



2026

HUMBOLDT COUNTY

CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Local Child Care Planning Council



LOCAL CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY 2026 CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LOCAL CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY.....	2
2026 CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	4
LOCAL CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY.....	5
Council Members and Roles.....	5
DATA SOURCES.....	6
DEFINITIONS.....	6
THE REGIONS OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY.....	7
CHAPTER 1: THE PEOPLE OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY.....	8
People Living in Humboldt County.....	9
Birth Rates in Humboldt County.....	11
Children Living in Humboldt County.....	12
Ethnicity of Humboldt County Residents.....	12
Home Languages Spoken in Humboldt County.....	14
CHAPTER 2: MAKING ENDS MEET.....	16
Earnings and Unemployment in Humboldt County.....	17
Poverty Rates in Humboldt County.....	19
Cost of Living in Humboldt County.....	20
Cost of Home Ownership in Humboldt County.....	22
CHAPTER 3: COST OF LICENSED CHILD CARE.....	24
Average Cost of Child Care.....	25
CHAPTER 4: SPECIAL POPULATIONS.....	27
Youth in Foster Care.....	28
Children Experiencing Homelessness.....	28
Children at Risk of Abuse and Neglect.....	29
Children of Families who are Migrant Workers.....	29
Children with Adverse Childhood Experiences.....	29
Children Eligible for Special Education Services.....	30
Services for Children with Special Needs.....	30
CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS & SUPPORT SERVICES.....	32
Public Assistance Programs.....	33
CHAPTER 6: CHILD CARE OPTIONS.....	34
Child Care Settings.....	35

Child Care Funding Sources.....	36
Expanded Learning for School Age Children.....	37
Universal Prekindergarten (UPK).....	37
Transitional Kindergarten (Tk).....	38
CHAPTER 7: CHILD CARE CAPACITY.....	39
Child Care Supply.....	40
Factors that Impact the Understanding of Child Care Capacity.....	40
Supply of Child Care Varies by Region and Child Age.....	42
Enrollment Trends.....	43
Enrollment in TK and Kindergarten Trends.....	44
CHAPTER 8: MET AND UNMET NEED FOR CARE.....	45
Local Efforts to Address Unmet Need for Care.....	48
CHAPTER 9: WORKFORCE.....	49
Workforce Turnover Rates.....	50
Emotional Well-Being of Workforce.....	50
Demographics and Education of Workforce.....	51
Workforce Wages.....	51
Workforce Economic Well-Being.....	52
CHAPTER 10: QUALITY CARE.....	53
Parent Input.....	54
REFERENCES.....	56

Local Child Care Planning Council of Humboldt County
 Judi Andersen, Education Initiatives Coordinator
 email: jandersen@hcoe.org

Report created by Holly Goldberg, PhD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Child Care Needs Assessment was made possible through the collective efforts and commitment of the Local Child Care Planning Council of Humboldt County. Special thanks to all of the Council members for their guidance, collaboration, and dedication throughout this process, especially Star Mohatt, Kelly Love, Jeanine Cañedo-Moncrief and Darius Kalvaitis for their additional time, leadership, and contributions that helped move this effort forward.

I am also grateful to the many agencies and partners who generously shared their time, expertise, and data. Their willingness to contribute information and insights was essential to ensuring that this assessment reflects the realities, strengths, and needs of the Humboldt County community.

This report was formulated with the respect and acknowledgment that Humboldt County is located on the unceded ancestral territory and homeland of many Indigenous tribes.

With appreciation,

Judi Andersen, Education Initiatives Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

This report provides important data and information for the county and its regions to inform prioritization and planning for early care and education in Humboldt County. This assessment was developed to provide a comprehensive review of the local child care landscape, identify gaps in service availability, and inform data driven strategies that improve access, affordability, and quality of care for families.

Child care plays an essential role in supporting the well being of families, the healthy development of children, and the strength of local communities. Reliable and affordable child care enables parents and caregivers to participate in the workforce, pursue education or training opportunities, and maintain stable employment. Increased access to child care can strengthen household financial stability, reduce stress for working families, and support broader economic participation within the community.

Extensive longitudinal research illustrates the positive outcomes for children participating in high quality early care and education programs including improved school performance, decreased need for special education, increased high school graduation rates, decreased crime rates, and increased earnings in adulthood (Heckman, et al., 2010). These findings are found to be magnified for children of families at the lowest income levels.

For many parents, care for children is an ongoing challenge both in terms of finding reliable, high quality care that fits their needs, as well as the affordability of the care they would prefer. There is an increasing need for high quality, available, and affordable early care and education, and limited capacity to meet this need.

Equitable access to high quality child care is particularly important in communities that face geographic barriers, workforce shortages, and income disparities. Rural counties such as Humboldt often experience additional challenges related to transportation, smaller provider networks, and limited infrastructure for expanding early learning programs.

This needs assessment aims to strengthen understanding of the child care system in Humboldt County and to support informed decision making by local leaders, planners, and community partners. The landscape of care post-COVID-19 is still in recovery to some degree and has changed as illustrated herein.

LOCAL CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Every county in California has a state-mandated Local Child Care Planning Council (LCCPC) funded by the California Department of Social Services. Every five years, the [Local Child Care Planning Council of Humboldt County](#) (LCCPC) is required to conduct a child care needs assessment (as outlined in Title 1, Division 1, Part 6, Chapter 2.3 of the California Education Code). The information compiled for this needs assessment is used to establish local priorities and develop a county-wide strategic plan in Humboldt County. It is also used to conduct outreach and education on the importance of child care in the local community. The LCCPC works collaboratively with organizations throughout Humboldt County.

Mission: Assess, plan, and promote quality, accessible, affordable child care and development services reflecting the diverse needs of families throughout Humboldt County.

Council Members and Roles

LCCPCs are mandated to maintain a diverse membership representing five core roles. This multi-sector composition ensures that local child care policies and funding priorities reflect the broad needs of the community. The following is a list of the Local Child Care Planning Council of Humboldt County members and their associated roles.

Jeanine Cañedo-Moncrief, LPC Chair, Community representative

Rodney Oien, LPC Vice Chair, Child care provider

Autumn Jimenez, Child care provider

Darius Kalvaitis, Public agency

Julia Anderson, Public/Discretionary member

Kelly Love, Child care consumer

Larisa Calloway-Cole, Child care consumer

Star Mohatt, Community representative

DATA SOURCES

The information included in this report comes from a variety of local, county, state, and national sources. The intent of this document is to share recently available information related to the target child population and their early care and education needs. Chart and table source data are cited throughout this document. In addition to the individuals listed under Acknowledgements, various agencies and organizations assisted with compiling this report. Note: Data for categories with counts fewer than 11 are not displayed in this report in order to protect individual privacy and maintain confidentiality.

DEFINITIONS

Age ranges - The primary age groups referred to within this report are as follows:

- Infant-toddlers (0 through 2 year olds)
- Preschoolers (3 and 4 year olds)
- School age children (5 through 12 year olds)

At times other age ranges are used depending on the data source.

Capacity - The maximum number of children that may be in a child care program at a point in time.

Child Care Centers (also referred to as centers and center-based programs) - Programs that are licensed to provide group early learning and care services in a nonresidential setting.

- Less than 24-hour per day of non-medical care and supervision are provided to children in a group setting (CCR, Title 22, Section 101152).
- Can provide care for more than 14 children.
- Directors and teachers are required to have educational college degrees or State teaching permits and experience in the profession of early care and education.
- City and/or county permits may be required.
- Fire clearance from the local fire authority is required.
- A Center must be licensed and maintain Title 22 standards at all times, by the Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing, who regularly monitor compliance.

Early care and education (ECE) - The term early care and education (ECE) program is used throughout this report to refer to licensed child care programs (operated in a family child care home as well as child care center settings) for children 0-5 years of age. At times the term child care is used interchangeably with the term early care and education. School age care, also known as after school care refers to care for children 5 to 12 years old.

Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs) - Licensed care offered in the home of the provider. A small FCCH program may care for up to 8 children, depending on their ages. A large FCCH has at least two adult staff, who can care for up to 14 children, depending on their ages.

Licensed Child Care - Child care centers and FCCHs must be licensed by California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD). All programs must meet the regulations and standards specified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 22.

Parent - The term parent is used as an inclusive representation of all primary caregivers and guardians.

THE REGIONS OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Humboldt County is approximately 3,600 square miles and has an estimated population of 134,541 (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)). A large portion of the county is composed of forestlands, protected redwood groves, and public recreation areas, with nearly 80 percent of the land base covered by forests. Communities are widely dispersed across coastal, river valley, and inland mountain regions. The geography of this rural community creates unique challenges related to transportation, service access, and infrastructure.

For the purposes of this report, geographic regions within Humboldt County are defined using local high school district boundaries as illustrated in the following chart.

Geographic Regions	Zip Codes
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	95546, 95556, 95573
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	95518, 95519, 95521, 95524, 95525, 95550, 95555, 95564, 95570
Eureka Unified High School District	95501, 95503, 95534, 95537, 95549
Ferndale Unified School District	95536
Fortuna Union High School District	95528, 95540, 95547, 95551, 95562, 95565
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	95511, 95514, 95526, 95542, 95545, 95553, 95554, 95559, 95560, 95569, 95571, 95589
Mattole Unified School District	95558

CHAPTER 1:

THE PEOPLE OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY



There are 134,541 residents (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)) and 16,587 children (ages 0-12) living in Humboldt County (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)). The total county population has increased by 1.1% since 2010 yet is projected to decrease by 19.6% in the next three decades (by 2060) ([California Department of Finance, 2025](#)).

The majority of residents (88.9%) speak English only, and identify as not Hispanic or Latino (85.9%) (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table s1601](#); [Table B03002](#)). The number of English Learners (EL) and Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students represents 11.4% of the total student population (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [DataQuest](#)).

People Living in Humboldt County

The total population in Humboldt County is 134,541 residents (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)). Regions with the greatest number of residents are Northern Humboldt Union High School District, Fortuna Union High School District, and Southern Humboldt Unified School District.



