pilot Program**<sup>55</sup> and the new **UPK Mixed Delivery Workgroup**.<sup>56</sup> The Subsidy Pilot Program was implemented during the last five years and completed, and now, the State, through AB 1352, is moving forward with new policy changes to give counties greater flexibility in how they administer subsidy funding. The UPK Mixed-Delivery Workgroup has been formed to address the need for wrap-around care for children attending TK and also other State Preschool programs. The goal is to develop a Mixed-Delivery Plan that meets the diverse needs of the County’s children and families.

“I recently became a first-time mom. As an elected official with a newborn, I have found it exceedingly difficult to find child care and continue my work as an elected official.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent



<sup>55</sup> <https://childhoodadvisorycouncil.org/child-care-pilot-program/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://childhoodadvisorycouncil.org/upk-mixed-delivery-workgroup/>

## FOCUS AREA 1: ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

## GOAL 1

Families of all socioeconomic levels have access to integrated and equitable care, education, and after-school opportunities for children, from birth up to age 13.

COMMUNITY VALUE	OBJECTIVE	ACTION STRATEGIES	LEADS AND PARTNERS
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE EARLY CARE, EDUCATION, AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS	1a. Advance a <b>local policy</b> to surmount state-imposed regulatory barriers to county's achievement of desired outcomes for early care, education, and after-school programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Develop and implement individualized child care subsidy pilot plans</b> based on the new State Assembly Bill 1352 - Child Care and Development Services: individualized county child care subsidy plans.</li> <li>• Update the countywide subsidy funding matrix of all state and federal programs.</li> <li>• Conduct Social Media Campaign on new income requirements for subsidized care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• Community Partners</li> <li>• Early Care, Education, and After-School Providers</li> <li>• Santa Cruz County Office of Education</li> <li>• Monterey County</li> <li>• San Benito County</li> <li>• Santa Clara County</li> <li>• San Mateo County</li> </ul>
	1b. Increase early care, education, and after-school facilities, including license-exempt care and family child care homes that provide safe, nurturing, and high-quality learning environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue the expansion of <b>diverse facility funding support</b> for local and state programs, including strategies for partnering with businesses to support facilities' needs.</li> <li>• Advocate for facility funding, including policies imposing developer fees on new developments, parcel taxes on existing developments, new cannabis taxes, and other funding mechanisms.</li> <li>• Create a <b>Child Care Financing Plan</b> that leverages a range of possible funding sources and mechanisms for new and expanded licensed child care facilities and programs.</li> <li>• Solicit <b>private investments</b> such as employer-funded child care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• Child Development Resource Center</li> <li>• First 5 Santa Cruz County</li> <li>• Community Partners including County and Cities</li> <li>• Early Care, Education, and After-School Providers</li> <li>• Local Partners including: developers, community banks, volunteers, and foundations</li> <li>• County and cities decision-makers and elected officials</li> <li>• Non-traditional partners to support facility locations: senior centers, private schools, churches, community centers</li> <li>• School Districts</li> <li>• Thrive by Five Advisory Council</li> </ul>
	1c. Develop a <b>centralized system</b> to improve coordination, communication, and linkages that will provide a continuum of early care, education, and after-school support for all families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce a system of single point of entry care service model/framework so that families can access current child care, early- and after-school care availability, and other resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bay Area Coordinators Association</li> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• Child Care Providers</li> <li>• Child Development Resource Center</li> <li>• Santa Cruz County Human Services Department</li> <li>• Santa Cruz County Office of Education</li> <li>• Thrive by Five Advisory Council</li> </ul>
	1d. Develop a new Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery Local Plan, which supports a range of options for children and their families considering Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and Kindergarten (K).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a UPK Mixed Delivery working group to develop a countywide plan on the issues and utilize recently awarded grant funds.</li> <li>• The UPK local plan will align with the ELO-P and P&amp;I grants approved by CDE for Santa Cruz County Office of Education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• County Office of Education</li> <li>• Child Care Providers</li> <li>• Child Development Resource Center</li> <li>• Santa Cruz County Human Services Department</li> <li>• Thrive by Five Advisory Council</li> </ul>

## FOCUS AREA 1: ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY - INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



“Children must be taught how to think,  
not what to think.”

- Margaret Mead



### AFFORDABILITY – COST OF CARE

- Decrease the percentage of income families dedicate to early care, education, and after-school programs, aiming to make it 10% or less of total family household income.

### AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Decrease the number of children in the County experiencing a shortage of space available by 10%.
- Increase the number of total spaces in early and after-school care centers including family-based programs.

