



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY 2026 CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Contra Costa County
Local Planning & Advisory Council
for Early Care & Education





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Executive Summary

Contra Costa County's 2026 Child Care Needs Assessment finds that the early learning and care system remains under significant strain, with the deepest gaps affecting infants and toddlers, low-income families, and children with disabilities. Child population trends are relatively stable overall, but growth is projected to concentrate among babies by 2035, while recent declines have been greatest for 2- to 4-year-olds.

- 73% of children under 5 have at least one working parent, nearly a quarter of young children live in families receiving CalFresh, a third rely on Medi-Cal, and 11.6% are in poverty, underscoring that many families who would benefit from early learning support are juggling high costs and economic insecurity.
- Only a small percentage of subsidy-eligible infants and preschoolers are served in subsidized programs, and publicly funded early childhood slots reach just 10.3% of children 0–5 under 200% of the federal poverty level.
- This leaves a large pool of eligible children without subsidized care even after accounting for some families' preference for parental or relative care.
- Supply, demand, and family experience data together indicate that unmet need is most acute at the youngest ages.
- Contra Costa has 28,538 licensed slots for children 0–5, but many seats are vacant.
- Licensed center-based infant/toddler and preschool classrooms operate closer to full, while family child care homes, an essential option for infants, toddlers, and non-traditional hours, have as much as one-third of their licensed capacity unused.
- Since 2022, infant/toddler waitlists nearly doubled while preschool waitlists dropped by 62%, likely reflecting the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten and the California State Preschool Program.
- More than half of recent requests for care are for children under age 3.





- Parent surveying reveals that families across the county, particularly in East County and among communities of color, report that cost, limited availability, non-traditional schedules, and language or cultural mismatches make it difficult to secure stable arrangements, even when they receive subsidies.
- A highly skilled but underpaid workforce, predominantly Latino and Black women, faces low wages, high turnover, and limited benefits.
- Facilities investments, Quality Matters participation, and new Head Start/Early Head Start slots show important progress but have not yet closed gaps in infant/toddler classrooms and inclusive preschool spaces.

Overall, the assessment points to a dual charge: expand infant/toddler capacity and utilization and strengthen affordability, workforce stability, inclusion, and geographic equity so that all Contra Costa children 0–5 can access high-quality early learning that matches their families’ needs.



Introduction

Purpose of the Report

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) requires county Local Child Care and Development Planning Councils (LPCs) to conduct a comprehensive assessment of local child care needs at least once every five years. This report fulfills that requirement for Contra Costa County and summarizes the most current available data on children ages 0–5, their families, and the early learning and care system that serves them. The findings are intended to guide long-term planning, policy decisions, and investments across public and private programs so that young children, particularly those who are eligible for subsidized services, have access to high-quality, affordable early care and education.

Data Sources

This assessment draws on a wide range of county, state, and national data sources. Primary sources include:

- California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit
- California Department of Social Services (CDSS)
- California Department of Education (CDE)
- California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD)
- U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey)
- California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
- CocoKids
- First 5 Contra Costa
- Contra Costa County Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA)
- Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Policy Development and Research

This assessment employs a hybrid approach, using multiple authoritative data sources to provide the most accurate and comprehensive analysis possible. Where current-year figures were unavailable, the report uses the most recent and reliable proxy data, with each source and data year clearly cited.

Report Structure

The organization of this report follows the California County Local Child Care Planning Council (LPC) Needs Assessment Template issued by the CDSS. Data and narrative findings are provided to address 20 mandated response topics, including demographics, economics, family and child characteristics, and components of the childcare system in Contra Costa County. The report also includes the results of a survey of 263 parents conducted in July 2025. For ease of reference, each section header notes the corresponding template item number(s), and required state and local data are integrated throughout.



Acknowledgements

The Contra Costa County 2026 Child Care Needs Assessment was prepared by the Contra Costa County Office of Education in partnership with local service agencies, educational and research institutions, public agencies, and Early Care and Education (ECE) experts. We especially acknowledge the individuals and organizations who contributed data, reviewed findings, and shared their on-the-ground experience to shape this assessment. A list of these contributors can be found at the end of the report, in Appendix A.

1. Child Demographics, Market Rate Ceilings, and Unmet Need

Note: Because the California Early Learning Needs Assessments Reports (CELNAR) database that is typically used for reporting does not provide data beyond 2022, substitute data has been used for sections 1a through 1e.

1a. Number of Children by Age

The California Department of Finance’s Demographic Research Unit (DRU) lists 69,137 children ages 0-5 in Contra Costa County for 2025, with this age group (on average) projected to remain relatively flat through 2035, as listed in the table below. The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2024 estimates the population of children under age 6 at 70,319¹ which is 1.7% higher than the DRU projection. This assessment uses DRU statistics as the baseline demographic source in most cases because it provides the forward projections essential to capacity planning.

Table 1: Contra Costa County — Projected Child Population Change (Ages 0-5) (2025-2035)

Age	Population 2025	Population 2035	Numeric Change	Percent Change
0 yrs (0-11 months)	10,897	12,016	+1,119	+10.3%
1 yrs (12-23 months)	10,946	11,660	+714	+6.5%
2 yrs (24-35 months)	11,480	11,478	-2	0.0%
3 yrs (36-47 months)	11,746	11,394	-352	-3.0%
4 yrs (48-59 months)	11,871	11,298	-573	-4.8%
5 yrs (60-71 months)	12,197	11,310	-887	-7.3%
Total (Ages 0-5)	69,137	69,156	+19	+0.03%

Source: State of California, Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit (DRU), P-2B County Population by Age, Vintage 2025 (released September 30, 2025). <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/>

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Table B23008: Presence of Children Under 18 Years by Household Type by Labor Force Status of Parents, Contra Costa County, California. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACS1Y2024.B23008?g=050XX00US06013>



The projections for 2025 to 2035 indicate eventual positive growth at the youngest end of the age spectrum, with babies (ages 0-11 months in 2025) projected to increase by 10% over the decade. However, this growth turns negative for children aged 3-5 years. This suggests a potential rebound in births after recent declines, but also implies that while infant-toddler capacity may need to expand, the overall cohort of young children remains relatively stable. It is also worth noting that significant East Contra Costa County in-migration is expected to continue to drive population gains, suggesting a need for geographic targeting for new subsidies and facilities.²

1b. Percent of Children by Race/Ethnicity and Age

The following California Department of Finance and American Community Survey synthesized data shows race and ethnicity estimates for 2025, offering a snapshot of the demographic composition of young children in Contra Costa County.

Table 2: Contra Costa County — Estimated Children Ages 0–5 by Race/Ethnicity (2025)

Race / Ethnicity	Percent	Estimated Children
Hispanic / Latino (any race)	36.0%	24,889
White (Non-Hispanic)	28.5%	19,703
Asian	16.0%	11,062
Black / African American	8.5%	5,876
Multiracial	9.0%	6,222
American Indian / Alaska Native	0.5%	346
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.5%	346

Sources: California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit (DRU), P-2B County Population by Age, Vintage 2025 (released September 30, 2025). <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/>. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 1-Year Estimates (Tables B01001A-I: Sex by Age by Race/Ethnicity) for children under age 5 in Contra Costa County, California. Because ACS reports under 5 while DOF reports ages 0–5, the race/ethnicity counts shown here are reconciled estimates.