Exhibit 1. Total population in Humboldt county by regions

	Total population
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	4,435
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	47,223
Eureka Unified High School District	49,500
Ferndale Unified School District	3,050
Fortuna Union High School District	23,084
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	7,287
Mattole Unified School District	230
Humboldt County	134,541

Note: Total population in Humboldt County is from US Census Data and therefore is not an exact match to the sum based on the regional totals.

US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)

There has been a slight increase of 1.1% in the total county population since 2010 (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)). The total population in Humboldt County is projected to decrease by 19.6% from 2024 to 2060 ([California Department of Finance, 2025](#)). The following chart illustrates the historic change in population over time.

Exhibit 2. Population change in Humboldt County (2010-2024)

	Population in 2010	Population in 2014	Population in 2019	Population in 2023	Population change 2010 to 2024
Humboldt County	133,058	134,876	135,940	134,541	+1,483

US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S0101](#)



Birth Rates in Humboldt County

Birth rates in Humboldt County have steadily decreased over recent years. There were 1,382 births in 2016 and 974 in 2024 (California Department of Public Health, [2016-2024](#)).

Exhibit 3. Number of births per year has decreased over the past decade



Year 2016 Year 2017 Year 2018 Year 2019 Year 2020 Year 2021 Year 2022 Year 2023 Year 2024

California Department of Public Health, [2016-2024](#)



Children Living in Humboldt County

There are 16,587 children (ages 0-12) living in Humboldt County (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)).

The number of children (0-12 year olds) in Humboldt County has decreased in the past decade from 17,489 in 2015 to 16,587 currently (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table [B09001](#)). The following illustrates the number of children by age and region.

Exhibit 4. Number of children by age living in Humboldt County

	0-2 year olds	3 & 4 year olds	5-12 year olds	0-12 year olds
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	223	25	380	628
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	948	799	3,397	5,144
Eureka Unified High School District	1,479	1,247	3,815	6,541
Ferndale Unified School District	*	36	211	247
Fortuna Union High School District	599	546	1,998	3,143
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	169	131	566	866
Mattole Unified School District	*	11	*	18
Humboldt County Totals	3,418	2,795	10,374	16,587

Note: Data for categories with counts fewer than 11 are not displayed in this report in order to protect individual privacy and maintain confidentiality.

US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)

Ethnicity of Humboldt County Residents

A minority (14.2%) of Humboldt County residents identify as Hispanic/Latino whereas 85.9% identify as not Hispanic/Latino. Similarly, the majority of residents (69.5%) identify their race as White (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B03002](#)).

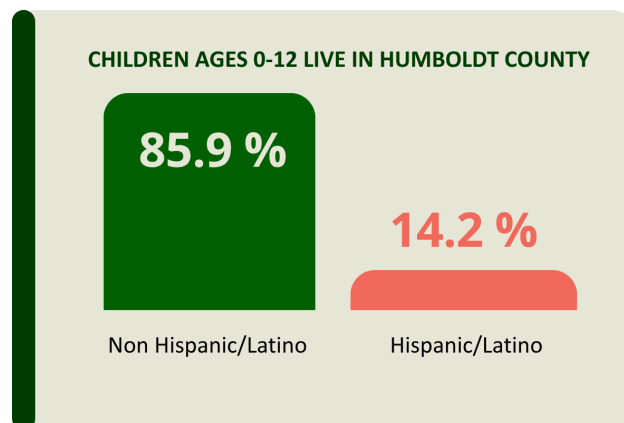


Exhibit 5. Race of local residents

	Percent of all residents
African American/Black	1.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.1%
Asian American/ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3.3%
Multiracial/other race	8.8%
White	69.5%

Note: Race data is not available for the entire population. As a result, percentages are calculated based only on respondents with reported race, and totals do not sum to 100%.

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B03002](#)

The ethnic composition of K–12 students in Humboldt County differs from that of the overall population, reflecting a more diverse younger generation. These differences underscore the need for culturally responsive, equity-focused service delivery that is inclusive of diverse backgrounds and tailored to meet the needs of all children and families.

Exhibit 6. Ethnicity of students K-12th grade

	Percent of children K-12 by Race/Ethnicity
Hispanic or Latino	22.1%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	8.7%
Asian American	3.0%
Pacific Islander	0.5%
Filipino	0.2%
African American	1.0%
White, Not Hispanic	52.7%
Multiracial/ethnic	11.1%
Not reported	0.9%

[CA Department of Education, DataQuest 2024-2025](#)

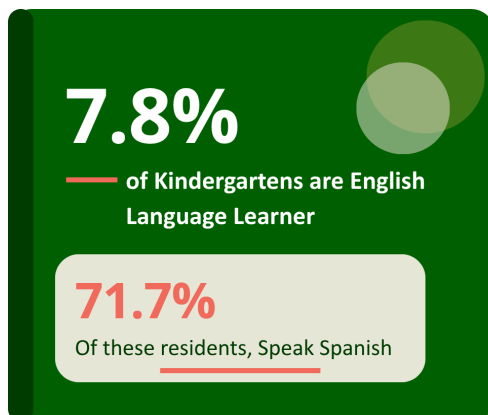
Home Languages Spoken in Humboldt County

The majority (88.9%) of Humboldt County residents' primary language spoken in the home is English only and 11.1% of local residents speak a language other than English. The majority (61.6%) of those who speak a non-English language speak Spanish (U.S. Census, ACS 5 Year data, 2024. [Table s1601](#)).

Humboldt County is home to a diversity of Indigenous languages (e.g. the Yurok language, Wiyot language, and Karuk language, etc.). The current number of fluent first-language speakers is very small; however, revitalization efforts such as Tribal language departments, immersion-style classes in K–12 schools, adult education courses, and culturally sustaining curricula have led to an increase in second-language learners and speakers. These initiatives aim to increase the number of speakers and strengthen cultural identity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community well-being by reconnecting language with land, history, and traditional practices.



There are 17,177 TK-12 students enrolled in Humboldt County schools. A minority (11.4%) of the total student population is classified as English Learners (EL) and Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students. Of the total population of students, 8.6% are Spanish speaking EL and FEP students (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [DataQuest](#)). Children who have support learning their home language are better able to also learn English. Children can more easily learn more than one language at a young age than at any other time in their lives, and being bilingual or multi-lingual offers a multitude of opportunities to them throughout their lives. Research also shows that bilingual children develop stronger thinking skills ([National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#), 2017).



Of the 1,169 Kindergarten students there were 92 English Language Learners (representing 7.8% of all Kindergarten students) and of those 71.7% spoke Spanish (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [DataQuest](#)). The following data can be used as a proxy to estimate the home languages of younger children (0-4 year olds).

Exhibit 7. Kindergarten English Learner (EL) students by primary language

	Number of EL Kindergarteners by home language	Percent of EL Kindergarteners
Spanish	66	5.6%
Mandarin	*	0.1%
Vietnamese	*	0.1%
Arabic	*	0.1%
Other: Punjabi	*	0.2%
Other: Hmong, Mong	11	0.9%
All other non-English languages	*	0.9%

Note: Data for categories with counts fewer than 11 are not displayed in this report in order to protect individual privacy and maintain confidentiality.
 California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [DataQues](#)



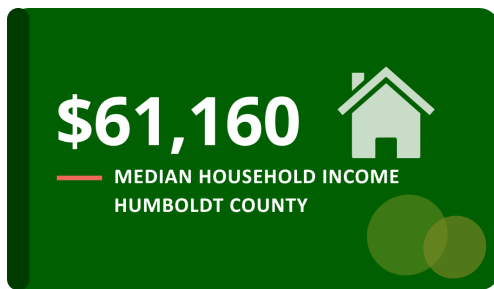
CHAPTER 2:

MAKING ENDS MEET



The annual household income needed to make ends meet for a family of four (two adults, one infant/toddler, one preschooler) is \$105,877 ([Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women’s Welfare](#), 2024). This is more than \$44,000 above the median household income in Humboldt County (\$61,160). The struggle is more pronounced for single parent households who have to earn \$93,188 (\$7,766 per month) to support two children in order to make ends meet. Child care is the greatest expense out of all essential living expenses for local families. A greater percentage of residents (18.7%) are living in poverty in Humboldt County compared to California (12.0%) (US Census, 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S1701](#)).

Earnings and Unemployment in Humboldt County



The median household income in Humboldt County is \$61,160; however, this varies by region with the highest median household incomes in Ferndale Unified School District (\$73,375) and the lowest in Southern Humboldt Unified School District (\$39,531) (US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates, [Table S1901](#)).

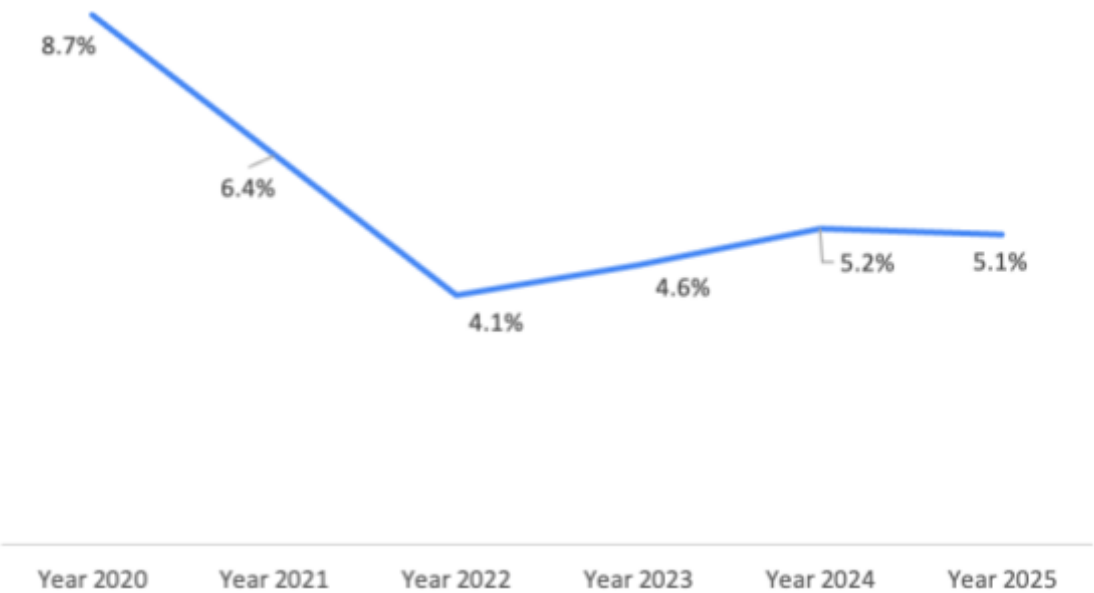
Exhibit 8. Median household income varies by city

	Median earnings per household
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	\$55,246
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	\$63,694
Eureka Unified High School District	\$63,964
Ferndale Unified School District	\$73,375
Fortuna Union High School District	\$61,443
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	\$39,531
Mattole Unified School District	\$51,719
Humboldt County	\$61,160

Note: A weighted average methodology is applied when aggregating zip code–level data to the district level to account for variation in the number of households across zip codes. Median household income for each zip code is weighted by its corresponding household count, ensuring that areas with larger populations proportionally influence the overall district estimate. This approach yields a more accurate and representative measure of economic conditions across the district. US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates, [Table S1901](#)

The county-wide current unemployment rate (5.1%) has decreased since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (8.7%), however has been steadily increasing in recent years (Department of Labor, [Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for Cities and Census Designated Places](#) 2025).

