DEPT. COMM. NO. 450

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August 31, 2026

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

The Honorable Speaker Nadine K. Nakamura,
and Members of the House of Representatives
Thirty-Fourth 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 discusses progress toward meeting enrollment benchmarks and implementing early care and education programs pursuant to Act 46, SLH 2020, as amended by Act 210, SLH 2021.

Per section 93-16, HRS, the report is available to 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,

Joseph Campos II
Director
Department of Human Services

Yuuko Arikawa-Cross
Executive Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

Enclosure

c: Governor's Office
Lieutenant Governor's Office
Department of Budget & Finance
Legislative Auditor
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REPORT TO THE THIRTY-FOURTH HAWAIʻI STATE LEGISLATURE 2027

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

Department of Human Services,
Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division,
Child Care Programs Office
and the
Executive Office on Early Learning
August 2026

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 early care and learning opportunities.

Act 46, SLH 2020

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 highlighted the importance of early learning as a State policy priority and recognized the urgent need to address gaps in preschool access and school readiness opportunities. Act 46, as amended by Act 210, SLH 2021 (Act 210), also authorized the sharing of educational data to support school readiness and the use of federal funds to identify and track available early learning programs, providing information to inform future planning and decision-making.

Codified in section 26-61, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (HRS), Act 46 established statutory benchmarks for access to early learning and assigned the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) responsibility for supporting access to preschool programs that meet or exceed those benchmarks. The benchmarks provide direction for the Legislature, government agencies, and community partners and help guide planning and investment in Hawai‘i's early childhood system. Section 26-61, HRS, further requires DHS and EOEL to report annually on progress toward meeting the statutory benchmarks and on the implementation of early care and education programs. This report fulfills the reporting requirements set forth in sections 26-61(a) and 26-61(c), HRS.

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, Department of Defense (now known as the Department of War (DOW) preschools and child care, 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. Families may also 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 subsidies for extended day care offered by a community-based program.

As we assess progress in expanding early care and education, it is essential to support a mixed delivery system that provides meaningful choice for all families, particularly those experiencing financial hardship, raising children with developmental differences, delays, or disabilities, living in rural or remote areas, or choosing to care for their children at home. Additionally, surveys continue to find that parents prefer home-based care with trusted friends or relatives and flexible hours.

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

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is the State's implementing and oversight agency for federal and state child care funds, and child care licensing. 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 supports providers' sustainability through resources and grants.

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).

Early Learning Benchmarks

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

(1) Fifty per cent of all otherwise unserved children who are three to four years of age...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...shall have access to enrollment in a preschool program by December 31, 2032.

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

Capacity

Thanks to ongoing support from the Legislature, Governor Green, the Ready Keiki initiative, and strong collaboration among community partners, government agencies, and higher education

institutions, Hawai‘i continues to make meaningful progress towards the benchmarks established by Act 46 and the long-term goal of providing universal access to preschool for all keiki.

Table 1. Estimated Maximum Pre-K Capacity by Program (SY 2026-27)

DHS Licensed & Registered Providers Serving 3 & 4-year-old children *(Max Licensed Capacity, note: this includes serving children under 3)*	22,000
EOEL Public Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Program	2,655
HIDOE Special Education (SPED) Preschool Eligible Students *(December 2025 eCSSS count)*	2,007
HSPCSC - Charter Schools Early Learning Programs	608
Department of Defense Preschools and Child Care	1,363

Table 1 presents the estimated maximum number of preschool children served across key segments of Hawai‘i's mixed-delivery early care and education system for SY 2026-27. Two caveats apply when interpreting these figures:

- Potential Double Counting: Children may be served by more than one program, particularly SPED-eligible students who are concurrently enrolled in EOEL or Charter Schools programs
- Licensed Capacity vs. Desired Capacity: The DHS figure represents total licensed capacity rather than operational or desired capacity (i.e., the actual number of children that providers intend to enroll based on available staffing and program resources).
    - Notably: Licensed providers are not required to self-report "Desired Capacity." See discussion below.

