

Fresno C2C
Early Care and Education
Policy Series
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Child Care in Fresno County:

Expanding the child care workforce and improving quality through collaboration and innovation

Child Care is Fundamental to Economic Development

The pandemic quickly revealed the immutable reality that child care is fundamental to the health of our economy and basic community services. Essential workers needed affordable care in an accessible and safe place at a time when centers were closing and in-home care providers were pulling back. We scrambled to provide child care with stopgap funding and piecemeal solutions. As we are emerging into the recovery phase, a lack of child care remains an obstacle at center stage in our recovery efforts. For many families, parents can't go back to work if the kids aren't in care.

The importance of early care and education (ECE) to Fresno's economic health is summed up in the Human Capital category of DRIVE's (Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy) 10-year investment plan, which states: *"This investment is critical not only to early childhood outcomes but also for lifelong outcomes of the next generation, representing a significant opportunity to reduce socioeconomic and racial equity gaps while investing in Fresno's future human capital value proposition and workforce."* A study by the Labor Center at UC Berkeley found that expanding high-quality ECE would generate economic output through the higher earnings of ECE workers and have an even greater impact on the state's economy by increasing the employment, earnings, and productivity of parents. The report identified substantial immediate and long-term economic benefits flowing from public investments in ECE including:^[1]

- Dollars spent in ECE flow through the economy with a multiplier effect.
- Greater access to high-quality ECE would increase the female labor force participation.
- Parents who have access to high-quality ECE are able to increase their earnings.
- ECE supports increasing worker productivity.

The annual costs of insufficient ECE to Fresno's employers and taxpayers are immense. A study recently released by Ready Nation, a national organization of business leaders, reports that the annual aggregate economic burden each year a child is under the age of 3 without sufficient child care costs the nation a total of \$122 billion with \$17 billion of this total attributable to California. The impact on families, businesses, and taxpayers has more than doubled since 2018. From birth to kindergarten total losses include:^[2]

- Working parents lose \$19,610 in lost earnings, reduced participation in the labor market, and in lower returns to experience.
- Businesses lose \$3,280 per working parent in reduced revenue and extra recruitment costs.
- Taxpayers lose an average of \$5,170 per working parent in lower federal and state/local taxes.

The **6** why's of childcare

- 1. For parents to be able to work, support their families (and as COVID-19 has explicitly demonstrated), their communities, child care is vitally important.**



2. The pandemic clearly highlighted the number of workers who are truly “essential” and required to be onsite in health care, food and agricultural production, elder care, food banks, grocery stores, warehouses, delivery services, child care providers and more.



The Foundations for Emotional Health and Cognitive Learning are Set Early

Traditionally, the term “child care” has been (and is to this day) widely viewed through the lens of “baby sitting,” especially when it relates to infants and toddlers. This “baby sitting” framework fails to account for the importance of what is actually occurring in terms of an infant’s development—the essential process of attachment which is our earliest and most important learning. The job of ECE workers in partnership with parents is to lay the foundational brain structures and underpinnings for lifelong emotional, social, educational, and adult success that arise from healthy attachment. Center-based ECE programs have specific requirements including a daily routine, planned curriculum and social emotional

supports all designed to get children off to a strong start. Planting the seeds for the key brain-based capacities—trust in others, empathy, and the ability to self-regulate in the face of strong emotions—is fundamental to lifelong social and behavioral health, and cognitive learning.



0-5 Sets the Trajectory for Academic Success

The shared vision of the Fresno Cradle to Career Partnership is that all Fresno County third graders, regardless of race, ethnicity or zip code are reading at grade level. This milestone is one of the most important markers on a child’s journey to success in school, career, and life. High-quality early care and education (ECE) play an enormous role in setting the academic trajectory for children. Setting a solid learning foundation when children are 0-5 helps ensure readiness to enter kindergarten, leading to third-grade reading success. Investing in our early care

and education workforce is one of the most powerful things we can do to help every child reach their full potential. Child care providers/early education teachers greatly impact the wellbeing of the children and families they serve and the community as a whole.

Fresno is paying a growingly high price in the lost opportunities presented in early childhood brain development. Fresno's Cradle to Career (C2C) Partnership recently released a report: *Our Kids, Our Valley, Our Future: 2022 Community Data Report* which found that by 3rd grade only 37% of Fresno students met or exceeded the SBAC reading standard with many Black, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income children performing even below that.^[3] These reading scores are a red flag signaling that unrecognized negative factors are at play in far too many children's lives. C2C's reported data bears this out, showing that by kindergarten many Fresno children are already struggling and not ready to learn, falling below 50% achievement in the developmental milestones on nearly half of the 18 DRDP Domains (Desired Results Developmental Profile).^[4] Low scores in two of these domains are particularly worrisome: just 48% in Self-Control of Feelings and Behaviors (impulse control) and 51% in Social and Emotional Understanding (empathy). The cortical brain-based capacities for self-regulation and empathy are essential for school success. And their foundations are laid in place—or not—from the beginning in the quality and consistency of interactions with their caregivers. This is when the foundation for cognitive learning and language development is laid.^[5] If we commit to acting on this understanding, we will find that high quality ECE, in partnership with families, has a powerful role to play in setting children up to succeed when they first walk through the door to kindergarten.^[6]

