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KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
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TRISTA SPEER
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August 31, 2025

The Honorable President Ronald D. Kouchi,
and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Speaker Nadine K. Nakamura,
and Members of the House of Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

Enclosed is the joint report from the Department of Human Services and the Executive Office on Early Learning, submitted in accordance with Section 26-61, Hawaii Revised Statutes. The report outlines progress toward meeting benchmarks and implementing early care and education programs, as established by Act 46, Session Laws of Hawaii (SLH) 2020, as amended by Act 210, SLH 2021.

According to Section 93-16, HRS, the report is available for review electronically at the Department's website, <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/reports/legislative-reports/>, and the Executive Office on Early Learning's website, <https://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/>.

Sincerely,

Ryan I. Yamane
Director
Department of Human Services



Yuuko Arikawa-Cross

Yuuko Arikawa-Cross
Executive Director
Executive Office on Early Learning



August 31, 2025

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Enclosure

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**REPORT TO THE HAWAII STATE THIRTY-THIRD
LEGISLATURE 2026**

**IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF
SECTION 26-61(a), HAWAI'I REVISED STATUTES, ON THE
PROGRESS TOWARD ACHIEVING THE BENCHMARKS FOR
ACCESS TO ENROLLMENT IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAM
AND
SECTION 26-61(c), HAWAI'I REVISED STATUTES, ON THE
PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE EARLY CARE AND
EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAMS.**

**Executive Office on Early Learning
and the
Department of Human Services,
Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division,
Child Care Programs Office**

August 2025

Early Learning Benchmarks

The passage of Act 46, Session Laws of Hawai‘i (SLH) 2020 (Act 46), marked a significant milestone in the State’s commitment to expanding access to early learning opportunities for Hawai‘i’s children. The legislation reinforced access to early learning opportunities as a policy priority and recognized the urgent need to address gaps in preschool access.

This report addresses progress made toward two statutory benchmarks established by Act 46:

- By December 31, 2027 - Access to enrollment in a preschool program for 50% of otherwise unserved 3- and 4-year-old children.
- By December 31, 2032 - Access to enrollment in a preschool program for *all* 3 and 4-year-old children.

Codified in section 26-61, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) are charged with ensuring “access to learning through preschool programs that meet or exceed” these benchmarks. The benchmarks provide direction for government agencies and community partners and help to guide both planning and investment.

Act 46 and Act 210, SLH 2021, also authorized sharing of educational data to support school readiness and authorized use of federal funds to begin tracking available programs to inform future decision-making.

This report reflects the progress made to date, based on currently available data, and acknowledges the ongoing need to improve data systems, refine and expand the data gathered, shared, and used to plan and measure success.

Notably, the benchmarks for 2027 and 2032 are broad estimates. To be better able to determine the number of accessible child care seats to aim toward, requires the consideration of different factors including, but not limited to: the number of children, parental demand for early learning or prekindergarten (Pre-K) services, parental choice of setting for their child, community capacity and workforce to provide the care, affordability of care and ease of access to subsidies or free public options, the availability of care that is geographically preferred by parents and caretakers, and available hours of care. Additionally, community capacity can encompass facilities maintenance, workforce development, the costs of doing business, the government’s capacity to provide oversight of health and safety, and the provision of subsidies for low- to moderate-income families.

Capacity

With the ongoing support of the Legislature, the leadership of the Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke’s Ready Keiki initiative, and strong collaboration among community partners, government

agencies, and higher education institutions, Hawai‘i is making meaningful progress towards the benchmarks and long-term goal of providing universal access to preschool for all keiki.

Table 1. Estimated Capacity School Year 2025-2026: Estimated Number of Pre-K Seats by Program & Overall

EOEL Public Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Program	2,275
HSPCSC - Charter Schools Early Learning Programs	608
HIDOE Migrant Education Program	46
HIDOE Special Education Preschool	2,352
Average DHS Licensed & Registered Providers Serving 3- & 4-Year-Old Children	22,519
Department of Defense Preschools and Child Care	1,228
Total estimated capacity:	29,028

Table 1 reports the estimated current capacity for preschool seats across Hawai‘i’s mixed-delivery¹ Child care system in SY 2025–2026. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the estimated current capacity does not reflect what is known as "operational capacity" or "desired capacity," which refers to the number of children that providers actively intend to enroll, given their current staffing and program resources. Consequently, the number of *accessible* seats is likely less than the estimated current capacity.

Projections

Now that we have Hawaii birth data for 2023 (14,848) and preliminary data on births for 2024 (14,956), we can estimate the number of children who will be 3- or 4-years-old in 2027 (29,804). Following HIDOE’s kindergarten age-eligibility cutoff and utilizing the Hawai‘i Department of Health (DOH) monthly birth counts, we can expect 29,942 children to be 3- and 4-year-olds in 2027.

While we have an idea of Hawaii's broader population of 3- and 4-year-olds in 2027, we currently do not have enough information or a proxy available to estimate the 50% of otherwise *unserved* 3- and 4-year-olds that will be on December 31, 2027. For further details and discussion, please refer to the sections and appendices below.

Importantly, the community and agencies are focused on efforts to increase *access* to child care

¹ "Mixed-delivery system" refers to various child care options such as public school-based preschools, charter schools, private child care centers, Head Start programs, family child care homes, community-based programs, and home-based care.

and Pre-K opportunities, include expanding preschool capacity, supporting workforce development, and expanding access to subsidies. These efforts include new facilities developed through partnerships between the School Facilities Authority, Charter Schools, and Counties, the Legislature's recent investment in additional EOEL Pre-K classrooms for the 2026-27 school year, and revisions to the eligibility criteria for the Preschool Open Doors (POD) program subsidies. These new facilities and expanded eligibility to subsidies will provide opportunities for additional seats in both community-based programs and public Pre-K.

Estimating the number of 3- and 4-year-olds the system will need to serve in 2032 is a dynamic process and will remain a moving target until birth data for 2029 becomes available. Based on DOH vital statistics data, Hawai'i's births from 2012 through 2024 declined at an average annual rate of 1.97%². If this trend continues through 2029, the population of 3- and 4-year-old children in 2032 is projected to decline to 27,046.

Although recent growth of Pre-K and child care seats, coupled with declining birth rates, appears to position us well to meet the benchmark for 3- and 4-year-olds in 2032, the community and agencies must continue to discuss and address the issues that hinder accessibility, including meeting parental choice, affordability, the true costs of care, worker compensation, and quality improvement. Additionally, we need to continue developing cross-agency data collection, management, and analysis to measure progress and better understand resource needs and allocation. Lastly, we do not know how the most recent legislation, Act 203, SLH 2025 (Act 203), which, amongst other things, expands eligibility to POD program subsidies to 2-year-old children, effective January 1, 2026, will influence parental choice or provider capacity.