As a result, the true number of accessible preschool seats may likely be lower than the maximum totals reported in Table 1. Evaluating progress toward universal access to preschool necessitates measuring realistic capacity rather than theoretical maximums. This requires potentially two main adjustments: using an available snapshot of self-reported desired capacity[1] to estimate the availability of community-based seats and identifying the number of SPED-eligible students who are not concurrently enrolled in EOEL or Charter Schools' Pre-K programs. Therefore, the following discussion of progress toward Act 46 statutory benchmarks uses available desired

[1] Desired (Operational) Capacity: The number of children a provider actively seeks to enroll given current staffing and program resources. Figures are based on voluntary data self-reported by providers to DHS contractor PATCH Hawai.

capacity figures and, whenever possible, unduplicated SPED counts to estimate and project the capacity of our mixed-delivery system.

Defining the 2027 Target

Based on available information and historical self-reported desired capacity data from licensed and registered providers, we estimate that the system's capacity at the time Act 46 was passed in 2020 could serve approximately 63.35% of Hawai'i's 3- and 4-year-old children. An estimated 36.65% of children were therefore unserved in 2020 (though see discussion below about nonparticipation). Accordingly, the 2027 benchmark in this report aims to reduce the share of children without access to preschool by at least half, from 36.65% to 18.325%. Achieving this target would require the system to provide an estimated **24,357 seats**, serving approximately 81.675% of the projected population of 3- and 4-year-olds in 2027.

Defining the 2032 Target

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. Hawai'i's births from 2012 to 2024 declined at an average annual rate of 1.97%, and preliminary data for 2025 indicates a continuation of this trend. If this continues through 2029, the population of 3- and 4-year-olds in 2032 is projected to decline to 27,381.

As we continue to make progress toward the 2032 benchmark of access to preschool enrollment for all 3- and 4-year-olds, it is important to note that universal access does not necessarily equate to 100% enrollment. Even when an affordable and accessible preschool option is available, some families may choose to keep their children at home or use other non-preschool arrangements. Evidence from states and communities with long-established universal pre-K programs suggests that some level of nonparticipation is to be expected. These dynamics should be considered as Hawai'i approaches the 2032 benchmark and we further refine how to measure and define progress or success.

Projections

Figure 1. Projected Population of 3- and 4-year-olds and Pre-K Seats 2020 – 2032 (Desired Capacity)

