



OCTOBER 2025

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

## Child Care Facilities Master Plan



# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CHILD CARE FACILITIES MASTER PLAN

2025 - 2030

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### *Navigating the Master Plan*

The **Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan** is presented in two connected documents: the **Master Plan** and the **Toolkit**.

The **Master Plan** shows what is needed, what can be achieved and how to make it happen. **Next Steps and Potential Measures** are offered at the end of each strategy, along with a **Resources** as well as links to related tools in the Toolkit and on the internet that can help with planning and implementation.

The **Toolkit** offers hands-on resources for partners directly involved in planning, design, and implementation to help them hit the ground running and quickly begin the work. Each page includes links to the **Tables of Contents** for both documents, making it easy to move between them.

Together, these documents form a single blueprint - a vision of what's possible and the tools to help make it happen.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was developed for the County of Santa Barbara through a partnership of Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County (CRR), Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF), Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council (CCPC), and Eileen Monahan Consulting. Research, data analysis, content, and report design were provided by Holly Goldberg, PhD; Kristen Anderson, PhD; Kathy Tama, MBA; Geomara Flores, and Eileen Monahan.

A special thanks to child care operators for generously sharing their stories, planning department staff for their interest and participation, First 5 Santa Barbara County for their wisdom and guidance, the County of Santa Barbara for investing in early childhood, and all the experts who provided valuable insights, perspective and input along the way.



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### Quick Overview of Key Terms

There are many terms commonly used to refer to licensed early learning programs, including child care, early care and education, day care, and preschool. For the purpose of this report the term **child care** is used.

There are also many terms used to identify child care operators and the programs they administer. Throughout this report, the terms **child care operator** and **provider** are used interchangeably, for both center and family child care operators.

*A comprehensive list of definitions can be found in the Appendices.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan and Toolkit (2025 - 2030)

High-quality child care is essential to a thriving community. It supports children's development, allows families to work, and strengthens the economy. But in Santa Barbara County, the supply of licensed child care spaces, especially for infants and toddlers, falls far short of demand.

This Master Plan is a call to action for child care supporters and providers, local government leaders, planners, funders, housing developers, and advocates who want to be part of the solution. Building from the 2024 Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment and Planning for Child Care report, the Plan works in tandem with a toolkit to lay out a practical and coordinated guide for creating 3,000 new licensed child care spaces by June 2030. This target is grounded in local data and experience. Between 2020 and 2025, more than 2,000 new spaces were created through the combined efforts of child care operators, public agencies, and community partners. The Santa Barbara County community can build on that momentum with deeper coordination, new tools, and a shared commitment to act.

#### Why This Matters Now

The child care needs are urgent. Today, only one in ten infants and toddlers in Santa Barbara County has access to a licensed child care space. In some regions, that number is even lower. If we want more child care, we must have more facilities. And facilities take time to plan, fund, design, and build. The existing gaps affect working families, especially in North County and other communities with high rates of child poverty. They also affect local employers who struggle to recruit and retain workers without reliable care options.

The good news is that more than 130 child care operators in Santa Barbara County have expressed interest in expanding or starting new programs. What they need is help navigating permitting, securing funding, and improving their facilities to meet best practice standards.



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## Five Strategies to Drive Progress

### **1. Build a Strong Infrastructure**

Create a staffed coalition, centralize guidance, and expand technical assistance to operators and developers. Use shared data tools to guide decision-making and measure results.

### **2. Ease the Land Use and Permitting Process**

Support all jurisdictions in updating zoning codes, streamlining permit reviews, and removing unnecessary regulatory barriers. Share model policies and templates to help cities move faster.

### **3. Identify and Develop Locations for Child Care**

Use local data to locate high-need areas. Promote co-location of child care with new housing and employment sites. Offer site assessment tools and guidance for facility planning.

### **4. Create Facilities Funding Models and Sources**

Blend local, state, and private funding. Help operators braid together grants, loans, and tax credits to build sustainable programs. Explore shared services and collective financing models.

### **5. Design for Quality, Workforce, and Viability**

Offer training and planning tools that help operators design child-centered, staff-friendly facilities. Emphasize long-term sustainability and support the expansion of infant and toddler care.

## Stakeholders and Partners

This Master Plan is intended for:

- Technical assistance providers or “Intermediaries”
- Child care providers and operators
- Local planners and policymakers
- Funders and philanthropic partners
- Housing developers and employers
- Early childhood advocates

Each of these groups has a role to play, whether by supporting projects on the ground, shaping policy, investing in infrastructure, or amplifying community priorities.

## A Coordinated Push, Starting Now

Santa Barbara County has strong partners, a growing base of public and private investment, and real interest in moving forward. What is needed now is more robust and seamless coordination, shared leadership, and a focus on action towards a common goal. With the right structure in place, the next five years can bring meaningful gains for children, families, and the broader community, and result in a sustainable system to develop child care facilities into the future.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### THE CHILD CARE FACILITIES MASTER PLAN

High-quality child care strengthens the foundation of a healthy community. It supports children's development during their most critical years, helps families participate in the workforce, and contributes to local economic success and stability. The facilities where this care takes place are central to this equation as they shape the daily experiences of children and educators and reflect a community's commitment to early learning and family well-being.

Although access for families is improving, Santa Barbara County continues to face a serious shortage of high-quality child care, especially for infants and toddlers. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the essential role of child care in communities and exposed the fragile systems that support it. The financial and community support developed for child care during that time offered lessons for ongoing system improvement. Expanding access and quality requires attention to the physical spaces where care occurs - their location, condition, and ability to grow. While the process of launching or expanding programs is complex (involving funding, regulation, and construction), many programs have succeeded in expanding and sustaining themselves, often with help from local and state partners.

In response to the ongoing shortage, two foundational reports were published in 2024: [Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment](#) and [Planning for Child Care in Santa Barbara County](#). The new Master Plan builds on these efforts and provides a guide for addressing the identified needs for child care facilities development and improvement.

#### How to Use This Master Plan

This document serves as a guide to support the development, expansion, and maintenance of licensed child care facilities across Santa Barbara County, with an emphasis on infant and toddler care.

Interested stakeholders will discover:

- Key findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment and Planning reports, and status updates
- Data, examples, resources, and practical steps for child care advocates engaged in this work
- Five Strategies to help expand child care access through facility development
- A toolkit with templates and guides to accompany each strategy
- Potential actions that can be taken, along with suggested timelines

The Master Plan is both a practical tool and a reference. Readers are encouraged to find the sections most relevant to their work and select strategies, data, and tools to guide decision-making and collaboration. The document is best used in tandem with the Toolkit, along with the previously published Needs Assessment and Land Use Planning documents, as part of a community-wide effort. *A glossary of terms can be found in the Appendices.*

## **Countywide Target: 3,000 New Spaces by 2030**

With this Master Plan, an ambitious but achievable goal is proposed, to create 3,000 new child care spaces between July 2025 and June 2030. Santa Barbara County has already laid a strong foundation for facility expansion over the years. Progress is reflected in current projects, and new local opportunities have emerged, such as co-location of child care with new housing developments and new supportive land use policies. Meeting this target will require thoughtful and creative solutions to familiar challenges, including designing care specifically for infants and toddlers and addressing persistent funding gaps.

## **Objectives of the Master Plan**

The Master Plan is designed to expand the availability of licensed child care spaces by inspiring action across the County to:

1. Align and strengthen existing efforts and resources into a coordinated, Countywide system for child care facility planning and support
2. Develop and maintain facilities that prioritize infant and toddler care
3. Establish long-term funding and resource options that support facility construction, renovation, and operational infrastructure

## **Intended Audience**

This plan is designed for:

- Child care intermediaries (organizations and professionals that support child care operators with startup and expansion)
- Local government planners and leaders
- Child care providers and operators
- Funders and community coalitions
- Child care advocates

## **Partners and Process**

This Master Plan is part of a larger effort to ensure that families in Santa Barbara County have access to high-quality child care. Funded by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors through federal American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) allocations, the initiative supports the following goals:

- Increase the infant and toddler child care workforce
- Expand facilities through grants, technical assistance, and business training
- Clarify facility-related needs across the County
- Help providers recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

The project is a result of a long-standing collaboration among the Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF), Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County (CRR), and the Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council (CCPC). Oversight of project grants is provided by First 5 Santa Barbara County, under the County of Santa Barbara.

Each partner brings distinct strengths to this work:

- As part of the **Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF)** mission to mobilize collective wisdom and philanthropic capital to build empathetic, inclusive, and resilient communities, SBF has identified child care as a critical area of focus, recognizing the vital role it plays in supporting working families and setting young children up for success. Through convening, developing strategic partnerships, and providing child care grantmaking programs, SBF seeks to address the challenges of providing quality, affordable child care options for families in Santa Barbara County.
- **Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County (CRR)** is a key collaborator in this effort with deep community connections and expertise. Their mission is centered on developing strong and healthy families by providing education, care, and resource systems to children, parents, and caregivers, with particular emphasis on supporting low-income and underrepresented populations.
- The **Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council (CCPC)**, a program of the Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO), leads collaborative efforts in planning, coordinating, and advocating for high-quality, accessible early care and education across the County. They offer extensive knowledge of the local child care landscape and commitment to systems-level change.

This work also aligns with other ARPA-funded efforts led by United Way of Santa Barbara County (United Way of Santa Barbara County), which focus on needs assessment, employer-sponsored child care, middle-income scholarships, and emergency care for first responders.



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## SECTION 2: CHILD CARE FACILITIES AND WHY THEY MATTER

Early childhood is a critical time for brain development, and access to high-quality child care during these years has lasting impacts on a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth. When working families cannot find quality care, they may be forced to settle for inadequate options or leave the workforce entirely, a burden that falls most heavily on low- and middle-income families and negatively affects the community's economy. Decades of research show the lasting benefits of early care and education on child development and family economic stability (*Heckman, 2011*; *Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016*). Ensuring equitable access to child care facilities strengthens family stability, supports healthy development, and contributes to long-term economic resilience.

The quality of child care facilities reflects a community's values about children, families, and early learning. When designed with care, they become places where children thrive, educators feel supported, and families feel welcome. Whether adapting a home to be a licensed family child care program, renovating an existing building, or developing a new center, every child care facility project should begin with a clear, best-practice design.

Local child care providers routinely navigate complex regulations, adapt spaces never intended for child care, and piece together funding from multiple sources, often contributing their own resources to remain open and affordable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many communities saw widespread closures, no centers and few family child care programs (FCCs) in Santa Barbara County closed their doors permanently. This resilience and determination are commendable, but they point to a deeper gap: the absence of a coordinated, well-resourced system to support facility development and maintenance. Physical infrastructure deserves the same attention as tuition, staffing, and program quality.

California's Community Care Licensing child care regulations establish only the basic requirements for health and safety. True quality goes further, reflecting what research and practice show children need for healthy development, supervision, and well-being. Starting with strong standards provides a vision that can be adapted to fit the space, philosophy, timeline, and budget without sacrificing quality.