Key Developments: Highlights

Public Pre-K Expansion

- **EOEL Classroom Capacity:** The Legislature approved funding to open 25 additional public preschool classrooms in SY 2025-26 and 25 more in SY 2026-27, creating approximately 1,000 new seats.
- **Charter Schools Development:** Hawai'i's first pre-K-only public charter school opened in 2025, with a second school planned for the 2025-26 school year. With legislative support, existing charter schools added classrooms to accommodate children on waitlists and in community workforce hubs. Fifteen (15) new pre-K classrooms were added, bringing the total to 33 pre-K classrooms in charter schools. Ongoing capital improvement projects for additional public charter preschool classrooms will support the continued expansion of capacity.

² Calculated as $rate = (2024Births/2012Births)^{1/(2024-2012)} - 1$; formula for compounded annual growth rate: see <https://www.bea.gov/help/faq/463>. Actual annual statewide birth counts for the period 2012-2024 are presented in the Appendix, Table C1.

Preschool Open Doors (POD) Program

- Expanded Income Eligibility: Effective July 1, 2025, an administrative rule change by DHS expanded eligibility for POD program subsidies to families earning up to 500% of the federal poverty guidelines. This rule change makes POD program subsidies available to moderate-income families, thereby reducing financial stressors and barriers to early learning opportunities for more families.
- Inclusion of 2-Year-Olds: The passage of Act 203 made significant amendments to the POD program, including expanding the POD program to qualifying 2-year-old children beginning January 1, 2026. This change allows more children to receive subsidies for up to three years of community-based early education before entering kindergarten.
- Removal of the mandatory accreditation requirement: Act 203 also repealed the mandatory accreditation requirement for program providers who enroll children receiving the POD subsidy. However, funds remain for DHS to support providers' efforts to gain accreditation.
- DHS will promulgate additional rule amendments to implement Act 203.

Workforce Support and Educator Pipeline

- Since launching in Summer 2023, the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program has supported 153 early childhood professionals pursuing degrees, certificates, or licenses. Sixty-one stipend program recipients now work in public Pre-K classrooms, Head Start programs, community-based programs, and other early learning settings.
- Launched in 2023 through a partnership between the Kamehameha Schools and Chaminade University, the Mu'o Scholarship Program prioritizes early childhood education applicants while also supporting elementary and secondary education majors. The program has served 157 scholars to date and produced its first graduates in Spring 2025.
- Starting in the Fall 2025 term, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Education launched a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program to meet the growing demand for qualified teachers serving children from birth through age eight.
- The Department of Human Services supported licensed and registered child care providers and their staff through grant funds.

Early Childhood State Plan

The State of Hawai'i is actively updating its Early Childhood State Plan, a strategic roadmap to support young children and their families. The updated plan is structured around a system of Building Blocks, each with clearly defined goals, action priorities, and metrics for success. The plan will outline specific goals for each Building Block of the early learning system. Each goal will be supported by three key action priorities. These priorities are being developed with

consideration for how they can sustain existing momentum, create new momentum for key initiatives, elevate Hawaiian culture and language, and improve coordination and integration across different systems and agencies. Each action priority will be measured by three to five Key Progress Indicators (KPI).

This update is being guided by extensive community and stakeholder engagement, examples of which are listed below.

- On May 15–16, 2025, the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) and vendor WestEd co-hosted the Hawai‘i Early Childhood State Plan Community Engagement Forum. These events gathered key stakeholders, including families, from across the islands and the early childhood ecosystem. The forum successfully identified current needs, aligned collaborative efforts, and guided future strategic investments in early learning and care. The insights gained from these discussions are directly informing updates to the State Plan.
- ‘Ohana Survey: In July, EOEL launched the Hawai‘i Early Childhood State Plan ‘Ohana Survey to gather feedback from families and the community. The survey is designed to help shape early learning programs that genuinely reflect the needs of keiki and ‘ohana.
- Island-Wide Talk Story Sessions: In September, EOEL and WestEd will conduct a face-to-face engagement tour across the islands. They will host "talk story" sessions with parents, children, kūpuna, and neighbors to better understand what matters most to their communities.

BACKGROUND

Importance of early learning investments

Extensive research has demonstrated that investments in early childhood programs yield lasting benefits across multiple domains of a child’s life, including education, health, employment, and overall well-being. Recognizing this, the Hawai‘i State Legislature has, over multiple sessions, enacted major legislation and allocated substantial funding to expand access to high-quality, affordable child care and early learning opportunities.

Mixed delivery system

Early care and education in Hawai‘i are provided through a mixed delivery system, offering families a range of options to meet their individual needs. These include community-based organizations, state-funded public preschools, federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs, family and group child care homes, before- and after-school care, home visiting and early intervention services, family-child interaction learning programs, and informal care from friends, family, and neighbors. This mixed delivery system may look different and evolve as public Pre-K expands. Families may potentially enroll a child in multiple programs on a given day to support working parents and caregivers. For example, families may enroll in free public

Pre-K while also utilizing federally funded child care or state-funded POD program subsidies for extended day care.

As we assess progress in expanding early care and education, it is essential to consider how the mixed delivery system supports meaningful choice for all families, particularly those experiencing financial hardship, addressing families' needs when raising children with developmental delays or disabilities, living in rural or remote areas, or choosing to care for their children at home.

Roles of the Department of Human Services and the Executive Office on Early Learning

Through collaboration and partnerships, the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) works to establish a system that ensures a solid foundation of early childhood development and learning for Hawai'i's young children (prenatal to age five), meaningful engagement and support for their families, and a stable, competent, and supported early childhood workforce. EOEL also administers the Public Pre-K program in partnership with the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE).

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is the State's implementing and regulatory agency for federal and state child care funds. DHS administers two child care subsidy programs: the federally funded Child Care Subsidy program and the state-funded Preschool Open Doors (POD) program. DHS also regulates child care providers and supports their sustainability through resources and grants.

Statutory references

The Legislature established early learning benchmarks codified in section [26-61](#), Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), that state the following:

§26-61 Benchmarks; duties. (a) The department of human services and the executive office on early learning shall ensure access to learning through preschool programs that meet or exceed the following benchmarks:

- (1) Fifty per cent of all otherwise unserved children who are three to four years of age, or will not be at least five years of age on or before July 31 of the current school year, shall have access to enrollment in a preschool program by December 31, 2027; and
- (2) One hundred per cent of all children who are three to four years of age, or will not be at least five years of age on or before July 31 of the current school year, shall have access to enrollment in a preschool program by December 31, 2032.