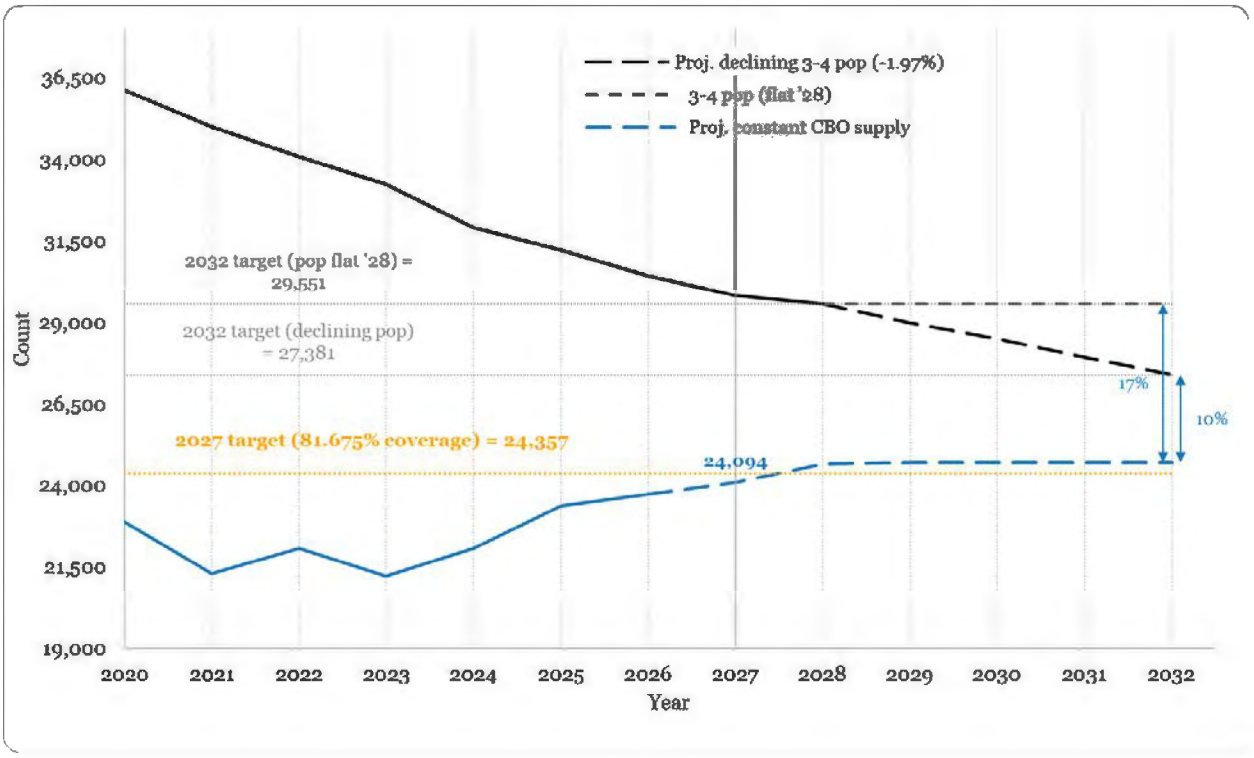


Figure 1 illustrates historical trends and future capacity projections for Pre-K seats through 2032. The blue line estimates the combined desired capacity of both Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), including registered family child care homes, licensed group homes, and licensed preschools (including Head Start), and non-CBO providers, which include EOEL, Charter Schools, and HIDOE SPED, along with DOW preschools. The solid blue line tracks historical capacity, while the dashed blue line from 2026 onward projects future capacity. Under this projection, Pre-K capacity is estimated to reach 24,094 in 2027, placing it just below the 2027 target of 24,357 (representing 81.675% coverage).

To evaluate how this projected capacity meets future needs, the chart displays two population trajectories represented by the black and grey dashed lines. The first trajectory (dashed black line) projects a declining population of 3- and 4-year-olds, decreasing at -1.97% annually based on historical birth rates, while the second trajectory (dashed grey line) assumes the population remains flat from 2028 onward. The horizontal grey lines mark the 2032 target goals (representing 100% coverage) under each population assumption: 29,551 children for the flat population trajectory and 27,381 children for the declining trajectory.

The gap between projected capacity and population need at the 2032 horizon is indicated by blue arrows, revealing that 17% of 3- and 4-year-olds would lack access to a Pre-K program under a flat population scenario, whereas 10% would remain uncovered under the declining population trajectory.

Limitations and Risk Factors

While the projections in Figure 1 provide a directional sense of progress toward Act 46 targets, several data limitations and future uncertainties could substantially alter actual outcomes. Data constraints and potential risk factors are:

- Data Limitations

  - Exclusion of Migration Patterns: The population trajectories are calculated using DOH Vital Records Birth Data. Because this methodology relies strictly on births, it does not account for the impact of in-migration or out-migration on the actual number of 3- and 4-year-olds residing in the state.

  - Lack of Geographic Granularity: The figure presents aggregated statewide information. Consequently, it does not reflect local or regional geographic availability, which may mask localized shortages of Pre-K capacity even if statewide targets appear within reach.

  - Self-Reported Capacity Metrics: The desired capacity figures rely on voluntary, self-reported data from community-based providers and reflect a point in time. The consistency and accuracy of the information cannot be verified.

- Unknowns and Risk Factors Impacting Outcomes

  - Demographic Deviations: Future demand will be dictated by actual birth rates and net migration trends, which may diverge from the flat or declining trajectories assumed in the model.