Some communities are improving the child care landscape by developing local expertise and establishing technical assistance hubs that provide funding, training, and practical support for child care facilities. These hubs help providers manage licensing, zoning, building codes, design, and business planning, guiding them through complex projects from start to finish. Santa Barbara County has laid important groundwork in this area and has strong partnerships and resources to build on.

A coordinated, long-term approach can address facility challenges through dedicated investments in funding, local knowledge, supportive policies, and strong partnerships to ensure that every child has access to a safe, developmentally appropriate space. Stronger infrastructure relieves pressure on operators, giving them the stability to grow their businesses, retain and properly pay skilled staff, and continue providing the high-quality care families need. By prioritizing excellence in design and a solid infrastructure, communities can provide high quality spaces that serve families today and for generations to come.

## **Family Child Care Homes (FCCs) and Centers**

FCCs and child care centers have the ability to offer high quality early learning services to children and support for working families. Both settings offer unique benefits in programming and facility development. The process of creating a child care center can be complex and costly; however, once established it can serve a large number of children and families for many years. Care offered in an operator's home via an FCC is generally easier and less expensive to launch. FCCs often offer more flexible hours of operation including evenings and weekends. Centers typically provide a more formal setting with multiple staff members and dedicated classrooms, and FCCs offer a smaller, home-like atmosphere for those seeking personalized care settings. When planning for child care, it is imperative that parental choice is honored by supporting both types of care, to reflect the needs and desires of families in each community.



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The Master Plan considers both types of facilities as essential to expanding access to child care. However, there is more information about centers in this Master Plan as the development of those facilities is more complex to start up.

## SECTION 3: INSIGHTS ON SANTA BARBARA COUNTY'S CHILD CARE FACILITIES

Santa Barbara County's gap in child care availability has real and lasting consequences. According to a [2019 analysis by the Bipartisan Policy Center](#), this gap results in an estimated \$305 million in lost annual revenue for the County's families, businesses, and government. The need is especially critical for infant and toddler care, which is scarcer than preschool-aged options, due to a successful buildup of preschool care over several years, along with the movement of many 4-year-olds out of licensed care and into the newly expanded Transitional Kindergarten programs operated by school districts. And access to affordable, high-quality care varies significantly by region and family income level.

While the challenges are substantial, there is also opportunity. Many child care operators across the County have expressed strong interest in expanding their services, particularly to serve more infants and toddlers. The needed investments and system-level support they identified through survey responses can be the key to unlocking this additional capacity.

The following key points summarize findings from the 2024 Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment and include status updates. Together, they highlight where the need is greatest, where momentum already exists, and what barriers must be addressed to expand access to quality child care facilities.

### Insight 1: More Child Care Facilities are Needed, Especially for Infants and Toddlers

There are 32,874 children (ages 0-5) living in Santa Barbara County (American Institute for Research (AIR), 2020), with the largest portion residing in North County. Yet there are only 1,457 licensed ECE spaces for 16,883 children aged 0-2 years old, and 11,892 spaces (9,782 licensed ECE spaces plus 1,996 TK spaces) for 15,991 preschool age children aged 3-5 living in Santa Barbara County.

This translates to one in 10 children aged 0-2 having access to a licensed child care space in Santa Barbara County, although this ranges from 0% to 13% by location. Additionally, only 7 in every 10 preschool aged children (ages 3-5) have access to a licensed child care or TK space. The shortage is especially pronounced in rural and low-income communities, where facility gaps are compounded by other systemic barriers.

1 in 10 infants and toddlers currently have access to a licensed child care space



7 in every 10 preschool-aged children have access to a licensed child care or TK space



Even where licensed spaces exist, availability is not guaranteed. Many child care programs don't operate at full capacity for a variety of reasons, and long waitlists are common. A licensed space does not always equate to an available space.

## **Insight 2: Disparities in Access to Affordable Child Care Persist**

Child care access is more than a matter of capacity; it is an equity issue. The cost of care and families' abilities to afford care vary widely across the county. The availability of subsidized care is limited despite the need being vast.

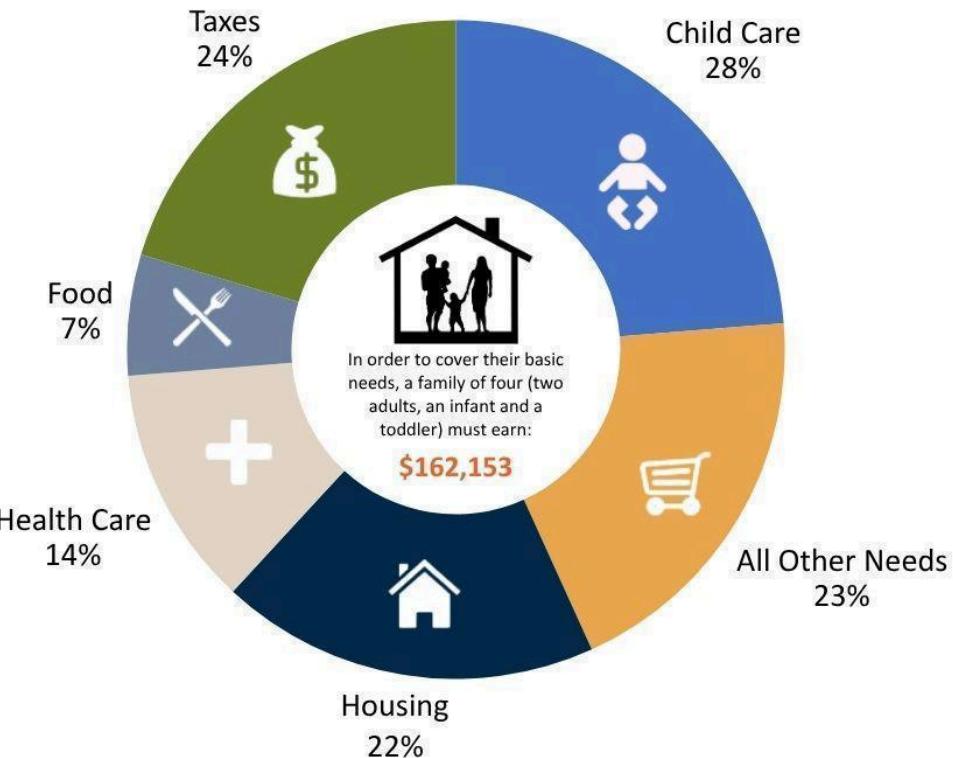
Poverty rates for children ages 0-5 are highest in North and Mid County, where more than 1 in 5 children live in poverty compared to 9% child poverty rate in South County. Communities with the highest rates of children (ages 0-5) living in poverty are Orcutt/Los Alamos (23%), Santa Maria (22%), and New Cuyama (21%), which are the same areas with the lowest percentage of children living in homes with working families. Even though North County is more affordable, children who are living there are twice as likely to face poverty compared to children living in South County.

The cost of child care varies based on location, type of care (center-based or FCC), and age group, making affordability a challenge for working families across the County. Child care tuition is highest for infants and toddlers, and in regions where supply is most limited. Fortunately, there are some tuition subsidies available through child care programs with state and federal grants, and through state funds available through SBCEO and CRR. Families needing subsidized spaces must balance waiting for a space and funding support to make the cost of care within reach.

The annual household income needed to make ends meet for a family of four (two adults, one infant/toddler, one preschooler) is **\$162,153** in Santa Barbara County ([Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare](#), 2024). This means **both adults** need to earn **at least \$38.89/hour** and work full time to earn **\$13,513 per month total**. The high cost of living in Santa Barbara County creates additional challenges for single parent households. A single parent with an infant and preschooler needs to earn at least **\$73.97/hour** and work full time to earn **\$13,018 per month** to make ends meet.

The following chart illustrates the allocation of expenses and what it takes for two working parents with two young children to make ends meet in Santa Barbara County. Child care accounts for 28% of a family's income and is a greater monthly expense than housing.

Working Families Making Ends Meet in Santa Barbara County



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/>

It is estimated that 68% of the child care operators in Santa Barbara County accept California Alternative Payment Program (APP) subsidies to offset parent tuition fees (CRR, 2025). There were 14,806 children who qualified and were eligible for subsidized care yet only 4,006 were enrolled in subsidized spaces, such as Title 5 State Preschool Program, Head Start/Early Head Start, CalWORKs Stage 2 and 3 and APP, according to the [Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council Needs Assessment \(2020\)](#). This means more than 10,000 children who were eligible for, and needing subsidized care could not access a space, thus underscoring the need for facilities that offer subsidized options. CRR currently holds a waitlist of more than 1,500 children whose families qualify for subsidized care but cannot be served due to insufficient funding (as of spring 2025). Only 1 in 9 eligible children under age 12 receive subsidized child care across California (California Budget & Policy Center, 2023). Families with the greatest economic need are disproportionately left behind, particularly in high-cost counties like Santa Barbara.

### Insight 3: There is Interest in Facility Expansion, Yet There Are Barriers

In the past 10 years, 16 child care centers and 31 FCCs expanded to add more licensed spaces, accounting for **587 new spaces** according to the Child Care Facilities Survey, Santa Barbara County Child Care Needs Assessment (2024). However, five centers and 23 FCCs indicated that they had wanted to expand and were unable to do so due to lack of available qualified staff to serve additional children and lack of adequate funding for the facility expansion/construction.

When surveyed, one hundred and thirty-three operators (37 centers and 96 FCCs) indicated a strong interest in expanding their child care facilities or starting new programs to serve more children. Operators in all regions of the County anticipate the need for facility renovations and repair in the next five years. Surveyed operators also reported that they face multiple obstacles related to their facility including:

<p><b>Aging or inadequate infrastructure</b> issues which limit the ability of existing facilities to grow or meet current licensing standards. Most operators anticipate the need for moderate to major facility renovations and repair in the next 5 years.</p>	<p><b>Workforce shortages</b>, particularly in infant-toddler care, making it difficult to maintain or increase enrollment. Difficulty hiring and retaining staff were reported as barriers to operating at desired enrollment according to 36.6% of centers and 9.6% of FCCs.</p>	<p><b>Funding for capital improvements and operating costs</b> remains a major barrier to facility development and expansion, especially for smaller, community-based operators.</p>
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### Insight 4: Land Use Policy Changes Are Needed to Create More Child Care Facilities

Nine local jurisdictions (all 8 cities and the County) shared their land use policies and processes through a survey and follow up sessions leading to the Planning for Child Care in Santa Barbara County report, part of the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment (2024). Findings revealed that as of January, 2024, some jurisdictions had incorporated child care considerations into their general plans, recognizing the importance of comprehensive planning in shaping zoning and policy frameworks that support the development of child care facilities. Other strategies implemented by some jurisdictions included permitting child care centers “by right” in certain zones, or through streamlined administrative processes, to facilitate new and expanded sites.