Exhibit 9. Local unemployment rate has been increasing after a drop during the pandemic

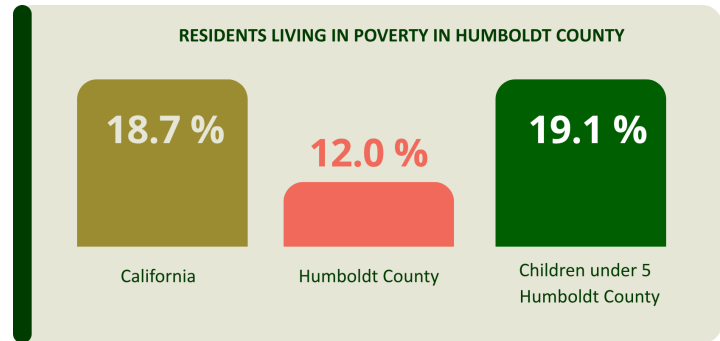


Department of Labor, [Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for Cities and Census Designated Places](#) 2025



Poverty Rates in Humboldt County

Currently, 18.7% of Humboldt County residents are living at or below federal poverty level (FPL) compared to 12.0% in California (US Census, 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S1701](#)). Poverty rates vary by region within the county, with the highest rates in Southern Humboldt Unified School District (38.2%) and the lowest rates in Ferndale Unified School District (10.3%) US Census, 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S1701](#)).



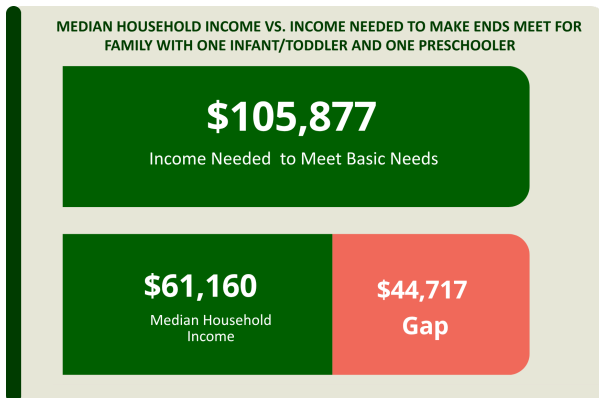
There is a slightly greater percentage of children (under 5 year olds) living in poverty (19.1%) compared to the overall population (18.7%), thus suggesting families with young children face additional challenges (US Census, 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S1701](#)).

Exhibit 10. Percent of total population living below FPL varies by region

	Percent total population living at or below FPL
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	18.1%
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	21.4%
Eureka Unified High School District	17.5%
Ferndale Unified School District	10.3%
Fortuna Union High School District	16.9%
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	38.2%
Mattole Unified School District	27.4%
Humboldt County	18.7%

Note: A weighted average methodology is applied when aggregating ZIP code-level FPL rates to the district level to account for variation in population size across zip codes. Each zip code's poverty rate is weighted by its total population, ensuring that areas with larger populations proportionally influence the overall district estimate. This approach yields a more accurate and representative measure of poverty across the district.
US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table S1701](#)

Cost of Living in Humboldt County



A living wage is the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support themselves and/or their family, working full-time. The annual household income needed to make ends meet for a family of four (two adults, one infant/toddler, one preschooler) is **\$105,877** ([Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women’s Welfare, 2024](#)). This is more than **\$44,000** above the median household income in Humboldt County (\$61,160).

The annual income needed to make ends meet requires **both adults** to earn **at least \$25.07/hour** and work full time to earn **\$8,823 per month total**. The high cost of living in Humboldt County creates additional challenges for single parent households. A single parent with an infant and preschooler needs to earn **at least \$44.12/hour** and work full time to earn **\$7,766 per month** in order to make ends meet.

The following chart illustrates the monthly cost of living for single income and dual income households (each with one infant and one preschooler).

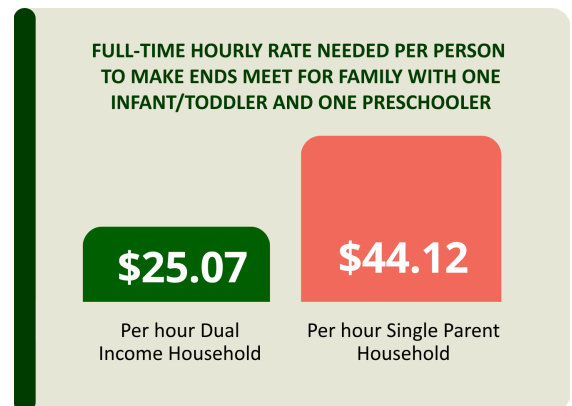


Exhibit 11. Income needed and the associated expenses for local families to make ends meet

	Two working adults with one infant and one preschooler	One working adult with one infant and one preschooler
Monthly Costs		
Housing	\$1,352	\$1,352
Child Care	\$2,512	\$2,512
Food	\$1,125	\$810
Transportation	\$815	\$426
Health Care	\$994	\$889
Premium	\$728	\$728
Out-of-Pocket	\$265	\$161
Miscellaneous	\$836	\$712
Broadband & Cell Phone	\$156	\$113
Other Necessities	\$680	\$599
Taxes	\$1,622	\$1,498
Earned Income Tax Credit (-)	\$0	\$0
Child Care Tax Credit (-)	-\$100	-\$100
Child Tax Credit (-)	-\$333	-\$333
Self-Sufficiency Wage		
Hourly	\$25.07	\$44.12
Monthly	\$8,823	\$7,766
Annual	\$105,877	\$93,188
Emergency Savings Fund (Monthly Contribution)	\$204	\$618

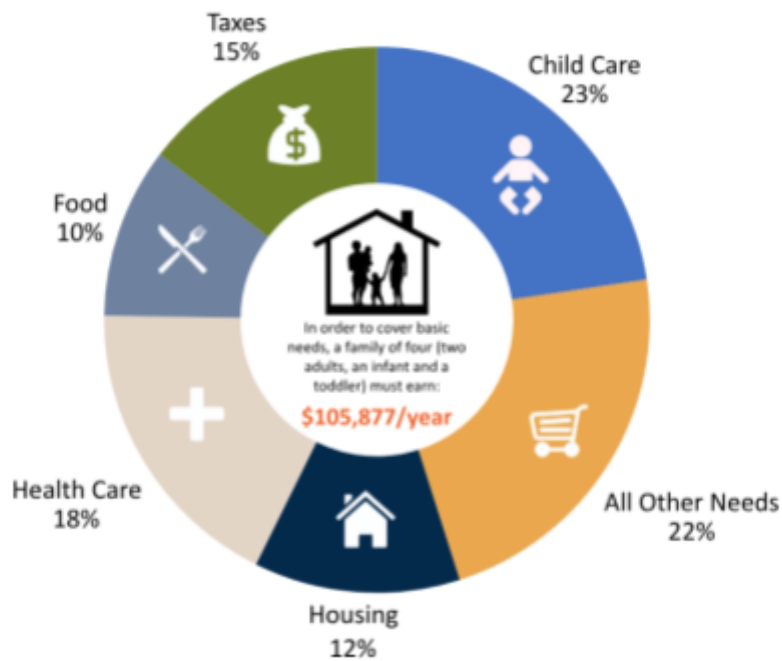
Note: Variation in totals due to rounding and application of tax credits.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California 2024; Source: Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington.

<https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/california/>

Nearly a quarter (22.7%) of a family's essential expenses are allocated to the cost of child care, an expense that is nearly double the cost of housing as illustrated by the following exhibit.

Exhibit 12. Cost of child care is the top living expense for dual income families with young children in Humboldt County



[The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California](#) 2024; Source: Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington. Child care programs may offer nutritious meals during the day through participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a federal program that provides reimbursement for meals and snacks served to children in licensed child care centers and FCCHs. Eligibility for meal reimbursement is partly determined by the proportion of children who qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) under the National School Lunch Program. Students with a household income that is less than 185% FPL typically qualify for FRL. Nearly two-thirds (60.6%) of students (K-12) are eligible for FRL in Humboldt County (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [DataQuest](#)).

Cost of Home Ownership in Humboldt County

The median price of a home in Humboldt County is \$413,000. Nearly a third (30%) of local residents in Humboldt County are able to purchase a median-priced single-family home ([California Association of Realtors, Housing Affordability Index, Quarter 4, 2025](#)). More than half (56.5%) of housing units are owner occupied in Humboldt County and the median owner costs with mortgage is \$2,147/month; the median rent in Humboldt County is \$1,287/month ([US Census Quickfacts, 2020-2024](#)).

