

BABIES AND TODDLERS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY:

PRIORITIZING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TO SET CHILDREN ON A PATH TO SUCCESS.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Alliance for Early Success

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ABOUT US

Advancement Project California is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization working on systems change. Our California staff in Los Angeles and Sacramento work to expand opportunities in our educational systems, create healthy built environments, build participatory and representative communities, and shift public investments towards equity. We develop rigorous evidence-based solutions, innovate technology and tools with coalition partners to advance the field, broker partnerships between community advocates and the halls of power, and build racial equity. With the understanding that education is an essential component in improving the lives and opportunities for all Californians, we work across the state and with a diverse set of stakeholders to improve the early learning and K-12 education systems. We believe that effective and respectful partnerships are the bedrock of success when working to fix a system responsible for educating all of California's children.

INTRODUCTION

Youth constitute a large proportion of Los Angeles County. The County's children have pressing health, education, economic and social needs. Strategic investments in youth are key to setting children on a trajectory for success. Investments in the youngest children is particularly beneficial, including babies and toddlers. This policy brief uplifts the pivotal role of local decision makers, such as the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, in supporting families with young children.

While the interaction of multiple systems are essential to best serve the needs of Los Angeles County babies and toddlers, the focus of this policy brief will be early care and education (ECE). ECE refers to the programs and early learning experiences for young children and their families that support babies and toddlers, learning, and ability to succeed in school and beyond. High-quality ECE programs enhance a child's intellectual, language, social development and overall well-being so that they are better prepared for kindergarten, less likely to suffer from long-term abuse and neglect, more likely to pursue higher education, and less likely to be dependent on public services.² High-quality ECE is a multifaceted issue that includes quality, access, teacher support, etc. A critical base factor of high-quality ECE programs for families is ensuring access to an available and affordable ECE space in the first place.

This brief takes a deep dive into the availability of ECE spaces for Los Angeles County's most vulnerable families. First, we begin by providing an overview of the importance of high-quality ECE. Next, we offer an analysis of available subsidized ECE programs for babies and toddlers in Los Angeles County. We highlight two significant contributory problems: inadequate funding and insufficient availability of ECE spaces (hereinafter facilities infrastructure). The brief shares parent voices struggling to navigate and attain access to ECE programs. We conclude with policy recommendations for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors that if adopted can lead to increased access to high-quality ECE programs for families.

CRISIS POINT:

In Los Angeles County, 51% of babies and toddlers are eligible for State subsidized child care programs

Only 6% of income-eligible babies and toddlers are served by State subsidies in Los Angeles County.



WHY ECE MATTERS: CHILDREN WHO START BEHIND, STAY BEHIND

During their first three years, a baby's brain develops and creates trillions of neural connections. A baby's experiences and relationships are the impetus for the creation of these connections. Neuroscientists share that the larger the number of interconnections, the faster and more meaningful learning will be.³ Neurons that are used will strengthen, and those that are unused will eventually disappear. Thus, the quality of experiences and relationships in the first three years of life has a deep and lasting impact on how the brain develops. ECE programs share with families the important responsibility of promoting and safeguarding the early social emotional development of babies and toddlers.

Stable quality care for babies and toddlers, in the home or at ECE programs, increases exposure to nurturing relationships and helps form healthy attachments. Research demonstrates that when a baby's "needs are met, the infant forms a secure attachment—or 'base'—that creates a foundation for healthy development in early childhood and beyond."

Developing attachments are the foundation for a baby's social emotional development, which in turn provides the basis for cognitive development, physical growth and health, language development and school readiness. When exposure to positive relationships and attachments are missing, children experience declines in fundamental skills and have a greater probability of developmental delays in learning, interpersonal relationships and socioemotional skills.

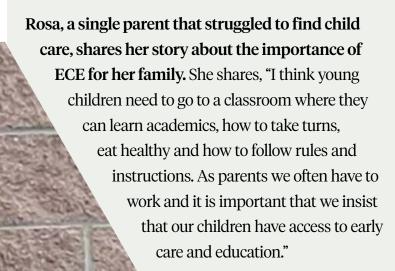
In addition to providing the stable environment babies and toddlers need, ECE programs are crucial in preparing our children for success in the K-12 system and in helping close the achievement gap as it first begins to form. Too many young children enter kindergarten unprepared, but high quality early learning experiences can help. On average, children who participate in high-quality ECE programs gain about a third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and math skills.8 Conversely, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study found that children who received low-quality care in their first 4.5 years exhibited academic and behavioral problems that persisted to age 15.9

NATIONAL RESEARCH SHOWS THAT CHILDREN WHO ATTEND HIGH-QUALITY ECE PROGRAMS¹⁷:

- Perform better on standardized tests in reading and math
- Are less likely to be placed in special education
- Are less likely to be held back a grade
- Are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college

Economists also find that supporting at-risk children is an effective strategy for reducing social costs. At-risk children are less likely to successfully transition into adulthood due to risk factors, such as poverty and less access to opportunities around social and economic resources. At-risk children can fall further behind their higher-income peers academically even before kindergarten. The readiness gap is especially apparent in vocabulary development — at age three, low-income children have heard 30 million less words than their higher-income peers. Dessed on cost-benefit analyses, economists share that investments in high-quality ECE programs is an efficient strategy for closing these gaps. Dessed on cost-





Rosa enrolled her son at "Pasitos," an ECE program offered by Human Services Association – a Los Angeles County community based organization. When Rosa's son was two years olds, she noticed he had difficulty pronouncing words. At the "Pasitos" program, Rosa learned that her child needed additional supports and she worked with program staff to get her son speech therapy. In second grade, Rosa's son was re-evaluated and he no longer needed the additional services. Access to ECE helped Rosa realize that her child needed support for language development.

Like most parents, Rosa wants the best for her child. She will continue to fight for a brighter future for her son and all children. She states, "As a single mother, it's difficult getting by with one salary, but I have high hopes for my son and I know he will achieve his dreams. We were lucky, he had ECE and access to the speech therapy he needed early."

BABY AND TODDLER CARE CRISIS IN LOS ANGELES

A child's early years are a critical window for identifying special needs, cognitive growth and social emotional development.¹² During the early years, children need stable, affordable and high-quality ECE. Yet, families often find that ECE opportunities are expensive and difficult to find, particularly for low-income communities.

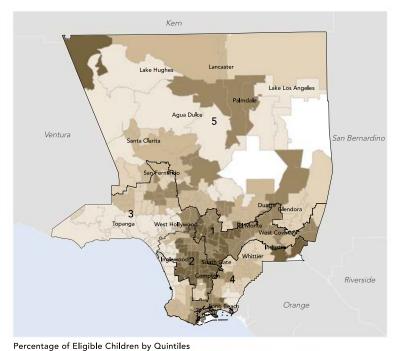
In Los Angeles County, fifty-one percent of babies and toddlers are eligible for California subsidized

ECE programs. See Map 1. The County is home to 370,313 babies and toddlers. Over half are eligible for State subsidized ECE programs. A family qualifies for a State subsidized ECE program either through their income and/or through categorical eligibility—such as being part of the child welfare system, homelessness or participation in California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs). Income eligibility is determined as a share of the state median income (SMI) and dependent on family size. Families are eligible for

services if their income falls below 70 percent of the state median income, determined by the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS). 13 For family income ceilings for initial certification for subsidized ECE programs, see: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/mb1708.asp.

Map 1 depicts the number of children under three eligible for state subsidized ECE programs and illustrates where they live. In areas of dark yellow color, 67% or more of babies and toddlers qualify to receive subsidized ECE programs. The map highlights large numbers of families that qualify for subsidized child care in Southeast Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles and the City of Industry.

MAP 1. LOS ANGELES: 51% OF BABIES AND TODDLERS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR STATE SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE



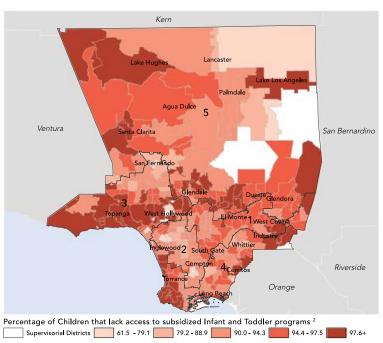


In Los Angeles County, there are 370,313 infants and toddlers (0-3). Approximately 192,548 infants and toddlers are eligible for State subsidized child care.

ootnotes
Advancement Project California collaborated with the Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Educatic
American Institutes for Research (AIR) data. This data includes the number of children eligible for state subsidized programs (unde
2015-2016 State Mediain Income) (five-year averages in 2016 from American Community Surveya.



MAP 2. LOS ANGELES: ONLY 6% OF BABIES AND TODDLERS ARE SERVED BY STATE SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS¹



In Los Angeles County, there are 370,313 infants and toddlers. Of those children, 180,571 (94%) are eligible but lack access to subsidized infant and toddler programs.³

- Notes

 Advancement Project California collaborated with the Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education and used American Institutes for Research (AIR) data. This data includes the number of children eligible for state subsidized programs (under 70% 2015-2016 State Median Income) (five-year averages in 2016, from American Community Survey).

 2. Natural Breaks: Separates data into classes based on natural groups in data distribution. These breaks occur in histograms at low points in valleys. White polygons are 1 or fewer eligible kids, and areas where no one resides.