The following reflects the progress made by the County and cities as of January 2024:

- 4 Jurisdictions address child care in their General Plans.** Comprehensively planning for child care through the General Plan process can direct zoning and other policies that can spur the growth of child care facilities.
- 5 Jurisdictions allow child care centers “by right” in at least one zone.** Facilitating the establishment of child care centers either by right (no permit) or through a streamlined ministerial or administrative permitting process encourages the integration of child care facilities in communities, ensuring families have convenient access to vital child care services.
- 3 Jurisdictions have made, or are currently making, efforts to streamline the permitting process for child care.** Intentionally encouraging child care facilities development through streamlined and low-cost processes and incentives removes barriers that may slow down or stall projects.
- 6 Jurisdictions offer at least one incentive or mitigation for child care projects.** Offering incentives, such as a density bonus, parking reduction or traffic mitigation can stimulate interest in child care facilities development by making the project more feasible.
- 9 Jurisdictions were aware of SB234** (large family child care “by right”), and all but one have complied, are in the process of complying, or have a plan to do so.

Additionally, a few jurisdictions were taking deliberate steps to simplify and expedite the permitting process for child care developments, aiming to eliminate barriers such as high costs or lengthy delays. To further support these projects, some jurisdictions provided incentives such as density bonuses, parking reductions, or traffic mitigations to enhance feasibility and attract development. Finally, the report noted broad awareness of SB234, which mandates the allowance of large FCCs by right in all residential zones. All but one jurisdiction had either fully complied with the mandate, were in the process of complying, or had developed plans to do so. The **Toolkit** includes policy data as of March 2024 for all jurisdictions, and highlights additional strides towards child care land use best practices.

#### **2024 Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment Recommendations**

- Build community knowledge and public will.
- Continue collection of key data to build community understanding.
- Learn more from child care operators about their experiences.
- Support city/county planning to address policies.
- Develop funding strategies for intentional investment.
- Create specific steps and strategies for each community.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

Efforts to improve access to quality child care continue and adapt based on the ebbs and flows of funding and the changing climate of child care in Santa Barbara County. Due to a recent surge, it is estimated there have been approximately 2,000+ new licensed FCCs and center-based child care spaces added in the past 5 years.

This success is due to willing and skilled operators, hands-on support from local organizations, and the infusion of funding in recent years through city and County American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) and local foundations and funders. The new [UPLIFT Central Coast](#) funding will help continue the success.

### **Examples of New Funding Dedicated to the Child Care Field**

The goal of [UPLIFT Central Coast's](#) goal is to create an inclusive economic resilience plan for the region through creative, community-led efforts. The regional plan identified child care as a core strategy to building economic mobility and consequently a portion of their \$9M of grants was distributed to child care related projects. Uplift's regional report states "By improving access to child care, the region has the potential to enhance workforce stability and productivity, enabling more caregivers of young children to engage in the workforce while ensuring their children's well-being and early childhood education needs are met."

The Goleta City Council in December 2024 approved \$250,000 in child care funds thanks to revenue from Measure B, a one cent sales tax approved by voters in 2022. The funding was awarded to several child care initiatives to bring more options to residents, help support local families, and enhance community well-being. The program offers [funding to start up family child care homes in Goleta](#), along with training and business development support.

The charts below detail some of the recent and upcoming facilities expansion, business capacity and workforce building efforts. These examples illustrate the foundation that is currently in place locally for this work and the results that can be achieved through thoughtful investment.

## Expansion of New Licensed Child Care Spaces - Recent and Planned Efforts

New Licensed Child Care Spaces	Planned Licensed Child Care Spaces	Description of Funding and Partners
1,599 new licensed infant/toddler spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1,204 new spaces through 285 FCCs</li> <li>395 spaces in 19 centers</li> </ul>		<p>Children's Resource and Referral (CRR) provided program support with technical assistance, coaching, and grants to start-up, expand, or convert to infant/toddler care.</p> <p>With funding through ARPA, Santa Barbara Foundation, Montecito Bank &amp; Trust, and the Child Care Initiative Project CRR supported child care operator start-up, expansion, and conversion.</p>
587 new licensed spaces.		Self-reported number of spaces added in the past five years (according to the child care operator survey in 2024).
146 new licensed spaces.		United Way of Santa Barbara County's ARPA-funded Brighter Futures Childcare Fund distributed nearly \$200,000 to local operators via Child Care Start-Up and Expansion grants.
147 new licensed spaces in 8 child care centers.		Audacious Foundation awarded \$369,000 in child care facility grants to support new licensed spaces.
	500 new licensed (FCC and center) spaces in Santa Barbara County.	<p>The Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF), in partnership with Children's Resource &amp; Referral (CRR), is leading the Central Coast Childcare Workforce Expansion Project (CCWEP) which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create 500 new licensed child care openings in Santa Barbara County and 72 additional openings across Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties, through both Family Child Care (FCC) programs and centers.</li> <li>Distribute \$287,500 in grants to providers throughout the four-county region.</li> <li>Build regional capacity by supporting capacity building of Resource and Referral agencies and training on the CRR-developed model.</li> </ul>
	60 new FCCs (480 new spaces).	CRR partnered with the Women's Fund of Santa Barbara, via the Steps to Licensing Program.
	12 new FCCs (98 new spaces).	CRR's new City of Goleta child care expansion initiative.
<b>Total New: 1,892 - 2,479 licensed spaces</b>	<b>Total Planned: 1,078 licensed spaces</b>	<b><i>NOTE: organizational and programming work was funded to make these successes possible, such as direct work with the planning departments, technical support and report development.</i></b>

## Child Care Workforce Building Efforts, Opportunities, and Challenges

Several child care business and workforce expansion efforts are underway in Santa Barbara County. The following chart details some upcoming opportunities.

Business Development and Workforce Funding Related Opportunities	Description of Funding and Partners
Business training to build operational capacity and expand service offerings in partnership with UC Santa Barbara. Workforce training that included Emergency Preparedness and business development opportunities that promote child care workforce development and career pathways.	United Way SBC's Brighter Futures Child Care fund and Child Care Business Development Opportunities fund.
Business training series to child care educators.	Women's Economic Ventures (WEV) and CRR.
Operator stipends for completing early care and education units and additional financial support for school related expenses (i.e. gas, books, paper, pens, etc.). Have provided stipends to over 100 students who completed infant/toddler education units.	Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO)

## State and Federal Child Care Facilities Policy and Budgets

State policies related to child care facilities reflect a growing understanding that early care and education requires a strong physical infrastructure. California recently invested \$350.5 million in the Child Care and Development Infrastructure Grant Program (IGP) through the Department of Social Services. This program provided funding for repairs, renovations, and new spaces over the course of four years. *See state and local data on the IGP in Strategy 4.* The need far exceeded the available funding, but the grants resulted in many new and improved facilities across the state. Although there is no dedicated funding for this program in the 2025-26 budget, advocates are making the case for its continuation. California also made large FCCs “by right” in all residential areas across the state beginning January 2020 by eliminating local authorities’ ability to regulate starting up new FCC services, as has been the policy for small FCCs for years. And a new bill, AB752 was introduced in the 2025-26 budget year that, if enacted, will make it easier to include child care centers in housing developments. And finally, the 2025-26 budget includes a commitment to 146,000 new state-funded child care tuition subsidies , as part of a goal to reach 200,000 by 2028. These newly funded spaces will require well-maintained facilities to provide the services.

At the federal level, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) allows states to use some funds for facility improvements, however there is no specific federal funding for building or renovating child care spaces. COVID-19 pandemic relief funds helped support child care facilities across California through city and county grants to operators, however those resources have now ended. Federal and state policy changes that pay operators based on enrollment instead of attendance for child care tuition subsidies may help stabilize child care programs’ income and make it easier to maintain and operate facilities.

On July 4, 2025, congress signed a budget that included level funding for Head Start services and other child care line items. Although maintaining current funding levels is much preferable than cuts, the 2024 funding amount does not allow cost of living and inflation and will likely result in a reduction of spaces across the country. Earlier in the year, congress made cuts to the infrastructure system of the programs, such as the number of Head Start regional offices. The closure of the Region 9 Head Start Office, which supported California's programs, has already affected access, with lengthy delays for approval of new or expanded programs due to reduced capacity of the remaining offices to serve larger territories. These changes were enacted alongside broader long-term efforts to shrink federal spending on social programs such as Head Start and CCDBG block grants to states. Together, these potential shifts in child care funding and infrastructure, if continued, could dramatically and negatively affect access for children and families, as well as the programs where the services are provided.

Advocates continue to call for increased child care funding, and to push for policies at the state and federal levels that treat child care facilities like essential infrastructure, similar to roads, schools, and libraries, with some success. One example is the CHIPS Act, enacted in 2022, to incentivize and fund semiconductor manufacturing across the country. The law required grant recipients to address employee child care and provided funding for new facilities. This kind of change in thinking along with strong, consistent investment, is key to creating and sustaining the child care facilities families need.



*Image licensed via Envato Elements*

## STARTUP AND EXPANSION - STORIES FROM THE CHILD CARE FIELD

Across Santa Barbara County, there have been numerous success stories of child care startups and expansions. The following highlights nine child care operators, including three center-based programs and six FCCs' recent experiences related to serving more infants and toddlers. ***See Appendices for Stories from the Field to learn more about each project.***

The operators who shared their stories were able to launch programs by layering multiple strategies, including license transfers, partnerships with churches or landlords, CRR coaching, public and private grants, loans, and personal funds, often paired with significant resourcefulness, and hands-on effort.

Center-based operators encountered the most complex and expensive barriers, including fire safety code compliance, building permit delays, and playground overhauls. The cost of one project tripled from its initial estimates. Despite these hurdles, the operators succeeded by repurposing materials, forming strong site partnerships, and rallying community fundraising to close funding gaps.

FCCs described smoother paths to licensing, especially when supported by CRR, and consistently emphasized their passion for supporting young children. However, they also faced challenges including limited start-up funding, maintaining full enrollment, and adapting home spaces to meet licensing and children's developmental needs.

Across both settings, operators demonstrated persistence, creativity, and a strong commitment to expanding access to early care and learning in their communities.



Image courtesy of LEAP - Lompoc Child Care Center

## SECTION 4: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

This section dives deeper into each of the components of a strong child care facilities infrastructure and offers context, guidelines, tools to make it happen, and examples to inspire hope and action.