The Need for Child Care Exceeds Current Supply

Child care is a mix of licensed and unlicensed care options including family child care homes, family/friend/neighbor care and center-based care. These options fail to meet the needs of many parents. According to the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools drawing on the American Institute of Research (AIR) - Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (ELNAT), Fresno County currently has only

enough slots for 23% of children ages 0-12 of working families leaving 77% unserved. For infants and toddlers, with their more intense needs, it is even worse with only enough slots for 15% leaving 85% of our youngest children unserved.



Promising Efforts are Underway to Develop Our ECE Workforce

A solid foundation for our early care and education system has been built through collaborative efforts between multiple entities including K-12 education providers, universities and public entities. This work includes an initiative that supports ECE workforce development (part of the DRIVE Preconception to Age 5 portfolio) called Pathways to Quality which is offered through the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. Through years of sustained relationship building, collaboration and outreach, Fresno's ECE leaders know that there are two key ingredients for

successful workforce development: navigation and mentoring to support professional development goals. By using philanthropic funding to fill in gaps in public funding, Pathways to Quality is an innovative and collaborative project that is opening doors for current and potential workforce like never before. Providing mentors and navigators, building relationships and instilling confidence are all key ingredients to successful career pathway completion. This workforce training is occurring simultaneously with efforts focused on the systems level to better coordinate our higher education institutions across the region. The overall goals are improved access and scheduling, higher completion rates and more qualified ECE professionals.

5. These small businesses are often women-owned and are community anchors that strengthen neighborhoods.



More Resources are Needed

ECE professional development can take many forms—an established teacher seeking an advanced degree, a caregiver working toward certification, a licensed family child care home provider wanting to increase quality—are just a few of the possible scenarios. Public money is available and does help the ECE workforce achieve their professional development goals. In recent years California has increased funding to support the field, however, this funding does not cover the full need. Existing government support is certainly appreciated, and more unrestricted funding is needed to meet the professional development needs of our diverse current and potential workforce.

Rethinking the Value of Early Care and Education

Basic brain building for infants, toddlers and preschoolers should be seen for what it is—the first and most crucial stage of education. Although early childhood professionals work with children during their most formative years of development and growth, they are the lowest paid in the low-paid profession of teaching. Given the extraordinary value of what they provide, child care professionals should be trained, paid, and valued accordingly. This premise upends our current world view of education where we see "higher education" as starting in college with the qualifications of teachers and their pay scale rising with a child's increasing age. In California a third of the families of child care workers—most of whom are women of color or immigrants—are on one or more public assistance programs such as Medi-Cal.^[7] People stocking shelves at Trader Joe's or loading boxes at Amazon, for example, receive more in compensation than child care workers.^[8] But early learning is THE primary time to positively influence the entire educational and adult trajectory. This is the time when trauma or the overwhelm of a child's nervous system takes its greatest toll.^[7] Toxic stress experienced early in life, including inadequate early attention and care, can have a cumulative toll on lifelong mental and physical health.^[8] The quality of our future workforce is dependent on the quality of life of our youngest children now.

6. Young children who receive quality child care (which includes early learning and developmental screenings) are on a trajectory for success in school and life.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Recast ECE as an integral part of public education and include it in the planning and budgets of school systems along with Pre-k -12.

2

Elevate the ECE profession by increasing compensation and reimbursement for ECE workforce.

3

Improve the state’s professional development infrastructure to create and maintain an effective ECE workforce which includes accessibility to coordinated, and standardized, high-quality training for educators and caregivers that is research-based and focused on applying knowledge to practice.

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Notes

[1] <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/investing-early-care-education-economic-benefits-california/>

[2] Ready Nation, "\$122 Billion: The Growing, Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis," Council for a Strong America, February 2023, retrieved from <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2038-122-billion-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis>

[3] Fresno Cradle to Career, "Our Kids, Our Valley, Our Future: 2022 Community Data Report," Winter 2023, retrieved from https://fresnoc2c.org/files/2023-01/FresnoC2C_AnnualReport2022_Final-DIGITAL.pdf

[4] Ibid

[5] Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "In Brief: The Science of Early Child Development," retrieved from https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/glo-gender_girls_rights_eccd_linkages-june2017.pdf

[6] Ibid

[7] Powell, A., Chavez, R., Austin, L., et al, "The Forgotten Ones," The Economic Well-Being of Early Educators During COVID-19," University of California, Berkeley, February 2022, retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CSCCE-Economic-Well-Being-of-Early-Educators-During-COVID.pdf>

[8] Goldstein, D., "Why You Can't Find Child Care 100,000 Workers are Missing," *The New York Times*, October 13, 2022, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/us/child-care-worker-shortage.html>