 3. Los Angeles has 9,690 Early Head Start seast and 647 CalWORKS stage 1 seasts that we have not included in this map as those are federal resources. This seat increase results in 12% of eligible families receiving access to infant and toddler programs.

Map created March 2018 by Advancement Project California (c) 2018 Advancement Project California All rights reserved

Only 6% of income-eligible babies and toddlers are served by State subsidies in Los Angeles

County. Map 2 illustrates the persistent gaps that remain in State funding for babies and toddlers. Map 2 does not depict federal investments, such as Early Head Start and CalWORKs Stage 1 subsidies. The inclusion of federal investments more than doubles the number of babies and toddlers served. Map 2 demonstrates that children under the age of three experience large disparities in access to California subsidized ECE programs. Large demand for subsidized ECE services, lack of spaces and minimal state funding all contribute to this significant problem. Of the 192,548 Los Angeles County babies and toddlers that are income-eligible for subsidized ECE programs, approximately 94% do not receive the ECE program subsidies. These gaps in access to high-quality subsidy programs mean children are missing essential learning opportunities to create a strong foundation necessary for school readiness and future achievements.

The dark red areas in Map 2 illustrate where gaps in access to State subsidized ECE programs are particularly severe. The dark red areas represent neighborhoods in which over 90% of children under three are income-eligible but do not have access to a State subsidized ECE program. For example, in Southeast Los Angeles, 12,217 children qualify for subsidized

child care, yet only 3% receive the California subsidies for which they qualify. This is significant as Southeast Los Angeles and South Los Angeles communities experience the largest gaps in educational degree attainment and school enrollment, according to the "Portrait of Los Angeles County" Education Index. 14 These gaps in services and the opportunity gaps illustrate how our current ECE system is failing these children and their families with real educational and economic impacts.

Los Angeles County families share stories of difficulty in finding child care for babies and toddlers. Waitlists for programs are so long that eligible children often age out.

Berta was on a waitlist for over a year for her now 18-month old. In March 2018, she learned that a local ECE program finally had a space for her son. Berta shares: "There are not enough child care programs in my community. My son is not reaching his potential, he is wasting time, and he is falling behind."

When Berta's son was born, she went to enroll him at a local ECE program. Unfortunately, she was told that her family's annual income just barely surpassed the eligibility threshold by \$30. "My husband is the only one who works and it is very hard for us to get by with all the bills, housing, and high cost of food." Berta's family income fluctuates. In June 2017, when eligibility guidelines went up, Berta became eligible for State subsidized ECE programs. However, she learned the waitlists were long. As Berta learned more about the importance of ECE, she continued to call local community based organizations that offer subsidized ECE programs.

In early March 2018, Berta learned that there was finally a space for her 18-month old. This opportunity for her son is also a tremendous opportunity for Berta. Now that her son will have access to a local ECE program, Berta hopes to participate in classes or workshops that will further help her support her son's development.

While Berta had to wait over a year for her baby to access an ECE program, other parents are not so lucky. A caregiver, who wishes to remain anonymous, is struggling to find care for her 5-month-old foster child. Due to participating in the child welfare system and having a hearing loss, the child automatically qualifies to receive subsidized ECE programs and ranks high priority to receive services. Nonetheless, she remains on the waitlist and without access to ECE services. The Crystal Stairs (a local Resource and Referral agency) enrollment supervisor helping the caregiver states: "This is an emergency situation with no resolution because we have no funds." The caregiver cannot afford an ECE program and thus turns to her community for support. Every day is a struggle. The caregiver asks friends and family if they are able to take care of the baby while the caregiver goes to work. The caregiver shares: "I am thankful for the community around me that has rallied to help me during this time. I hope that as a broader community we can mobilize to win increased funding for our children."



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: PLANNING FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) can play a pivotal role in increasing availability of subsidized programs for babies and toddlers. The Board is entrusted with championing policies and budgets that support the needs of children and their families. The Board can opt to support families significantly through providing additional ECE opportunities, which will have long-term societal benefits.

The maps above analyze the problem of insufficient funding to serve the needs of Los Angeles County families. This problem is compounded by the fact that Los Angeles County lacks sufficient ECE facilities to serve babies and toddlers. During the Great Recession, California and Los Angeles County in particular, lost ECE facilities infrastructure. Per the Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education: "The County continues to lose licensed family child care spaces... facilities, which are located in a provider's home, offer parents an early care and education option that often has more flexible hours of operation and smaller provider-child ratios. In Los Angeles County, as of March 2016, there were 6,052 family child care providers compared to 7,623 in 2011. Over the past five years, family child care programs have experienced a decrease in their licensed capacity by 17 percent." ¹⁵

In Los Angeles County, rebuilding the ECE facilities infrastructure is especially important. Los Angeles County families are scarcely accessing subsidized ECE programs. Access to subsidized ECE programs for families is further challenged by lack of sufficient facilities. In jurisdictions that do not plan appropriately for family friendly communities, children will inevitably have less access to quality ECE spaces.