### STRATEGY 1: BUILD A STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE FOR FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

**Objective:** *A coordinated support system for child care facilities is created that encourages and facilitates child care operators, developers, funders and governments to plan for, support, and implement child care facility projects. The system includes experts in related fields and dedicated staff time, along with centralized guidance, tools, and technical assistance for operators and developers.*

#### Overview

A coordinated, system-level approach to child care facilities development can effectively and quickly address complex barriers and current opportunities. While many operators are deeply resourceful, they need assistance navigating the system. Ideally, this assistance comes from permanent, local, well-trained staff who can consistently respond to requests for help. *See The Child Care Intermediary Job Descriptions Tool in the Toolkit.*

Data, a critical piece of the infrastructure, is most effective when collectively addressed effort across organizations and communities. Santa Barbara County can build on its existing infrastructure to align efforts across jurisdictions and organizations and promote data-informed planning, raise funding, and support operators through training, staffing, and technical assistance. *See the Data Tracking Tool in the Toolkit*

Community input and political advocacy are essential to shaping solutions that reflect local needs and enable sustained improvements in access to quality child care. Santa Barbara County has a long history of providing dedicated support for child care, including facility development. In the 1990s, the cities of Santa Maria and Lompoc each hired City Child Care Coordinators who drafted and implemented child care plans tailored to their communities. In the early 2000s, CCPC and the County created the Office of Early Care and Education. Over the years, CCPC, CRR, First 5, the two County United Way organizations, SBF, employers, Chambers of Commerce, and other local organizations have played important roles in advancing child care infrastructure. These efforts have led to the addition of new spaces, tuition subsidies, policy changes, and increased funding, including recent successes in supporting child care facilities development.

The national organizations listed below support coalition-building around child care by helping community leaders become critical partners for child care facilities coalitions.

- [The Early Learning Nation Collective](#) is focused on helping community leaders be effective in supporting young children and families. Partners include the [National League of Cities](#), which has its own child care initiative that offers local technical assistance.
- [The National Association of Counties](#) provides tools for county governments to become strong and effective champions for child care.
- [The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#) offers data and research as well as a Business Leads Fellowship Program and other resources to help employers to invest in child care.

The following examples illustrate how other structured coalitions, anchored by strong leadership and dedicated resources can drive measurable and lasting progress.

[Children First Collective San Diego](#) is a coalition of non-profits, public entities, childcare providers, and parents with a goal of “finding solutions to make raising a child in San Diego possible for everyone.” Their [Facilities Focus Area](#) encourages co-location of child care with housing, including a [report](#) with guidance for developers.

The [Build Up San Mateo County](#) initiative employs dedicated staff to provide technical assistance, engage partners, and secure funding to expand and preserve child care spaces. So far, the group has facilitated the development or preservation of over 10,000 spaces, raised funding for facilities and addressed several system-level issues.

These efforts demonstrate that building a local coalition to support child care facilities development starts with engaging key stakeholders, such as government, economic development agencies, operators, employers, and philanthropy. Staff leadership is essential to coordinate the coalition’s work, maintain momentum, and ensure consistent communication. Leads also can provide technical assistance, offer data and policy guidance, and help connect partners to funding and external expertise. A shared vision, clear goals, and action-oriented structure are critical for sustaining engagement and achieving meaningful outcomes.

**A County Facilities Readiness Assessment is included in the Toolkit** and can be used to plan coalition work, by first measuring a community’s strengths and identifying other areas that can be built up.

### Key elements of a strong child care facilities coalition:

**A county-level facilities task force** to guide countywide implementation, monitor progress, align stakeholders, and support local community action.

**Local experts** involved in child care facility development, financing, zoning, community engagement, economic development and community planning. Include those who can act as “intermediaries” and provide technical assistance across the different infrastructure areas.

**Sustained funding** for the entire project, including the creation of the infrastructure, the services offered, and the facilities capital needed to expand spaces.

**Countywide child care facilities data inventory** including program types, locations, physical condition, licensing capacity, and projected demand. Consistent data can be effectively tracked and then used across the county to drive investments, inform policy, uncover inequities, track progress, and coordinate planning. *See the Data Tracking Tool in the Toolkit.*

**Deep engagement of the community**, including families, caregivers, and neighborhood leaders to ensure facilities reflect community needs and aspirations.

**Integration of child care into broader systems planning** by aligning child care development with housing, workforce, and economic development strategies to reflect its essential role in community wellbeing.

### Case Study: Build Up San Mateo County

In response to San Mateo County's growing child care crisis, the Center for Early Learning at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation convened a Task Force in 2017, leading to the launch of [Build Up San Mateo County \(Build Up\)](#) in 2018. Housed within the Child Care Coordinating Council, Build Up brought together a cross-sector coalition including operators, planners, developers, and public officials to preserve, improve, and expand child care facilities. A Capital Fund was created with early funding from Gilead Sciences and Silicon Valley Community Foundation, awarding over \$1 million to local projects. Build Up continues to provide funding, technical assistance, and advocacy to a range of care settings, including FCCs, school-based programs, and faith-based operators. To date, it has supported over 60 child care developments, primarily in underserved communities, resulting in nearly 2,300 new spaces with 1,500 more in progress. This initiative shows that coordinated leadership, strategic investment, and community partnerships can transform access to early learning. *(From the Build Up San Mateo County website)*

*"Facilities development is not just a real estate issue—it's a child development issue. If we want thriving communities, we need to invest in the places where children grow."*

— Community Planner, Build Up San Mateo County



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### **Strategy 1: Child Care Facilities Infrastructure**

The County has strong child care organizations, engaged local and state policymakers and funders, and recent successes in developing new spaces.

#### **Next Steps**

- Identify the current status of the strategy and coordinate with local initiatives addressing the same issue to align and strengthen efforts.
- Build a coalition and bring interested parties together.
- Staff the coalition with hired and trained individuals across multiple organizations.
- Refine Master Plan goals to match the current situation, capacity, and next steps.
- Set up systems to efficiently track data regarding child care and facilities, including the gathering of input from operators on facilities expansion plans and needs.
- Create a child care facilities resource hub.
- Offer targeted technical assistance to operators and stakeholders.

#### **Potential Measures**

- The number of representatives from key organizations, and active participation in the Coalition.
- Staff identified and trained.
- First year plan in place.
- Five-year plan created.
- Child care facilities resource hub launched.
- Number of expansion projects and new sites in the pipeline.

#### **Strategy 1 Tools**

- Data Tracking Assessment
- Child Care Intermediary Job Description
- County Facilities Readiness Tool

#### **Strategy 1 Key Resources**

- [Build Up San Mateo County](#)
- [Children First San Diego](#)
- [The Early Learning Nation Collective](#)
- [National League of Cities Early Learning Nation](#)
- [National Association of Counties](#)
- [US Chamber Foundation](#)
- [Collective Caregiving Framework](#)

## STRATEGY 2: EASE THE LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

**Objective:** *All cities and the County amend their zoning and permitting policies and processes within their jurisdictions to best support child care facilities development.*

### Overview

Land use and permitting processes can pave the way for child care facility expansion in a community; not just by removing barriers, but by effectively encouraging smart development of spaces where needed. Permitting pathways can be complex and expensive, creating unintended challenges to child care facility development - from site selection to permit processes to navigating local zoning codes and parking requirements. Cities and counties can unlock child care development potential by planning for child care in General Plans, land use policies and permit processes. *See Toolkit for a Land Use Planning Glossary.*

As noted above in the Startup and Expansion and Stories from the Field sections, operators who recently opened child care centers encountered some of the unintended consequences of land use policies that were not yet updated. Center startups dealt with a range of challenges related to land use, zoning, and permitting, which often made opening or expanding child care facilities more complex and expensive. Zoning regulations were sometimes unclear or restrictive, making it difficult for providers to understand what was allowed or to secure appropriate sites. In some cases, child care was not explicitly addressed in local zoning codes, forcing operators to seek special permits or go through lengthy approval processes. Permitting itself was often delayed or inconsistent across jurisdictions, creating uncertainty and setbacks.

Fees for planning reviews, use permits, building upgrades, and fire safety improvements added up quickly, straining budgets—especially for providers with limited funding or those serving lower-income families. Some centers had to invest in extensive renovations to meet code requirements, particularly when adapting buildings not originally intended for child care use. These costs, paired with a lack of coordinated guidance across agencies, made the process burdensome for many.

In the *Toolkit*, a number of resources have been developed to support child care startup and expansion, such as the *Template for City/County Child Care Permit Process*, which outlines ways jurisdictions can share their specific child care facilities guidelines; and the *Parking and Child Care* calculator, which details the information needed to accurately measure the amount of parking needed for a child care center to ensure sufficient space is allocated for the children.

A leading reference book for child care land use is “*Planning for Child Care in California*”, by Kristen Anderson, published by Solano Press. Included in the book are explanations of the various elements regarding child care land use, examples and templates, as well as recommendations for planning departments.

*(Note: As the book was written prior to 2020 when SB234 was enacted in California, the references to FCCs can be disregarded)*

**Land use Best Practices for child care typically revolve around the following elements:**

- Comprehensively plan for child care and intentionally encourage child care development through inclusion in the General Plan, supportive zoning policies, streamlined and low-cost processes, and incentives to spur growth. Because the General Plan guides zoning, adding language regarding child care development during General Plan updates is an excellent strategy.
- Ensure key definitions and policies are aligned with state codes. The way child care facilities are defined in local regulatory documents can support a smooth process and can also avoid confusion and extra effort for both planners and operators.
- Amend child care center policies and processes to encourage development. Such amendments can include fast tracking of applications, incentives, fee reductions, and simplified processes.
- Help operators find facilities by providing technical assistance and support, maintaining and sharing development pipelines, identifying surplus properties, and considering child care when a property use is discussed.
- Share clear steps in the process and resources where developers and potential child care applicants can easily access.

For a thorough description of child care land use best practices, along with resources and examples, [see the \*Child Care Land Use Best Practices in the Toolkit\*](#).

### Local Efforts

In fiscal year 2023-24, a survey and review of the nine jurisdictions in Santa Barbara County showed different levels of support for child care. Four jurisdictions had included child care in their General Plans, helping guide zoning and policy decisions. Five allowed child care centers “by right” in at least one zone, making it easier to open them without going through a lengthy permitting process. Three were working to streamline the permitting process, and 6 offered some kind of incentive, like reduced parking requirements or traffic mitigation, to support child care projects. All 9 jurisdictions were aware of the state law SB234 (enacted in January 2020, makes large FCCs “by right”, like small FCCs.) and all but one had either complied with the new law, were working on it, or had a plan to do so.

By spring of 2025, because of efforts by local planning departments since the survey, local jurisdictions have instituted more policies and practices to support child care in their communities. Below are some of the highlights.

- California’s SB234 law states that local jurisdictions cannot regulate FCCs in areas where residential uses are allowed. All jurisdictions have amended their codes to align with SB234 or are in the process of doing so.
- The City of Santa Maria currently requires a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for child care in all zones. Yet, one of the planners who consistently participated in the study sessions is available to help child care center applicants with the application and create connections to other departments, as needed. As a result, the CUP process takes much less time in Santa Maria, with a relatively low cost.