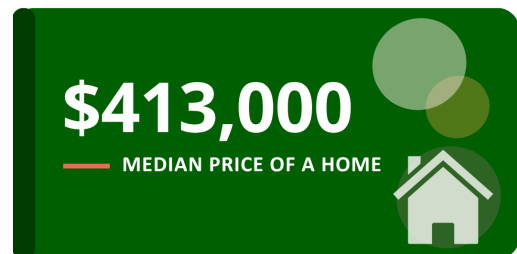
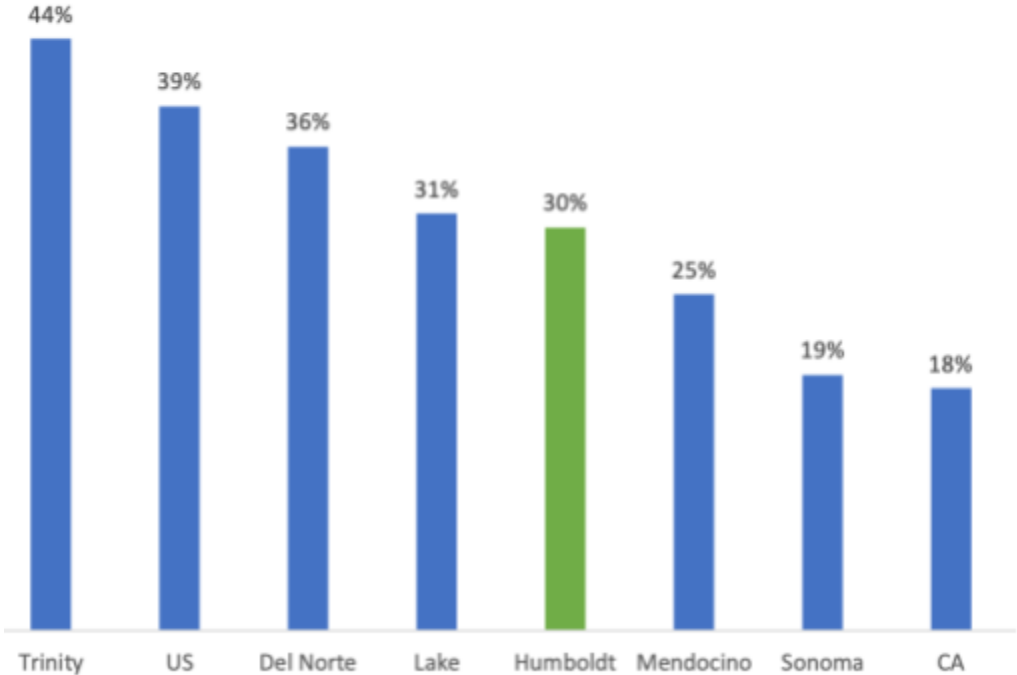


Exhibit 13. Comparison of housing affordability in various regions



Fourth quarter 2025. Percent able to purchase a median-priced single-family home per county/region. [California Association of Realtors, Housing Affordability Index, Quarter 4, 2025](#)



CHAPTER 3:

COST OF LICENSED CHILD CARE



The cost of care is prohibitive for many families living in Humboldt County. Average full-time tuition for infants and toddlers has historically been the highest, currently ranging from \$1,587/month to \$1,094/month depending on the setting and location. On average, in center-based settings families are spending \$19,044/year for infant/toddler care compared to \$9,969/year for preschoolers. Costs vary in FCCH settings with the average annual tuition being \$13,136/year for infant/toddler care and 10,616/year for preschool care. These figures represent average child care tuition, some programs charge significantly more and others charge less.

Average Cost of Child Care

Tuition rates in Humboldt County vary by child age and type of care. The rising high cost of operating a child care business makes it difficult for providers to maintain their programs and for families to afford quality care. Even with state rate reform approved by the legislators for lower income families, child care affordability continues to be a challenge. On average, in center-based settings families are spending \$19,044/year for infant/toddler care compared to \$9,969/year for preschoolers. Costs vary in FCCH settings with the average annual tuition being \$13,136/year for infant/toddler care and 10,616/year for preschool care.

Exhibit 14. Average monthly cost of full-time care by age and type of care

	Average monthly cost of infant-toddler care		Average monthly cost of preschool care	
	Centers	FCCHs	Centers	FCCHs
Humboldt County	\$1,587.00	\$1,094.00	\$830.00	\$884.00

[CA Children Resource and Referral Data Tool](#), 2023

The cost of care for school age children varies by type of care. Part-time care is more common for this age group with average annual tuition ranging from \$5,220/year in center-based settings to \$6,780/year in FCCHs.

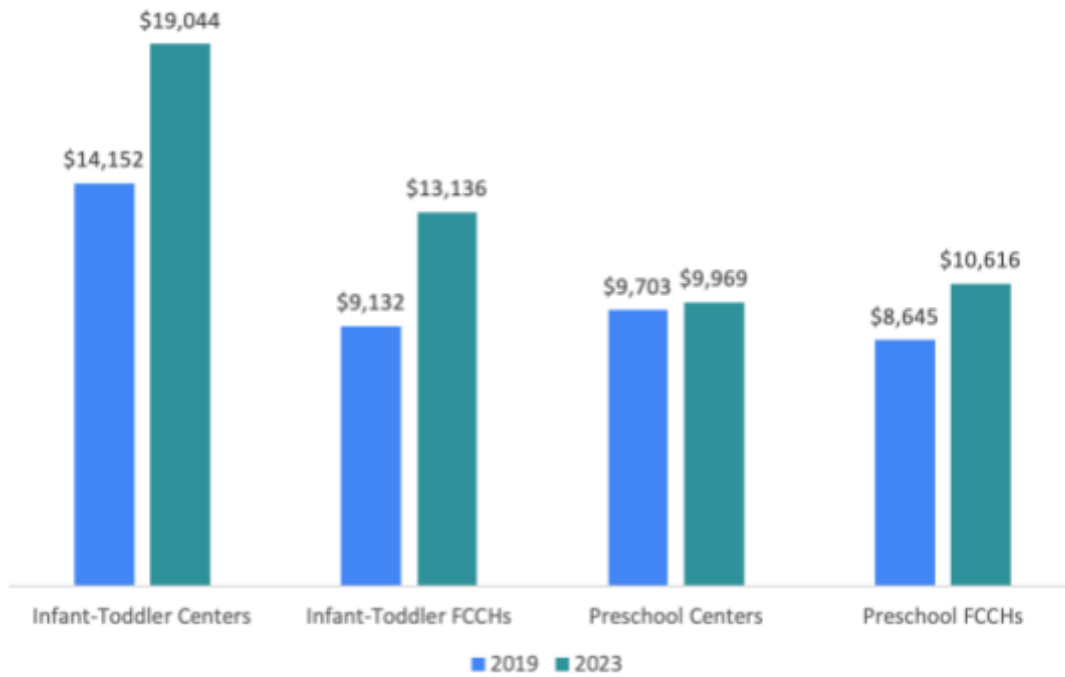
Exhibit 15. Average monthly cost of part-time care for school age children by type of care

	Centers	FCCHs
Humboldt County	\$435.00	\$565.00

Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

Overall, child care tuition rates have increased, particularly for infant-toddler care. The rise in preschool tuition is less pronounced, likely due to the increased availability of TK.

Exhibit 16. Cost of full-time annual care has increased for all ages and in all settings



[CA Children Resource and Referral Data Tool](#), 2019, 2023

Although child care subsidies are available (see section on child care options), many local families face obstacles accessing financial assistance, further compounding affordability. Strict income limits disqualify families who earn slightly above the eligibility thresholds, despite their inability to afford child care without support. Additionally, a lack of awareness about available financial aid programs prevents some families from applying, while the complexity of the application process discourages some eligible families from pursuing assistance. Furthermore, some child care providers do not accept subsidies due to lower reimbursement rates and the administrative burdens. These challenges leave a portion of the population without the financial support needed to afford child care.



CHAPTER 4:

SPECIAL POPULATIONS



There are a variety of special populations of children in Humboldt County. There were 133 children (0-15 year olds) in foster care and 137 children (0-18 year olds) who are experiencing homelessness in Humboldt County based on the most recent Point of Time report (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. [Continuum of Care homeless populations and subpopulations report: CA-522 Humboldt County CoC, 2024](#)). There were 1,560 children (0-15 year olds) who experienced one or more allegations of child maltreatment in the past year (October 2024 - September 2025) (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, [CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 3](#)). Lastly, there were 244 cumulative active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2) (Redwood Coast Regional Center and Humboldt County Office of Education, March 2026), 149 cumulative active IEP cases for children (3 & 4 year olds), and 1,851 IEP cases for children (5-12 year olds) (CALPADS Fall 2025, Humboldt-Del Norte SELPA).

Youth in Foster Care

There were 44 children (0-5 year olds) and 89 children (6-15 year olds) in foster care according to a point in time count in July 2025 (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2024, [CWS/CMS 2024 Quarter 4](#)).

Exhibit 17. Number of children in foster care in Humboldt County, by age

	Number of children in foster care
Children ages 0-2	22
Children ages 3-5	22
Children ages 6-15	89
Total Children ages 0-5	44
Total Children ages 0-15	133

Note: Point of time data: July 1, 2025

California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, [CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 3](#)

Children Experiencing Homelessness

Children experiencing homelessness often face frequent moves due to housing instability, which can interrupt consistent child care attendance. High quality child care can offer children stability and routine to counterbalance this challenge. Regular attendance helps support learning and development while providing a predictable environment. It is estimated there are 137 children (0-18 year olds) who are experiencing homelessness in Humboldt County based on the most recent Point of Time report (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. [Continuum of Care homeless populations and subpopulations report: CA-522 Humboldt County CoC, 2024](#)).

Children at Risk of Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse and neglect can create a multitude of short- and long-term negative consequences including psychological implications, such as cognitive delays or emotional difficulties, and challenges forming healthy and secure attachments. There were 1,560 children (0-15 year olds) who experienced one or more allegations of child maltreatment in the past year (October 2024 - September 2025), and of those, 668 were young children (0-5 year olds). There was a decrease in the number of young children who experienced allegations since 2014-2015 from 868 children (0-5 year olds) (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, [CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 3](#)).