### UTILIZATION

- Increase awareness of who qualifies for subsidized care in the County.
- Increase the number of children enrolled in subsidized care in the County by 10% to 20% over the next five years.
- Increase in 4-year-olds participating in Transitional Kindergarten by 25% over the next five years.

## Focus Area 2 - Quality, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

“Every day, in a 100 small ways, our children ask, ‘Do you hear me? Do you see me? Do I matter?’  
Their behavior often reflects our response.” - L.R. Knost

### Overview

A common value families share is a desire to see their children happy, healthy, and thriving – developing to reach their fullest potential. **Our responsibility, and our collective best interest, is to commit to making that possible for everybody’s children by providing quality early care, education, and after-school programs, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, gender, and socio-economics.** The Childhood Advisory Council is committed to supporting quality programs that provide equitable, safe, and engaging learning environments for children.

### Understanding the Challenges

**Families have too few child care options**, coupled often with a limited understanding of what quality, equity, and inclusive care involves. Most agree in a general sense that children must get their basic needs met while in care—they are fed, safe, and clean. Although some validated tools are available, determining providers’ abilities in attending to a child’s emotional and developmental needs, as well as engagement in age-appropriate learning activities, remains difficult to define. The County is working hard to address the needs of the whole child and family, ensuring that each child and their family belongs or feels included and is part of the community. In Santa Cruz County efforts to address inequities are under way by a variety of agencies and organizations. The Pajaro Valley Unified School District’s Literacy Equity program focuses on the Innovation, Expansion, Empowerment, Learning, and Transformation of children and their families and includes a dual language learner approach.

**Common characteristics of quality care that translate into markedly better developmental results for children include:**

- Having **appropriate child/adult ratios**;
- Having positive relationships among caregivers, teachers, children, and the community;
- Fostering **meaningful family engagement**;
- Having educational curriculum and materials to meet all children’s developmental and cultural learning styles;
- Implementing **good management and effective leadership**;
- Utilizing assessments to monitor children’s learning and developmental progress;
- Building **staff competence** through mentoring, training, and support.

The County has many high-quality programs. However, high-quality child care remains out of reach for many low-and middle-income families. These families often do not meet the eligibility requirement for high-quality subsidized programs and, therefore, struggle to access affordable quality care and education.

The early care, education, and after-school care workforce also face equity and inclusion issues. Many child care workers and providers are single heads of households with children and women of color in Santa Cruz County. A recent study by the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment, University of California – Berkeley found:

“The sexist and racial history of the United States prevails today as child care labor is undervalued and early educators are abhorrently paid because the work is considered “women’s work” that is often associated with the large proportion of women of color doing the work.”<sup>57</sup>

Latina women make up a large portion of the child care workforce in Santa Cruz County. The Berkeley Study notes: “Latina educators make the largest racial/ethnic group, but they are the least likely among all groups to hold a lead teacher position compared to other groups.”<sup>58</sup>

## Opportunities

**Ninety percent of a child’s brain develops in the first 5 years.** Research shows that quality early care and education programs help prepare children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Long-term studies demonstrate that children who attend high-quality early learning programs have advanced social skills and self-regulation, finer math, and reading skills, are more likely to complete high school, and go on to college. It is important that young children have the best possible environment for learning and development.

In response, Santa Cruz County has built a local Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as one strategy to assess and improve the quality of care among all participating providers, called Quality Counts Santa Cruz County. Quality Counts supports, rates, and rewards early care and education in Santa Cruz County. As of 2023, there are 106 programs in Quality Counts, or a 47% increase overall in program participation since 2018.

The QCC Workforce **Pathways Grant Program** provides funding for child care professionals to acquire additional education that directly impacts the quality of care in the County, which can lead to higher wages and increased quality. This program is described more in Focus Area 3 – Sustainability and Workforce.

“I am an in-home daycare and felt scared and overwhelmed when I started. Sometimes we need a local point of contact to answer questions, [and] get reassurance during the process.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

**New funding for addressing children with special needs and training for child care professionals is now available.** The Santa Cruz County Office of Education was awarded a five-year grant funded by the California Department of Education (CDE) to address inclusion and equity issues, and professional development of the child care workforce in 2019/2020. The purpose of the Santa Cruz County Inclusive Early Education Expansion

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<sup>57</sup> Yoonjeon Kim, Hopeton Hess (2023): Set up for Instability and Injustice: QuantCrit and the Early Care and Education Workforce. Center for the Study of Childcare Employment, University of California – Berkeley. <https://aera23-aera.ipostersessions.com/Default.aspx?s=FF-5A-D4-93-B6-D5-CA-74-4F-82-CF-D3-27-62-42-60>, accessed 5.25.23