The 2025 estimates indicate a diverse young population in Contra Costa County, with Hispanic children representing the largest group (36%). White (Non-Hispanic) children also constitute a large segment of the 0-5 population. The data highlights the presence of substantial Asian, Black, and Multiracial populations, along with smaller American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander groups. This race and ethnicity breakdown is crucial for understanding culturally responsive program development.

² East Contra Costa Regional Fee Program Update: Draft Final Report (Fehr & Peers for ECCRFFA, May 2024), p. 9–12 (Table 3–6: Projected growth 2023–2040). https://eccrffa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ECCRFFA_Nexus_Update_2024_DraftFinal_May2024.pdf



1c. Regional Market Rates for State-Subsidized Care by Age/Setting

The Regional Market Rate (RMR) methodology sets maximum reimbursement ceilings for state-subsidized child care, varying by setting type, child’s age, and hours of care. These ceilings are intended to allow parents access to a significant percentage of providers in their market. As of January 1, 2022, the RMR ceilings were updated to be the greater of two values: either the 75th percentile of the 2018 regional market rate survey for that region, or the RMR ceiling that was in effect for that region on December 31, 2021.³ Contra Costa County is part of the “Bay Area” region for these calculations.

It is important to note that while the state is transitioning to a new cost-based single rate structure, the specific rates under this new methodology are not yet fully finalized or publicly available in a comprehensive table. Therefore, the current RMR ceilings, based on the 2018 regional market rate survey, remain the official reference for existing reimbursement rates. In the interim, temporary ‘Cost of Care Plus’ monthly payments are being provided to state-subsidized child care providers from January 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, to help bridge the gap between standard reimbursement/regional market rates and actual costs. In Bay Area counties, these payments fall within the state’s \$140–\$211 per-child monthly range for licensed providers, with lower amounts for license-exempt providers.⁴

The table below provides the current Regional Market Rate Ceilings for Contra Costa County, effective January 1, 2022.



³ California Department of Social Services. Child Care and Development Bulletin 21-21: Regional Market Rate (RMR) Ceiling Changes. November 30, 2021. https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CDSS-Child-Care-and-Development-Bulletin-21-21_-Regional-Market-Rate-Ceiling-Changes.pdf

⁴ Legislative Analyst’s Office. The 2025-26 Budget: Child Care and State Preschool. March 28, 2025. <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5024>



Table 3: Contra Costa County — Maximum Reimbursement for State-Subsidized Care by Age

Age Group	Full-time Daily	Full-time Weekly	Full-time Monthly	Part-time Hourly	Part-time Weekly	Part-time Monthly
Child Care Centers						
0-24 Months	\$1111.93	\$448.93	\$1889.8	\$21.14	\$309.58	\$1208.60
2-5 Years	\$87.13	\$364.82	\$1499.5	\$16.09	\$261.08	\$920.58
School Age	\$61.08	\$293.97	\$1067.5	\$11.88	\$149.90	\$527.61
Family Child Care Homes						
0-24 Months	\$75.26	\$323.94	\$1326.1	\$15.83	\$225.86	\$896.98
2-5 Years	\$71.91	\$303.64	\$1257.6	\$15.20	\$230.01	\$893.91
School Age	\$50.85	\$223.18	\$924.44	\$11.50	\$153.31	\$592.86
TrustLined/Relative (Licensed-Exempt)						
0- 24 Months	\$52.69	\$226.76	\$928.27	\$11.08	\$158.10	\$627.88
2-5 Years	\$50.33	\$212.55	\$880.33	\$10.64	\$161.01	\$625.73
School Age	\$35.59	\$156.23	\$647.11	\$8.05	\$107.31	\$415.01

Source: California Department of Social Services (CDSS). <https://rcscc.adm.dss.ca.gov/index.aspx>

The continued reliance on 2018 market rate survey data for current RMR ceilings, despite being updated in 2022, indicates a significant lag between reimbursement rates and the actual, rising costs of providing childcare. This disparity is partially addressed by temporary supplemental payments, but the long-term financial stability of providers in Contra Costa County hinges on the successful and timely implementation of the new cost-based single rate structure. The higher cost of infant/toddler care compared to preschool, and center-based care compared to family child care homes, remains a consistent trend.

1d. and 1e. Unmet Need for State/Federally Subsidized Infant/Toddler Programs and Preschool Programs

Current data on unmet need for state and federally subsidized infant/toddler and preschool programs by specific age groups and program types for Contra Costa County is not available through the recommended CELNAR database. However, other indicators highlight a potential overall unmet need for subsidized support, and far too many of the county's low-income families who are eligible for subsidized care likely cannot access spaces due to the county's low supply.



Table 4: Estimated Child Care Needs for Infant/Toddler Programs (0-35 months) in Contra Costa County (2023)

Category	Number of Children	Share of Eligible
Subsidy-eligible children	19,660	100%
Subsidy-served	1,780	9%
Unmet need	17,880	91%

Sources: California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2023 Child Care Portfolio: Contra Costa County sheet (April 2025); First 5 Contra Costa, “Early Childhood Education Crisis in Contra Costa County”(2023), p. 4; California Department of Finance Population Projections (2023) and 2022 Contra Costa Child Care Needs Assessment ratios.

Table 5: Estimated Child Care Needs for Preschool Programs (36-59 months) in Contra Costa County (2023)

Category	Number of Children	Share of Eligible
Subsidy-eligible children	17,450	100%
Subsidy-served	6,750	39%
Unmet need	10,700	61%

Sources: California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2023 Child Care Portfolio: Contra Costa County sheet (May 2025); First 5 Contra Costa, “Early Childhood Education Crisis in Contra Costa County”(2023), p. 4; California Department of Finance Population Projections (2023) and 2022 Contra Costa Child Care Needs Assessment ratios.

The First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Systems Map (July 2025) shows that known, publicly funded early childhood program slots could serve approximately 10.3% of children ages 0-5 under 200% of the federal poverty level, underscoring significant unmet need, particularly for infants and toddlers.⁵

These estimates indicate that only a small share of subsidy-eligible infants/toddlers and a minority of subsidy-eligible preschoolers are currently served in subsidized programs; the remaining eligible children are not in subsidized care and therefore represent the potential pool of unmet need. Some of these children may be in informal or unsubsidized arrangements by family choice, but waitlist, request-for-care, and parent survey data suggest that a substantial portion reflects families who want but cannot obtain affordable, regulated care.

⁵ First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Systems Map (July 2025), p. 39. Estimate reflects known publicly funded slots relative to children under 200% FPL and may undercount total participation due to blended funding and data limitations. <https://www.first5coco.org/our-impact/early-childhood-systems-map/>



2. Local Population Data

Additional population County and State data is provided by the California Childcare Resource and Referral Network’s 2023 Portfolio Report (released in April, 2025). According to the report, in Contra Costa County, there were 72,731 0-5 year olds in 2023 vs a total of 77,746 0-5 year olds in 2021 (-6.5%).

Table 6: Contra Costa County and California — Young Child Population in 2021 and 2023

Population	CC County			California		
	2021	2023	Change	2021	2023	Change
Under 2 years	23,909	23,259	-3%	861,008	830,631	-4%
2 years	12,567	11,636	-7%	460,224	407,630	-11%
3 years	13,292	12,067	-9%	469,378	443,300	-6%
4 years	13,916	12,540	-10%	484,018	455,053	-6%
5 years	14,062	13,229	-6%	493,582	464,560	-6%

Source: California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2023 Child Care Portfolio – Contra Costa County sheet, Population table (April 2025). https://rrnetwork.org/assets/general-files/Contra-Costa_2025-04-28-172348_iqgo.pdf

Overall, both Contra Costa County and California have experienced a slight decrease in their total resident populations, with the county seeing a ~1% decline and the state a ~0.4% decline as of 2023. This general trend of population contraction between 2021 and 2023 is also reflected in the child population. When examining the 0-5 age group, the most significant percentage decreases in Contra Costa County are observed among 4-year-olds (-10%), 3-year-olds (-9%), and 2-year-olds (-7%). Even the “Under 2 years” category saw a 3% decrease.