Exhibit 18. Number of children for whom there were one or more allegations of child abuse/neglect, by age

	Children with one or more allegations
Children ages 0-2	305
Children ages 3-5	199
Children ages 6-10	363
Children ages 11-15	693
Total Children ages 0-5	668
Total Children ages 0-15	1,560

Note: Data is from October 2024-September 2025; A child is counted only once, in the category of highest severity. California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, [CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 3](#)

Children of Families who are Migrant Workers

Finding child care can be difficult for migrant parents who often work 12 hour days in agricultural jobs. Center-based and family child care migrant Head Start programs offer extended hours of operation. It is currently estimated that there are no children (0-5 year olds) of migrant families living in Humboldt County (Region 2 Migrant Education, Butte County Office of Education); however, these numbers fluctuate and may be underreported due to the transient nature of migrant families, limitations in data collection, and fear related to immigration status or potential consequences of sharing personal information.

Children with Adverse Childhood Experiences

[Adverse childhood experiences](#) (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood. [Research](#) indicates that the greater the number of ACEs, the higher the likelihood of negative outcomes including obesity, autoimmune disease, depression, alcoholism, difficulty in school, and unemployment. Additionally, high ACE scores are associated with increased risk of developmental and behavioral challenges (according to research compiled by the [ACEs Aware initiative](#)).

This can translate into early care classrooms with more children who need additional social-emotional support, individualized attention, and trauma-informed care. These additional needs can strain staffing ratios, increase provider stress and burnout, and make it more difficult to maintain stable, high-quality care environments. The high prevalence of ACEs impacts children and families, as well as the capacity and sustainability of the child care programs and workforce. The [Humboldt Community Health](#)

[Improvement Plan \(2022-2027\)](#) identified ACEs as a top priority area in response to the local prevalence rates.

Children Eligible for Special Education Services

Families with children identified as eligible for special education services through either the Redwood Coast Regional Center or Humboldt County Office of Education have an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individual Education Program (IEP). An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed for children from birth to age three who have developmental delays or disabilities, focusing on early intervention services and family involvement. Once a child turns three, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is created for children who qualify for special education services from a school district, outlining specific educational goals, services, and supports in a school setting. Both plans are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child and are developed in collaboration with families and professionals.

There were 244 cumulative active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2) (Redwood Coast Regional Center and Humboldt County Office of Education, March 2026), 149 cumulative active IEP cases for children (3 & 4 year olds), and 1,851 IEP cases for children (5-12 year olds) (CALPADS Fall 2025, Humboldt-Del Norte SELPA).

Exhibit 19. Current active cases of IFSPs and IEPs

	Active IFSP cases children 0-2 year olds	Active IEP cases children 3-5 year olds	Active IEP cases children 6-12 year olds
Humboldt County	244	149	1,851

Active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2): Redwood Coast Regional Center and Humboldt County Office of Education, March 2026
 Active IEP cases for children (3 & 4 year olds and 5-12 year olds): CALPADS Fall 2025, Humboldt- Del Norte SELPA

Services for Children with Special Needs

Humboldt County Office of Education offers the [Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program \(IEEEP\)](#), funded by the CDE. IEEEP provides resources, training, and support for educators to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students. This includes training on shifting common classroom practices and strategies for supporting students with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, as well as workshops on creating inclusive classrooms and promoting positive social and emotional learning.

Inclusive classrooms are designed to support the academic and social requirements of students with and without disabilities. Students receive individualized accommodations and modifications to help them access the curriculum and participate in classroom activities alongside their peers.

Inclusive classrooms are filled with diverse learners who can learn together, grow together, and benefit from each other's strengths and perspectives. Through these classrooms, students learn to appreciate and respect differences and develop important skills for success in a diverse and inclusive society.

The goals of the IEEEP grant program are:

1. Ensure children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, have greater rates of enrollment in inclusive subsidized early learning programs.
2. Increase access and building capacity for inclusive early learning subsidized programs for example, by encouraging LEAs to establish partnerships with their local child-care community

agencies that have contracts to directly serve subsidized children, including both public and private agencies.

3. Increase access to inclusive early learning care for children representing a broad range of disabilities and levels of support needs.
4. Provide the individualized and necessary supports to enable children with disabilities to meet high expectations within the early learning settings.

There are multiple programs offered for children with special needs in Humboldt County. Additionally, Humboldt County has a number of trained Itinerant Preschool Teachers who travel to students in order to provide special education and care and also work with programs participating in Quality Counts to better serve children with special needs. Despite this, families in remote areas face additional barriers, as the geographic dispersion of services further limits access to specialized care.



CHAPTER 5:

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS & SUPPORT SERVICES



CalFresh, CalWorks, and Medi-Cal are essential public programs serving low-income families and children in Humboldt County. There are 6,957 children (ages 0-18) served by CalFresh, 2,447 children (ages 0-18) served by CalWorks, and 12,699 children (ages 0-18) served by Medi-Cal (County of Humboldt, Department of Social Services. February 2025). The percentage of the local population enrolled in Medi-Cal has doubled from 20.2% of the population in January 2012 to 42.9% in December 2025 ([California Health Foundation, 2025](#)).

Public Assistance Programs

The following is an overview of the broad public assistance child care programs. More specific programs are presented in the Child Care Funding Sources section.

CalFresh - CalFresh is California’s implementation of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), delivering monthly food benefits via an EBT card to low-income individuals and families to purchase nutritious groceries at stores and farmers’ markets.

California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS) - CalWORKS is California’s implementation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and provides temporary cash aid and services, to help eligible families obtain food, shelter, and essential services. Most adults are limited to receiving up to five years of cash aid over a lifetime. Unless exempt, CalWORKS participants are required to participate in welfare-to-work activities. For CalWORKS recipients participating in such activities that lead to employment and self-sufficiency, subsidized child care is available for their children up to age 12 and children with disabilities up to 18 years of age.

Medi-Cal - Medi-Cal is a public health insurance program that provides health care services for eligible low income Californians. [Partnership HealthPlan of California \(PHC\)](#) is the designated Medi-Cal managed care provider in Humboldt County. The percentage of the local population enrolled in Medi-Cal has doubled from 20.2% of the population in 2012 to 42.9% in 2025 ([California Health Foundation, 2025](#)).

Women, Infants & Children (WIC) - California’s WIC program provides families across the state by providing nutrition education, breastfeeding support, healthy foods and referrals to health care and other community services. WIC is an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) based program in which food benefits are aggregated on a family basis.

The following summarizes the number of children and families who receive public assistance.

Exhibit 20. Children (under 18) and families who receive public services

	Number of children (ages 0-18)	Number of families
CalFresh	6,957	NA
CalWORKs	2,447	1,477
Medi-Cal	12,699	NA

Note: Data not available for children (0-5 year olds)
County of Humboldt, Department of Social Services. February 2025

CHAPTER 6:

CHILD CARE OPTIONS



A variety of child care options are available throughout Humboldt County including center-based care, family child care (FCCHs), and license-exempt home-based care from family, friends, and neighbors (FFN). Systems of support are in place to help offset the high costs of care including subsidy programs such as Alternative Payment Program, CalWORKS, Head Start, and state-funded preschool, all of which depend on family eligibility. Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is available throughout Humboldt County to 4 and 5 year olds. Additionally, expanded learning options are available to school age children.

There are a number of child care options for families to choose. When determining the best option that meets a family's needs there are many considerations including location, kind of care, and the cost of care, including the subsidies that may be available to offset the cost of child care. This chapter provides additional information on some of the available child care options.

Child Care Settings

Center-Based Care - Licensed child care centers are facilities that operate in a commercial setting. These programs are licensed through the CDSS CCLD and may obtain licenses for infant, preschool, and/or school age care. Some center-based care may be license-exempt if they abide by special regulations. Note: School districts and local education agencies (LEAs) may operate child care as well as before and after school programming, which have different regulations.

Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs) - FCCH is licensed child care offered in a provider's home, licensed by CDSS CCLD. A FCCH must be in the licensee's own home and reflect a home-like environment. Small FCCHs serve up to 8 children and large FCCHs serve up to 14 children, depending on the combination of the ages of the children (0-12 year olds) enrolled.

License-Exempt Care - Legally permitted child care arrangements that are not required to be licensed under Community Care Licensing. This may include relatives or friends, or by a provider who cares only for the children of one other family, certain parent co-ops, and public or non-profit recreation and school-based child care programs. For more information about whether a program is license-exempt under [state regulations](#) see the Department of Social Services.

Family, Friend, & Neighbor Care (FFN) - FFNs is care provided in the child's or child care provider's home by a person who is a relative, friend, neighbor, or other license-exempt provider. This type of care is not required to be licensed by the state of California.

Tribal Child Care - Tribal child care refers to child care programs administered by Tribal governments and organizations to support the cultural, linguistic, developmental, and family needs of American Indian and Alaska Native children, typically under the age of 13 years old. Often funded through the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), these programs prioritize community-based care and may include center based care and FCCHs and support child development and family well-being including parental work/education.

Child Care Funding Sources

Now more than ever, there is a need for more options to help pay for the cost of child care, particularly in light of escalating cost of operation and static reimbursement rates. Eligibility criteria for subsidized child care varies by program. For example, the income eligibility for federally funded Head Start programs (\$33,000 for family of four) is lower than the income eligibility for California State Preschool Programs (\$127,338 for a family of four); some programs serve only a particular age group; and some programs require families to be income eligible and for parents to be employed or in an educational or job training program.

There are multiple types of state or federally funded programs that offer child care to eligible families in Humboldt County (some included in Public Assistance list above).

- After School Education and Safety (ASES) (for school age children)
- Alternative Payment Program (Parent Choice)
- California State-Funded Preschool
- CalWorks
- Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN)
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs

Alternative Payment Program (AP) - Funded by California Department of Social Service, these programs subsidize the child care costs for eligible families. Parents may choose from family child care homes, child care centers, or license-exempt child care providers. Children are eligible for child care services until their 13th birthday. Household income must be below 85% of the SMI to be eligible and the annual income threshold for a family four must be under \$108,237 (California Department of Social Services, Child Care Bulletin 25-26).