  - Workforce Constraints: Expanding and maintaining capacity and quality are tied to the early childhood workforce supply. Staffing shortages or recruitment challenges could limit a provider's ability to operate at their desired capacity, regardless of physical space or planned expansion.

  - Policy and Funding Shifts: Policy and funding shifts could improve child care capacity—such as expanded eligibility under Preschool Open Doors or future state investments in early childhood education. Yet these opportunities are tempered by growing uncertainty around the continuity and funding levels of federal programs that support young children and families. This federal uncertainty complicates long-term planning, increases the administrative workload associated with grant management, and heightens the risk of

disruptions in essential early learning services. Proposed changes to federally funded Head Start programs, along with administrative rule revisions proposed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), introduce additional administrative and potential fiscal challenges. These changes would likely raise compliance requirements for federal grants, constrain expansion or innovation if political appointees assume grant-approval authority, and broaden agencies' ability to suspend, modify, or terminate grants.

For small, community-based and home-based providers already strained by workforce shortages, rising costs, and post-pandemic recovery, these shifts add significant administrative pressure and could hinder system stability.

Progress of Implementing the Early Care and Education Sector Programs

This report discusses the system-wide progress made toward stabilizing and improving Hawai'i's early care and education system. The report outlines updates related to accessibility, affordability, workforce, federal impacts, and data collection and analysis.

Accessibility and Affordability

The State of Hawai'i helps families access early care and learning through two main state pathways: free public preschool classrooms in participating schools (via EOEL and Charter Schools) and tuition subsidies for community-based programs.

State subsidies are offered through the Preschool Open Doors program and Hawai'i's Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Additional federal support includes Head Start and Early Head Start, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies, public school Special Education Preschool, Native Hawaiian Education Act grants for Family Child Interaction Learning Programs, and the federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

Preschool Open Doors Subsidy

The Department of Human Services (DHS) continued implementation of the Preschool Open Doors (POD) program expansion for the 2026–2027 program year. The POD program is intended to support families in accessing early learning services for young children.

On May 29, 2026, DHS formally adopted the Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) to expand POD eligibility and program restructuring to implement changes required by Act 203, SLH 2025. Immediately after adopting the rules, DHS opened the application period for the 2026–2027 POD program year. This ensured that families could begin applying for tuition assistance and allowed providers to begin planning for enrollment supported by POD subsidies.

On the first day, POD received over 2,800 applications. As of August 2026, the application

volume has exceeded 6,500, reflecting significant interest in the program. POD continues to process applications and implement operational improvements to support accurate eligibility determinations.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan

The Office of Child Care (OCC), which is under the US Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, is expected to release the draft CCDF Plan Preprint for public comment in September. The release of the Preprint signifies the start of the formal triennial planning process for DHS. By March of 2027, OCC issues the final version with official instructions to complete the plan and submit by the July 2027 deadline. DHS is currently reviewing the recently issued CCDF Plan tools and outstanding compliance-related issues that align with ongoing amendments to administrative rules for child care payments and licensing.

Public Preschool Programs

The expansion of Hawai‘i's public Pre-K system is improving access to affordable, 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 (IEP) 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 percent of the federal poverty level.

Many classrooms are strategically located in rural communities and areas with limited preschool options, helping to close gaps in access to early learning. There are now EOEL Pre-K classrooms on every island, including Lāna‘i and Moloka‘i, as well as four Hawaiian Language classrooms. Demand remains strong, with the total number of applications exceeding the number of available seats.

Both EOEL and Charter Schools Programs continue to focus on offering high-quality early learning opportunities for children while navigating the challenges of recent expansion and growth. These efforts have resulted in both state public Pre-K programs being recognized by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for meeting 10 of 10 preschool quality benchmarks for the fourth year in a row.

First 5 Hawai‘i

First 5 Hawai‘i is an online resource that helps connect families with early childhood programs. The portal provides information on early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services to improve access and coordination across Hawai‘i's early childhood system. It also includes a personalized eligibility screening tool that helps families determine whether they may qualify for 18 early childhood programs administered by multiple Hawai‘i state agencies, including

federally funded programs, and provides links to the relevant programs.