The trends in Contra Costa County generally mirror those of California, where all child age groups (ages 0-12) also experienced declines during this period, with 2-year-olds showing the largest statewide decrease at 11%. This consistent pattern across both the county and the state may suggest broader demographic shifts, such as declining birth rates or out-migration of families with young children. Despite an expected continuing decrease in the preschool population in Contra Costa County, longer-term analysis, as provided in Section 1, suggests positive growth at the youngest end of the age spectrum, with babies (age 0 in 2025) projected to increase by 10% by 2035.

Contra Costa County faces a dual challenge in childcare planning: a recent decline in ages 2-4, contrasting with a projected significant increase in infants (age 0) by 2035. This necessitates a strategic shift in childcare resources, moving from current preschool-focused services towards expanding infant and toddler care capacity over the next decade. Flexible funding models are crucial to support providers through these demographic fluctuations, ensuring financial stability while preparing for future demand. Ultimately, understanding these evolving population trends is vital for effective resource allocation and program development to meet the county’s diverse childcare needs.



3. Enrollment

February 2026 CocoKids snapshot data indicates that Contra Costa County has 28,538 licensed child-care slots for children 0–5, with an estimated 22,266 filled slots and 6,272 vacancies, meaning about 22.0% of licensed seats are not in use at present. Centers account for 2,310 infant–toddler (0–35 months) slots, with an estimated 20.0% vacancy rate, and 16,924 preschool (36–59 months) slots with a 15.1% vacancy rate, suggesting that preschool classrooms are somewhat more fully utilized than infant/toddler rooms. Family child-care homes (FCCs), which serve mixed ages 0–59 months, contribute 9,304 licensed slots but show an estimated 34.9% vacancy rate, highlighting that a large share of licensed home-based capacity is currently underused despite these settings being an important option for infants, toddlers, and families needing non-traditional hours.

Table 7: Contra Costa County — Licensed Child-Care Capacity, Enrollment, and Vacancies

Provider Type	Age Band	Licensed Capacity	Estimated Filled Slots	Vacant Slots	% Vacant
Centers	Infant–Toddler (0–35 mo)	2,310	1,849	461	20.0%
Centers	Preschool (36–59 mo)	16,924	14,362	2,562	15.1%
Family Child-Care Homes (FCCs)	0–59 months	9,304	6,055	3,249	34.9%
Totals		28,538	22,266	6,272	22.0%

Source: CocoKids, My Child Care Plan extract. Data pulled on February 3rd, 2026. Estimated Filled Slots are calculated as Licensed Capacity minus Vacant Slots.

Because “Estimated Filled Slots” are calculated as licensed capacity minus provider-reported vacancies, and providers may be reporting openings relative to their desired operating capacity rather than their full license, these numbers should be interpreted as a proxy for system utilization rather than precise child enrollment counts. Even with that caveat, the pattern is informative: FCCs represent a large pool of unused licensed capacity, while center-based preschool operates closer to full. This implies that near-term strategies to expand access, particularly for babies and toddlers, should focus on reactivating idle FCC capacity through workforce stabilization, higher and more predictable subsidy reimbursement, and business supports, alongside maintaining incremental growth in center-based preschool to keep pace with demand among 3- to 5-year-olds. When paired with county-wide findings from the California Resource & Referral 2023 Portfolio Report and First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Systems Map, the total licensed capacity still covers only a portion of infants and toddlers, especially in low-income, subsidy-eligible families. The data point to a dual challenge: Contra Costa must both expand the overall supply of infant/toddler care and make available more of its existing licensed FCC and center slots, rather than relying solely on building new preschool classrooms.



The First 5 Systems Map (p. 40) shows 9,767 known children ages 3–5 served by public early childhood education programs, including California State Preschool Program (1,916), child care subsidy (1,739), and Transitional Kindergarten (5,317); the report notes potential duplication/undercounting due to blended funding and incomplete data. Yet waitlists persist, especially for low-income infants (e.g., long Head Start/Early Head Start delays).⁶

Even though Contra Costa has a sizable licensed child-care infrastructure, especially in family child-care homes, a portion of those slots sit unused while total licensed capacity still falls far short of meeting the care needs of low-income infants and toddlers. Based on recent estimates, licensed capacity covers only 72% of children ages 5 and under in households with all parents working, even before accounting for providers operating below their licensed maximum or the role of family/friend/neighbor care in filling gaps.⁷

4. Waiting Lists

CocoKids, as the local resource and referral agency in Contra Costa County, maintains a waitlist for parents seeking child care in Contra Costa County. Below is a comparison of the March 2022 waitlist snapshot and the February 2026 waitlist snapshot.

Table 8: Contra Costa County — Child Waitlist Trends by Age Group (2022 vs. 2026)

Age Group	2022 Waitlist	2026 Waitlist	Numeric Change	% Change
Infant/Toddler (0-2 yrs)	828	1,616	+788	95%
Preschool (3-5 yrs)	3,047	1,151	-1,896	-62%
Totals	3,875	2,767	-1,108	-29%

Source: CocoKids CareControl 4 (CC4) “Wait-List Age Report.” Data pulled in February 2026. The January-March 2022 baseline (3,875 children) is taken from the 2022 Contra Costa County Childcare Needs Assessment. <https://d16k74nzx9emoe.cloudfront.net/78469974-b46a-42d4-9f42-a8f6eef78ff7.pdf>

The number of young Contra Costa children waiting for a child care slot shrank from 3,875 in March 2022 to 2,767 in February 2026, a nearly 30% percent decrease. Requests for infant–toddler care nearly doubled, from 828 to 1,616 (95%), so babies and toddlers now account for over a third more than preschoolers on the waitlist. The preschool wait-list fell by 62% percent, likely reflecting the further roll-out of Transitional Kindergarten and recent expansions in state preschool (CSPP) capacity. The data signal that Contra Costa’s unmet demand has pivoted from preschool to the earliest ages, even as licensed infant capacity shows vacancies that could potentially be activated with targeted supports.

⁶ First 5 Contra Costa. (July, 2025). Early Childhood Systems Map. p. 40

⁷ First 5 Contra Costa. (July, 2025). Early Childhood Systems Map, p. 38 (Licensed Capacity and Potential Gaps in Child Care section)



5. Language

Spanish is the majority language among kindergarten English learners in Contra Costa County, comprising 67.5% of all EL kindergarteners. A diverse set of languages forms a long trail, with Farsi, Mandarin, Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Pashto, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil, Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Filipino each representing smaller but meaningful shares. This pattern indicates that while Spanish-language services must remain central, districts and providers should anticipate and plan for multilingual outreach and supports across several Asian and Middle Eastern language communities.