- The County of Santa Barbara instituted a policy whereby smaller day care centers intended to serve 50 children or less are allowed with a Land Use Permit instead of a Conditional Use Permit. At least two centers have made use of this policy to date.
- As part of the City of Goleta's extensive amendment of child care land use policies (prior to the ARPA-funded child care land use work), planning department staff developed a one-page guide to the changes, highlighting the key policies and the zones where child care centers can be located [\*\*Goleta Guide to Zoning Day Care Facility in the Toolkit\*\*](#).

For a full description of each jurisdiction's current child care land use policies see [\*\*Local Child Care Land Use Policies and Processes in the Toolkit\*\*](#).

Other examples of land use policy initiatives outside of Santa Barbara County include the [City of San Diego](#), which has on its Early Learning and Child Care page a section on facilities that includes a list of surplus properties, pathways to city permits and approvals, and guidance on Fire Marshal inspections. Similarly, [Redwood City](#) has a page for providers that orients them to opening child care and identifies city land use policies and procedures specifically related to centers. The City of South San Francisco, in their [2022 Child Care Master Plan](#), included a section on land use policies in which they tell the history of how their supportive policies, including their child care impact fee fund, came to be.



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## Case Study: Goleta Child Care Policies

The City of Goleta considered child care throughout its Zoning policy updates and related processes that were adopted in 2020. From the beginning, local child care experts were consulted about policies and provided public input, and models from other communities were referenced. Planners, the Planning Commission and the City Council approached child care from a wide perspective, seeking to allow child care with the least restrictions in as many zones as possible.

The resulting policies reflect this perspective, with restrictions removed in many zones, and lessened in others. In the end, child care centers are not allowed in just 4 zones due to potential health risks. Child care was also deemed a “Beneficial Project” and exempted from development impact fees, with development incentives to promote new child care projects. Two developers immediately expressed interest in including child care in their projects.

***See the Toolkit for a full version of Goleta's Establishing a Day Care Facility.***

### ESTABLISHING A DAY CARE FACILITY GUIDE TO ZONING ORDINANCE PROVISIONS



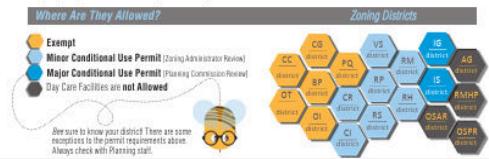
There are three categories of day care addressed in the Zoning Ordinance: (1) Family Day Care Homes; (2) Day Care Facilities that operate as a principal use of a piece of property; and (3) Day Care Facilities that operate as accessory to another principal use on a piece of property. Applicable provisions can be found in Sections 17.41.110, Day Care Facilities, 17.41.140, Family Day Care, and 17.41.040, Accessory Use and are summarized below.

#### Family Day Care Home

Family Day Care Homes are facilities that provide care for 14 or fewer children in the provider's own home for periods of less than 24 hours per day. There are two types of Family Day Care Homes, small and large, which are defined in Section 17.41.040 of the Health and Safety Code. Family Day Care Homes are licensed by the State. No permit or business license is required from the City. Additionally, Family Day Care Homes are not subject to City Development Impact Fees.

#### Day Care Facility, Principal Use

Day Care Facilities, including nurseries, preschools, and facilities for children or adults providing supervision and non-medical care for durations of less than 24 hours per day, that operate as a principal use on a piece of property are allowed throughout the City as follows:



## Advocating for Child Care Policy Changes

There are a variety of approaches that can inspire planning departments and policy leaders to make impactful changes to child care policies. The following are local illustrations of some approaches that resulted in efforts to create land use policies that support child care.

1. **County-wide technical assistance:** In the first year of the ARPA-funded child care facilities initiative, a team worked with the city and County planning departments in Santa Barbara County to help make their policies supportive of child care. All 9 jurisdictions completed a survey regarding their child care policies. Results were organized and shared back to the departments with a comparison to child care policy best practices. Study sessions with planning department staff were conducted, offering information about child care policies as well as the opportunity to share processes, plans, and challenges. The study sessions also provided the opportunity to hear from the City of Goleta and the County of Santa Barbara about their successful efforts to amend policies. A list of key resources, many requested by the departments themselves, was developed and shared - ***See Child Care Land Use Best Practices in the Toolkit.***

In the second year of the project, individual meetings were held with each of the 9 jurisdiction's planning departments to review their policies, learn about any plans and progress, and offer additional resources. All departments had made progress towards more child care-friendly policies.

**2. Direction from leadership:**

- a. The County of Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors prioritized amending the County child care land use policies by asking the planning department in 2023 to:
  - Prioritize amendments that include provisions and incentives for the development of childcare facilities
  - Promote and support safe child care services throughout the community
  - Reduce barriers for operators

The process took just over one year (accomplished amidst a heavy workload) and resulted in smoother processes for applicants.

- b. The Buellton City Council asked the United Way SBC to speak about child care at a Council meeting. The speaker shared information about many aspects of child care, including land use policy and the potential barriers that can arise. The Council asked the planning department to review the policies and suggest changes. As the department has already participated in the survey and study sessions, the path forward was fairly well spelled out, but they hadn't been able to implement it due to a prioritized work load. Once the Council added child care policy change to the department's work plan, the staff were able to quickly move forward with proposals for policy changes.
3. **Integrating child care into planning efforts:** The City of Goleta took on child care policy change during its zoning update process over several years. The city was interested in adopting child care-friendly policies and considered child care in nearly every aspect of the process. Draft language was created with the help of advocates, who spoke at hearings to suggest amendments and offer support. The City's changes were thorough, filtering through the layers of land use planning. *See Case Study in this section for more information.*

## **Strategy 2: Ease Child Care Land Use Processes**

Planning Departments across Santa Barbara County have been diligently working to make changes in their communities' policies to support child care development, and currently have key staff who are knowledgeable about the work.

### **Next Steps**

- Identify the current status of the strategy and coordinate with local initiatives addressing the same issue to align and strengthen efforts.
- Continue study sessions, peer learning and training to support all jurisdictions to achieve child care-friendly policies.
- Track opportunities to amend city and County General Plans to support inclusion of child care, and advocate in favor of proposed policies that encourage child care development.
- Provide best practice language for recommended changes, and ask the Facilities Coalition from Strategy 1, as well as local communities, to advocate for the changes.
- Monitor progress in all jurisdictions towards child care land use best practices and celebrate process and policy successes.

### **Potential Measures**

- Number of amended child care policies per jurisdiction.
- Model zoning/permitting guidance completed and published.
- Local staff across planning, building, and licensing departments learn about child care facilities policy best practices.
- A centralized and shared resource hub is created.
- All cities and the County make progress towards best practices.

#### **Strategy 2 Tools**

- Land Use Planning Glossary
- Child Care Land Use Best Practices
- Goleta Guide to Zoning Day Care Facilities
- Local Child Care Land Use Policies and Practices
- Parking and Child Care
- Template for City/County Child Care Permit Process

#### **Strategy 2 Key Resources**

- [Planning for Child Care in California](#), Kristen Anderson, Solano Press
- [City of San Diego Early Learning and Care](#) section for new child care permits
- [Redwood City](#) child care webpage
- [City of South San Francisco](#) Child Care Master Plan

## STRATEGY 3: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP LOCATIONS FOR CHILD CARE

**Objective:** *Develop a system to use data, technical assistance and partnerships to locate, assess, and prepare potential sites for additional child care facilities that serve communities most in need.*

### Overview

This strategy focuses on determining appropriate child care sites and developing them into high quality facilities. As previously stated, there are a variety of ways child care is made available in Santa Barbara County. FCCs provide care in the operator's own home (as required by Community Care Licensing) which can be in an apartment, condo, single family home, or any other type of residence. Centers can operate in facilities specifically designed for licensed child care or in church education rooms, elementary school classrooms, and community rooms that are converted to child care facilities.

The child care facility sets the foundation for a successful program; the design, location, size, indoor and outdoor areas, accessibility and condition of the building are all important. Historically, operators have “made do” with what was available, creatively taking available sites and turning them into child care programs. The condition of local child care facilities varies throughout the County.

According to the operator survey conducted as part of the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment (2024):

- The majority (66.2%) of centers lease their site whereas the majority (65.4%) of FCC respondents own their child care site.
- Nearly half of centers (48.1%) and nearly a third of FCCs (29.3%) are in sites that were built more than 50 years ago.
- Many surveyed FCCs (42.7%) and center-based (54.3%) operators report their facilities will need moderate renovations in the next five years.
- Many FCCs and center facilities have maintenance/repair needs that are difficult to address due to high costs, which can hamper the work of the staff and impede children’s learning.
- Most operators surveyed (72.8% of FCCs and 66.7% of centers) indicated that funding was their top need to expand.

The interest in, and understanding of, the importance of child care facility expansion is growing. Local organizations and community leaders are focusing on child care at the policy level, as well as the strategy level, encouraging facility development to meet the need, especially to serve infants and toddlers. There are several proposed housing sites that include, or are considering including, FCCs and center-based child care facilities in their development.

Locating and designing child care facilities is a strategic investment in children, families, and the early education professionals who serve them. Communities can create child care facilities that reflect their values and become a foundational part of the community with intentional planning and shared commitment. An in-depth look at the different options through community, business, and strategic planning processes is essential before embarking on any child care facilities project.

## Child Care Facility Options

The following section explores the various options for adding more child care spaces in a community, including the benefits, challenges, and resources available, as well as the processes involved.

### *Expansion of Current Site*

Whenever possible, the expansion of a current child care facility is a strong option, as the site selection and property control are already completed and there is likely administrative infrastructure in place that can support more classrooms, along with existing physical infrastructure such as utilities and parking. An assessment of the need in the area, along with the feasibility of the different possibilities for expansion is just as important as it is with a startup and includes benefits as well as possible issues, such as the impact on the current programming at the site.

### *Startup of New Site*

Whether home-based or center-based, child care programs run on thin profit margins and depend on having stable, affordable, and appropriate facilities where families need them. Owning the space, leveraging costs, and/or having predictable, below-market rent, can make a difference in the long-term success of a program by controlling costs, reducing uncertainty, and strengthening the business overall. In Santa Barbara County, centers operate in a variety of settings. Some are stand-alone sites, while others are in churches, school district buildings, or as part of housing or businesses.

As summarized in Startup and Expansion: Stories from the Child Care Field section of this document (*full stories included in the Appendices*), several child care centers and many FCCs were successfully opened in the past two years, representing different locations, sizes, and jurisdictions. All projects were accomplished with facilities technical assistance and grants through ARPA funding, as well as other resources. The following summarizes these projects.

**More Mesa Preschool** - Located in the County of Santa Barbara. The for-profit operator with another site nearby, leased a facility at a church site that had been used for child care in the past. The new program is licensed for 60 children aged 12 months to 5 years (20 under 2 years old). The startup transition was relatively smooth and quick because the site had recently been used for child care. The operator was able to expand to other spaces in the church buildings once the initial program began.

