Early Care and Education in California

What It Is

On kidsdata.org, indicators of early childhood care and education include:

- The percentage of children ages 0-5, whose parents read with them, by weekly frequency
- Single-year estimates of the percentage of children ages 3-5 enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, by county and county group, and, for the U.S. and California, by age and by race/ethnicity; also available are five-year estimates for cities, school districts, and counties with 10,000+ residents and legislative districts

Kidsdata.org also provides the following measures of licensed child care in California:

- The annual cost of child care for infants and preschoolers in child care centers and family child care homes
- The percentage of children in working families for whom child care spaces are available
- The number of child care spaces in licensed facilities and the percentage of full-time and part-time spaces available
- The number of licensed child care facilities and the percentage of facilities offering evening, weekend or overnight care
- The percentage of child care requests by age group and the percentage of requests for evening, weekend or overnight care

Why This Topic Is Important

Experiences during early childhood lay the foundation for future health and well being, and the quality of children's early care and education (ECE) can have significant, lasting effects. High-quality ECE programs deliver consistent, developmentally sound, and emotionally supportive care and education. This type of care before age 5 is associated with improved cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, and physical health, as well as increased school readiness, academic achievement, and earnings in adulthood. Positive outcomes are particularly pronounced for children from low-income families, children of color, and those at risk for academic challenges, such as children in immigrant
families and those with a first language other than English. A critically important ECE need for many families is child care; reliable child care can help families move out of poverty and achieve financial stability by enabling parents to work or pursue education and job training.

However, finding affordable, high-quality ECE is a major challenge for many families, especially in California, and access differs based on geography, race/ethnicity, and income. In 2021, California was ranked the least affordable state for center-based infant care in the nation. For example, costs for center-based infant care in California made up an estimated 17% of the median annual income for married couples and 54% for single parents in 2021.

How Children Are Faring
In 2018, an estimated 61% of California children ages 3-5 were enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, similar to percentages from previous years. An estimated 55% of Hispanic/Latino 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in pre-primary programs, compared with more than two-thirds of their African American/black, Asian American, white, and multiracial peers. Across counties with data in 2014-2018, the percentage of children in this age group enrolled in preschool or kindergarten ranged from less than 50% (Kern, Tulare) to more than 75% (Marin, San Francisco).

California's 36,827 licensed child care centers and family child care homes provided 976,835 child care spaces in 2019. Overall, the number of licensed facilities and spaces have been on the decline since 2008. According to 2019 estimates, there was one licensed child care space available for every four California children ages 0-12 with working parents; in some counties, availability was as low as one in six.

The average annual cost of licensed infant care exceeded $17,000 in child care centers and approached $12,000 in family child care homes in 2018. Care for preschool-age children was less expensive, but still more than $12,000 in child care centers and nearly $11,000 in family child care homes.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic:
https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/19/early-care-and-education/summary