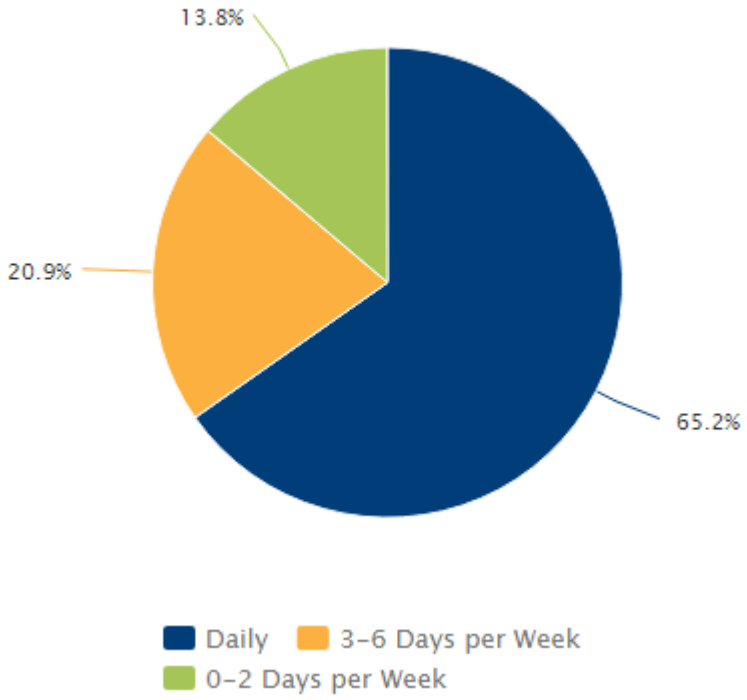
KidsData

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Early Care and Education in California

Children Ages 0-5 Whose Parents Read with Them: 2017-2018
California



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-5 whose parents read with them, by frequency (e.g., in 2017-2018, 65.2% of young children in California had parents who read with them daily).
Data Source: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, California Health Interview Survey (Aug. 2020).

Median Annual Cost of Licensed Child Care, by Age Group and Facility Type: 2022

California	Median Annual Cost	
Age Group	Child Care Center	Family Child Care Home
Infant	$19,719	$14,787
Toddler	$12,289	$12,380
Preschooler	$11,699	$11,629
School-Age	$10,326	$9,675

Definition: Estimated annual child care cost at which families of half of children enrolled in full-time licensed care pay more and families of half of children enrolled in full-time licensed care pay less, by age group and type of facility (e.g., in 2023, the median annual cost of full-time licensed child care for an infant in a child care center in California was $19,719).
Data Source: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, California Child Care Portfolio (May 2025).

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 at least 10,000 residents and for legislative districts

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

- The median annual cost of child care in child care centers and family child care homes, by age group
- 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

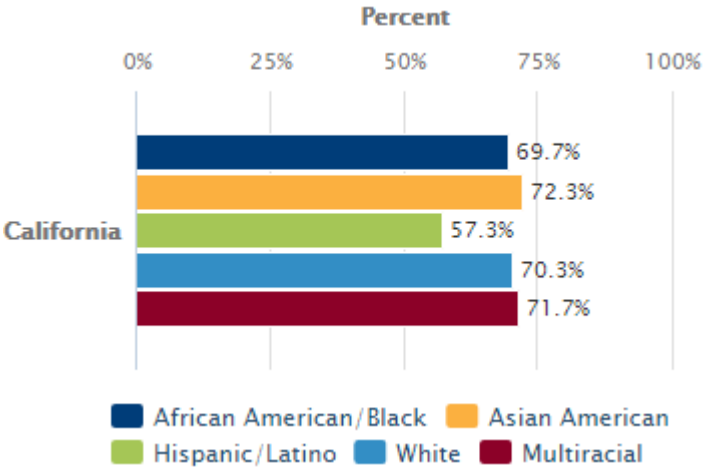
Experiences during early childhood lay the foundation for future health and well being, and the quality of children's early care and education (ECE) can have significant, lasting effects. High-quality ECE programs deliver evidence-based learning opportunities that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, along with emotionally responsive care that supports the whole child. Participation in quality ECE programs 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. The benefits of quality ECE extend beyond

Availability of Child Care for Working Families: 2023

Locations	Percent
California	25.6%
Alameda County	33.6%
Contra Costa County	29.9%
Fresno County	17.9%
Kern County	16.7%
Los Angeles County	24.5%
Orange County	28.9%
Riverside County	15.0%
Sacramento County	28.7%
San Bernardino County	14.7%
San Diego County	31.3%
Santa Clara County	36.4%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-12 with parents in the labor force for whom licensed child care spaces are available and unavailable (e.g, in 2023, licensed child care spaces were available for 25.6% of children with working parents in California).
Data Source: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, California Child Care Portfolio (May 2025); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey public use microdata (Dec. 2024).

Children Ages 3-5 Enrolled in Preschool or Kindergarten, by Race/Ethnicity: 2024



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 3-5 enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2024, 57.3% of Hispanic/Latino children ages 3-5 in California were enrolled in preschool or kindergarten).
Data Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey public use microdata (Aug. 2026).

individuals to society overall, as improved long-term outcomes can reduce the need for more costly interventions later in life.

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 child care is a major challenge for many families, especially in California, and access differs based on geography, income, race/ethnicity, language, and disability status. California consistently ranks among the least affordable states for center-based infant care in the nation. Unaffordable child care has a large-scale impact on California's economy, with unmet needs for infant and toddler care alone estimated to cost the state $17 billion annually in lost productivity, wages, and tax revenue.

How Children Are Faring

California's 35,836 licensed child care centers and family child care homes provided 990,332 child care spaces in 2023—up more than 27,000 spaces from 2021, but still more than 93,000 spaces lower than 2008. According to 2023 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 lower than one space for every six children.

In 2022, median annual costs for full-time licensed infant care at the county level ranged from $11,500 to $31,500 in child care centers and from $9,900 to $21,200 in family child care homes. Across counties, care for toddlers and preschoolers was generally less expensive, but also showed wide variation, from $7,600 to $24,800 annually in child care centers and from $9,000 to $21,300 in family child care homes.

An estimated 64% of California children ages 3-5 were enrolled in preschool or kindergarten in 2024, up from 51% in 2021. U.S. figures followed a similar trend, recovering to pre-pandemic levels after falling below 60% in 2021 and 2022. Statewide and nationally, pre-primary participation rose in each age and race/ethnicity group with data over this period.

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