State-Funded Preschool (CSPP) - The [California Department of Education](#) funds state-funded preschools administered through local education agencies, colleges, community-action agencies, and private non-profits. Household income must be below 100% State Median Income (SMI) in order for a family to be eligible. The threshold for a family of four income must be under \$127,338 per year ([California Department of Education](#), 2025-26).

General Child Care and Development (CCTR) – The California Department of Social Services funds General Child Care and Development programs administered through licensed child care centers and family child care home networks. CCTR provides subsidized, full-day and year-round child care for eligible families, generally serving children from birth through school age. Eligibility is based on income and need. Household income must be below 85% SMI in order for a family to be eligible. The threshold for a family of four income must be under \$108,237 per year ([California Department of Social Services](#), 2025–26).

Head Start - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds Head Start and Early Head Start. Northcoast Children’s Services, Yurok Tribe, and Hoopa Tribe are the Head Start and Early Head Start grantees in Humboldt County. Head Start eligibility is based on multiple factors related to need. The income eligibility factor is based on the federal poverty level, which is \$33,000 for a family of four ([Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation](#), 2026).

Tuition (Private Pay) - Non-subsidized spaces are utilized by private pay families in child care centers and family child care homes that are operated by community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, individuals, nonprofit and for-profit agencies.

CalWORKS - CalWORKs child care subsidies are available to current or former eligible recipients of CalWORKs cash aid and participate in county-approved Welfare-to-Work activities. There are three stages of CalWORKS child care:

- Stage 1 is funded by the California Department of Social Services and is administered locally by Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Service and Changing Tides Family Services through contracts with local Alternative Payment Program (AP) agencies. Stage 1 begins with a parent's entry into a County-approved welfare-to-work program.
- Stage 2 is available to eligible families. Families may receive Stage 2 Child Care for up to 24 months after they stop receiving cash aid. Parents may select from 1) licensed providers such as center-based and family child care homes; or 2) license-exempt child care providers such as family, friend, and neighbor care.
- Stage 3 supports families as they move off welfare and into self-sufficiency. Families can continue to receive Stage 3 Child Care until they no longer meet the income eligibility requirements or their children exceed the age limit. Parents may select from 1) licensed providers such as center-based and family child care homes; or 2) license-exempt child care providers such as family, friend, and neighbor care.

More information on CDSS funding streams, including Children with Severe Disabilities (CHAN), Migrant Child Care and Development Programs (CMIG), and general child care (CCTR) can be found on the [CDSS website](#).

Expanded Learning for School Age Children

Many school districts and community agencies operate expanded learning programs (including before school, after school, summer, and intercession). The following is a summary of the out of school options offered in Humboldt County.

After School Education and Safety (ASES) - ASES programs are created through partnerships between schools and local community resources to provide literacy, academic enrichment, and safe constructive alternatives for students in TK through ninth grade (TK-9). ASES is primarily funded through the state and administered by the California Department of Education.

Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) - ELO-P provides funding for afterschool and summer school enrichment programs for TK through sixth grade. ELO-P funds are provided to local education agencies (LEAs) and are to be used to create activities that support the whole child, including social-emotional learning and child development. ELO-P funds are provided by CDE; each LEA has flexibility in determining how ELO-P funds are spent. Licensed, license-exempt community programs, as well as district-run programs deliver ELO-P services.

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)

UPK is an umbrella term that includes California State Preschool Programs (CSPPs), Transitional Kindergarten (TK), Head Start, district and local community-based preschool programs, early learning services for students with disabilities, private pay preschools, and expanded learning options to support access to a full day of services. California's goal is to serve more children ages 3 and 4 in high-quality

preschool programming. California intends to meet this goal through the implementation of universal TK, as well as investments in other state-funded programs, such as state preschools and other subsidized programs. UPK also provides funding to Local Planning Councils (LPCs) for workforce development and funding.

Transitional Kindergarten (Tk)

TK is the first of a two-year Kindergarten program that is designed to be developmentally appropriate and aligned to the [California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations](#). TK serves as a bridge between preschool and Kindergarten, utilizing a modified Kindergarten curriculum taught by a credentialed teacher.

TK is one component of the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) mixed-delivery system. While families may choose care from across this system, local education agencies (LEAs - school districts and charters) are mandated to offer TK to all age-eligible children.

Universal TK (UTK) means that by 2025–26, and each year thereafter, regardless of background, race, zip code, immigration status, or income level, every child who turns 4 years old by September 1st of the given school year will have access to TK as a quality learning experience the year before Kindergarten.



CHAPTER 7:

CHILD CARE CAPACITY



It is estimated there are more than 400 licensed child care spaces for infant/toddlers and nearly 3,000 spaces for preschool age children in Humboldt County; however, this represents maximum licensed capacity and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the operating capacity nor an indication of how many children are currently enrolled. The availability, demand, and use of child care spaces fluctuate by child age, type of care, location, and parent needs.

Child Care Supply

Licensed child care adheres to the state regulatory standards and reporting requirements, and is used to determine the current child care capacity in Humboldt County within this report. Exempt home-based child care (e.g. FFN), although valuable, is typically excluded from community needs assessments as these settings are difficult to reliably track.

Factors that Impact the Understanding of Child Care Capacity

Licensed capacity is the maximum number of children a child care program can serve at one time in a specific facility; however, it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the operating capacity nor an indication of how many children are currently enrolled. The availability, demand, and use of child care spaces fluctuate in any community. There are many moving factors that impact the understanding and depiction of current child care capacity:

- Increased availability of TK
- Defined age groupings
- Shift in how centers are licensed
- FCCH capacity estimations
- Under-enrollment trends
- AM and PM sessions
- Family preferences regarding care
- Family demand for care

The following is a description of these and how they may impact the understanding of child care capacity.

- **Increased availability of TK** - TK expansion has increased the number of spaces available to eligible children. Families with 4-5 year olds may opt to enroll their child in TK instead of other early education settings.
- **Defined age groupings** - There is variation in how age groups are defined, which creates challenges in tracking and analyzing capacity related data. The licensed capacity within centers has historically been allocated to child age ranges that slightly overlap (e.g. 0-24 months, 18-36 months, and 2-6 years) which create tracking and analysis related challenges. Additionally, these age ranges do not align with child population data ages, which makes it difficult to accurately assess the need/demand for care against the licensed capacity. Additionally, the capacity data in the 3-4 year old age group includes TK and licensed child care spaces, yet TK spaces are only accessible to children that turn 4 by September 1 of the school year. There are also challenges related to tracking how licensed child care capacity for this age group as a whole breaks down for each age. Licensing requirements related to classroom configurations and adult:child ratios as

well as best practice makes it difficult to determine the number of spaces that are accessible to preschool age children, particularly by individual age.

- **Shift in how centers are licensed** - Historically, child care centers were licensed based on children's ages. This has recently changed and Community Care Licensing has started issuing single licenses to centers (similar to how FCCHs are licensed). This shift creates challenges in determining the capacity and unmet need by age group, as data is reported for all children and not by age.
- **FCCH capacity estimations** - FCCHs can serve children ages 0-12 and are licensed for a total maximum capacity (8 for small FCCHs and 14 for large FCCHs). The commonly used formula for calculating FCCH capacity is: 15% of FCCH licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children. Caring for younger children reduces the total number of children FCCHs can legally serve, which often makes it economically infeasible.
- **Under-enrollment trends** - There are various reasons why programs may not be enrolled to their full licensed capacity.
 - **By choice to achieve higher quality** - Some programs limit enrollment in order to allow more space per child and/or smaller groups per teacher.
 - **Logistical limitations** - Limitations related to facility design, quality, staffing shortages, and/or funding.
 - **Lack of demand** - Due to the increased availability of TK, many programs are under-enrolled in their classrooms that serve 4 year olds.
- **AM and PM sessions** - Some programs offer part-day, part-time options. In these cases, the number of enrolled children may be greater than the licensed capacity. Additionally, some programs may opt to offer night and evening hours rather than enrolling to full capacity.
- **Family preferences regarding care** - Families have different preferences regarding the kind of care (e.g. home-based or center-based), quality of care, cost of care, hours of care (e.g. full day or part-day, traditional hours or evenings and weekends, etc.), and the location of care (e.g. near home, work, or transit routes). All of these preferences impact enrollment decisions.
- **Family demand for care** - Not all families need or want child care. Some parents choose to stay home, some culturally prefer care inside the home with family, friends, or neighbors, and some families enroll in care solely based on their needs while they work whereas others prioritize enrollment for the social-emotional-cognitive development benefits. All of these factors impact the demand for and enrollment in child care.

“A new [Stanford research paper](#) estimates that universal child care would enable over 100,000 mothers to enter the workforce, adding \$23 billion to California’s GDP—more than covering the cost of universal child care. A [companion study](#) from UC Irvine and UC Berkeley found that 600,000 children under age 3 lack access to licensed care, costing the state up to \$53 billion in annual economic losses.” First 5 Association

Supply of Child Care Varies by Region and Child Age

The following charts present the total licensed capacity as well as TK spaces per region as a way to estimate the maximum available supply of care. License-exempt spaces are not included in the supply data. However, it is noted there are Tribal Child Care license-exempt spaces throughout the county. TK data has been included since families with 4 year olds may choose to enroll their child in TK or licensed child care. However, as previously noted, a licensed space does not always equate an available space.

Exhibit 21. Child care and TK capacity in Humboldt County, by age and region

	Licensed capacity for children 0-2 year olds			Licensed capacity for children 3 & 4 year olds			
	Centers	FCCHs	TOTAL	Centers	FCCHs	TK	TOTAL
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	0	6	6	15	31	34	80
Northern Humboldt High School District	118	32	150	508	151	238	897
Eureka Unified High School District	124	75	199	673	347	239	1259
Ferndale Unified School District	0	3	3	49	15	22	86
Fortuna Union High School District	11	38	49	228	177	99	504
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	0	2	2	74	12	28	114
Mattole Unified School District	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
Humboldt County	253	156	409	1,547	733	668	2,948

Note: The following formula is used to estimate the child care capacity by age in FCCHs: 15% of FCCH licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children.