The department of human services and the executive office on early learning shall submit an annual report to the legislature, no later than August 31 of each year, on the progress

toward achieving the benchmarks until all children who are three to four years of age, or will not be at least five years of age on or before July 31 of the current school year, are enrolled in a preschool program.

(b) The department of human services and the executive office on early learning shall collaborate to identify the need for child care and early learning in geographic regions of the State and consider using public facilities including schools, libraries, and the University of Hawaii system as locations for child care and early learning programs.

(c) The department of human services shall work jointly with the executive office on early learning to monitor the progress of implementing the early care and education sector programs. No later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular sessions of 2025, 2026, and 2027, the department of human services and the executive office on early learning shall submit to the legislature a joint report on the progress of implementing the early care and education sector programs.

(d) The department of human services shall facilitate and support data sharing among public and private entities to the extent not otherwise prohibited by law or rule.

PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAMS

This report discusses the system-wide progress made to stabilize and increase the capacity of the early childhood education system. The report focuses on preschool seats or capacity, accessibility, affordability, workforce development, and data collection and analysis.

a. Seats and Capacity

Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL)

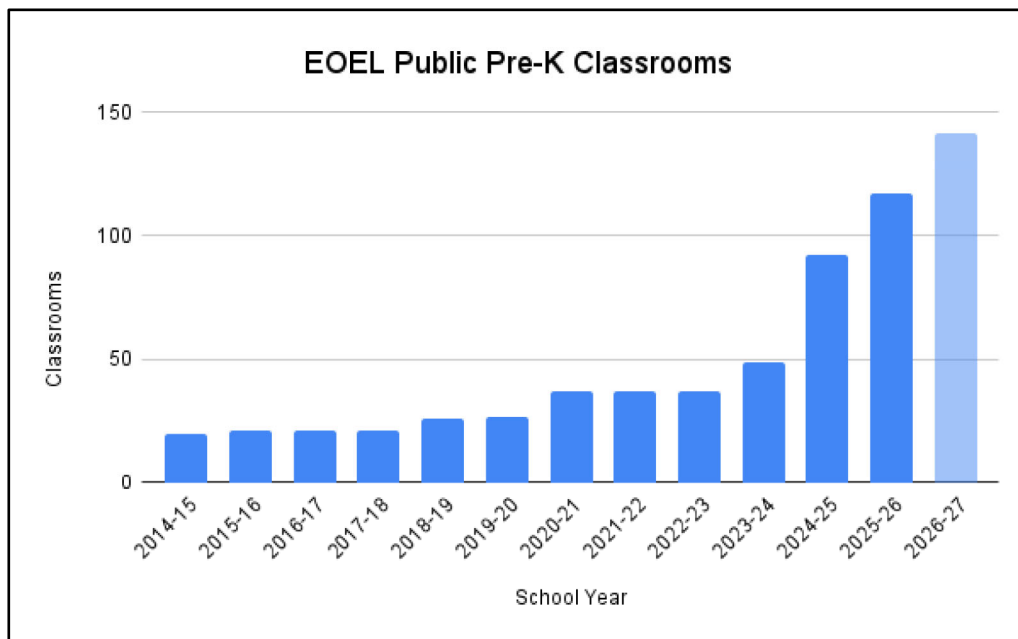


Chart 1. EOEL Public Pre-K Classrooms, 2014-2027

Through strong partnerships with HIDOE and the School Facilities Authority, and with significant public investment, the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) has expanded Hawai‘i’s public Pre-K program and increased access to high-quality early learning for families. Since the 2022–23 school year, EOEL has added 80 classrooms, bringing the total to 117 for the current school year. In SY 2025–26, EOEL will double its Hawaiian Language Pre-K sites from two to four. Funding secured during the 2025 legislative session will also support an additional 25 classrooms in SY 2026–27, continuing the program’s strong growth in recent years.

The EOEL also supports Family–Child Interaction Learning (FCIL) contracts operating at four sites. FCIL and related family/parenting supports are a core complement to preschool seats. They reach families who prefer home-based care, improve attendance and readiness for those entering pre-K later, and provide culturally and linguistically responsive support. As the POD program expands and demographics shift, FCIL can stabilize engagement, strengthen home learning environments, and serve rural areas where new classrooms are harder to establish.

Hawai‘i State Public Charter School Commission (HSPCSC or Commission)

Through the [Ready Keiki Initiative](#), together with community partners, the Hawai‘i State Public Charter School Commission (Commission) embraced the shared goals for the State of Hawai‘i aligned with Act 46 as amended by Act 210 (SLH 2021): 1) To meet fifty percent of unserved 3 and 4-year-old keiki by 2027; 2) To meet one hundred percent of 3- and 4-year-old keiki by

2032; 3) To honor the two educational pathways – in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language) and English; 4) To commit to working collaboratively as partners to address the challenges; and 5) To maximize the use of Act 257, (SLH 2022) – which invests \$200 million to expand early learning facilities.

To effectuate this plan, the Commission envisioned implementing the following: 1) Create a new pathway to increase access to Pre-K programs in charter schools; 2) Maximize the use of Act 257, SLH 2022, to expand early learning facilities in charter schools; 3) Develop a Pre-K-only charter application to expand Pre-K-only charter schools; and 4) Communicate unified support for high-quality Pre-K for all of Hawai‘i’s keiki.

On May 25, 2023, the Hawai‘i State Public Charter School Commission (HSPCSC) approved the recommendation to open the charter application and process seeking the first-ever, Pre-K-only charter school under the authority of section [302D-39](#), HRS. On September 15, 2023, Parents And Children Together (PACT) at Parkway Villages of Kapolei was the sole applicant and was awarded a charter contract in January 2024.

In January 2025, Waikīkī Community Center applied for a Pre-K-only charter contract and was awarded a contract in July 2025 to open six Pre-K classrooms. Waikīkī Community Preschool will begin serving keiki in August 2025.

Department of Human Services (DHS)

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law No. 117-2) appropriated child care stabilization funds to the State as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the child care needs of workers and the importance of maintaining access to child care. The additional fiscal support was necessary for child care providers to revamp their business practices to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on their staff and the families they served. The DHS Child Care Stabilization Grant program disbursed nearly \$72,000,000 directly to 616 licensed and registered family child care homes, group child care centers, group child care homes, infant and toddler centers, before- and after-school facilities, and exempt center-based providers providing afterschool A+ services between December 2021 and September 2023.

