

# 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.

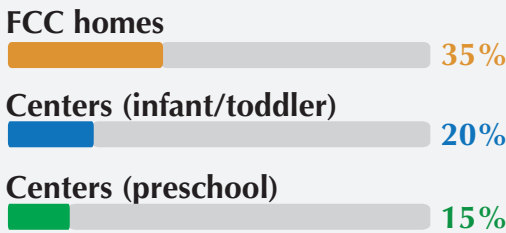


**\$43,000**  
is the approximate  
annual child care cost  
for a typical family.



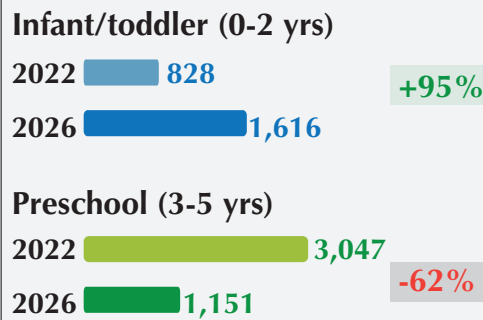
## Supply, Demand & Unmet Need

### Estimated Vacancy Rate by Provider Type



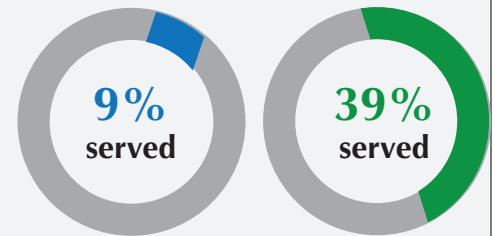
FCC homes are a key activation opportunity for infants and after hour care.

### Waitlist Shift 2022-2026



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%.

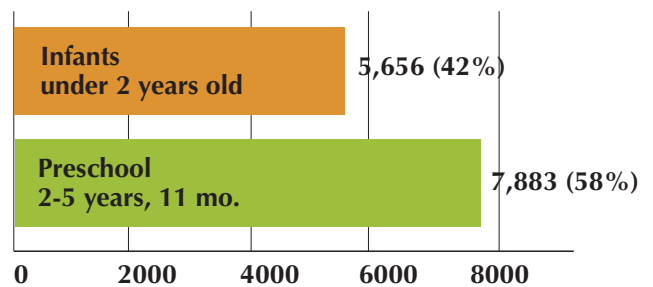
## FAMILY VOICE: MIXED DELIVERY 2025 PARENT SURVEY (N=263)

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

- **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)