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

Program (IEEEP) grant is to increase access to inclusive early learning and care (ELC) programs for children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities in inclusive early learning settings. The overall goal of the IEEEP program is to increase the confidence of early learning and care educators supporting children with disabilities and severe disabilities. Participating educators and administrators will take part in five required, evidence-based trainings focused on inclusive practices.<sup>59</sup>

The **Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments** is a funding model and movement to achieve equitable health and well-being in Santa Cruz County, using a results-based, collective impact approach that is responsive to community needs. Originally adopted as a funding model by the County and City of Santa Cruz in 2016, CORE Investments has grown into a broader movement to create the CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being, with equity at the center, as depicted by these graphics.:



“Consistent, predictable, and trauma-responsive child care services can further support children and families.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

<sup>59</sup> See <https://childhoodadvisorycouncil.org/inclusive-early-education-expansion-program/>

## Our Commitment<sup>60</sup>

The CAC welcomes and embraces diversity among individuals from all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, abilities, genders and gender identities, sexual orientations, immigration status, and religions. We will advocate for and protect the rights and opportunities of all children and families in our community, as well as those that provide their early care and education.

We seek to engage a broad range of constituents, including parents, child care providers, policy-makers, and community stakeholders, in decision-making, determining priorities, and planning. We use local data to understand and transform inequities and remove barriers to access in our ECE system, examining data related to:

- Racial/ethnic disparities
- Family income and child poverty
- Children with special needs
- Dual language learners
- Unsheltered or houseless children
- Children in the child welfare system
- Children in protective services
- Demographics and needs of the ECE workforce

The Child Care Needs Assessment, prepared every five years by the CAC, is the perfect opportunity to measure changes in equity, diversity, and inclusion. The CAC will develop key performance measures based on actual data collected for the County or published by public agencies, which can be tracked over time.

We seek to transform our institutions by eliminating inequitable practices and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests of every child so that success and failure are no longer predictable by a child's identity - racial, cultural, economic, or any other social factor. Equity in child care means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. Working towards equity in early care and education settings involves:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our child care system;
- Removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic, or cultural factor;
- Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural early care and education environments for adults and children; and
- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every human possesses.

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<sup>60</sup> Some of this language is taken from the San Mateo Strategic Plan 2019-2024 and from the National Equity Project's definition of Educational Equity. <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition>

## FOCUS AREA 2: QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING - IMPLEMENTATION

## GOAL 2

Every child thrives socially, emotionally, and academically because they receive quality early care, education, and after-school programs.

COMMUNITY VALUE	OBJECTIVE	ACTION STRATEGIES	LEADS AND PARTNERS
EVERY CHILD IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY IS THRIVING AND FEELS INCLUDED, SEEN, AND VALUED FOR WHO THEY ARE	2a. <b>Increase</b> the number of child care <b>providers engaged in quality</b> improvement systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Childhood Advisory Council will provide quality professional development opportunities, extend professional development services to non-subsidized providers, and explore the development of a countywide training calendar.</li> <li>Increase participation in Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (the local Quality Counts California program) by 25%.</li> <li>Develop a public awareness campaign for parents on the importance of quality standards.</li> <li>Continue to participate in countywide efforts in developing trauma-informed organizations, services, and policies.</li> <li>Partner with early care, education, and after-school programs' stakeholders to identify the diverse federal, state, and local evidence-based tools that measure quality programs to be implemented as a measurement of quality in our community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabrillo College Early Childhood Education Program</li> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Child Development Resource Center</li> <li>Early Care, Education, and After-School Partners</li> <li>Family Child Care Providers</li> <li>First 5 Santa Cruz County</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Mental Health, and Human Services Departments</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Office of Education</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Quality Counts Consortium</li> <li>Trauma-Informed System - Santa Cruz County</li> <li>Thrive by 5</li> </ul>
	2b. <b>Increase School readiness</b> countywide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and develop strategies to ensure continuity of learning as children transition from early care to TK through 12th grade.</li> <li>Partner with school districts to implement a Universal Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Tool.</li> <li>Connect all early care and education providers to the TK-12 system to increase communication and coordination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Early Care, Education, and After-School Partners</li> <li>First 5 Santa Cruz County</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Office of Education and School Districts</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Quality Counts Consortium</li> </ul>
	2c. <b>Promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging within all programs and activities.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Raise awareness regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging</b> amongst providers, families, policymakers, and elected officials.</li> <li>Work with other Community Partners and efforts to <b>expand access to affordable care</b>, regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, religion, and language spoken.</li> <li><b>Host Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion workshops and trainings</b> for child care providers and staff.</li> <li><b>Conduct deep data analysis on racial and economic equity</b> in our system during Needs Assessment preparation and each update of the Strategic Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CORE Investments and CORE Institute</li> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Early Care, Education, and After-School Partners</li> <li>First 5 Santa Cruz County</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Office of Education and School Districts</li> <li>Santa Cruz County Quality Counts Consortium</li> <li>County of Santa Cruz and local city governments</li> </ul>