### **Building Types**

During the decision-making process to expand facilities, a variety of options and properties will be identified as potential opportunities for child care centers. Each site will require different types and levels of construction to transform it into an operational facility. Whether expanding a current site or developing a new site, the construction methods often used for child care centers include:

- New Construction (“Stick Built”)
- Permanent Modular Construction
- Renovation
- Adaptive Reuse Renovation
- Remodeling

Each method has varying building code requirements and related construction costs. While these are not specific code categories they represent the common child care construction types throughout California. ***See Child Care Construction Types in the Toolkit.***

**Island View Preschool** - Located in the City of Santa Barbara. A seasoned child care administrator opened a new independent child care center in a business complex. The building has historic landmark status and is in an area with a Specific Plan, both of which added a layer of complexity, as well as the fact that the building had not previously been used for child care.



Image courtesy of Cathleen Smith

**LEAP** - Located in the Lompoc Center in the City of Lompoc. A nonprofit operator with child care sites in Goleta leased a space in a church education building that had been used as a licensed center in the past. Several changes had to be made to the building, including removal of ceilings with asbestos and the installation of a fire sprinkler system and an additional water line (together \$150K), which was ordered in part due to new state fire code changes that are now being reconsidered. *See the full story in the appendices.*



*Image courtesy of LEAP*

**Family Child Care Operators** shared positive experiences and challenges regarding the startup and management of their programs. Several reported smooth licensing processes when support was available from the onset. Organizations like CRR were especially helpful, offering personalized coaching, licensing guidance, start-up funding, and access to materials. Participation in business cohorts was beneficial and resulted in full enrollment by some FCCs.

Still, challenges were widespread. Start-up and operational costs were major concerns, especially for those needing facility renovations or specialized tools. Some FCCs struggled early in the licensing process or faced delays in inspections. Others had difficulty maintaining full enrollment, which created financial stress. Reliable coaching, funding, and peer support made a clear difference in overcoming these obstacles.

To better support future FCC start-ups, successful strategies like coaching, funding, and access to materials should be expanded. Streamlining licensing timelines and strengthening peer networks will also help more providers launch and sustain high-quality programs.

### **Co-locating Child Care and Housing**

In Santa Barbara County and across California, housing is being constructed at a high rate and rapid pace due to the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), the state's process that seeks to ensure cities and counties plan for enough housing in their Housing Element cycle to accommodate all economic segments of the community. Each jurisdiction is assigned a specific number of units it is required to develop for housing in the near future. Both cities and counties must be able to demonstrate that their target can be met, and the process allows less oversight than what was possible in the past. One strategy to meet the target is to change the zoning of certain properties from one that did not allow housing to one that does (e.g., an agriculture to housing zone).

This policy presents a tremendous opportunity for local jurisdictions, communities, and child care advocates to encourage the co-location of housing and child care at newly developed housing sites. Co-location provides child care where families live and includes child care in a larger project, which

## Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan 2025

streamlines the process for opening a new child care center. The Toolkit offers several resources to facilitate understanding and action to co-locate child care with other developments:

- ***Co-Location of Child Care with Other Developments***
- ***Potential Local Child Care Sites and Development***
- ***Co-Location Examples***
- ***Child Care Co-Location Guide***

For the 2023–2031 planning period, Santa Barbara County is required to plan for at least 24,856 housing units across four income levels (based on data from the Department of Finance and U.S. Census). The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) tracks and monitors the plan and progress. The following [RHNA Allocation Table](#) shows the number of housing units by income level that each jurisdictions' plans are required to accommodate in their housing elements.

***RHNA Allocation by Income Level***

Jurisdiction	RHNA Allocation	Allocation by Income Level			
		Very Low	Low	Moderate	Above Moderate
Carpinteria	901	286	132	135	348
Santa Barbara	8,001	2,147	1,381	1,441	3,032
Goleta	1,837	682	324	370	461
Uninc. (South Coast)	4,142	809	957	1,051	1,325
Lompoc	2,248	166	262	311	1,509
Uninc. (Lompoc Valley)	521	209	72	54	186
Santa Maria	5,418	1,032	536	731	3,119
Guadalupe	431	3	24	77	327
Uninc. (Santa Maria Valley)	721	262	118	118	223
Solvang	191	55	39	22	75
Buellton	165	55	37	30	43
Uninc. (Santa Ynez Valley)	280	93	53	57	77
County Total	24,856	5,799	3,935	4,397	10,725
Total Unincorporated	5,664	1,373	1,200	1,280	1,811

*Regional Housing Needs Allocation Plan 6th Cycle 2023-2031 - SBCAG*



*Escalante Meadows Child Development Center. Images courtesy of the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara.*

### Case Study: Escalante Meadows Child Development Center Co-location

The Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara (HASBARCO) led the redevelopment of a former public housing site in Guadalupe into a vibrant community that now provides affordable and permanent supportive housing for more than 80 households. Central to the project is a new child development center designed to serve 70–100 children, and support both residents and the broader Guadalupe community.

Initiated in 2019 and completed in 2025, the project integrated land use approvals for the center within the overall development process, avoiding the need for separate permits or policy compliance. From the start, the City of Guadalupe was a strong and steady partner, which helped facilitate the development.

To bring the vision to life, HASBARCO collaborated with the project architect, a child care facilities design expert, a child care consultant, the selected operator, and a group of committed community partners. Funding for the community spaces was secured through multiple sources, independent of the housing financing, including New Market Tax Credits, federal and state grants, and the strategic leveraging of HASBARCO resources.



*Escalante Meadows Child Development Center. Images courtesy of the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara.*

## Assessing a Location for Child Care Compatibility

When selecting a location and/or facility for a child care center, there are numerous factors to consider, with the primary criteria being that it is safe, healthy, and accessible for families. Some other factors that must be considered include the desired size of the program (number and ages of children to be served), space for playground and parking, the availability of utilities and the city or County zoning designation. Some of this information will be identified during a business planning process, but some of the details are granular and will vary depending on the site. To support the planning and assessment process, several tools have been created and can be found in the **Toolkit**:

- **Child Care Facility Assessment Criteria**
- **Child Care Site Feasibility Framework**
- **Assumptions - Square Footage and Capacity**
- **Steps to Identify Potential Child Care Facility Properties**

## Child Care Facility Cost Modeling

Estimating construction costs is essential in planning to increase the supply of child care facilities. However, determining child care facility construction cost is difficult because child care building design and construction are not standardized like elementary schools. The major challenges include:

- The different types of construction used for building child care facilities: new construction, adaptive reuse/fit-out of an existing building, and permanent modular.
- The diverse range of potential building types (e.g., office buildings, retail spaces).
- The size of the center defines the number of children and the appropriate classrooms.
- High construction costs in Santa Barbara County. For a broad estimate of costs, mid-range residential building costs should be used to estimate child care center costs. There is not a specific cost per square foot published, but the estimate is \$500/sq foot or higher.

To address this issue nationally, cost models are being created, including:

1. The [National Children's Facilities Network \(NCFN\)](#), is beta testing a [Child Care Facility Cost Estimator](#). The tool will estimate broad project costs, (both soft and hard), and will account for cost variations for geographic location, type of construction, and size of center-based facilities. The estimator is based on child care programming and facility design best practices and uses RS Means's construction cost estimating software database. The purpose of the cost estimator is to provide intermediaries with accurate information to help policy makers allocate resources to increase the supply of child care facilities. NCFN's cost model is in the testing phase in the summer of 2025. Once fully developed, Santa Barbara will be able to use it to estimate the approximate costs for three different sized centers using three different types of construction. There are plans to expand the tool to include costs specific to infant-toddler centers and FCCs. Link: [Cost and Quality - LISC/NCFN child care facility cost calculator](#).
2. [The Children's Funding Project](#) offers training and support for communities on finding and securing public financing, fiscal mapping, and cost modeling to maintain and sustain comprehensive programs, including child care, at a community level.

### Case Study: LEAP in Lompoc

In 2022, LEAP (Learn, Engage, Advocate, Partner), which had centers in Goleta, began developing a new early learning center in Lompoc, one of the county's most underserved areas for child care, with a goal of opening in fall of 2024. They secured \$1.4 million in state General Child Care and Development (CCTR) expansion funds to provide tuition assistance for low-income families in Lompoc and partnered with a church to convert existing classrooms into three large, high-quality rooms. Lease negotiations took 18 months as the agreement was new for both parties, but strong relationships formed along the way.

Because the building was older, LEAP had to renovate inside and out, replace asbestos ceiling tiles, redesign and build playgrounds, complete ADA upgrades, and extend special insurance coverage. When the work was nearly complete, they learned of new state building codes which required a sprinkler system, new water line, and fire alarm for the site because it would be serving more than six children under 36 months. These changes added major costs and delays. Across the state, this code change led many other local child care facility expansion projects to pause, but LEAP persisted. They launched a short advocacy and fundraising campaign, coordinated construction, and kept the licensing process on track with a revised opening date of January 2025. They worked closely with the fire marshal and passed their pre-licensing inspection with no findings. Just as work finished, the state paused the new building code requirements, though LEAP had already completed the facility upgrades. After submitting a final playground waiver, they received their license to serve 58 children.

The center opened March 12, 2025 - nearly three years after the first conversation with the church - at a total remodel cost of about \$425,000 for a 3,451 square feet rented facility. Enrollment is growing, and LEAP is grateful for the strong support from CRR, the church, donors, and state leaders.

### Child Care and the State Building Code

In 2023, California implemented updates to its building code that significantly impacted child care centers, particularly those serving infants and toddlers. The revised fire safety regulations limited classrooms to a maximum of five non-ambulatory children (for example, infants or toddlers who cannot walk without assistance) unless costly upgrades like fire sprinklers and fire-rated walls were installed.

This change caught many operators by surprise, leading to delays in licensing, reduced enrollment capacity, and a financial strain on centers already grappling amid a statewide child care shortage. In response to mounting pressure from child care advocates, in September 2024, lawmakers passed legislation granting a temporary reprieve from these requirements. The pause allows the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the California Department of Social Services 3 years to collaborate with stakeholders to develop new standards that balance safety with the practical needs of operators.

It is not yet certain whether the building code will be revised following the 2023 updates, meaning most current and future child care facilities may still need to comply with the newer standards. Strong advocacy and participation in the process will be required to ensure decisions are made with a full understanding of the consequences for child care access.

### **Strategy 3: Securing Appropriate Child Care Facilities**

Several housing developers across the County have plans for inclusion of child care in their developments, and one was just completed.