Licensed Center and Large FCCH data: [Community Care Licensing Department of Social Services](#), March 2026

Licensed Small FCCH Data: Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [Dataquest](#)

The following is a summary of the number of spaces in child care centers and FCCHs for school age children (ages 5-12). The need for care for this age group is unique. Families often rely on expanded learning and after school activities (also known as license-exempt programs e.g. ASES, etc.) in place of formal licensed child care care. These are typically run by schools, districts, or community-based organizations and are often located on school campuses. The following is a summary of the licensed child care programs only.

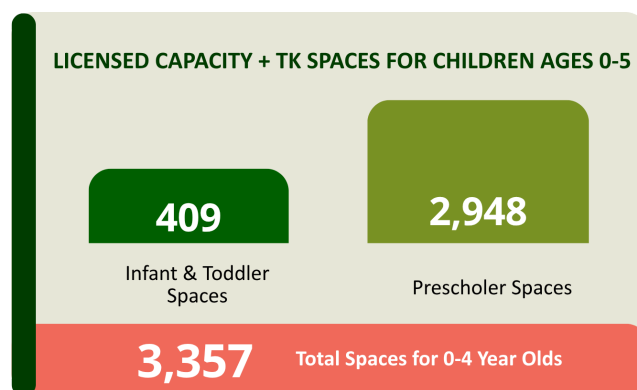


Exhibit 22. School age care capacity in Humboldt County, by region

	Capacity in centers	Capacity in FCCHs	Total school age capacity
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	0	6	6
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	30	32	62
Eureka Unified High School District	44	75	119
Ferndale Unified School District	0	3	3
Fortuna Union High School District	0	38	38
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	0	2	2
Mattole Unified School District	0	0	0
Humboldt County	74	156	230

Note: The following formula is used to estimate the child care capacity by age in FCCHs: 15% of FCCH licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children.

Licensed Center and Large FCCH data: [Community Care Licensing Department of Social Services](#), March 2026

Licensed Small FCCH Data: Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

It is estimated there are also 375 Family, Friends or Neighbors (FFNs) providing care in Humboldt County April 2026); however, the number of FFNs is likely much higher as only FFNs receiving payment subsidies are included in this count.

Enrollment Trends

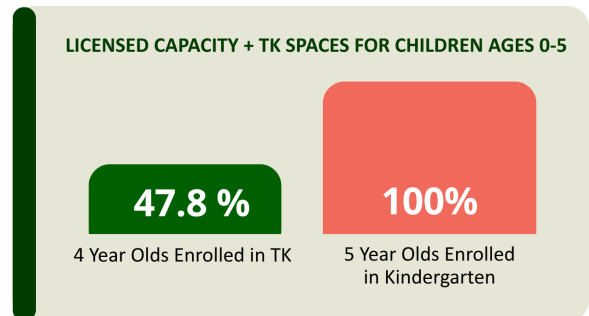
More than half (56%) of parents use child care services that follow traditional weekday schedules, while only 9% utilize evening care and 6% rely on weekend care according to the Humboldt County Child Care Access Survey (2024). However, this is likely due to the limited availability of care outside normal working hours as nearly 55% of parents expressed a preference for nontraditional options (Humboldt County Child Care Access Survey, 2024). Many parents adapt by working from home, bringing children to work, or relying on family members to patchwork care options together.

Child care programs and school districts are adjusting in response to the roll-out of Universal TK. As a result, many child care programs are enrolling fewer 4 year olds and school districts are having to expand services to meet the needs of younger children.

Enrollment in TK and Kindergarten Trends

It is estimated there are approximately 1,397 four-year-olds and 1,296 five-year-olds in Humboldt County (US Census Data, 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table [B09001](#)) and as of the 2024-25 school year there were 668 children enrolled in TK and 1,169 children enrolled in Kindergarten (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [Dataquest](#)).

It can therefore be estimated that 47.8% of 4 year olds in Humboldt County enrolled in TK and 100% of 5 year olds enrolled in Kindergarten. Due to the age eligibility threshold for enrollment in TK (which has been expanding each year recently) and Kindergarten, it is impossible to make an exact calculation regarding the number of eligible children per age group and grade.



The percent of eligible 4 year olds who are enrolled in TK in Humboldt County is lower than California as a whole. There are varying estimates regarding California TK enrollment ranging from 59% of eligible children ([Learning Policy Institute, 2024](#)) to 70% ([Public Policy Institute, 2025](#)). The variation is likely due to the evolving eligibility age criteria and sources using different means to calculate the number of eligible children. The enrollment rate range in California is somewhat comparable to those in other states that offer universal TK (e.g. Florida, Iowa, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin), ranging from 66% to 76% ([Learning Policy Institute, 2024](#)).

Humboldt County's Kindergarten enrollment rate is higher than California trends. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Department of Education (CDE) estimated that around 95% of eligible children attended Kindergarten (public & private combined), however current estimates post-pandemic are closer to 90% ([California Assembly Committee on Education, 2024](#)).



CHAPTER 8:

MET AND UNMET NEED FOR CARE



The number of licensed child care spaces available to children varies significantly based on their age, location, and the kind of care. Approximately 1 in 10 children (0-2 year olds) have access to a licensed child care space and 5 in 10 children (0-4 year olds) have access to a licensed child care or TK space (based on the current maximum supply of licensed care). However, as previously noted, a space does not always equate to a space open for enrollment and availability is largely dependent on many factors.

There are more than 3,300 licensed child care and TK spaces in Humboldt County for children (0-4 year olds). Despite this, an unmet need for care remains.

- The unmet need is most pronounced for younger children (0-2 year olds); 88% face an unmet need for care.
- Although in theory, there is no unmet need for preschool age children (3 & 4 year olds) this does not mean all of the licensed spaces are actually available for enrollment, and to all children within that age range, particularly three year olds. Availability is dependent on a variety of factors as previously mentioned.
- Nearly half (46%) of all children (0-4 year olds) face a collective unmet need for care in Humboldt County.

Note: A discussion regarding the unmet need for school age children is not included due to the role after school activities and license-exempt programs play in care options.

Exhibit 23. Unmet need for care is most pronounced for infant/toddlers in Humboldt County

	Number of children	Total capacity	Percent of met need for care	Percent of unmet need for care
Children ages 0-2 years	3,418	409	12.0%	88.0%
Children ages 3 & 4 years	2,795	2,948	100+%	0%
Children ages 0-4 years	6,213	3,357	54.0%	46.0%

Note: Capacity is defined as licensed capacity and TK

Children population data: US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)

Licensed Center and Large FCCH data: [Community Care Licensing Department of Social Services](#), March 2026

Licensed Small FCCH Data: Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [Dataquest](#)

The potential met and unmet need for care varies by location within Humboldt County. Regions with the greatest unmet need for infant/toddler care are Southern Humboldt Unified School District (98.8%), Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District (97.3%), and Fortuna Union High School District (91.8%). The small size of the population of children (0-2 year olds) in Ferndale Unified School District restricts meaningful inclusion in the following chart.

1 in 10 children (0 - 2 year olds) have access to a licensed child care space



Exhibit 24. Estimated unmet need for care for infant/toddlers (0-2 year olds) varies by location

	Number of children 0-2 years	Total capacity	Percent of met need for care	Percent of unmet need for care
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	223	6	2.7%	97.3%
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	948	150	15.8%	84.2%
Eureka Unified High School District	1,479	199	13.5%	86.5%
Ferndale Unified School District	*	*	NA	NA
Fortuna Union High School District	599	49	8.2%	91.8%
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	169	2	1.2%	98.8%
Mattole Unified School District	0	0	NA	NA
Humboldt County	3,418	409	12.0%	88.0%

Note: Data for categories with counts fewer than 11 are not displayed in this report in order to protect individual privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Children population data: US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)

Licensed Center and Large FCCH data: [Community Care Licensing Department of Social Services](#), March 2026

Licensed Small FCCH Data: Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [Dataquest](#)

It is estimated that there is a minimal unmet need for care for preschool age children in Humboldt County based on maximum licensed capacity and TK spaces. However, as previously mentioned, licensed capacity is not a reflection of operating capacity or current enrollment. The following chart may overstate the availability of care for preschool age children, particularly for 3 year olds and children living in various regions within the county. Additionally the unmet need does not take into account if and how workforce shortages impact the availability of care, as well as hours of operation, location, and quality of care. Lastly, many local child care programs report unfilled spaces thus suggesting that the available care may not align with families needs (e.g. located in proximity to where parents work or live, etc.) therefore caution is advised when reviewing the estimates of met and unmet need for this age group.

Exhibit 25. Estimated unmet need for care for preschoolers (3 & 4 year olds) by location

	Number of children 3 & 4 years	Total licensed capacity + TK	Percent of met need for care	Percent of unmet need for care
Klamath Trinity Joint Unified School District	25	80	100+%	0%
Northern Humboldt Union High School District	799	897	100+%	0%
Eureka Unified High School District	1,247	1,259	100+%	0%
Ferndale Unified School District	36	86	100+%	0%
Fortuna Union High School District	546	504	92.3%	7.7%
Southern Humboldt Unified School District	131	114	87.0%	13.0%
Mattole Unified School District	11	8	72.7%	27.3%
Humboldt County	2,795	29,48	100+%	0%

Children population data: US Census Data. 2024, ACS 5-Year Estimates. [Table B09001](#)

Licensed Center and Large FCCH data: [Community Care Licensing Department of Social Services](#), March 2026

Licensed Small FCCH Data: Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026

TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, [Dataquest](#)

Local Efforts to Address Unmet Need for Care

In the past two years, several developments have contributed to expanding early learning and care facilities in Humboldt County. Since July 1, 2024 there were 22 new licenses issued to sites (16 homes, 6 centers) ([Changing Tides Family Services, March 2026](#)). There has been growing interest among providers and community partners in expanding infant and toddler spaces, particularly in response to the increased availability of Transitional Kindergarten (TK), which has shifted demand within the mixed-delivery system.

A handful of new facilities are in the planning phase and will eventually offer a combination of child care services. However, progress has been slowed by funding barriers. There has also been interest in developing a co-located child care and housing project, though this concept is still in early discussion stages. Local facility development and renovation efforts continue to be affected by broader statewide barriers, including limited funding opportunities to support facility development and renovation.

