

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY 2026 Child Care Needs Assessment



Summary Brief



69,137
children ages 0–5
in Contra Costa (2025).



73%
of children under age
5 have a working parent.



22%
of licensed seats
are currently vacant.



28,538
licensed child care slots
were reported as of
February 2026.



10%
expected increase in
0-1 year old population
by 2035.



7%
expected decrease in
5-year old population
by 2035.

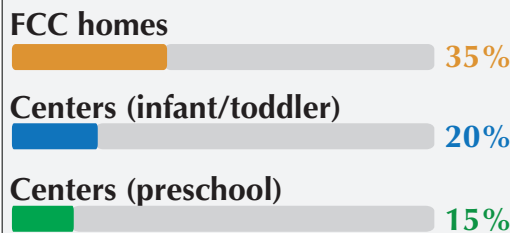


\$43,000
is the approximate
annual child care cost
for a typical family.



Supply, Demand & Unmet Need

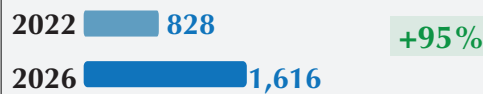
Estimated Vacancy Rate by Provider Type



FCC homes are a key activation
opportunity for infants and
after hour care.

Waitlist Shift 2022-2026

Infant/toddler (0-2 yrs)

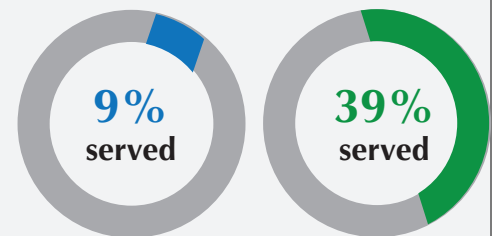


Preschool (3-5 yrs)



Unmet demand has moved sharply
toward the youngest children.

Eligible Children in Subsidized Care



Infant/toddler
91% unmet

Preschool
61% unmet



EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE: SKILLED BUT UNDERVALUED

The Challenge

- 4,000 educators - predominantly women of color, many bilingual.
- Center teachers on average earn \$6,300 less/yr than TK-12 teachers and FCC providers \$16,500 less/yr.
- 95% of centers reported staff turnover (2021–23).

* Many educators rely on CalFresh and Medi-Cal to meet basic needs.

The Progress Made

- 159 certified Quality Matters sites serving 4,722 children.
- \$29.7 Million Head Start/Early Head Start award for Contra Costa.
- The First 5 wage-enhancement pilot drew applications far beyond available slots.
- Licensed facilities grew from 1,118 in 2023 to 1,182 in 2026, and FCC homes increased 7.4%.

FAMILY VOICE: MIXED DELIVERY 2025 PARENT SURVEY (N=263)

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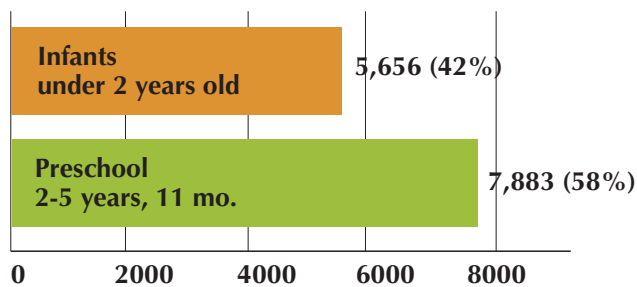
“It is a patchwork of family, friends, and paid child care that can crumble in a thousand tiny ways at any time.”

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- **84%** name cost as the #1 barrier.
- **61%** want non-traditional hours.
- **30%** cited limited availability, especially for infants and toddlers.
- **17%** wanted bilingual or multicultural care.



Care Requests by Age Jan 2025-Jan 2026



Who Needs Care

- Hispanic/Latino children make up 36% of all children ages 0–5.
- East County is projected to see continued population growth.
- 6,136 children ages 0–5 have an IFSP or IEP, and inclusive preschool spaces remain scarce.
- About 40% of residents speak a language other than English at home. Spanish, Farsi, and Mandarin are the top three languages spoken by kindergarteners.



Economic Need

- 11.6% of young children live in poverty.
- 34% are on Medi-Cal, 24% receive CalFresh, and 7% are in CalWORKs households.
- Self-sufficiency requires \$182,895 per year for a family of four, and child care alone accounts for \$43,396.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1



EXPAND AND ACTIVATE INFANT/TODDLER CAPACITY

Reactivate idle family child care slots and rebuild infant/toddler classrooms in high-poverty, high-waitlist communities. Increase and stabilize subsidy reimbursement rates. Add business and administrative supports for home-based providers.

2



STABILIZE AND FAIRLY COMPENSATE THE WORKFORCE

Raise wages toward a living wage and ensure access to health benefits. Expand bilingual and inclusive educator supports. Sustain wage-enhancement pilots beyond time-limited funding cycles to reduce chronic turnover.

3



IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY, ACCESS, AND EQUITY

Raise subsidy income thresholds to reflect Bay Area costs. Coordinate enrollment across programs and strengthen navigation hubs such as CocoKids, First 5, and school-linked systems. Expand non-traditional-hour, multilingual, and inclusive care, especially in East and West County.

Sources: Contra Costa County 2026 Child Care Needs Assessment | CocoKids (Feb 2026) | First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Systems Map (July 2025) | CA Dept. of Finance Vintage 2025 | U.S. Census ACS 2024 | MIT Living Wage Calculator (Feb 2026) | CSCCE at UC Berkeley (2024)