DHS also implemented the Supplemental Child Care Grant program, designed to support licensed and registered child care providers across Hawaii, offering financial relief to stabilize operations and expand access to care. The program provided funding to a diverse range of providers, including registered family child care homes, licensed group child care centers and group child care homes, infant and toddler care facilities, before- and after-school programs, and legally exempt after-school programs (A+ services). Funds were allocated to cover essential operating expenses, including payroll, rent, utilities, and supplies. In addition, the program provided resources to enhance safety, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and supported workforce development through retention bonuses and professional development

opportunities. There were two (2) rounds of funding; each round provided an operating expenses award based on provider type and maximum capacity, and a separate staff retention award. The operating expenses award ranged from \$500 to \$3,500 per child care seat, and a staff retention award of \$4,500 was provided for directors, teachers, assistant teachers, lead caregivers, and caregivers. Additionally, \$3,000 was available for aides, substitutes, directors, program leaders, assistant program leaders, and registered family child care providers. However, even with the disbursement of grant funds over two (2) rounds, there was a high return of staff retention awards at the end of the second round as workforce challenges persisted.

DHS ended its Supplemental Grant program in October 2024, and between May 2024 and October 2024, disbursed an additional \$40,000,000+ to 617 licensed and registered family child care homes, group child care centers, infant and toddler centers, before- and after-school facilities, and exempt center-based providers providing afterschool A+ services in two (2) rounds of funding.

These federal stabilization grant funds were necessary to support the child care community and workforce in adapting to the dramatic and frequent changes in their business practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent "unwinding." The DHS gained additional administrative capacity to distribute these types of grants, and these funds enabled working families to access child care, contributing to Hawaii's economy and recovery.

b. Accessibility and Affordability

EOEL

Recent investments in Hawai'i's public Pre-K system are expanding access to high-quality early learning for families across the state. Enrollment in EOEL programs is free, with priority given to at-risk children as defined under section 302L-1, HRS, which includes children placed through their individualized education programs in a general education setting, English as a second language learners, children who are in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and families whose income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

Many classrooms are also strategically located in rural communities and areas with limited preschool options, helping to close gaps in early education access. To make participation easier and streamline the enrollment process, EOEL offers an online application that is now used by most families. The paper-based application is also available in twelve languages to increase accessibility for families who have limited English proficiency.

DHS

[Act 171](#), SLH 2023 (Act 171), amended the Preschool Open Door (POD) program statutes, expanding POD to include eligible 3-year-old children starting in the 2024-2025 program year.

Act 171 was the result of the strong advocacy and support of Lieutenant Governor Luke, the Legislature, cross-sector agencies, and community organizations and advocates.

The key amendments of Act 171 are: 1) Inclusion of 3-year-olds: families can now enroll eligible 3-year-olds in the POD program, allowing up to two (2) years of preschool before their child enters kindergarten; 2) Increased income eligibility limits: more families are now eligible for POD due to higher income limits. Families that were previously over the income threshold may now qualify if they have eligible 3- or 4-year-old children and need help with preschool tuition; 3) Lowered family copayments: family copayments have been reduced to 0-7% of the family's gross income. This change ensures that families pay less out of pocket for child care; and 4) Higher monthly child care subsidy: The program now provides an increased monthly subsidy amount to cover the costs of providing high-quality child care. These amendments aim to support low- and moderate-income families in accessing quality preschool education.

Notably, in September 2023, DHS launched its child care portal to promote access with an online application for families (see childcaresubsidy.dhs.hawaii.gov). Since going live, families have overwhelmingly selected the online application over the hard copy application when applying for child care subsidies. Families also had access to DHS's new child care search portal, which provides a list of all licensed and registered family child care homes, group child care centers and homes, infant and toddler centers, and before- and after-school facilities.

As mentioned above, [Act 203](#), SLH 2025, effective on January 1, 2026, broadens access to child care by expanding POD program eligibility to include 2-year-olds and removing accreditation requirements for child care providers. These changes continue to reduce financial barriers for families and may encourage more individuals to become providers or increase providers' child care capacity across the state.

Importantly, DHS also promulgated and implemented new administrative rules that expand access to the POD program. These rule amendments increased eligibility limits from 300% to 500% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG), benefiting more working families. Potentially, a family of four earning \$180,000 may qualify for POD program subsidy assistance.

DHS also restructured family copayments to align with either 1% to 3% of the cost of care or the department's established maximum tiered rate, whichever is lower. The highest DHS copayment under the new structure for a family will be \$45.00. These changes to the copayment structure will have another positive financial impact on many families and will be implemented for the 2025-2026 program year, starting in July 2025.

c. Workforce Development

Stipends & Scholarships

The EOEL and the UH Mānoa College of Education work together to implement the Hawai‘i Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program and support both current and aspiring members of the early childhood workforce in pursuing higher education and advancing their credentials. Since its initial launch in Summer 2023, a total of 153 stipend recipients have utilized the program to work towards obtaining a degree, certificate, and/or a license in early childhood education. The program has served individuals at multiple career stages, from those completing entry-level coursework to those pursuing advanced degrees, reflecting the need to strengthen the pipeline of qualified educators.

In its first year (Summer 2023–Spring 2024), the ECE Stipend Program experienced rapid growth, with new recipients rising from 10 in Summer 2023 to 45 in Fall and 48 in Spring, boosting total participants from 10 to 98. While the number of new participants declined after Spring 2024, the number of graduates (“outgoing” participants) increased each term. In Year Two (Summer 2024–Spring 2025), the total number of recipients stabilized at approximately 100 per term, reflecting steady progress toward certificate or degree completion. From Spring 2024 to Spring 2025 (excluding summer), an average of 86 active recipients per term were enrolled, with approximately 16 inactive participants who remain in the program but are not receiving funds due to pauses in coursework or other factors. Chart 1 above illustrates the shift from rapid growth to stable participation, showing how early expansion transitioned into a sustained pool of active learners progressing toward qualifications while graduates entered the workforce.