Table 9: Contra Costa County — Kindergarten English Learner Students by Language for the 2024-2025 Academic Year (≥ 1% of learner population)

Language	Kindergarten EL Count	% of EL Kindergarten
Spanish; Castilian	1,760	67.53%
Persian (Farsi)	120	4.6%
Mandarin (Putonghua, Guoyu)	86	3.3%
Arabic	42	1.61%
Cantonese	42	1.61%
Russian	48	1.84%
Portuguese	44	1.69%
Telugu	35	1.34%
Uncoded languages (Other non-English languages)	35	1.34%
Pashto	36	1.38%
Punjabi	34	1.3%
Vietnamese	28	1.07%
Tamil	28	1.07%
Filipino; Pilipino	26	1%

California Department of Education. DataQuest: English Learners by Grade and Language, 2024-2025. Accessed at <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

The significant percentage of dual-language homes and English Language Learners among Kindergarten students underscores the linguistic diversity of Contra Costa County’s young population. This highlights an ongoing need for culturally responsive and age-appropriate early learning environments and resources to support language acquisition and school readiness for children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.



6. Local Language Data

Almost 40% of the Contra Costa County population speaks a language other than English at home, with a growing proportion speaking Spanish, and 6.4% of the population has limited English skills. Additional data from childcare providers reporting on what languages are spoken to children ages 0-5 while in care provides additional insights into languages spoken by this population. English accounts for the majority of languages spoken by providers on site, at approximately 55%, followed by Spanish at 21%. The diversity in languages spoken, as seen below, once again suggests the need for multilingual support and highlights the varied linguistic needs of families in the community.

Table 10: Contra Costa County — Languages Spoken by Childcare Providers While Caring for Children (1% or greater)

Language	Center	Family Child Care	Total	Percentage
English	328	783	1,111	54.89%
Spanish	127	300	427	21.10%
Other	31	121	152	7.51%
Farsi	16	68	84	4.15%
Tagalog	18	18	36	1.78%
Hindi	8	26	34	1.68%
Russian	6	26	32	1.58%
Sign Language	12	20	32	1.58%
Chinese (Mandarin)	10	11	21	1%

Source: CoCo Kids: My Child Care Plan (MCCP) dataset. Data pulled on February 3rd, 2026





7. Children with Special Needs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates free appropriate public education for eligible individuals with disabilities, including special education and related services for those aged 0-22 years. Children under 3 years old are eligible for an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), and individuals aged 3-22 are eligible for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The most recent data available for IFSP and IEP numbers for the 0-5 age population in Contra Costa shows the following counts from the Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA).

Table 11: Contra Costa County — Number of Children with an IFSP or IEP by Age Group (2024-2025)

Category	Mt. Diablo	Contra Costa	West Contra Costa	San Ramon Valley	TOTAL
IFSPs (0–3 yrs)	10	35	50	19	114
IEPs (3–5 yrs)	504	645	478	68	1,695
TOTAL	514	680	528	87	1,809

Source: Contra Costa County Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), Special Education Information System (SEIS) database. 2024-2025 data from October 2025. (Note: This data only divides ages by 0-3 and 3-5. Data specifically for 3-4 year olds is not fully available.)

Beyond primarily school-reported SELPA data is a broader capture of young children with special needs, such as through many private childcare providers, as shown in the next table.





Table 12: Contra Costa County — Number of Children with an IFSP or IEP by Age Group

Age Group	Plan Type	Broader Service Count
Birth–36 months (0–3)	IFSP (Part C/Early Start)	3,363 (May 2025, RCEB)
Ages 3–5	IEP (Part B/ECSE)	2,773 (FY 2024–25)
Total 0–5	IFSP + IEP	6,136

Source: First 5 Contra Costa. Early Childhood Systems Map (July 2025), pp. 107-113 (Early Childhood Special Education section), 35-37 (Early Intervention), 75 (ECSE outcomes); data from Regional Center of the East Bay (RCEB), May 2025. Ages 0-5 <https://www.first5coco.org/our-impact/early-childhood-systems-map/>

The Early Childhood Systems Map data for Contra Costa County identifies significant gaps in serving children with developmental delays/disabilities. Contra Costa excels at delivering Early Start services in everyday home settings at 95% (above state average) but lags in inclusive preschool settings, highlighting the need for better child find, screening, and workforce expansion.

8. Children in Child Protective Services

The California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP), a collaboration between the University of California at Berkeley and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), provides data on children receiving Child Protective Services (CPS). One representative data point is the number of children in foster care, based on recent point-in-time counts.

Table 13: Contra Costa County — Number of Children in Foster Care by Age (0-5 Years)

Age	Oct 1, 2023	Oct 1, 2024	Oct 1, 2025
0	39	32	38
1-2	63	59	62
3-5	40	52	54
Total	142	143	154

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP), University of California, Berkeley and California Department of Social Services, In Care—Point in Time Count (AB 636), Contra Costa County, age group table (0; 1–2; 3–5), accessed January 22, 2026, at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/reports/PIT/MTMG/r/ab636/>

The number of children aged 0-5 in foster care in Contra Costa County shows fluctuations between 2023 and 2025, revealing small increases over time. This indicates a consistent, albeit variable, need for specialized childcare services for this vulnerable population. The varying numbers within specific age groups (infants, 1-2 year olds, and 3-5 year olds) highlight the need for adaptable childcare resources and strong collaboration between providers, foster families, and child welfare agencies to meet the unique and changing demands of children in foster care.



9. Children in Working Families

The typically used Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (ELNAT) does not provide up-to-date information on children in working families in Contra Costa County. However, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2024 1-year estimate shows that approximately 73% of children under age 6 in Contra Costa County live in families where all available parents are in the civilian labor force. This represents a significant proportion of families who may potentially need childcare services to support their employment.

To provide the age-specific breakdown, the table below estimates children in working families by single year of age. Since ACS Table B23008 reports the 73.1% aggregate for children under 6 (not broken out by individual age years), this rate was applied to the California Department of Finance's P-2B 2025 population projections of children ages 0-5 by year to estimate potential childcare demand.

Table 14: Contra Costa County — Estimated Number of Children in Working Families by Age Group (2025)

Age	Number of Children in Working Families
Infants (less than one year old)	7,966
1	8,002
2	8,392
3	8,586
4	8,678
5	8,916
Total (Ages 0-5)	50,540

Sources: 1) California Department of Finance. Demographic Research Unit. Report P-2B: Total Population Projections, California Counties, 2020-2070 (Baseline 2024 Population Projections; Vintage 2025 Release). <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections>. 2) Working family rate (73%): U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2024 1-Year Estimate, Table B23008. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2024.B23008?g=050XX00US06013>

These estimates total 50,540 children ages 0-5 in working families, representing significant potential demand for early care and education across all ages. This figure represents the maximum potential demand for childcare, as not all families with working parents necessarily use paid childcare services. Some families may rely on family members for care, have flexible work arrangements, utilize school-based programs like Transitional Kindergarten, or arrange care through other informal means.



10. Families Receiving Public Assistance

Contra Costa County serves a substantial number of families with young children through several key public assistance programs, addressing health, nutrition, cash aid, and specialized support needs for children ages 0 to 5.

- CalFresh (federal SNAP) supplies monthly food-purchasing benefits.
- CalWORKs provides temporary cash aid, employment services, and a pathway to childcare subsidies for very-low-income families.
- Medi-Cal offers no- or low-cost health and dental coverage to income-eligible children and adults.