The portal was developed through a collaborative effort supported by Preschool Development Grant, Birth to 5 (PDG B-5) funding and led by a team from the community-based organization (CBO) Hawai‘i Children’s Action Network (HCAN). The Hawai‘i Data Collaborative, also a CBO, and the departments and agencies that administer the programs connected to the portal also contributed to the effort, bringing partners together to streamline access to services through a common eligibility portal.

Current-year PDG B-5 funds are supporting preliminary work to connect the portal more directly to individual program application processes. This work could eventually allow the platform to evolve from a common eligibility screening tool into a common application portal, making it easier for families to apply to programs they may be eligible for.

Workforce

Stipends & Scholarships

From Summer 2023 through Spring 2026, the **Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Stipend Program** funded 183 stipend agreements for recipients pursuing ECE credentials within the University of Hawai‘i system. Supported by personalized, student-centered retention strategies, the program maintains a low attrition rate of 13% (24 terminations overall). The initiative has achieved a 55% completion rate to date, graduating 99 individuals who are now committed to working in the local early childhood workforce for at least two consecutive years.

In an effort to support the professional development of early learning program directors and administrators, EOEL provided access to the **Online National Administrator Credential (NAC) Program** offered by the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) at the end of 2025. EOEL utilized Federal Preschool Development Grant Birth to 5 funding to support 48 program participants from Hawai‘i Island, Kaua‘i, Maui, and O‘ahu. Participants joined from across the sector, including center-based programs, home visiting, family child interaction learning programs (FCIL), and family child care. Participants working in policy and advocacy were also included. The Online NAC course provided training to equip early childhood education administrators with essential leadership competencies across 10 targeted sections, including staff management, financial planning, educational programming, operations, and regulatory compliance.

Also, the DHS **Early Childhood Scholarship program** supports the quality and continuous improvement of early child care programs by investing in the education and professional development of the workforce. The scholarship program prioritizes individuals who are already employed in a licensed child care facility or who operate a registered family child care home. In state fiscal year 2026, DHS expended $69,133, which supported a total of 121 individuals. Of

the 121 individuals who received scholarships, 77 pursued a Child Development Associate credential, 23 pursued an associate's degree in early childhood education, 10 pursued a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and 9 pursued a master's degree in early childhood education.

In late 2025, Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education and EOEL partnered with the Public Consulting Group to use PDG B-5 funds to provide a one-time supplemental wage award to help stabilize and retain the early childhood workforce. The program distributed over $3.9 million in awards to 1,710 educators across Hawai'i's mixed delivery system. Recipients were employed in a broad range of settings, including center-based programs, group and family child care homes, friend, family & neighbor care, and FCIL programs.

Since the last COVID-related federal stabilization grants ended in 2024, opportunities to support recruitment and retention through financial awards or wage stipends have diminished—even as low wages remain one of the primary barriers to building the early care and learning workforce Hawai'i needs. While the above measures offer some opportunities, they do not address the underlying compensation challenges facing early childhood educators. Sustained progress in expanding access to high-quality early care and learning opportunities may require longer-term policy strategies that strengthen workforce stability and ensure competitive, reliable compensation.

Early Childhood Educator Pathways and Programs

The University of Hawai'i at West O'ahu (UHWO) received provisional approval by the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) of an Early Childhood Education (ECE) P-3 to add a Teaching Field licensure program. The program will create another pathway for HTSB Elementary Education License holders to add the Early Childhood Education P-3 teaching field to their existing license. The UHWO ECE Program has the potential to help alleviate preschool teaching vacancies in the HIDOE and State Public Charter Schools by providing an additional licensing pathway.

Act 30, SLH 2026, temporarily extends the length of time the HIDOE may employ emergency hire permit holders from three to five years. This legislation will help public PreK teachers who are initially hired without a state license in early childhood education stay in the classrooms while balancing coursework with full-time teaching responsibilities and personal obligations as they pursue licensure.