## FOCUS AREA 2: QUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING - INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

### QUALITY

- Increase the number of providers participating in quality improvement frameworks including, but not limited to, Quality Counts Santa Cruz County and QCC Workforce Pathway Grant Program.
- Increase quality of early care and education sites participating in Quality Counts.
- Improve the well-being of incoming TK/K children through the assessment of basic health indicators and social-emotional indicators to be monitored and assessed through the school district Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) process.
- Increase the number of children ready for TK/K across all school districts.

### EVERY CHILD IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY IS THRIVING, BELONGS AND FEELS INCLUDED, SEEN, AND VALUED FOR WHO THEY ARE

- Reduce the disparities between income and opportunities for child care providers, and staff, particularly women of color.
- Increase Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training for Early Care and Learning Education workforce.

*"As our cities and county governments begin to make child well-being a high priority in their budget processes, utilizing the Childhood Advisory Council's Master Plan for Early Care and Education as a compass, and bringing early educators into the conversation, would lay the groundwork for giving every child a stronger start in school. It's not too late."*

- Michael C. Watkins – Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools



## Focus Area 3 - Sustainability and Workforce

“It’s not a ‘nice to have’ – it’s a ‘must have.’ It’s time we stop treating child care as a side issue, or a women’s issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is for all of us.”

— President Barack Obama

### Overview

It’s time to be bold and embrace our values, our commitment to the County’s child care workforce and providers, and, in turn, assume our collective responsibility toward the health and well-being of all children in Santa Cruz County. The Santa Cruz County Childhood Advisory Council will unite policymakers, business leaders, and educators to shape private and public policy that invests in the sustainability of early care, education, and after-school programs.

### Understanding the Challenges

Funding sources for early care, education, and after-school programs are fragmented. Wages are low in the field and especially in the context of the cost of living in Santa Cruz County. Many providers struggle to find workers to staff their programs. Varying revenue sources and eligibility constraints result in families bearing the burden of substantially covering the costs of care. “The US Department of Health and Human Services considers childcare “affordable” if it costs less than 7% of a family’s income. But nearly two-thirds of parents, including 95% of low-income parents, spend far more than that. And only 2% of counties in our analysis fell within this limit, meaning that by the government’s definition, childcare is unaffordable in 98% of counties across the country.”<sup>61</sup> In addition, “The most expensive counties generally have fewer childcare workers or the state doesn’t provide enough financial support for low-income families.”<sup>62</sup> The need for policymakers to act and invest in building an infrastructure of early care education and after-school care is imperative.

In Santa Cruz County, according to the US Census Bureau, 71% percent of mothers with children under six are in the labor force, yet there remains inadequate supply of high-quality care for infants and toddlers, particularly for families struggling economically to live in our community. In Santa Cruz County, 14% of children 0 to 4 years old live in families below the federal poverty level.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, 40% of those children 0 to 12 years old that qualify for full-time subsidized child care do not have space available.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, inadequate paid parental leave policies drive families to heavily rely on early and after-school care in their communities.

Most child care providers do not earn a living wage relative to the high cost of living in Santa Cruz County. According to a recent study on the true cost of care, the true cost of care in the Bay Area is much higher if

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-expensive-cities-for-childcare-daycare-us-affordable-care-cost-2023-5>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> See Table A-9, Appendix A.

<sup>64</sup> See Table A-9, Appendix A.

living wages are assumed.<sup>65</sup> Adjusting for living wages and other appropriate expenses for providers, the annual true cost of full-time care per child is \$16,200 for School Age, \$27,700 for Preschool, and \$42,800 for Infants, for center-based care.<sup>66</sup> Current annual average market rates are \$9,100 for School Age care, \$18,500 for Preschool care, and \$22,200 for Infant/Toddler care<sup>67</sup> or significantly lower than the true cost of care. State reimbursement rates are somewhat higher than average market rates but still below the true cost of care.