According to the County’s Employment and Human Services Department (Youth Services Annual Report, July 2025), approximately 16,425 children ages 0-5 benefit from CalFresh, 4,895 live in CalWORKs households, and 23,774 depend on Medi-Cal for health coverage. Based on the California Department of Finance P-2B projected population of 69,137 children ages 0-5 in Contra Costa County (2025), these figures represent approximately 24% (CalFresh), 7% (CalWORKs), and 34% (Medi-Cal) of young children in the county. While the current total number of young children in families receiving housing support in Contra Costa County is not readily available, the estimated number of these children living in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-supported rental units or public housing (see below) provides some indication of housing assistance in the County.

Table 15: Contra Costa County — Social Safety Net Programs for Children Ages 0-5 (2025)

Program	Children receiving benefits (Ages 0-5)
CalFresh	16,425
CalWORKs	4,895
Medi-Cal	23,774
HUD Housing Support	~3,000 (2023)

Sources: Contra Costa County, Department of Employment and Human Services, Community Services Bureau, Children and Family Services Committee Meeting presentation, July 14, 2025. <https://contra-costa.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14497454&GUID=7D9EF7DF-95E6-45FE-A5B9-A1F9C6E8337C>. HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, Picture of Subsidized Households (2023, County-level data for Contra Costa County). Accessed on January 29, 2026, at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/assthsg.html#:~:text=>

These figures underscore the scale of low-income families facing cost and access barriers to early learning support, which is an essential consideration when prioritizing subsidized slots, outreach, and supportive services.



11. Median Family Income

The US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2024 1-Year estimates report the median family income for a four-person family in Contra Costa County is \$191,534.⁸ For context, the California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD) uses a 2025 Area Median Family Income (AMI) of \$159,800, with the 80% AMI threshold for a 4-person household at \$125,050.⁹

The median household income figure in Contra Costa County, while higher than the state average, masks significant racial and economic disparities within the county, and many families still require public assistance and struggle to meet basic needs, highlighting the ongoing importance of childcare subsidies and support programs. As of 2023, 11.6% of children ages 5 and under were in poverty in Contra Costa, and over a quarter more were in families with low income.¹⁰

12. Children in Migrant Families

As of January 2026, the California Department of Education, Migrant Education Program, identified the following number of children as being Migrant Education Program-eligible in Contra Costa County.

Table 16: Contra Costa County — Migrant Education Program Eligible Children Ages 0-5

Ages	Number of Children
0-2	3
3-5	5

Source: California Department of Education, Migrant Education Program (MEP), Region 23, San Joaquin County Office of Education. Accessed on January 21, 2026.

The Migrant Education Program (MEP) identifies only a very small number of young children in Contra Costa County because eligibility is narrowly defined and focused on families who have recently moved due to qualifying agricultural work, and most of Region 23’s migrant population is concentrated outside Contra Costa. These figures likely reflect both the county’s relatively small agricultural migrant base and under-identification of very young children, rather than an absence of migrant families with young children.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2024 1-Year Estimates, Table B19119 (“Median Family Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2024 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Family Size”), Contra Costa County, California. Table B19119. Accessed on January 30, 2026 at <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2024.B19119?g=050XX00US06013>

⁹ CA Dept. of Housing & Community Development (HCD), “2025 State Income Limits” (Apr 22, 2025), based on HUD FY2025 data from ACS 2023 adjusted for regional costs; Contra Costa County official Excel: <https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/87003/2025-State-Income-Limits>

¹⁰ First 5 Contra Costa County Early Childhood Systems Map, December 2025, P.11



13. Meeting Early Learning Facility Needs

Table 17 below compares 2023 licensed child care facility counts from KidsData/California Child Care Portfolio with CocoKids’ active licensed provider counts from February 2026. Because the two sources use slightly different snapshots and counting conventions, the change figures should be read as directional rather than exact year-over-year comparisons.

Table 17: Contra Costa County — Active Child Care Facilities (2023 and 2026)

Facility Type	Number of Facilities (2023)	Number of Facilities (2026)	Change
Licensed Childcare Centers	339	345	+1.8%
Family Childcare Homes (FCCs)	779	837	+7.4%
Total	1,118	1,182	+5.7%

Source: KidsData.org, Licensed Child Care Facilities, by Type (California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, California Child Care Portfolio, April 2025); CocoKids Child Care Provider Counts, accessed February 3, 2026.

The County secured a 2024-2025 multi-year Head Start/Early Head Start award (\$29.7M) supporting 1,634 slots and site upgrades, with Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF) and The Unity Council adding/renovating classrooms across Richmond, San Pablo, Hercules, Martinez, Pittsburg, Antioch, Concord, Oakley, Pinole, and Rodeo.¹¹ The Contra Costa College Early Learning Center received \$2.8M (including \$752k for classroom/playground upgrades) to operate at full licensed capacity and extend hours.¹²

State expansions are advancing through California’s General Child Care and Development (CCTR) FY 2024–25 RFAs statewide (\$306M total), CSPP 2024–25 contract awards, and ongoing UPK Mixed-Delivery planning, alongside county contracts like CocoKids’ \$1.4M+ Emergency Child Care Bridge program.¹³

These investments are bringing additional rooms online, though activation is paced by construction and workforce. Overall, momentum is real, but federal funding cuts threaten further facility development, and additional capital plus workforce supports are still needed to rebuild infant–toddler classrooms and activate FCC capacity in high-need neighborhoods.

¹¹ Contra Costa News. (September 5, 2024). Contra Costa County agencies awarded \$29.7 million in grants for Head Start early child care programs. <https://contracosta.news/2024/09/05/contracosta-county-agencies-awarded-29-7-million-in-grants-for-head-start-early-child-care-programs/>

¹² Contra Costa Pulse. (September 24, 2024). Contra Costa College to offer free childcare & Pre-K education. <https://ccpulse.org/2024/09/24/contracosta-college-to-offer-free-childcare-pre-k-education/>

¹³ Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. File #25-4829, “Contract #20-170-16 (CFS) CocoKids, Inc., Contract Amendment – Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children.” November 18, 2025. <https://contra-costa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7744368&GUID=E5044810-32A9-41F4-AE2B-F93D110D6712>



14. Requests for Care During Non-Traditional Hours

According to February 2026 CocoKids-provided snapshot data, there were 1,292 recent requests for care during nontraditional hours, including 757 before and/or after child care requests; 9 for summer-only, and 526 for other child care (e.g., drop in, evening, overnight, weekends). The 2023 Resource & Referral Childcare Portfolio report for Contra Costa County revealed that requests for child care during nontraditional hours (evening, weekend, or overnight care) accounted for 2% of all child care requests. The same data revealed that only 22% of FCC homes and 1% of licensed child care sites in Contra Costa County offered non-traditional hour care. Overall, extended hours for evening or weekend care are an important need for parents. In a survey of Contra Costa parents cited below who utilize childcare, 61.4% of those surveyed desired nontraditional hours.





15. Meeting Early Learning Workforce and Quality

Contra Costa County's early care and education workforce includes nearly 4,000 educators across center-based and home-based settings (teachers, assistants, directors/administrators, and FCC providers/assistants).¹⁴ A 2024 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at U.C. Berkeley study on Contra Costa County finds that this workforce is predominantly women of color and that almost half of center teachers and assistants are Latina. Accordingly, equity for a largely bilingual and culturally diverse workforce is a central concern. Despite high levels of experience (many educators report more than 10 years in the field) CSCCE concludes that Contra Costa's ECE workforce is "highly skilled yet undervalued," reflecting low pay and limited benefits relative to K–12 peers.