CHAPTER 9:

WORKFORCE



Workforce challenges continue to affect early learning and care programs locally. Programs report difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff, which in some cases has delayed the opening of classrooms. Additionally, a backlog in the processing of required permits and credentials has created delays for members of the workforce seeking to qualify for various positions. These permitting delays, including those related to teacher credentialing, are part of a broader statewide issue that is also impacting providers in Humboldt County.

The workforce is further burdened by increasing budget cuts. The consistently tenuous status of the budget has put child care facilities at a grave disadvantage. Many facilities are reducing staff and reducing their desired capacity or offering half day services. Child care providers frequently receive reimbursements in arrears and funding is frozen when the state and federal budget cannot be resolved. This has resulted in many leaving the workforce all together.

Humboldt County participated in the [State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#). The Humboldt County Office of Education sponsored the county profile, which provides a snapshot of the local early care and education workforce, with comparison data from the region and state. The profile includes information on educator characteristics, well-being, and staffing, and helps inform understanding of workforce conditions in the county. No recent focus groups or surveys have been conducted with local educational agencies (LEAs) for this Needs Assessment.

Workforce Turnover Rates

The annual child care workforce turnover rate is higher in center-based teacher positions in Humboldt County (28%) compared to California (22%), however lower in FCCHs locally (17%) compared to the state (30%). Additionally, in Humboldt County only 14% of FCCHs and 25% of center teachers indicated that they plan on getting a different job or retiring in the next three years.

Exhibit 26. Turnover rates among child care workers

	Humboldt County	California
Lead teachers in all centers	28%	22%
Assistant teachers in all centers	31%	26%
FCCH providers (small and large)	17%	30%

[State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Emotional Well-Being of Workforce

Although the majority of child workers reported that they intend to stay in the field, they also reported high levels of stress (36% of FCCH providers and 73% of center teaching staff) and significant depressive symptoms (21% of FCCH providers and 52% of center teaching staff). Despite this, 90% of FCCH providers and 80% of center teaching staff reported they feel they make a difference, which likely contributes to their commitment to the children they serve and working in the field. Targeted supports for child care workers could help mitigate the stress and burn-out they experience while also helping to keep qualified early care teachers in the field.

Exhibit 27. Emotional well-being of child care workers

	FCCH providers	Center teaching staff
High level of perceived stress	36%	73%
Significant depressive symptoms	21%	52%
Feel they make a difference	90%	80%

[State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

Demographics and Education of Workforce

The majority (63%) of local FCCH providers and Center teaching staff (55%) identify as White and speak English (90% FCCHs and 96% Center teaching staff) whereas only 27% of FCCHs and 14% of center teaching staff speak Spanish. A minority of FCCHs (13%) and 8% of center-based teaching staff were born in a country outside of the United States.

More advanced teacher training, skills, and competencies lead to higher quality programs for children. There are different educational requirements for different positions and child care settings. A smaller percentage of local FCCHs (7%) have a high school degree or less compared to 18% in California, yet cumulatively, a greater percentage of local FCCHs have a higher degree (37% have an Associates degree and 17% have a Bachelor’s degree or more) compared to those in California (22% have an Associates degree and 29% have a Bachelor’s degree or more). A higher education is more common for teachers in centers. Locally, 33% of center-based teachers have an Associates degree and 37% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (compared to California, 27% have an Associates degree and 42% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher).

Workforce Wages

Child care workers have historically been paid low wages making it difficult to attract and sustain quality teachers, which in turn impacts the quality of programs. Local wages have neither kept pace with the cost of living, nor with the increased education levels of child care professionals. Locally center-based teaching staff have the highest earning potential of all child care workers, averaging \$45,000-52,000/year compared to FCCHs \$34,500-43,000/year. However, all teachers (center-based and FCCHs) are earning less than the average across the state. The following chart is based on self reported median hourly rates, which were converted into annual income based on a full time 40 hour/week work schedule schedule.

Exhibit 28. Median self reported wages of child care workforce

	Humboldt County	California
Head Start/Title 5 Center Lead Teachers	\$25.00/hour \$52,000/year	\$27.00/hour \$56,160/year
Head Start/Title 5 Center Assistant Teachers	\$21.90/hour \$45,552/year	\$23.56/hour \$49,005/year
All FCCHs (small and large average)	\$16.59-\$20.67/hour \$34,500-\$43,000/year	\$21.63-\$26.92/hour \$45,000-\$56,000/year

[State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

The median hourly rate for child care workers is far below the average earnings of TK and K teachers according to [The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (2023).

Exhibit 29. Average earnings of child care workers compared to TK/K teachers

	Median hourly wage	Mean annual wage
Child care workers	\$17.45/hour	\$38,390/year
Preschool teachers, except Special Education	\$20.76/hour	\$45,640/year
Education and Child Care Administrators, Preschool, and Daycare workers	\$28.48/hour	\$68,900/year
Kindergarten teachers, except Special Education	NA	\$78,730/year

Note: Category titles in this chart are defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor. [The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), 2023

Workforce Economic Well-Being

In addition to low pay, many child care workers struggle with food insufficiency, rely on public assistance, and lack health insurance and retirement savings according to [State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#).

Exhibit 30. Child care workforce faces economic struggles

	Humboldt County	California
FCCHs enrolled in health insurance	82%	90%
Center teachers enrolled in health insurance	92%	94%
FCCHs with any retirement savings	32%	27%
Center teachers with any retirement savings	28%	54%
FCCHs who are food sufficient	59%	60%
Center teachers who are food sufficient	46%	57%
FCCHs enrolled in public assistance programs	46%	41%
Center teachers enrolled in public assistance programs	60%	34%

[State of the Early Care and Education Workforce, Humboldt County, 2026](#). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

CHAPTER 10:

QUALITY CARE



Research highlights the critical role of early care and education (ECE) program quality for children’s optimal outcomes. Children who participate in high-quality early childhood programs experience greater academic success, including improved school readiness (Barnett, 2011) and higher graduation rates (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These children require less time in special education services due to early developmental gains (Reynolds et al., 2011). Longitudinal studies illustrate that participation in high-quality early education leads to greater productivity and success in adulthood, including higher educational attainment, increased earnings, and improved life outcomes (Heckman et al., 2010).

Quality programs have environments, relationships, interactions, and activities to support children’s growth and development in order to prepare them for success in school and life. High-quality childcare, particularly for infants and toddlers, requires smaller class sizes and lower staff-to-child ratios, which are essential for fostering a safe and nurturing environment. However, these standards also limit the financial viability of childcare operations, as fewer children per staff member reduces potential revenue without corresponding increases in funding. This creates a difficult balance for providers, who must weigh financial sustainability against the imperative of maintaining high standards of care.

Humboldt County continues to see strong interest in participation in Quality Counts California (QCC) programs, reflecting both workforce development needs and provider interest in quality improvement. In September 2025, the Humboldt QCC grant program received applications from 57 child care programs, including Tribal child care programs, Head Start programs, private and state preschools, and family child care homes, for the four available Quality Improvement (QI) grants. Participation options include both program-level and individual-level grants; however, current coaching capacity and grant funding limit the number of applicants that can be served. Many providers reapply each year, and several new applicants join annually, including providers who are new to the child care field as well as those new to the QCC grant program.

Current participation includes:

- IMPACT Legacy Grant: 32 individuals
- Quality Improvement Grant: 27 programs
- California State Preschool Program (CSPP) QRIS Block Grant: 12 programs
- Workforce Pathways Grant: 21 individuals

Peer coaches supporting participating programs report high levels of engagement. Participants consistently complete more than the minimum required professional development hours. Providers across program types, particularly family child care providers, report that they value the networking, mutual learning, and professional support that comes from participating in the grant programs and shared professional development opportunities.

Parent Input

Local parents (n = 149) were surveyed as part of the recent Humboldt County Mixed-Delivery Universal Pre-Kindergarten Needs Assessment report (December 2024) regarding their views on the current context of care. Outreach to historically underserved populations was prioritized, including Native American families, families that have children with exceptional needs, those in frontier areas, and Spanish speaking families. A quarter of respondents identified having a child/children with exceptional needs. Household size varied, with the majority of respondents (65%) reporting two adults in the household. Single-adult households accounted for 15% of respondents. Nearly half (46%) of families indicated that their household consisted of two employed adults, whereas 32% reported one employed

adult. A small percentage of families (4%) reported no employed adults. Survey respondents represented a diverse range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. The input collected provided insight into how parents learn about child care options, the factors that influence the care they select, and the kind of care they desire. Other topics included child care schedule preferences and impact of employment on child care decision making.

Additionally, First 5 Humboldt County recently conducted a playgroup parent survey and asked about the policy or system changes parents would like First 5 Humboldt to advocate and/or raise awareness for. There was overwhelming support to advocate for childcare access and affordability.

Local parents voiced the need for child care staff who are trained to support children with special needs or those who have experienced trauma according to research conducted by [California Center for Rural Policy \(CCRP\) at Cal Poly Humboldt \(2024\)](#). Families seek caregivers who understand the unique developmental, emotional, and educational challenges their children face and can provide the specialized care they require. Many parents would like to see more professional development opportunities for childcare workers to build expertise in these areas. However, high staff turnover makes it difficult for providers to invest in long-term training, leading to inconsistencies in care. Without a stable and well-trained workforce, parents struggle to find childcare options that meet their children's specific needs, highlighting the urgent need for systemic improvements in staff training and retention.



REFERENCES

- Barnett, W. S. (2011). [Effectiveness of early educational intervention](#). *Science*, 333(6045), 975–978.
- California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) at Cal Poly Humboldt. (2024). [Humboldt County childcare needs assessment](#).
- Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. A., & Yavitz, A. (2010). [The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program](#). *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(1–2), 114–128.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). [Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures](#). The National Academies Press.
- Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., White, B. A. B., Ou, S. R., & Robertson, D. L. (2011). [Age 26 cost–benefit analysis of the Child-Parent Center early education program](#). *Child Development*, 82(1), 379–404.
- Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M. R., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K. A., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. J. (2013). [Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education](#). Society for Research in Child Development.