#### **Next Steps**

- Identify the current status of the strategy and coordinate with local initiatives addressing the same issue to align and strengthen efforts.
- Include child care in new housing developments:
  - Map the housing developments in the early stages through city/County lists and approach each developer to share how child care can be added, advocate for inclusion, and offer support and resources.
  - City Councils, Board of Supervisors, and planning departments encourage developers to incorporate FCCs and centers in all feasible developments.
- Continue to support local cities and the County to amend land use policies leading towards best practices.
- Provide technical assistance to help expand capacity through identification of sites and facilitation of the process, with a focus on infant and toddler spaces.

#### **Potential Measures**

- Number Housing developments in different areas of the County plan to include child care.

<b>Strategy 3 Tools</b>	<b>Strategy 3 Core Resources</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Child Care Construction Types</li><li>● Co-location of child care with other developments</li><li>● Potential Local Child Care Sites and Development</li><li>● Co-Location Examples</li><li>● Child Care Co-Location Guide</li><li>● Child Care Facility Assessment Criteria</li><li>● Child Care Site Feasibility Framework</li><li>● Assumptions - Square Footage and Capacity</li><li>● Steps to Identify potential child care sites</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <a href="#">Child Care Design Guide</a> - Anita Rui Olds</li><li>● Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <a href="#">A Community Win-Win: Co-Locating Child Care with Affordable Housing in San Diego County</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Including Family Child Care in Affordable Housing Developments</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Co-Location of Child Care with Community Resources</a></li></ul></li><li>● Child Care Aware -<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <a href="#">Opening and Running a Child Care Center</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Opening a Child Care Center Business Guide</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Opening a Child Care Center: Action Steps</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Starting Your Child Care Business</a></li></ul></li><li>● <a href="#">NCFN Child Care Facilities Cost Estimator</a></li></ul>

## STRATEGY 4: CREATE FACILITIES FUNDING MODELS AND SOURCES

**Objective:** *Develop sustainable funding models and financial support systems for building, renovating, and maintaining child care facilities.*

### Overview

Ongoing investments in facility expansion and upgrading for child care centers and FCCs can ensure more stable and higher quality options for families. More communities are being creative, blending funding sources, and building strategic options that include grants, loans, developer contributions, and tax-based incentives. Using these funds, along with technical assistance and cost modeling, operators and communities can plan sustainable projects.

Historically, access to private capital was out of reach for many child care operators due to the typically low child care revenue margins, the absence of child care-specific facilities funding, and structural bias within lending institutions. Additionally, for programs with federal funding, the grant rules often disincentivize the use of public funds for acquisition, construction, or major renovation of child care centers.

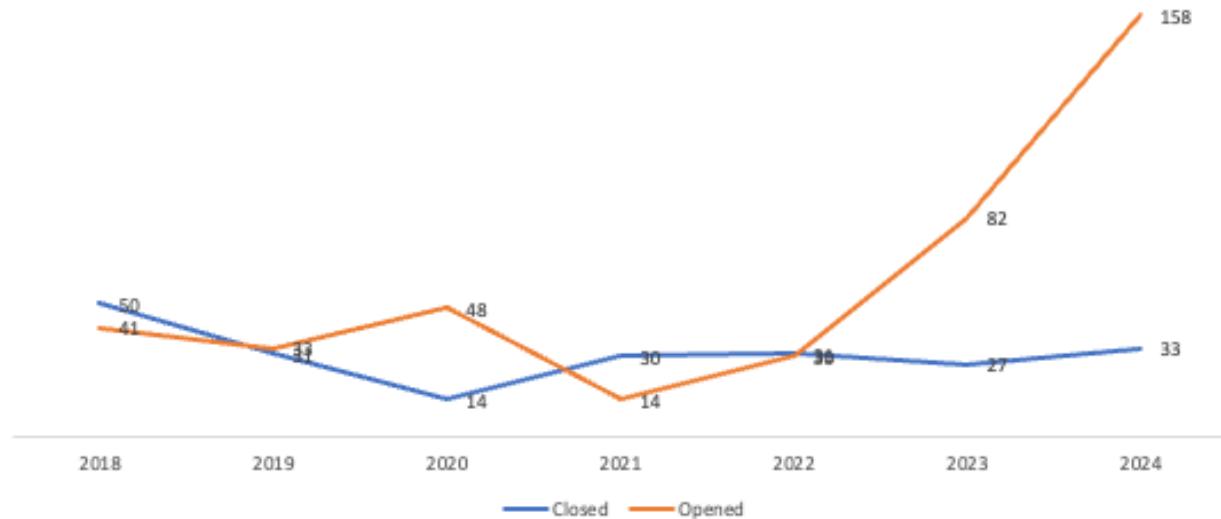
Meanwhile, development costs continue to rise, and facility upgrades often trigger expensive code compliance issues. These constraints have left many operators stuck, unable to expand, improve, or even maintain their environments without sacrificing employee compensation or raising tuition beyond what families can afford.

Communities across California have responded to the need by offering facilities funding, which have allowed for improvements and expansion. The funding, though, has often been limited and inconsistently offered, or restricted to certain programs or project types.

Responses from operators surveyed through the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment (2024) underscore the financial challenge of developing new child care spaces. Most respondents (72.8% of FCCs and 66.7% of centers) indicated that support for securing funding was their top need to expand.

The recent successes with facilities funding, described in the *Where We Are Now* section of this document, provide solid evidence that consistent, direct funding, combined with technical assistance, is a solid and practical strategy to increase spaces. One measure of [Kids Data](#) found that “between 2019 and 2021, California lost more than 1,100 licensed child care facilities and nearly 19,000 licensed spaces—more spaces than the total number of children in Mendocino or 20 other California counties”. Through the programming funded by ARPA and other investments, Santa Barbara County was able to quickly build back capacity. The chart below shows the impact of the investments from 2021 through 2024.

**Number of Operators that Opened Surpassed the Number that Closed Since the Infusion of Support from APRA and Other Dollars**



(CRR, 2025)

### Funding Sources and Models

Although funding specifically for child care facilities in California has not been consistently available, different initiatives over the years have been developed to provide financial resources for facilities - some at the state level and some local, most recently related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The Infrastructure Grant Program](#) through the California Department of Social Services made available \$350.5 million to licensed FCCs and center operators for facilities renovation, repair, and construction. Priority was given to operators who serve low-income families as well as those who serve infants and toddlers. The program has been funded since the 2020-21 budget year but will only continue with new funding in the 2025-26 state budget. A bill is currently in the works to invest more funding to keep the initiative going.

In Santa Barbara County, 89 of the 128 applications from local operators (69%) were funded for the Minor Renovation and Repair grant, yet just four of the 28 applications for New Construction and Major Renovation grants were approved for funding (14%). Data from the two rounds highlights the need for facilities funding in Santa Barbara County, with just 93 of the 156, awarded in total, leaving 63 applicants with renovation and startup projects and no funding from the grant. The unawarded 63 applicants (and others who didn't apply) likely have expansion plans ready to deploy once funding is available. More information can be found at LIIF's [What is IGP?](#) Page.

## Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan 2025

FCCs are in Greenish-Gray Centers are in Orange



Location of sites funded through the Infrastructure Grant Program

### CALIFORNIA CHILD CARE & DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT PROGRAM (IGP) Santa Barbara County



IGP is administered by CDSS in partnership with LiIF. Build Up California is an ECE facilities advocacy initiative of LiIF.

Last edited: December 2024, figures subject to change

ROUND OF FUNDING	PURPOSE OF GRANTS	ECE PROVIDER APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	REQUESTED FUNDING (TOTAL)	ACCEPTED APPLICATIONS	AVAILABLE FUNDING (APPROVED)
Round 1	Minor repairs & renovations <i>Applications closed 3/25/22</i>	Statewide			
		>5,000	\$309.6 million	>3,800	\$200.5 million
		115	\$7,134,762	89	\$4,397,360
Round 2	New construction & major renovations <i>Applications closed 1/31/23</i>	Statewide			
		1,848	\$666 million	253	\$150 million
		28	\$6,261,309	4	\$1,544,539

#### Round 1

View IGP 1 Recipients Map on [buildupca.org](#)

**78**  
Home-based programs

**11**  
Center-based programs

**77%**  
of total projects funded in Santa Barbara County

**1,674** children served through enhanced spaces  
**320** jobs preserved

Payments began late 2022

#### Round 2

**14%**  
of total projects funded in Santa Barbara County

Projected & actual spaces created:

Age group	If all applications were funded	Awarded providers
Infant	56	5
Toddler	16	17
Preschool	151	43
School-age	83	6
Total	356	75

**3**  
Home-based programs

**1**  
Center-based programs

Construction type:

Expansion	3
New site	1
Relocation	0



Payments will be sent on a rolling basis starting in early 2025

Source: [LiIF IGP Fact Sheets](#)

## Funding Opportunities and Options for Child Care Facilities

While the child care facility funding system can seem fragmented, there are many opportunities to layer funding from public, private, and philanthropic sources to fund specific projects, as well as to generate a pool of funding for which operators can apply. A key leveraging resource, start up allowance, is available through the CSPP and CCTR California tuition subsidy grants and can be used for some of the facilities development costs.

In addition to funding, intermediaries in Santa Barbara County can provide technical assistance to operators on how to put together a financial plan, including a mix of financing tools, funding, equity, debt, and grant funding to create a financially sustainable facility project. Steps would include detailed analysis of the operator's financial capacity, research on available public and private funding sources, and advancement of strategic partnerships with lenders, investors, and community organizations. Layered on top could be scenarios for leveraging grants, securing favorable loan terms, and optimizing tax incentives to reduce financial burden.

Below are the major categories of options that can be used to fund child care facilities. Refer to the [\*\*Funding and Financing Options for Child Care Facilities in the Toolkit\*\*](#) for more details and links.

### *Leveraged Development Projects*

- **Co-location with housing and other developments:** Child care can be integrated into a variety of developments. Developers may be able to access and leverage housing funds such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), especially in areas of the County where housing and early childhood needs overlap.
- **Employer-sponsored models:** Some employers may directly invest in child care construction or renovation, either on-site or through partnerships. Tax and development incentives exist to encourage the co-location of child care and businesses, as a multi-pronged strategy to support families and children, recruit and retain staff, and positively add to the business profile and bottom line.
- **City or County development fees:** Jurisdictions can require or incentivize developers to pay fees that can be redirected to child care facilities development.

### *Financing Strategies*

- **Loans and owner equity:** Providers or facility owners may contribute capital or take on debt, either independently or through community-based intermediaries.
- **Community-level financing models:** This could include pooled local investments, municipal financing tools, or other approaches where a group of organizations share the responsibility.
- **Shared services model:** A shared services model lets child care operators pay a low rate for functions such as HR, finance, and purchasing so they can spend less on overhead. That frees up money they can use to buy, lease, or take better care of their facilities. The Opportunities Exchange has been a leader in this concept and offers a [Startup Toolkit for Communities](#). One of the key strategies offered is to assist child care providers in purchasing a Child Care Management System (CCMS) to automate day-to-day operations. The Opportunities Exchange offers a [Community Toolkit for Scaling the Use of CCMS](#).