Compensation and economic insecurity are the most critical workforce needs. The CSCCE 2024 report documents wages that lag far behind local living costs and shows that many educators report difficulty paying for housing, food, and health expenses, with material hardship indicators higher than for California workers overall. First 5 Contra Costa's Early Childhood and Education Crisis in Contra Costa County brief reinforces these findings, noting that center-based teachers earn on average \$6,300 less per year than comparable TK–12 teachers and FCC providers about \$16,500 less, pushing many to take second jobs, incur debt, or rely on programs such as CalFresh and Medi-Cal.¹⁵ In focus groups convened for wage-enhancement planning, educators repeatedly described being unable to afford local rents or health care on their current wages, and participants identified higher base pay and access to health benefits as the top priorities for sustaining the workforce.

Workforce stability and retention are closely linked needs. CSCCE's Contra Costa County survey shows that most centers experienced staff turnover in the prior year and many directors reported persistent vacancies that were difficult to fill, especially in infant–toddler and inclusion classrooms. According to the survey, between January 2021 and Spring 2023, 95% of centers had one or more positions turn over, with an average of 5.6 positions per site, significantly exceeding the statewide rate of 84% (avg. 4.2 positions). A substantial share of teachers and assistants indicated they did not expect to remain in their current center three years into the future, particularly in lower-resourced, non–Head Start programs, signaling ongoing risk of churn and loss of experienced educators. In First 5's 2024 wage-enhancement focus groups and stakeholder sessions, providers described chronic understaffing, difficulty finding qualified substitutes, and burnout from covering multiple roles; Local Education Agency (LEA) and community-based leaders echoed that teacher instability undermines continuity of care and quality in preschool and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) partnerships.¹⁶

¹⁴ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment & First 5 Contra Costa. The Early Care and Education Workforce of Contra Costa County: Executive Summary. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2024. <https://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ECE-Workforce-Exec-Summary.pdf>

¹⁵ First 5 Contra Costa. Early Childhood and Education Crisis in Contra Costa County. Martinez, CA: First 5 Contra Costa, 2023. <https://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Contra-Costa-Early-Childhood-Education-Crisis-2023.pdf>

¹⁶ First 5 Contra Costa. Wage Enhancement Pilot Program Stakeholder Input Session Report. Martinez, CA: First 5 Contra Costa, 2024. <https://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/F5-Contra-Costa-Stakeholder-Input-Session-Report-FINAL-6.26.2024-1.pdf>



Participation in Quality Counts California (QCC), implemented locally as Quality Matters, is both a strength and an area of unmet need. According to the First 5 Early Childhood Systems Map for Contra Costa County, in 2024, 159 sites were participating in Quality Matters, employing 664 educators and involving 4,722 children.¹⁷ This is a notable strength representing structured quality improvement across diverse settings. However, these stats also reflect unmet need, as licensed capacity covers only ~72% of working families' children ages 0-5, and high turnover disrupts program quality and continuity despite participation efforts.

CSCCE reports that publicly funded centers (Head Start, Early Head Start, and state preschool) are more likely to participate in intensive quality-improvement efforts such as coaching, college coursework, and structured quality assessments than private centers and FCC homes, which often have fewer administrative supports. The Contra Costa Workforce Development Board's Wage Enhancement Stipends Program supports early childhood education retention and quality improvement through financial incentives for inclusive practices and training to support children with disabilities in high-quality learning environments.¹⁸ However, many FCC providers and smaller centers in First 5's 2024–2025 provider input sessions cited the time required for documentation, lack of paid release time, and the cost of arranging substitutes as major barriers to joining or deepening their engagement in QCC, indicating a need for simplified processes and stronger financial supports tied to quality participation.

Since 2020, Contra Costa has made measurable progress toward meeting these workforce and QCC needs, though gaps remain. CSCCE's 2024 county report and the 2025 State of the Early Care and Education Workforce – Contra Costa¹⁹ snapshot highlight increased access to higher education and professional development, including substantial numbers of educators completing college ECE coursework and participating in coaching and Communities of Practice supported by Quality Matters. First 5 Contra Costa's wage-enhancement pilot (funded in part by Measure X) provides time-limited monthly stipends to selected FCC and center educators; the pilot summary notes that applications far exceeded available slots, confirming both strong participation interest and the depth of unmet need around compensation.²⁰ Taken together, these studies, surveys, and focus-group findings indicate that Contra Costa is moving in the right direction by expanding QCC-linked supports, investing in educational advancement, and testing wage strategies. However, sustained action is still required to raise compensation to livable levels, stabilize staffing, expand infant/toddler capacity, and reduce administrative barriers so that more FCCs and small centers can fully participate in Quality Counts California.

¹⁷ First 5 Contra Costa Early Childhood Systems Map (2024), p. 45.
Accessed at: <https://www.first5coco.org/our-impact/early-childhood-systems-map/>

¹⁸ Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County. "Wage Enhancement Stipends Program."
Accessed January 23, 2026. <https://www.wdbccc.com/wage-enhancement-stipends-program/>

¹⁹ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. State of the Early Care and Education Workforce – Contra Costa County 2025. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2025.
<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/state-of-ece-contra-costa-2025.pdf>

²⁰ First 5 Contra Costa. Wage Enhancement for Early Educators: Pilot Project Summary. First 5 Contra Costa, 2024.
<https://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/First-5-CoCo-Wage-Enhancement-Pilot-Project-Summary-FINAL.pdf>



16. Addressing Parent Needs and Concerns

In July 2025, the Contra Costa County Office of Education's Early Care and Education Department, with outreach support from CocoKids, conducted a comprehensive parent survey to inform the county's childcare needs assessment. The survey was distributed through a newsletter targeting a cross-section of families who access, seek, or have recently applied for childcare in the county. A total of 263 parents and caregivers completed the survey, providing a robust dataset for understanding family experiences and concerns locally.

Parents from every region of Contra Costa County responded. The largest group came from East County, where just over half (53.3%) of surveyed parents reside. Central County was home to about a quarter (24.5%) of respondents, with the remainder (22.2%) living in West County. This slightly overrepresents East County compared to the county's total population but aligns well with the region's higher rates of families with young children and greater childcare needs. Respondents self-identified with a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds, a distribution that both reflects and at times amplifies Contra Costa's demographic diversity. 30.9% identified as Black/African American, 26.3% as Hispanic, 20.2% as White/Caucasian, 14.5% as Mixed race, 6.9% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and the remaining 1% as American Indian/Alaska Native. While Black/African American families are overrepresented (relative to their share among all county households with young children) in the survey, and Hispanic/Latino families are somewhat underrepresented, the sample nonetheless provides strong voice to those managing the greatest systemic child care barriers in Contra Costa.

Across the county, parents expressed a common and urgent theme: quality early learning and care is both essential and difficult to afford and access. The cost of care stood as the primary and overwhelming barrier, with 84.3% of parents naming it as a current challenge. As one parent wrote, "Prices are out of control. Assistance thresholds need to be raised to accurately represent the costs of those living in the Bay Area... I can't afford to work AND pay child care." More than half of all families surveyed spend less than \$500 per month on care, but a combined 38.8% pay \$500 to \$2,000, and 9.2% pay over \$2,000 monthly, indicating a sharp affordability cliff for those not qualifying for subsidies or for those with multiple children in care. As noted below, over 80% of those in the survey currently receive a childcare subsidy.