“I really thought I would see some change since COVID. I heard over and over how much early education was essential, yet we are paid low and not funded enough to pay folks a livable wage; it is truly depressing, and I continue to lose staff due to this.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

Currently, a preschool teacher in the County makes 48% of what an elementary school teacher makes, while a child care program administrator makes about 45% of a school administrator.<sup>68</sup>

Most child care providers, workers, and families don’t have the time, resources, and tools to undertake the lobbying needed to drive the early care and education policy agenda. Many policymakers and business leaders are unaccustomed to the societal relevance and impact of quality early care, education, and after-school programs. **Experts agree that investing in high-quality early childhood development yields high annual rates of return and produces long-term societal rewards.** According to the work of James Heckman, Nobel Laureate, and many other economists, investing in high-quality early childhood development programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% annual return on investment, improving personal and social gains.<sup>69</sup> Although there is extensive information substantiating the value of investing in early care and education, **public policy has yet to align with the science and economics of investing in early childhood.**

“We need to find other entities that are willing to step up and contribute so that young families can afford quality care without the owners/teachers having to supplement by working for such low wages. No one goes into this field to get rich, and hopefully, only those who really want to make a difference stay. Unfortunately, those of us for whom this is a career and not just a job, do so at our own peril. I hold a Master's degree in Education and make less than my daughter, who is a cake decorator.” –

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<sup>65</sup> Living Wage Cost of Care is from “*Understanding the True Cost of Child Care in California: Building a Cost Model to Inform Policy Change*” Prepared by Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies - Jeanna Capita, Katie Fallin Kenyon, and Simon Workman, August 2022, pages 24-26.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See Table A-15, Appendix A.

<sup>68</sup> See Table A-11, Appendix A.

<sup>69</sup> Heckman, J. 2014. Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy,. [www.heckmandequation.org](http://www.heckmandequation.org).

2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

## Opportunities

To reach quality, accessible, and affordable care, child care programs that meet the needs of all families and afford Santa Cruz County’s youngest children the opportunity for the best possible start in life, will take longstanding dedication, political will, and leadership. **A unified system of public and private resources will be essential to the creation of a sustainable infrastructure of care.** This unified system needs to also work towards the sustainability of providers and the child care workforce. Without child care workers willing to enter and stay in the field, we will not be able to sustain our current system of care.

In order to provide sustainable quality care, education, and after-school programs, communities **need a qualified workforce that is well compensated and supported through ongoing professional development opportunities.** Sustainability requires creating a strong childcare program workforce pathway that attracts qualified providers entering the field. Sustainability further requires Santa Cruz County to address the wage gaps providers experience working and staying in the field long-term.

The Santa Cruz County **QCC Workforce Pathways Grant** is designed to align with the Quality California Counts (QCC) professional development system and focus on the local workforce needs across all early learning and care settings. The QCC Workforce Pathway program offers support for early educators in three ways: Workforce Advising, Professional Development, and Higher Education. All areas are recognized as essential for ensuring early learning and care professionals and improving the quality of care they provide to young children. Training topics are guided by State recommendations and investments in research-based topics such as Dual Language Learners, child and environmental assessments, social-emotional development, and family engagement. The QCC Workforce Development Pathway program informs and supports early educators through the State professional development system in order to increase the professional advancement of early educators and increase the quality of early learning offered to children enrolled in their programs.

The QCC Workforce Pathways Program,<sup>70</sup> in collaboration with the QCC Local Consortia and Partners, represents investments by the Department of Social Services Child Care and Development Division to support a statewide Quality Improvement System and Quality Rating and Improvement System.<sup>71</sup> It will continue to encourage QCC system alignment in order to build a stronger quality system.

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<sup>70</sup> See <https://childhoodadvisorycouncil.org/qcc-workforce-pathways-grant/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/qiactivities1213.asp>

## FOCUS AREA 3: SUSTAINABILITY AND WORKFORCE - IMPLEMENTATION

## GOAL 3

The child care workforce and providers are valued, supported, and encouraged to expand and seek additional education and resources.