Federal Impacts

Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDG B-5)

Since 2014, federal Preschool Development Grants (PDG B-5) have served as an essential resource for Hawai‘i’s early childhood system. Under the current federal administration, the grant’s structure has shifted from traditional multi-year awards to single-year, competitive grants with a narrower focus on targeted systems building for 2026 and 2027. Future opportunities are uncertain. The President’s FY 2027 budget proposal eliminates PDG B-5 spending entirely, leaving the final outcome dependent on ongoing congressional negotiations.

Head Start

As Hawai‘i continues its work toward expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities, federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start remain important components of the State’s mixed-delivery early care and education system. The federal program funds 1,703 Head Start Seats and 576 Early Head Start Seats statewide.

Recent and anticipated federal regulatory changes affecting Head Start warrant close attention. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has initiated changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards and has signaled additional regulatory activity that may affect program operations, workforce requirements, eligibility and enrollment practices, administrative requirements, and local program flexibility. Because Head Start and Early Head Start serve children and families who often face the greatest barriers to accessing early learning, including families experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, children with disabilities, and families with low incomes, changes in federal policy may have implications beyond individual Head Start grant recipients and influence Hawai‘i’s broader efforts to expand equitable access to early care and education.

As new Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs) are released, Hawai‘i has an opportunity to assess their potential effects from a statewide systems perspective. Areas for consideration include whether federal changes could affect Head Start enrollment or eligibility practices; program capacity; recruitment and retention of the early childhood workforce; coordination with state-funded preschool and child care programs; services for children with disabilities and other priority populations; and the alignment of federal requirements with Hawai‘i’s early learning goals. Particular attention should be given to whether regulatory changes create gaps, create opportunities for greater flexibility, or present areas where State policy, governance, funding, partnerships, or technical assistance may be required to help sustain services for children and families. Continued coordination will help ensure that changes at the federal level are considered alongside Hawai‘i’s commitment to increasing access, strengthening the early care and education sector, and building a coordinated system that meets the needs of young children and families across the State.

Family Child Interaction Learning Program Funding

Hawai‘i’s family child interaction learning (FCIL) programs are an important component of the State’s mixed-delivery early learning system, providing early learning opportunities for families who may not participate in center-based care or preschool. They also support children’s well-being by strengthening parents’ and caregivers’ capacity to serve as their children’s first and most important teachers. Hawai‘i’s largest FCIL providers rely heavily on grants from the federal Native Hawaiian Education Program (NHEP), making these programs vulnerable to changes in federal policy and funding. Although FFY 2026 NHEP funding was preserved, the program faced significant uncertainty during federal budget negotiations last year. The President’s FY 2027 budget proposal would eliminate NHEP funding entirely, and Congress has not yet completed the FY 2027 appropriations process. Continued uncertainty or reductions in federal funding could disrupt services, undermine continuity for children and families, and reduce providers’ capacity to sustain these programs.

Federal Tax Credit Changes for 2026

Recent legislation enhanced two federal tax credits related to early care and education. Starting in 2026, the federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit maximum credit rate increased from 35% to 50% of qualifying expenses, and the income ranges that determine the credit rates were adjusted. In addition, the federal Employer-Provided Child Care Credit under Section 45F was expanded to enhance incentives for employers to offer child care benefits to their employees. The credit increased from 25% to 40% of qualified child care expenditures, or 50% for eligible small businesses, and the maximum annual credit increased from $150,000 to $500,000, or $600,000 for eligible small businesses.

Implementation of One Big Beautiful Bill Act or HR 1 (2025)

As the State continues implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (HR 1, 2025), the full effects of its major cost shifts and expanded eligibility requirements for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid are only beginning to emerge. Significant concerns include the loss of eligibility for certain non-U.S. citizens, substantial new demands on the State’s general fund to sustain SNAP benefits, and the ripple effects that SNAP changes may have on general-funded programs such as Preschool Open Doors. Restrictions on Medicaid financing tools further limit the State’s ability to maintain the breadth of services currently available, and research shows that when parents lose coverage, their children often lose coverage as well—even if the children remain eligible.