Parents also pointed frequently to limited availability, especially for infants and toddlers. 30.1% cited a lack of available spots, while concerns about inconvenient hours, program quality, lack of special needs support, and language/cultural alignment surfaced throughout both statistical and narrative responses. Many described piecing together "patchworks" of care across friends, relatives, providers, and their own variable work schedules, often with anxiety about stability. As one parent summarized, "It is a patchwork of family, friends, and paid childcare that can crumble in a thousand tiny ways at any time."

Among those surveyed, over half (each 52.7%) used a licensed childcare center or a family childcare home, and more than a third (34.7%) relied on family, friend, or neighbor care. Smaller numbers accessed a nanny or babysitter (17.6%), a school-based program (16%), or had one parent able to remain home (3.1%).

Families across backgrounds were clear about the improvements that would best address their challenges: extended hours for evening or weekend care (desired by 61.4%), more affordable options (54.5%), more preschool/early education programs, and more employer-supported childcare (36.2%). Smaller but substantial numbers of parents also named more childcare options for infants (17.9%)



and bilingual or multicultural options (17.1%). Most parents in the survey (80.2%) currently receive a childcare subsidy, and describe programs like CocoKids as “a lifesaver.” Satisfaction levels were mixed: while 16.9% of families report being “very satisfied” with their current arrangement, 64.8% rate themselves only “somewhat satisfied,” and the remainder are neutral or unsatisfied.

The engagement between families and providers is valued, but could be stronger. There are family calls for increased communication, more transparent information about available care and subsidies, and opportunities for deeper involvement in programs.

Experiences with school transitions were mixed. Only a small percentage of respondents had a child currently enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten (TK). Among these, 57% were satisfied with their experience, while comments suggest that rigid age cutoffs and the limited hours of many TK programs left gaps in both coverage and readiness for many young children, especially for working families and those with children who narrowly miss the TK cutoff.

The 2025 parent survey clearly demonstrates deep parental concern, and at times, distress, about the cost, availability, and suitability of early learning and childcare in Contra Costa County. For most families surveyed, affordable, high-quality, and flexible child care remains out of reach without significant support. Barriers are even more pronounced for care covering non-traditional hours, infants/toddlers, those who need culturally or linguistically responsive programming, and support for children with disabilities. Even families able to access some forms of support still find that care arrangements are fragile. Most parents want more affordable care, greater supply (especially for very young children and outside “standard hours”), and integration with special needs, language access, and family support services. They also call for smoother, more inclusive transitions to TK and kindergarten, and for more robust family engagement from providers and public agencies. In the words of one parent, “Childcare is what helps me keep my family afloat... I can work the hours I need and make sure both my kids are fine.” These findings reinforce that addressing cost, access, flexibility, and quality for all families is not just a social priority but an economic imperative for the region.





17. Increasing Access

Contra Costa County is working to ensure that families in every corner, including the river-delta communities of East County and the hill towns and unincorporated pockets of West County, have pathways into sufficient and high-quality early learning and care. The Local Planning Council (LPC), First 5 Contra Costa, CocoKids, and the County Office of Education are working together to expand the number of subsidized slots in high-need neighborhoods, make available mobile and regionally distributed outreach and support services, and make it easier to locate child care facilities in more parts of the county.

New and expanded publicly funded programs are being directed to areas that have historically lacked sufficient early learning options. As outlined above, 2024 federal Head Start/Early Head Start grant provides \$29.7 million in the first year and similar amounts over five years to Contra Costa County,²¹ the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF), and The Unity Council,²² supporting 1,634 total Head Start and Early Head Start slots (949 preschool, 685 infant–toddler) across multiple communities including Richmond, San Pablo, Pinole, Rodeo, Hercules, Martinez, Pittsburg, Antioch, Bay Point, Oakley, and Concord. These expansions explicitly prioritize underserved parts of West, Central, and East County, where low-income and immigrant families have faced the longest commutes to access quality early learning. In parallel, the Local Planning Council is using California’s Universal PreKindergarten Mixed Delivery Planning Grant to strengthen partnerships between school districts, private centers, family child-care (FCC), and others in the early learning and care ecosystem.

The county and its partners are addressing geographic barriers by moving services closer to where families live and work. CocoKids’ Child Care Eligibility Office in Concord serves as a central hub and also covers East County communities such as Antioch, Bay Point, Pittsburg, Brentwood, Byron, Discovery Bay, and Oakley, allowing families in these areas to access subsidy eligibility, referrals, and navigation through one regional office and multilingual phone support. First 5’s Quality Matters initiative offers free coaching and training to early learning providers across Contra Costa County and now serves more than 200 participating programs, including many family child care homes (FCCs). Through Quality Matters and related initiatives, providers receive individualized site-level coaching, rating support, and professional development delivered through a mix of on-site visits, in-person trainings, and virtual learning formats, which has made it easier for FCCs and centers in outlying areas to engage consistently in quality-improvement activities.

Third, Contra Costa is using its zoning authority to embed child-care access into land-use decisions so that new development in more remote or previously underserved areas includes space for licensed programs. The County Ordinance Code’s Chapter 82-22 (Child Care Facilities) clarifies that child care facilities are an allowed or conditionally allowed use in a broad range of zoning districts and, through recent amendments, authorizes child care centers (beyond small family day care homes) in residential, recreation, office, and agricultural zones with a land-use permit, expanding the number of places where

²¹ Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department. “Contra Costa County Agencies Awarded \$29.7 Million in Grants for Head Start Early Child Care Programs.” Headlines Newsletter, September, 2024. <https://ehsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/EHSD09-06-24.pdf>

²² The Unity Council. “The Unity Council Announces Munderservedajor Grant Award and Expansion of Head Start Services.” September 26, 2024. <https://unitycouncil.org/the-unity-council-announces-major-grant-award-and-expansion-of-head-start-services/>



centers can be established.²³ These land-use changes, combined with affordable-housing and mixed-use projects that reserve ground-floor space for community-serving facilities near transit nodes like Bay Point Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), are intended to ensure that as new housing is built (even in canyon corridors and delta communities) so families will have access to regulated early learning options within their own neighborhoods or along their daily commute.

Collectively, strategies of targeted slot growth, mobile and regionally distributed supports, and child-care-friendly zoning have begun to narrow geography-based gaps, though transportation limitations and workforce shortages remain key challenges cited by providers and families and will require ongoing investment in wage supports and mobile outreach to achieve truly universal geographic access.

18. Requests for Care

CocoKids data shows a total of 9,312 requests for care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers between January 30th, 2025 and January 30th, 2026. Data is not available for part-day or full-day requests, but below is a breakdown by age range.

Table 18: Contra Costa County — Requests for Child Care by Age

Type of Care	Number of Requests	Percentage
Infants (under 2 years old)	5,656	42%
Preschoolers (2 years through 5 years, 11 months)	7,883	58%

Source: CocoKids, R&R Department Requests, January 30th, 2025 through January 30th, 2026.

Children under 2 years drive 42% of demand (5,656 requests), while preschoolers 2–5+ years represent 58% (7,883). Requests for care during nontraditional hours during this same time period totaled 2,557 (1,584 = before/after school; 46 = summer only; 927 = evening, overnight, weekends). CocoKids request data show a directional shift toward greater demand for infant/toddler care and nontraditional hours since the 2022 Child Care Needs Assessment.

This picture, combined with population and waitlist information, underscores the need for capacity to support the needs of working families for a range of childcare support.