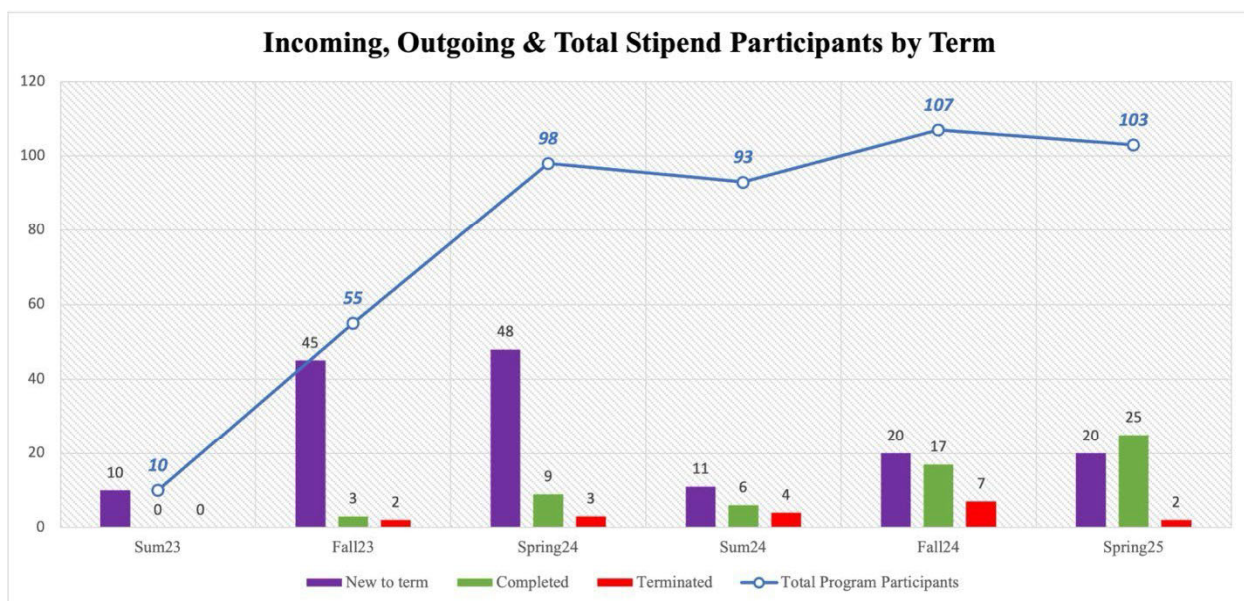


Chart 2. Incoming, Outgoing & Total Stipend Participants by Term

As of the Spring 2025 term, the program has had a total of 61 completers. Program completers have moved into the workforce to fulfill their two-year work commitments and are working in public and Head Start Pre-K classrooms, community-based settings, and community college children's centers. Program completers are primarily working in teacher and assistant teacher roles; however, some also work in Family Child Interaction Learning (FCIL) programs and other roles.

Complementing the state-funded workforce development efforts, the Mu'o Scholarship Program further expands access to higher education for aspiring educators. The Mu'o Scholarship Program, launched in 2023 through a partnership between Kamehameha Schools and Chaminade University, reflects a shared commitment to advancing educational opportunities, particularly in early childhood education (ECE), while also supporting majors in elementary and secondary education. Designed to meet the high demand across the state, the program prioritizes ECE applicants and awards scholarships across disciplines, fostering a diverse community of scholars. In 2025, the program received 156 applications, admitting 70 students who will join existing cohorts for a total enrollment of 157 scholars. Since its inception, the Mu'o Scholarship has celebrated its first three graduates in Spring 2025, with 5 to 10 more expected in Fall 2025 and a similar number in Spring 2026. Recognizing that most participants are non-traditional students who are working adults, the program supports flexible timelines, anticipating a steady flow of graduates each term as students balance academic goals with employment and personal responsibilities.

Early Childhood Educator Pathways and Programs

Starting in the Fall 2025 term, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Education will launch a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program to meet the growing demand for qualified teachers serving children from birth through age eight. The program will provide a high-quality, accessible pathway to address Hawai'i's critical need for early childhood educators and will support efforts to expand early learning access. Rooted in Hawai'i's cultural and educational context, the ECCE program will integrate community input to ensure responsiveness to local needs. Graduates who complete the full-time, hybrid-format program will be recommended for a Hawai'i early childhood teaching license for preschool through third grade.

DHS

The Supplemental Grant program disbursed over \$40,000,000 between May 2024 and October 2024, to 617 licensed and registered family child care homes, group child care centers, infant and toddler centers, before- and after-school facilities, and exempt center-based providers providing

afterschool A+ services in two (2) rounds of funding.

As discussed above, the DHS Supplemental Grant program supported providers experiencing financial hardship due to the instability of the program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant funds were available to cover the financial obligations of continuing operations, preventing permanent closures, and enabling programs to reopen safely. The tables below provide a breakdown by county and service type of the awards provided to each county, as well as staff changes that occurred during the grant program.

Table 2. Utilization of the DHS Supplemental Grant Program Awards by County

Expense Category by Island	Operating Expense Award	Staff Retention Award
Honolulu	\$26,150,939.00	\$6,989,000
Hawaii	\$2,558,272.00	\$713,500.00
Maui	\$2,411,491.00	\$835,750.00
Kauai	\$932,327.00	\$211,500.00

Table 3. Reported Staff Changes during the DHS Supplemental Grant Program

Service Type ³	# Providers w/Turnover	#Caregivers Who Left	#Providers who hired new caregivers	Total #hired
BAS	5	16	9	42
FCC	1	1	3	3
GCC	108	424	118	236
GCH	0	0	2	2
IT	28	142	26	59

³ Service Type Acronyms: BAS: Before & After School; FCC: Family Child Care; GCC: Group Child Care Center; GCH: Group Child Care Home; IT: Infant & Toddler Child Care Center; LE-BAS: Licensed-exempt Before & After School.

Service Type ³	# Providers w/Turnover	#Caregivers Who Left	#Providers who hired new caregivers	Total #hired
LE-BAS	73	172	85	181

*The number of staff changes is self-reported by the child care provider.

Since the ARPA funding has come to an end, DHS is concerned about the periodic and ongoing need for funds beyond subsidies, such as these grant funds, to assist providers in meeting the high costs of doing business, enhancing staff retention, and maintaining child care capacity.

d. Data Collection and Analysis

EOEL

The EOEL has been working with HIDOE to collect and analyze data on the State’s children’s early learning experiences and academic outcomes. An article has been submitted to a scientific journal and is currently under review.

The EOEL is currently facilitating the process to update the Hawai‘i Early Childhood State Plan, a strategic roadmap to support young children and their families. The updated plan is structured around a system of Building Blocks, each with clearly defined goals, action priorities, and metrics for success. The plan will outline specific goals for each Building Block of the early learning system. Each goal will be supported by three key action priorities, and each action priority will be measured by three to five Key Progress Indicators (KPI). Once completed, a key part of EOEL’s role in implementing the updated State Plan will be to collect data from diverse stakeholders and provide regular reports on progress toward the action priorities, measured by the State Plan’s Key Progress Indicators (KPIs).

EOEL and the advocacy organization Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) continued to work with the [Children’s Funding Project located in Washington, D.C.](#), to complete a fiscal map and a fiscal map reporting dashboard to identify how resources available to the State of Hawai‘i support children and families within the State. A fiscal map analyzes various resources that support programs and services connected to, in this case, children and families in the State and attempts to answer which agencies or stakeholders invest resources in children and families, and at what levels and through which programs, to quantify resources directed to children and families, or a sub-group or -category of those children and families, at this time.