COMMUNITY VALUE	OBJECTIVE	ACTION STRATEGIES	LEADS AND PARTNERS
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY VALUES CHILDREN'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT AS FUNDAMENTAL TO OUR SHARED PROSPERITY	3a. Support child care providers with business training, education, workshops, and strategies to manage and access resources to create stable business operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generate more child care <b>programs' revenue resources</b> through strategies such as ballot measures, parcel taxes, local children's funds, developer fees and support, local foundation funding, and government set-a-sides.</li> <li>Provide technical assistance to providers in accessing local and state grants.</li> <li>Hold training workshops on Business Best Practices to help increase provider financial stability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Central Coast Early Childhood Policy Advocacy Network</li> <li>Early Care, Education, and After-School Partners</li> <li>Local, state, and federal decision-makers</li> <li>Business Partners</li> <li>Funders – Government, Foundations, and Corporations</li> </ul>
	3b. Increase the number of early care, education, and after-school program professionals and the average education levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Work with school districts</b> to include early care, education, and after-school services within their <b>local control accountability plans</b>.</li> <li>Encourage retired ECE teachers to participate in an ECE Substitute Teacher Pool to support existing teachers with needed time off, including time for vacations, trainings, etc.</li> <li>Work with school districts, community colleges, and vocational training programs to develop and/or increase early care, education, and after-school <b>Career Pathway Programs</b>.</li> <li>Participate and engage in appropriate <b>workforce development efforts</b> to address the shortage of early care, education, and after-school program professionals.</li> <li><b>Encourage Small Family Child Care Home (FCCH)</b> providers to expand, when possible to become Large FCCHs.</li> <li>Support emerging family providers with licensing permit and workforce registry.</li> <li><b>Identify Family, Friends, and Neighbor providers who can become licensed providers</b> when possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Child Development Resource Center</li> <li>First 5 Santa Cruz</li> <li>Central Coast Early Childhood Policy Advocacy Network</li> <li>Santa Cruz County School Districts</li> <li>Cabrillo College</li> <li>Human Services Department</li> <li>Workforce Development Board</li> <li>Retired ECE teachers and teacher aides</li> </ul>
	3c. Increase the number of early care, education, and after-school professional providers earning a living wage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advance a <b>'Worthy Wage' Campaign</b> to advocate for higher wages in the industry.</li> <li><b>Prepare a "Santa Cruz County Workforce Survey and Study."</b></li> <li>Develop a method to <b>quantify wage disparities</b> within the early care, education, and after-school labor market.</li> <li>Participate in Statewide advocacy efforts to <b>increase reimbursement rates</b> to be closer to the actual true cost of care.</li> <li>Prepare a Santa Cruz County <b>"True Cost of Care Study."</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Partners</li> <li>Central Coast Early Childhood Policy Advocacy Network</li> <li>Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>Local and State elected officials</li> <li>State and local advocacy organizations</li> <li>Human Services Department and Workforce Development</li> <li>Workforce Investment Board</li> <li>Thrive by 5</li> </ul>

## FOCUS AREA 3: SUSTAINABILITY AND WORKFORCE - INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

### INCREASED SUSTAINABILITY AND WORKFORCE

- **Increase the average wages** for early care, education, and after-school professionals.
- **Develop an ECE Substitute Teacher Pool** to support existing teachers.
- **Increase the number** of early care, education, and after-school professionals in the field.
- **Complete a comprehensive countywide Workforce Survey and Study by 2024**, including use of focus groups.
- **Increase the retention** of early care, education, and after-school professionals.
- **Increase the number** of child care professionals participating in the **Workforce Pathway Grant program and Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP)** trainings.



*"The COE's trainings that I've attended this year are so useful in my every day work with children. The information is really helping me feel better prepared for classroom challenges that have been hard for me to manage. Since these trainings, I've been able to share the tools and information with families, so we can work together to help their children learn and feel more successful in school."*

- Preschool Teacher



*"The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one."*

- Malcolm Forbes

## Focus Area 4 - Child Care Collaborations

“We are all responsible for the future and care of children in our community.”

- 2023 Stakeholder Survey Respondent

### Overview

The CAC is committed to creating “One System” with a collective voice and taking the lead on systems alignment in partnership with diverse stakeholders, community leaders, families, public service agencies, and nonprofits. The CAC will co-create the vision for the County’s child care system in order to strengthen families, children’s well-being, and the local economy. We will connect with other partners in the County and State through systems and standards alignment, advocacy, policy influence, and propose legislative action.