These federal changes create a heavier administrative burden for both families and State agencies, making it harder for families to maintain essential benefits while balancing employment and child care responsibilities. With HR 1’s impacts on the health care system projected to continue through 2032, Hawai‘i may eventually face difficult decisions about curtailing services, mirroring steps already taken in other states.

Data Collection and Analysis

Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)

HIDOE has developed the KEA Kaiapuni in ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi for administration in the Kaiapuni schools across the Department. The assessment is operational as of SY 2026-2027, and official data will be reported alongside the English KEA data. The KEA Kaiapuni uniquely provides information about both child developmental readiness and linguistic readiness for the Kaiapuni context.

2025–2030 Hawaiʻi Early Childhood State Plan

The 2025–2030 Hawaiʻi Early Childhood State Plan provides a statewide roadmap for ensuring that all keiki and ʻohana have the resources, opportunities, and support needed to thrive. Building on lessons from the 2019–2024 State Plan and findings from the 2024 Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the 2025–2030 State Plan update embraces a community-centered, inclusive approach—ensuring that ʻohana, providers, agencies, and community partners each have voice and kuleana in shaping Hawaiʻi's early childhood system. The overarching structure of the State Plan is six Building Blocks that represent key focus areas across the early childhood system sectors of health, wellness, and early care and learning:

- Building Block 1 – Keiki and ʻOhana Health, Safety, and Well-Being
- Building Block 2 - ʻOhana Partnerships and Engagement
- Building Block 3 – Keiki Learning and Development
- Building Block 4 – Early Childhood Workforce
- Building Block 5 – Access to Early Care and Learning Opportunities
- Building Block 6 – Early Childhood Systems

As part of the State Plan's development, Building Block Committee participants discussed sharing data from work they are currently undertaking to advance the Action Priorities, with the opportunity for additional partners to join over time. EOEL will collect and analyze these data annually and publish the findings in aggregate, providing a systemwide snapshot of implementation and impact.

DHS continues to work on a data-sharing agreement with HIDOE to receive and maintain the KEA data and each child's prior early learning program attended during the year before entering Kindergarten. The data will be used to determine the need for child care in geographic regions of the State and to identify the highest-priority regions that require prekindergarten programs and child care to meet the needs of unserved or underserved children.

APPENDIX A

Table A1. EOEL Pre-K Program (School Years 2022-2027)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Seats Available
2022-2023	37	707
2023-2024	49	947
2024-2025	92	1,775
2025-2026	117	2,275
2026-2027	136	2,655

6 additional EOEL classrooms are not included in the 2026-2027 counts cited in this report, but are expected to open in the second semester of SY 2026-27 or the first semester of SY 2027-28

Table A2. HSPCSC Charter School Early Learning Programs (School Years 2022-2027)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Seats Available
2022-2023	18	327
2023-2024	18	327
2024-2025	18	327
2025-2026	33	608
2026-2027	33	608

Table A3. HIDOE Migrant Education Program (MEP) (School Years 2022-2027)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Students Served
2022-2023	2	14
2023-2024	3	21
2024-2025	4	42
2025-2026	4	46
2026-2027	0	0

Program ended after the 2025-2026 School Year

Table A4. HIDOE Special Education Preschool (3-5) (School Years 2022-2026)

School Year	SPED Classrooms	SPED Eligible Students
2022-2023	259	2,146
2023-2024	259	2,255
2024-2025	259	2,480
2025-2026	236	2,007*

A student is counted if eligible under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and special education and related services are provided according to an active Individualized Education Program (IEP). 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 be reflective of 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.