Work on the fiscal map with the Children’s Funding Project continued into 2024 and throughout 2025, and the Children’s Funding Project is at the stage of completing a rough draft of the fiscal map and fiscal map reporting dashboard in the next several weeks. The EOEL and ECAS anticipate that the map will be ready for public release and use by September 2025, and

policymakers will have access to the information communicated by the fiscal map and fiscal map reporting dashboard soon thereafter.

HIDOE

To assess and address the evolving needs of underserved groups and areas previously identified in the 2020 Hawaii Early Childhood Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the EOEL, HSPCSC, DHS, Department of Health (DOH), and the Hawai‘i P-20 collaborated with a contractor. This effort is part of the 2022-2025 Hawai‘i Preschool Development Grant, Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal grant. Through this federal grant, states have the opportunity to break down barriers and improve access to higher-quality early childhood services, guided by data, research, and needs assessments. The 2024 Early Childhood Needs Assessment update specifically includes a Risk and Reach Reassessment utilizing the most recent national and state data on vulnerability and program reach, an in-depth Family Preferences Assessment based on direct community input, a new Economic Impact Assessment to understand the sector’s economic role, and an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) Feasibility Study to explore integrated data systems for early childhood. The final report has been completed. The information and data collected through this 2024 needs assessment will be used, along with other data sources, to develop the 2025 PDG B-5 State Plan.

The Department of Education (HIDOE) has implemented a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) in its English medium classrooms as of School Year (SY) 2023-2024. HIDOE adopted the *Ready for Kindergarten* assessment from Johns Hopkins University. The assessment addresses all specified domains of early childhood development and provides tiered indicators of child readiness for kindergarten - Demonstrating Readiness, Approaching Readiness, and Emerging Readiness. In the SY 2024-2025 assessment, 30% of students were Demonstrating Readiness (compared with 29% in SY 2023-2024), suggesting a continuing need for addressing children’s developmental readiness at kindergarten entry. HIDOE is using the KEA data to inform focal areas for professional development and intervention support, with an emphasis on building local capacity regarding quality kindergarten services.

HIDOE is developing a Kaiapuni KEA in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i for the Hawaiian immersion kindergarten classrooms. The assessment is being developed in partnership with the UH at Mānoa and the kumu Kaiapuni. The first draft of the Kaiapuni KEA was field tested SY 2024-2025, allowing UH Mānoa to conduct item analysis, cognitive interviews, and item standardization. The psychometric evaluation demonstrated high degrees of reliability and validity of the assessment items, requiring minimal revision. An operational field test of the Kaiapuni KEA will be administered in SY 2025-2026. Outcomes from the SY 2025-2026 operational field test will be reported.

DHS

Act 46, as amended by Act 210 (SLH 2021), authorized \$5,000,000 of federal Child Care and Development Funds to modify the DHS child care data system and create a child care registry. These Act 46 funds were encumbered through a contract with a contract period from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2026. DHS is working alongside HIDOE to receive and maintain the KEA data, as well as each child's prior early learning program history from the year preceding their kindergarten entry. Enhancements to DHS's data system are being developed to collect data, which will be used to determine the need for child care in geographic regions of the State and assist in identifying the highest-priority regions that require Pre-K programs and child care to meet the needs of unserved or underserved children. A new workforce registry system was established in the fall of 2024, and licensed and registered family child care providers, center-based providers, and their staff now have direct access to their professional development records. Additional work on the registry is pending broader stakeholder decision-making regarding which data points would be most beneficial for DHS to include in its future system modifications. Additional resources, including legal assistance, will be required to assist with registry governance, data sharing, and data access.

APPENDIX A

Table A1. EOEL Pre-K (Classrooms and Seats Available by School Years 2022-2025)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Number of Seats Available
2022-2023	37	707
2023-2024	49	947
2024-2025	92	1775
2025-2026	117	2275
The EOEL classroom schedule is based on the HIDOE academic year schedule and aligns with the kindergarten full-day schedule. Typically, most school days start at 8:00 a.m. and end at around 2:00 p.m. A child must be 3 or 4 years of age on or before July 31 of the current school year to be eligible to participate in the EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program. The maximum number of students enrolled in each class is determined by the square footage of classroom space, consistent with DHS Group Child Care Center Administrative Rules. However, each classroom is limited to no more than 20 students at any time. (Class sizes may change to address the health and safety needs of children and staff that arise from unexpected circumstances from time to time.) The numbers reflect all EOEL Public Prekindergarten classrooms and seats for the identified school years.		

Table A2. HSPCSC Charter School Early Learning Programs (Number of Classrooms and Seats Available, for School Years 2022-2025)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Number of Seats Available
2022-2023	18	327
2023-2024	18	327
2024-2025	18	327
2025-2026	33	608
Aligned with EOEL. The charter school classroom schedule is based on the K-12 academic year schedule and aligns with the kindergarten full-day schedule. Typically, most school days start at 8:00 a.m. and end at around 2:00 p.m. A child must be 3 or 4 years old on or before July 31 of the current school year to be eligible to participate in an HSPCSC charter school early learning program. The square footage of classroom space determines the maximum number of students enrolled in each class and is limited to no more than 20 students at any given time. The numbers reflect all State Public Charter School Early Learning public prekindergarten classrooms and seats.		

Table A3. HIDOE Migrant Education Program (MEP) (Number of Classrooms and Seats Available for School Years 2022-2025)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Number of Students Served
2022-2023	2	14
2023-2024	3	21
2024-2025	4	42
2025-2026	4	46
The MEP classroom schedule is based on the HIDOE's academic year schedule, aligning with the kindergarten full-day schedule. Most school days start at 8:00 a.m. and end around 2:00 p.m. Students are eligible for the program from ages 3 to 5. Preference is given to children who will be entering kindergarten the following school year. Each classroom is currently limited to 10-12 students to establish a low teacher-to-student ratio. The data reflects the total number of school sites and students served.		

Table A4. HIDOE Special Education Preschool (3-5) (Number of Classrooms and Enrollments, School Years 2022-2025)

School Year	Number of SPED Preschool Classrooms	Number of SPED Eligible Students
2022-2023	259	2,146
2023-2024	259	2,255
2024-2025	259	2480
2025-2026	257	*2352
*This is point-in-time data (June 24, 2025) and not comprehensive 2025-2026 enrollment data. The reported number of Special Education Preschool (SPED)-eligible students includes data from all but one charter school that does not use Infinite Campus** which captures official enrollment counts. If eligible, special education services*** begin by the child's third birthday. Services are provided based on the individual needs of the child. The amount of time a child receives services is determined by the specialized interventions a child needs to participate in preschool-age activities with typically developing peers. Placement in preschool programs should reflect a variety of educational environments available to preschool-age children. These may include, but are not limited to, settings such as private or public preschool, daycare, home, to settings for children with disabilities. Placement decisions always consider inclusive natural environments that recognize the developmental and educational benefits of learning alongside typically developing peers. **Infinite Campus is a student information system (SIS) and learning management system (LMS) that allows students and parents to access information about a student's school life. ***HIDOE Special Education Preschool services are pursuant to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).		