²³ Contra Costa County. Ordinance Code, Title 8 Zoning, Division 82 General Regulations, Chapter 82-22 “Child Care Facilities.” Available via Municode at: https://library.municode.com/ca/contra_costa_county/codes/ordinance_code?nodId=TIT8ZO_DIV82GERE_CH82-22CHCAFA



19. Self-Sufficiency Standard Income

The previously used Insight Center for Community Economic Development does not provide current self-sufficiency income levels for a family of four in Contra Costa County, but the MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates that a family of two adults (both working) and two children in Contra Costa County requires an annual income of \$182,895 before taxes to meet basic needs, equaling a monthly total of \$11,863. This equates to an hourly wage of \$34.22 per adult, assuming full-time employment (2,080 hours/year).

Table 19: Contra Costa County — 2026 Self-Sufficiency Standard Costs for a Two-Adult, Two-Children Household (both parents working)

Expenditure Category	Monthly Cost	Annual Cost	% of Annual Costs
Food	\$1,228	\$14,738	8.1%
Child Care	\$3,616	\$43,396	23.7%
Medical	\$1,134	\$13,604	7.4%
Housing	\$2,930	\$35,159	19.2%
Transportation	\$1,380	\$16,555	9.1%
Civic	\$819	\$9,827	5.4%
Internet & Mobile	\$218	\$2,618	1.4%
Other	\$900	\$10,804	5.9%
Annual Taxes	\$3,016	\$36,193	19.8%
Required Annual Income Before Taxes	\$15,241	\$182,895	100.0%

Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator for Contra Costa County, California (updated February 15, 2026). Available at <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/06013>

The annual living wage required for a Contra Costa County family with two working adults and two children has risen substantially in recent years, driven primarily by escalating child care and housing costs amid persistent inflation. Without substantial wage growth or expanded child care subsidies, many dual-income households will continue struggling to achieve self-sufficiency despite full-time employment.

20. Emergency Preparedness

Contra Costa County continues to strengthen a multi-agency system to support children and families during public health emergencies, wildfires, and other disruptions, with a focus on technology access, emergency childcare, health guidance, and multilingual outreach. These coordinated efforts aim to maintain continuity of early learning, protect health and safety in schools and child care, and reduce disparities for families most affected by health emergencies and other crises.



The Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE) provides laptops and Internet hotspots to support the ongoing use of devices and online platforms for instruction, allowing schools to pivot between in-person and remote learning when classrooms must close due to smoke, flooding, or disease outbreaks.

CocoKids administers the California Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children, offering time-limited childcare vouchers and navigator services to foster, kinship, and guardianship families who need care during placement changes or crises. On June 24, 2025, the Board of Supervisors expanded a contract with CocoKids to operate Bridge services from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.²⁴ This contract ensures that foster and other vulnerable children can remain in stable, licensed care when emergencies disrupt family routines, reducing the likelihood that caregivers must leave work or that children experience unsafe arrangements.

Contra Costa County Public Health works with school districts and child-care providers to apply the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) TK–12 Guidance, which recommends layered prevention strategies including improved ventilation, staying home when sick, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfection, and keeping vaccinations up to date. CDPH explicitly notes that this guidance is intended for schools and child care and is to be implemented in collaboration with local health departments. In addition, Contra Costa Health publishes a “Communicable Disease Guide for Schools & Child Care Settings” that provides disease-specific fact sheets, exclusion criteria, and reporting procedures for outbreaks such as COVID-19, influenza, and gastrointestinal illnesses, giving child-care programs clear protocols to follow during health emergencies.

Contra Costa’s Employment and Human Services Department’s child care and community partners resources connect families to subsidies, emergency assistance, and developmental supports through coordinated referral systems. The Help Me Grow/Contra Costa Community Services Bureau resource directory lists centralized contacts for child-care subsidies, developmental screening, and home visiting, indicating that families can reach services through a single access point. Through the Emergency Child Care Bridge contract with CocoKids, the county also funds navigation and support for caregivers seeking licensed care that can meet children’s behavioral and medical needs in times of crisis.

The Contra Costa County Office of Education’s Early Learning Programs (ECE & CPIN) provides county-wide training, technical assistance, and resource materials for early educators and families, and highlights partnerships with the California Child Care Health Program to promote health and safety in child-care settings. The Early Learning resources page includes multilingual materials and links on topics such as COVID-19, immunizations, and emergency preparedness, enabling providers to share information with families in languages commonly spoken in the county. These efforts complement the county’s emergency alert system, which sends notifications about wildfires, power shutoffs, floods, and other hazards and offers preparedness materials in multiple languages to reach diverse communities.

Together, these actions demonstrate how Contra Costa County is working to ensure that children and families can continue learning, access safe care, and protect their health during and after health and other emergencies.

²⁴ Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. File #25-4829, “Contract #20-170-16 (CFS) CocoKids, Inc., Contract Amendment – Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children.” November 18, 2025. <https://contra-costa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7744368&GUID=E5044810-32A9-41F4-AE2B-F93D110D6712>



Conclusion

The 2026 Contra Costa County Childcare Needs Assessment confirms that while Contra Costa County has made progress in expanding preschool access and supporting provider quality, the early learning and care system remains under significant strain. Gaps are most severe for infants and toddlers, with only a small share of subsidy-eligible children served in public programs, rising waitlists, and persistent barriers for families seeking full-day, affordable care. Family child-care homes and centers together offer a sizable licensed infrastructure (although still insufficient), but providers report that staffing shortages, reimbursement levels, and operating costs limit their ability to use all of their licensed slots, especially for infant/toddler care. Preschool access is comparatively stronger, likely reflecting Transitional Kindergarten and CSPP growth, yet still falls short for working families that need full-day and wraparound options, and for children who require inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive environments.

The early learning and education workforce, predominantly women of color and often bilingual, is skilled and dedicated but underpaid. Many educators experience economic insecurity, contributing to high turnover and chronic vacancies that undermine stability and quality. Quality improvement efforts through Quality Matters, increased professional development opportunities, and targeted wage-enhancement pilots have moved the county in a positive direction, but participation is uneven, and smaller centers and FCCs still face administrative and financial barriers to full engagement. Facilities investments are bringing additional rooms online in high-need communities, yet infant-toddler classrooms and inclusive preschool spaces remain insufficient in number and unevenly distributed. Taken together, these findings point to the need for bold, targeted strategies that address the underlying drivers of the challenge: Affordability, availability, compensation, infrastructure, and inclusion.

Going forward, the county's priorities should focus on:

- Expanding and activating infant/toddler capacity, especially in communities with the highest child poverty and waitlists;
- Stabilizing and valuing the early childhood workforce through sustained wage and benefit enhancements, streamlined access to professional development and credentials, and targeted support for bilingual and inclusive practice; and
- Improving affordability and navigability for families by enhancing subsidy access, coordinating enrollment across programs, and strengthening navigation through trusted hubs such as CocoKids, First 5 Centers, and school-linked services.

In parallel, the county should continue to invest in inclusive and multilingual environments and enhance shared data tools so partners can monitor capacity, utilization, equity gaps, and progress over time.

These efforts will require sustained collaboration among the Local Planning Council, First 5 Contra Costa, CocoKids, school districts, county departments, Head Start grantees, and community providers, as well as robust advocacy at the state and federal levels for cost-based reimbursement and flexible, long-term funding. If implemented together and at scale, the recommended strategies can move Contra Costa toward an early learning system in which infants and toddlers, preschoolers, children with disabilities, and linguistically and culturally diverse families all have genuine access to affordable, high-quality care in the neighborhoods where they live and work.



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