**Child Count data from December 1, 2025, generated from the Electronic Comprehensive Student Support System (eCSSS). eCSSS is the statewide database platform HIDOE uses to record student eligibility, IEPs, and service data, from which Child Count figures are generated. Prior years were point-in-time data from the Infinite Campus student information and learning management system.*

Table A5. DHS Number of Seats Available (Licensed and Registered Providers, Calendar Years 2022-2026)

Year	Licensed & Registered Providers	Maximum Seats
2022	815	31,558
2023	806	31,304
2024	785	30,623
2025	774	30,610
2026*	763	30,112

DHS licensed and registered providers include group child care centers (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.

** State fiscal year 2025-26*

Table A6. DHS Licensed & Registered Providers Primarily Serving 3 & 4-Year-Old Children (Calendar Years 2022-2026)

Year	Providers / Sites	Maximum Seats
2022	716	23,653
2023	705	27,834
2024	685	22,587
2025	678	22,519
2026	664	22,050

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. Department of Defense (DoD) Preschools (School Years 2024-2027)

School Year	Number of Classrooms	Seats Available
2024-2025	17	1,093
2025-2026	18	1,228
2026-2027	19	1,363

Military child centers off base and on other non-DOD federal property are not represented here. Classrooms and seats are estimates and may change if updated information becomes available.

Table A8. Family Child Interaction Learning (FCIL) Programs (School Years 2022-2027)

School Year	Number of Sites	
2022-2023	48	--
2023-2024	48	--
2024-2025	56	--
2025-2026	51	--
2026-2027	62	--

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 program capacity is not restricted by the adult-child

ratio as an adult accompanies the child. The number of sites is based on provider reports. Some FCILs also have virtual online program options.

Table A9. Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care through the federally funded Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) for Program Years 2022-2026

Program Year*	Age	Licensed & Registered Providers	Exempt Providers	Total
2022	3	1,131	201	1,332
	4	1,351	150	1,501
	Total	2,482	351	2,833
2023	3	552	129	681
	4	602	124	726
	Total	1,154	253	1,407
2024	3	574	127	701
	4	631	105	736
	Total	1,205	232	1,437
2025	3	417	100	517
	4	228	89	317
	Total	645	189	834
2026	3	394	89	483
	4	159	79	238
	Total	553	168	721

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.

** Program Year is the state fiscal year*

Table A10. Preschool Open Doors (POD) State Subsidy Program (Program Years 2022-2026)

Program Year*	Accredited Providers	Non-Accredited Providers	Total Providers	Total Children Receiving Subsidized Care
2022	27	42	69	621
2023	46	57	103	816
2024	68	120	188	666
2025	54	144	198	2,343
2026	68	174	242	3,823

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 way to assess quality; however, accreditation standards can be higher than the state's requirements. However, Act 203 (SLH 2025) removed the accreditation requirement for preschools. This amendment will allow parents more options for their child care needs and give providers more flexibility to pursue accreditation.

** Program Year is the state fiscal year*

Table A11. Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program (Incoming, Outgoing, and Active Participants by Term)

Term	New to Term	Completed	Terminated	Active Program Participants
Summer 2023	10	0	0	10
Fall 2023	45	3	2	55
Spring 2024	48	9	3	98
Summer 2024	11	6	4	93
Fall 2024	20	17	7	107
Spring 2025	20	25	2	103
Summer 2025	9	1	1	85
Fall 2025	14	23	3	97
Spring 2026	6	15	2	77

APPENDIX B

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.

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 14,972 and 14,851, respectively.

A note regarding births in the State of Hawaii: according to preliminary data from the Department of Health (DOH), vital statistics[2]. There were 14,579 recorded births statewide in 2025. As we assess progress toward achieving universal access by 2032, our current projections assume a continuation of the general downward trend in birth rates seen since 2012. These estimates may be revised as more recent and comprehensive data become available.

Table B1. Statewide Birth Count 2012 – 2025

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*
2017	17,523	2024	14,972**
2018	17,027	2025	14,579***

* Children born in 2023 will begin to turn four in 2027
** Children born in 2024 will begin to turn three in 2027
*** Number is preliminary as of July 6, 2026

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.

[2] See https://health.hawaii.gov/vitalstatistics/

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.