Table A5. DHS Number of Seats Available (Licensed and Registered Providers and Number of Seats available for Calendar Years 2022-2025)

Calendar Year	Licensed and Registered Providers	Number of Seats Available*
2022	815	31,558
2023	806	31,304
2024	785	30,623
2025	774	30,610
DHS-licensed and registered providers include group child care centers (also known as preschools), group child care homes, infant and toddler centers, before- and after-school		

programs, and family child care homes. *The number of seats available is based on each provider's maximum license capacity.

Table A6. DHS Licensed & Registered Providers Serving 3- & 4-Year-Old Children (Licensed Registered Providers Primarily Serving 3-&4-Year-olds, Number of Seats Available for Calendar Years 2022-2024)

Calendar Year	Licensed and Registered Providers Primarily Serving 3- & 4-Year-Old	Number of Seats Available*
2022	716	23,653
2023	705	27,834
2024	685	22,587
2025	678	22,519
DHS licensed and registered providers who serve 3 & 4-year-old children include group child care centers (preschools), group child care homes, infant and toddler centers, and family child care homes. The count may include children younger or older than 3 and 4 years of age. *The number of seats available is based on each provider's maximum license capacity.		

Table A7. Number of Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care (Federally funded Child Care and Development Fund; CCDF) (By Age, Provider Type, Total for Program Years 2022-2025)

Program Year*	Age	Licensed and Registered Providers	Exempt Providers	Total
2022	3	1131	201	1332
	4	1351	150	1501
	Total	2482	351	2833
2023	3	552	129	681
	4	602	124	726
	Total	1154	253	1407

Program Year*	Age	Licensed and Registered Providers	Exempt Providers	Total
2024	3	574	127	701
	4	631	105	736
	Total	1205	232	1437
2025	3	417	100	517
	4	228	89	317
	Total	645	189	834
Licensed providers include group child care centers (such as preschools), group homes, and registered family child care homes. Exempt providers include relatives and non-relatives who provide care in accordance with section 346-152, HRS. *The program year is the state fiscal year.				

Table A8. Number of Preschool Open Doors Programs (By Accredited and Non-Accredited Providers, Program Years 2022-2025, Annual Totals).

Program Year	Accredited Providers	Non-Accredited Providers	Total
2022	27	42	69
2023	46	57	103
2024	68	120	188
2025	54	144	198

Acts 46 (SLH 2020), 210 (SLH 2021), and 169 (SLH 2023) established that all licensed providers that accept enrollment of a child eligible for Preschool Open Doors (POD) must be accredited within seven (7) years and provides that existing licensed providers must start the accreditation process by July 1, 2029, and be accredited by July 1, 2034. Note that accreditation is a means of assessing quality; however, accreditation standards may exceed the State's requirements. However, Act 203 (SLH 2025) removes the accreditation requirement for preschools. This amendment will provide parents and caretakers with more options for their child care needs and give providers flexibility to pursue accreditation.

Table A9. Family Child Interaction Learning (FCIL) programs (By number of sites for School Years 2022-2025; and Total number of Seats for School Year 2025)

School Year	Number of Sites	Number of Seats Available
2022-2023	48	-
2023-2024	48	-
2024-2025	56	-
2025-2026	51	1797*
FCIL programs employ a multi-generational, culturally responsive approach and provide services at various locations in communities. These programs usually consist of two hours a day, twice or three times a week. FCIL programs are mixed-age and do not have specific allocations for 3 and 4-year-olds. The adult-child ratio does not restrict the program capacity, as an adult accompanies the child. The capacity may be restricted by the room capacity when the program is held indoors. The number of sites is those that have been identified. FCILs also have virtual online program options. *This number is based on provider reports and not the capacity for all sites.		

Table A10. Department of Defense (DoD) Preschools (Number of DOD Sites and Seats Available for School Years 2022-2025)

School Year	Number of Sites	Number of Seats Available
2022-2023	17	1093
2023-2024	17	1093
2024-2025	17	1093
2025-2026	*18	1228
There are 17 existing Child Development Centers on military bases. Aliamanu Military Reservation is on track to open a new center in 2025, with an estimated 136 seats for children aged 3 through 5 years old. Not represented in the data are military child centers off base and on other non-DOD federal property.		

APPENDIX B

2032 Projections Utilizing Desired Capacity Estimates

To estimate progress toward the goal of universal access to preschool for all 3- and 4-year-old keiki by 2032, we have to project the number of births in 2028 and 2029. In making these projections, we considered the declining birth rate as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) reports on births.

In 2024, the CDC reported that the general fertility rate in the United States hit a historic low in 2023, decreasing 3% from 2022. The CDC calculated that “from 2014 to 2020, the rate consistently decreased by 2% annually.”⁴ The number of births in Hawaii in 2023 was also a historic low at 14,848, continuing the consistent downward trend since 2012, when Hawaii reported 18,985 births⁵. Thus, Hawaii’s births from 2012 through 2024 declined at an average annual rate of 1.97%⁶. We will use the annual average decrease in Hawaii’s birth rate as the basis for our population projections.

Following HIDOE’s kindergarten age-eligibility cutoff, we define the 3- and 4-year-old population as children who are at least 3 years old by August 1 of the school year and who turn five after July

⁴https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2024/20240525.htm?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=birth%20rates%20decline&utm_campaign=2025.08.19-BirthRate#print.

⁵ <https://hhdw.org/data-sources/birth-data/>

⁶ Calculated as $rate = (2024Births/2012Births)^{1/(2024-2012)} - 1$; formula for compounded annual growth rate: see <https://www.bea.gov/help/faq/463>. Actual annual statewide birth counts for the period 2012-2024 are presented in the Appendix, Table C1.