### Understanding the Challenges

The provision of child care serving all age children is a massive collaborative effort, involving multiple organizations, businesses, public agencies, diverse funding sources, teachers, social services, etc. Public and local decision-makers often do not fully understand the complexity of the child care delivery system. Many still think of child care as daycare or someone to watch their kids. But in today’s world where school readiness is so important to children’s success in life, and many families have two incomes and workers, child care is an essential part of the fabric of our lives and the economy. Without child care including before and after school care, parents cannot go to work. Some of the challenges faced by the child care industry include:

- Child care worker wages are significantly below other types of teachers and school administrators.
- Child care workers need a high level of education to succeed in the field, but the wages are not commensurate with the investment in education required.
- Child care wages do not support a livable wage for most workers, given the high cost of living in Santa Cruz County, including housing costs.
- Recruitment of new child care workers is challenging due to low wages where potential workers can make higher wages working in the retail or restaurant industries, for instance.
- Child care is expensive for many families, consuming from 20% to 30% of their household income on average, leaving little left for other expenses besides basics and housing.
- About 45% of children that qualify for subsidized care in the County do not have available subsidized space, affecting 12,600 children 0 to 12 years old.
- The location of child care is often in the opposite location from work, leading to long commute times for parents and challenging schedules.
- Sick care and non-traditional hours are lacking in most communities although the need is great.
- The impact on the local economy from parents’ inability to find child care is significant.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, child care was deemed an essential service. With many providers having to shut down, local employers and industry realized just how important child care is to a functioning economy. Early educators have always provided a critical service that allows other workers to do their jobs. But during

this pandemic, they were asked to serve children of other essential workers without the appropriate pay, health care, and personal protective equipment (PPE) or recognition that should come with risking their lives.<sup>72</sup> During the COVID-19 Pandemic, early care professionals were asked to make impossible choices between their own health and that of their families, and the needs of their families and their children. Since the pandemic, policymakers and employers are starting to recognize the importance of early education and child care to the functioning of a healthy economy.

## Opportunities

The Childhood Advisory Council is a council made up of diverse individuals involved in the child care field. The CAC's core value is collaboration. Santa Cruz County excels in collaboration in many areas of children's and families' well-being. DataShare Santa Cruz County is a great example of collaborative efforts in the County. Extending these collaborations to new stakeholders in the County over the next five years is key to addressing the many challenges the industry faces. New partnerships with the following are needed and essential:

- Local Businesses and Corporations
- Private Foundations
- The Workforce Board
- Chamber of Commerce(s)
- CORE Investments, including the CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact
- Thrive by 5 Advisory Council
- Local cities and jurisdictions
- Local developers, including housing developers
- Non-profit housing organizations
- Local colleges and universities, public and private

The CAC is committed to extending its invitations to collaborate with multiple new organizations, individuals, and businesses in an effort to expand the recognition of the importance of child care, early care, learning, and after-school care.



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<sup>72</sup> <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/infographic/child-care-teachers-are-essential-workers-lets-treat-them-that-way/>

## FOCUS AREA 4: CHILD CARE COLLABORATIONS - IMPLEMENTATIONS

## GOAL 4

There will be community and political commitment to sustained investment in high-quality, accessible, and affordable early care, education, and after-school programs.

COMMUNITY VALUE	OBJECTIVE	ACTION STRATEGIES	LEADS AND PARTNERS
THE PROVISION OF CHILD CARE IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY	4a. <b>Increase public and private investment</b> in early care, education and after-school programs and workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Build community awareness and political will</b> in support of investing in early care, education, and after-school programs through policy advocacy, advisory participation, community forums, marketing campaigns, and grassroots organizing.</li> <li>• Develop an <b>Economic Impact Report</b> for Santa Cruz County early care, education, and after-school programs and the impact of the lack of care on the functioning of the County economy.</li> <li>• Use the new CAC website and Social Media to raise awareness regarding ECE Workforce issues and opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Businesses and Corporations</li> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• Early Care, Education, and After-School Partners</li> <li>• Local officials and decision-makers</li> <li>• Business Partners</li> <li>• Chamber of Commerce(s)</li> <li>• Funders – Government, Foundations, and Corporations</li> <li>• Workforce Development Board</li> <li>• South County Triage Workgroup</li> <li>• Thrive by 5</li> </ul>
	4b. <b>Create new partnerships</b> in the County with businesses, non-profits, and organizations that benefit directly and indirectly from child care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a “<b>Day Without Child Care</b>” event in the County.</li> <li>• Engage and convene community partners in long-term planning, strategizing, and advocacy.</li> <li>• Identify five new community partners and secure commitments to increase the supply of child care providers and spaces in the County.</li> <li>• Conduct a countywide <b>Parent Survey</b> of the needs, challenges, and preferences of parents regarding the care and education of their children.</li> <li>• Utilize the results of the <b>Parent Survey</b> in the next 2026 Needs Assessment.</li> </ul>	
	4c. <b>Develop Community Outreach, Messaging, and Key Advocacy protocols.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Define</b> aligned key messages and talking points about the importance of high-quality child care and critical priority issues.</li> <li>• <b>Connect</b> early care and learning to positive school and life outcomes.</li> <li>• <b>Develop</b> common protocols for advocacy communications.</li> <li>• Define target audiences and <b>outreach strategies</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage</b> leaders of existing countywide efforts to attend or present at CAC meetings</li> <li>• Hold <b>Hot Topic</b> presentations at CAC meetings, where community members can highlight new projects, initiatives, and promote <b>Availability of Subsidized Care</b> issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childhood Advisory Council</li> <li>• Local Businesses and Corporations</li> <li>• Private Foundations</li> <li>• The Workforce Development Board</li> <li>• Chamber of Commerce(s)</li> <li>• The CORE Investments and CORE Institute</li> <li>• Local cities and jurisdictions</li> <li>• Local developers, including housing developers</li> <li>• Non-profit housing organizations</li> <li>• Local colleges and universities, public and private</li> <li>• Children’s Network and CCECAN.</li> <li>• Thrive by 5</li> </ul>