The Board is in a unique position to support policies that promote an increase in the ECE facilities infrastructure for babies and toddlers. To champion the bedrock for high-quality ECE programs, the facilities in which these programs operate, the Board should consider action in the following areas:

1. ADVOCATE FOR INCREASED STATE FUNDING FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS.

To create additional ECE slots, additional funding is imperative. We recommend the Board advocate at the state level for additional funding for subsidized care for babies and toddlers. Specifically, the Board can direct the County of Los Angeles Legislative Affairs & Intergovernmental Relations Office to make babies and toddlers a priority. To provide a greater impact, it is important to align with other advocates like the California Early Care and Education Budget Coalition and statewide budget asks.

2. BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTS FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS BY STARTING WITH FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT.

Due to the Great Recession, Los Angeles County lost both Family Child Care Homes and Center-based ECE facilities. Even before the recession, Los Angeles County had a shortage of facilities that served babies and toddlers. As we build the ECE infrastructure, the Board can:

 Offer one-time grants to Family Child Care Homes for zoning permit applications and/or to update homes to be ready for babies and toddlers. Furthermore, child protection is one of the Board's priorities and ECE programs operated in Family Child Care Homes can be an important network of providers to engage for support to prevent and reduce child abuse and neglect. ECE providers build strong bonds with the families they serve. Parents and caregivers are an integral part of ECE programs, with the mindset that parents are the first and most



important teacher. This empowering and asset-based mindset can have significant positive effects on parenting practices and reduction of the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Studies have found that participation in high quality ECE programs can reduce the incidence of maltreatment by as much as 52%. ¹⁶

 Conduct an assessment of county-owned property that would be conducive for operating Child Care Centers. County-owned property for consideration may include county regional parks.

• Develop ECE Centers in areas of high need for the most vulnerable children. To identify areas of high need, see maps above.

 Provide low-cost leases for Child Care Center facilities to nonprofits that administrate ECE programs. Nonprofits administrating ECE programs often operate at the margins of profit.
 Low-cost leases, such as \$1 yearly leases, allow ECE operators to invest in materials, their staff and other important components to lift up quality in programs.

3. INVEST IN BUILDING CAPACITY TO DEMOCRATIZE CHILD CARE DATA NEED AND ACCESS.

On a yearly basis, Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education collects child care need data. This information is shared with the Board and the California Department of Education. With minimum additional resources, this data could be mapped to provide an annual picture of Los Angeles County child care need. This would provide the Board with critical information for making child care investments that are data driven.

CONCLUSION

High-quality ECE is an important societal strategy to assure we put children on the path to success for life. In Los Angeles County, many children do not have access to ECE, especially our youngest learners – babies and toddlers. As the data and stories above demonstrate, Los Angeles County babies and toddlers find themselves in a lottery game for quality ECE programs, where the vast majority lose out. It is time for Los Angeles County to invest in access and to support an ECE system that will serve children and families of highest need.

ENDNOTES

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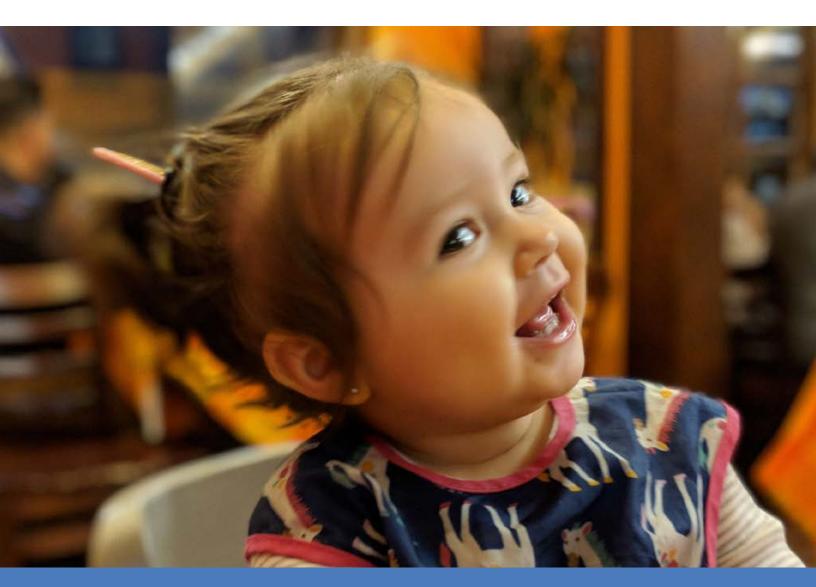
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