31; estimates are derived from the Hawai‘i Department of Health (DOH) 's monthly birth counts.⁷

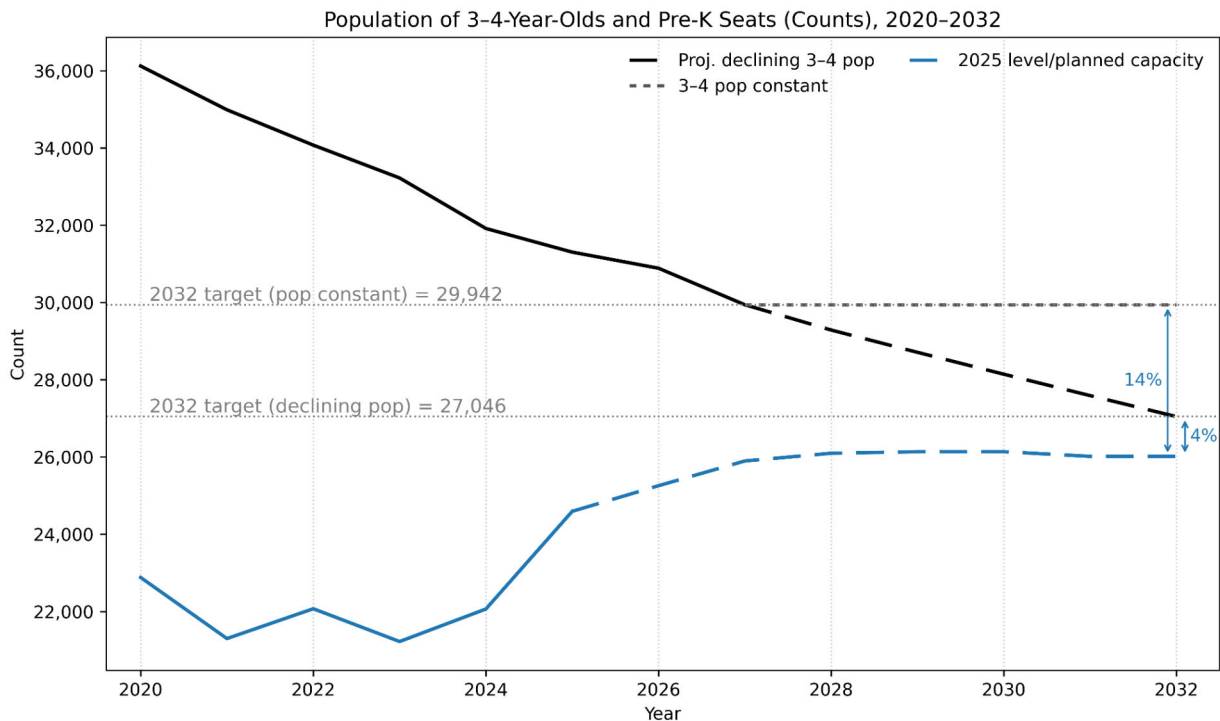


Figure B1. Population of 3- and 4-Year-Olds and Pre-K Seats, 2020–2032.

Historical values (solid lines) are shown through 2025 for seats and through 2027 for the 3- and 4-year-old population; dashed lines indicate projections. Two population trajectories are plotted: a continued decline at an annual rate of -1.97% and a counterfactual constant population (based on 2023 and 2024 birth counts). Horizontal grey lines indicate the seat-count target coverage goals for 2032 under each population assumption.

Figure B1 displays historical trends and projected trajectories for Hawai‘i’s 3- and 4-year-old population and the number of available pre-K seats. Capacity⁸ reflects the state’s mixed-delivery system, which includes community-based organizations (CBOs)⁹, Head Start, EOEL Public Pre-K, HIDOE Special Education classrooms, Charter Schools, and Department of Defense preschools.

Projections consider two post-2027 population paths: a continued annual decline of -1.97% (see

⁷<https://health.hawaii.gov/vitalstatistics/>

⁸Presented here as operational or desired capacity: the number of children a provider is actively seeking to enroll, given current staffing and program resources. This figure is based on self-reported by providers voluntarily by PATCH. Consequently, it does not encompass the operational or desired capacity of all CBO providers

⁹ CBO comprises: Registered Family Child Care Homes; Licensed Group Homes; Licensed Preschools serving children ages 3-4.

discussion above) and a scenario where the 3- and 4-year-old population remains steady at 2027 levels, illustrating a range of potential outcomes. To present a conservative picture, seat availability is projected with CBO supply capacity held constant at its 2025 levels. For purposes of capacity projections, non-CBO providers are accounted for in terms of currently funded planned expansion and are otherwise held constant.

Actual outcomes and updated projections will depend on several factors, including workforce capacity, the effects of recent changes to POD program subsidy eligibility, the pace of future public Pre-K expansion, the level of federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund and programs such as Head Start and FCILs, and actual birth rates.

APPENDIX C

Definitions and methodology

Number of 3- and 4-year-olds: This report estimates the number of 3- and 4-year-old children in a given year based solely on Hawai‘i’s reported births. It does not account for factors such as in-migration, out-migration, mortality, census adjustments, or other demographic changes. Based on statewide birth data, the projected number of children who will be 3 and 4 years old in 2027 is 14,956 and 14,851, respectively.

A note regarding births in the State of Hawaii: according to preliminary data from the Department of Health (DOH), vital statistics¹⁰, there were 14,956 recorded births statewide in 2024. This marks the first year-over-year increase since 2012, although it remains significantly below the average number of births seen in the previous decade. As we assess progress toward achieving universal access by 2032, our current projections assume a continuation of the general downward trend in birth rates. These estimates may be revised as more recent and comprehensive data become available.

Table C1. Statewide Birth Count 2012 - 2024.

Calendar Year	Births	Calendar Year	Births
2012	18,972	2019	16,832
2013	18,825	2020	15,811
2014	18,556	2021	15,656
2015	18,444	2022	15,570
2016	18,053	2023	14,851*

¹⁰ See <https://health.hawaii.gov/vitalstatistics/>

Calendar Year	Births	Calendar Year	Births
2017	17,523	2024	14,956**
2018	17,027	2025	NA

* Children born in 2023 will begin to turn four in 2027

** Number is preliminary as of July 9, 2025

Quantifying Access to Enrollment in Community-Based Programs: Estimating access to early learning opportunities requires more than counting the number of licensed child care slots. While **licensed capacity** refers to the maximum number of children a provider is legally permitted to serve, it does not reflect the number of children the provider is able to or plans to enroll. Licensed capacity likely overstates accessibility because many providers face real-world constraints such as staffing shortages, classroom space limitations, and financial or operational barriers that prevent them from filling all licensed slots.

In contrast, **desired capacity** refers to the number of children a provider actively seeks to enroll, given their current staffing and program resources. In Hawai‘i, desired capacity data are voluntarily reported to PATCH, the State’s child care resource and referral agency, under contract with the DHS. Although not mandated or consistently updated, this measure attempts to capture a provider’s capacity, which they are realistically able to perform at a given point in time. It, however, is not comprehensive.

Licensed capacity is included in this report as a reference point representing the system’s theoretical maximum, and until desired capacity can be accurately captured, licensed capacity should be considered the upper limit of system capacity and not necessarily what is available for purposes of the Act 46 benchmarks. More work and resources are needed to support community-based providers, enabling them to provide quality care and services at their licensed capacity.