## FOCUS AREA 4: CHILD CARE COLLABORATIONS - INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

## INCREASE COLLABORATIONS

- **Strengthen relationships** with local agencies, businesses, and other organizations/agencies serving children and families.
- **Convene Bi-Annual Conference** on the State of Children, Early Care, Education, and After-School Care, and report data and trends including results of **Workforce Study and Economic Impact Report**.

## EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS

- **Increase partnerships** with local business leaders and elected officials to address issues facing the child care field in the County.

## REPORT OUTCOMES

- **Increase awareness** of the importance of early care, education and after-school care through social media, community meetings, and public hearing participation.



*“What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”*

**-George Bernard Shaw**

## V. Call to Action

This section summarizes the actions proposed to address the needs of children and families regarding early care, education, and after-school care in Santa Cruz County. These actions require concerted efforts by a wide variety of entities, organizations, public agencies, school districts, private child care providers, employers, and local decision-makers, including elected or appointed officials. Child care is extremely complicated and intersects with a wide variety of stakeholders. The Childhood Advisory Council is the lead on implementing this Strategic Plan but they cannot do it alone. It requires the entire community to rally together to support our children. As discussed in the beginning chapter of the Strategic Plan, the benefits of early care and education are broad and significant and transect various aspects of society, including:

- Providing a safe and nurturing environment for our children
- Supporting school readiness so children can succeed in school and life
- Providing the ability for parents to work, knowing their children are well cared for and safe.
- Providing employers with a more stable workforce and labor supply
- Reducing public spending during the future of children's life
- Resulting in higher education success rates



# CALL TO ACTION

HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO:

## BUSINESS & PRIVATE SECTOR

**Invest!** The government cannot and will not be able to do it alone. Include facility space for on-site child care, paid parental leave, and adopt family-friendly workplace policies. Support the workforce through resource linkages and provider discounts.



## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

**Stay informed!** Work collaboratively with those in the early care, education, and after-school field, non-profit community, education, and government. Contribute to being a united voice for early care, education, and after-school programs.



## PARENTS & COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**Be civically active!** Educate the community on the needs and challenges by sharing your story with employers, community members, private sector leaders, and most importantly, elected officials.

**Participate** in any way that fits with your life, career, and capacity. Demand elected officials to respond to your needs and continually advocate for children-focused policies and vote for elected officials that share your values.





## FUNDERS

**Join us!** Support the plan by providing the resources needed for implementation strategies that generate systems changes, such as support for the development of a Universal Kindergarten Readiness Tool and an updated economic impact report. Prioritize funding early care and education and involve providers in conversations.

## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

**Advance!** Develop career pathways that support the growth and development of this field by working with partners such as the Workforce Development Board and other local colleges. Provide opportunities for professional development of providers in the early care, education, and after-school field and ways for them to connect after with Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers for successful child and family transitions into the school system.



## POLICY MAKERS

**Be bold!** Use data-driven policy decision-making. Hold yourself and your colleagues accountable to your policy choices and inspire others to choose policies that support kids.

**Invest, Invest, Invest!** Make tough trade-offs and allocate scarce resources to early care, education, and after-school programs.



## PROVIDERS, PRACTITIONERS, & TEACHERS

**Inspire!** Actively seek an action strategy from this Strategic Plan that you want to work toward and lead or join with others to work on it.

**Mentor** and support the next generation of child care professionals.

**ALL**

Get Involved in the Childhood Advisory Council by contacting:  
Diane Munoz at 831-466-5822 or [dmunoz@santacruzcoe.org](mailto:dmunoz@santacruzcoe.org)

As the Santa Cruz County Childhood Advisory Council, we invite you to join us in advancing change for our future generation and for the future of humankind.