*Grants and Public-Private Partnerships*

- **Grants:** Available through state and federal agencies, as well as private funders.
- **Foundation support:** Donor advised funds, challenge grants, or matching fund opportunities can be considered.
- **Philanthropic and public-private partnerships:** These can include blended financing from civic, business, and philanthropic partners.
- **Collective funding mechanisms:** Community foundations or early childhood coalitions may manage pooled funds to support facilities. The Economic Development Collaborative in Ventura County offers a [Child Care Investment Loan Fund](#).
- **Technical Assistance for grant applications and advocacy:** Communities and providers may need guidance on how to advocate and apply for state or federal funding. This includes identifying the right programs, aligning proposals with priorities, and building local support.

*Tax initiatives*

- **Local ballot measures or special taxes earmarked for early childhood facilities**  
Several counties in California have passed tax initiatives to fund different aspects of child care, including facilities. In 2020, Alameda County voters passed Measure C - a 0.5% sales tax to generate approximately \$150 million annually for expanding access to early childhood education in the County. The plan for expenditure of the funds includes grants and technical assistance for facilities, including conversion of preschool to infant and toddler spaces.
- **New Market Tax Credits:** These funds are provided by investors in projects with social benefits and can be used for facility development in eligible census tracts. The Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) developed a document on [Pairing New Market Tax Credits with Early Care and Education Centers](#).

King County, Washington created the [Child Care Facilities Financing Program](#), supported by staff from the Best Starts for Kids initiative, to offer grants and hands-on support for facility development. The program is an initiative of the County Department of Community and Human Services, with funding provided through the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account. Applicants can apply for predevelopment, renovation funding or construction funding for new center based providers and organizations.

The Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) has partnered with two Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI), Ascendus and Working Solutions CDFI, to launch a [Family Child Care \(FCC\) Capital Access initiative](#). This loan product, coupled with technical assistance, is a scalable model that seeks to close the gap for in-home child care entrepreneurs looking to grow and maintain their businesses via activities such as health-and-safety repairs, license upgrades and professional development. Catalytic capital will be offered as three- to five-year, fixed-rate loans of up to \$100,000, with California as the initial market. The Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, through the Mastercard Strive small business program, is providing philanthropic support for program design, plus the creation of a data-sharing plan to best measure impact in the sector.

the sector.

#### ***Strategy 4: Funding Child Care Facilities Expansion***

Multiple counties across California, including Santa Barbara, have implemented successful child care facilities funding models.

#### ***Next Steps***

- Identify the current status of the strategy and coordinate with local initiatives addressing the same issue to align and strengthen efforts.
- Use a Child Care Facilities Cost Calculator to model project costs based on type, size, and location, and for communities based on targets.
- Establish a service to help operators braid funding sources (e.g., ARPA, philanthropy, tax credits, loans) and build multi-layered financing structures .
- Promote co-location models where housing or commercial developers include child care as part of larger projects.
- Identify the need for, and interest in, a Shared Services model for child care operators.
- Develop community-level financing models, including impact investments, city/County funds, and/or tax initiative funding allocated to infrastructure.
- Provide financial advising, grant writing, and technical support for child care operators applying for facilities grants, facility renovation awards, and loan applications.

#### ***Potential Measures***

- Amount of funding raised for infrastructure.
- Funding/financing plan and the number of tools in place for facilities.

#### ***Strategy 4 Tools***

- Funding and Financing Options for Child Care Facilities

#### ***Strategy 4 Key Resources***

- Operator [Cost of Quality Calculator](#)
- [Opportunities Exchange - Shared services for early childhood programs](#)

## STRATEGY 5: DESIGN FACILITIES FOR QUALITY, WORKFORCE AND VIABILITY

**Objective:** Promote high-quality, child-centered, and workforce-supportive design standards for all new and renovated child care facilities. Ensure facilities contribute to strong developmental outcomes, attract and retain staff, and operate with long-term financial and programmatic sustainability.

### Overview

Designing child care facilities with quality workforce support and long-term sustainability in mind is essential to building a stronger early childhood system. Facilities that support high quality care are more than just safe; they are intentionally designed to foster positive relationships, support flexible learning, and provide environments that draw educators to the program and help them stay in the field. Thoughtful design from the start avoids costly retrofits, strengthens children's developmental outcomes, and creates a sense of comfort and pride among staff and families.

Physical site planning should be closely aligned with workforce needs, program goals, and regulatory requirements.



Image licensed via Envato Elements

Expanding access to care for infants and toddlers adds another layer of complexity. These classrooms require specific facility modifications, including separate diapering areas with sinks, safe sleep environments with cribs or cots, separate playgrounds, and additional storage for food and supplies. Licensing standards in California require a minimum of 35 square feet per child of usable space in classrooms, but best practices call for more space to allow for quiet zones and more individualized care. Similarly, licensing may require a diapering station with a sink, while quality standards add the importance of designing for classroom flow. These design improvements support child safety and staff efficiency, but they also come with added costs.



Image licensed via Envato Elements

### Quality Facilities

High-quality child care facilities elevate the entire early childhood educational experience beyond meeting the basic needs of children by supporting effective programming, teacher well-being, and family partnership. The building and grounds of a child care program create the space for children to thrive socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

### Facilities that Support the Workforce

A well-trained, adequately compensated, and

supported workforce is fundamental to quality child care. The physical design of a facility directly impacts a program's ability to recruit and retain early educators. Features such as properly sized classrooms, designated staff break rooms, secure storage, space for professional development, and access to natural light contribute to a work environment where educators can do their best work, will feel valued and be more likely to stay.

According to the recent operator survey from the Santa Barbara Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment (2024), the majority of centers (76.8%) reported that the number one business support needed to rebuild from the pandemic and be ready for the future is workforce recruitment, retention, and labor policies. The availability of a qualified workforce is necessary for a facility to open and operate, and high-quality facilities will draw high quality staff.

### **Maintaining Child Care Facilities**

Facility design and quality play a key role in sustainability. As many existing sites are aging and often were not originally built for child care, operators continue to face serious infrastructure challenges. As previously mentioned, 48.1% of surveyed centers and 29.3% of FCCs are in sites that were built more than 50 years ago according to the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Needs Assessment (2024). Most surveyed FCCs (42.7%) and center-based (54.3%) operators report their facilities will need moderate renovations in the next five years. A 2021 study by the Office of Head Start found that more than one-third of centers across the nation reported inadequate ventilation, unsafe flooring, and lack of adequate classroom space. These are conditions that impact children's learning and the health and safety of both children and staff. Maintaining existing facilities is just as important as building new ones, and long-term planning should reflect the realities of aging infrastructure, regulatory updates, and evolving care models.



*Image licensed via Envato Elements*

## **Designing Facilities That Work**

The viability of a program must be considered alongside design when addressing facilities. Serving younger children typically results in lower enrollment capacity per classroom due to lower adult-to-child ratios. These ratios, while essential to quality, increase labor costs and require additional staff training and support. Shifting to serve younger children requires staff who are specifically trained and also want to work with infants and toddlers.

Santa Barbara County has a strong foundation to build upon to help local operators serve more infants and toddlers including a dedicated network of operators, established partnerships, recent insights gained through COVID adaptations, needs assessments and facility evaluations, as well as the tools and guidance from this Master Plan. The next phase is to catalyze this foundation into coordinated action.

When each of these elements is adjusted, the quality and viability of the program changes. For example, the size of the classroom generally determines the number of children who can be served in the space based on Licensing regulations. However, children's ages, teacher-to-child ratios and group sizes determine the actual number of children who can be served. If the room is a bit larger than needed, additional children cannot be added because that would exceed the group size or require another teacher.

The [federal Administration for Children and Families](#) (ACF) created an online tool that can help operators plan for high quality, sustainable child care programs by loading and then adjusting information for the various levers to arrive at the best quality and most feasible business plan for a child care center. Financial planning using these detailed models will help derive accurate figures for individual, community and county-wide facilities costs.

Child Care Aware offers comprehensive guides for FCC and center child care startups, which go into detail about the various considerations, and can be useful for ongoing assessment and design changes to programs as well as for startup. Two resources can be found in the [Toolkit](#) to help plan for serving younger children:

- [Programming - Classroom Ages and Staffing](#)
- [Foundations for Designing a Child Care Center](#)

## **Building a Facility To Sustain a Business**

### **The Levers in Action**

The complexity of operating a successful child care business requires more than funding. Operators must understand and coordinate different levers to build a sustainable program, which include the following elements:

**Facility & Classroom Size**

**Teacher/Child Ratios**

**Group Sizes**

**Square Feet per Child**

**Playground**

**Teacher Pay**

**Tuition Rates**

### ***Strategy 5: Developing Facilities That Support Quality, Workforce, and Viability***

Many current child care sites in the County follow best practices, and there is expertise in the community about facility development.

#### ***Next Steps***

- Identify the current status of the strategy and coordinate with local initiatives addressing the same issue to align and strengthen efforts.
- Provide targeted training for facility planners and operators on designing spaces that attract quality workforce and support staff well-being.
- Develop and share model classroom layouts that incorporate best practice standards beyond licensing, highlighting examples from the community.
- Create cost and revenue modeling for calculating County-wide (and regional if possible) costs and revenues needed for upgrades, expansions and new construction, especially for infant and toddler spaces.

#### ***Potential Measures***

- At least 30 facility stakeholders complete workforce-focused design training.
- Model layouts are published and shared with stakeholders.
- At least five sites use the cost modeling tool to inform facility design and conversion decisions.

#### **Strategy 5 Tools**

- Programming - Classroom Ages and Staffing.
- Foundations for Designing a Child Care Center.

#### **Strategy 5 Key Resources**

- [Child Care Aware Center and FCC Startup Guides](#)
- [Provider Cost of Quality Calculator](#)
- [GSA Child Care Center Design Guide](#)
- [Spaces for Children](#)

## SUMMARY AND OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Important progress is already underway to expand and improve child care facilities, but the work remains fragmented. Now is the time to bring these efforts together, fill in gaps, build on the current momentum, and create a coordinated path forward. Providers have identified clear challenges and opportunities. Cities and the County are advancing supportive policies. Communities are ready to act. The Master Plan offers a foundation, but lasting change will require structure, commitment, and investment. With a focused effort for five years, Santa Barbara County can make real, measurable progress while building a system to continue in the future.

### High Priority Activities



#### Overall Recommendations:

##### **1. Build a strong coalition with dedicated support.**

Bring together the people and organizations already working on facilities, and those ready to get involved. Ask for a shared commitment to a time-bound, collective effort. Hire or designate staff to keep things moving, coordinate across efforts, and support implementation. This structure will help align energy, avoid duplication, and turn ideas into action.

##### **2. Focus the work on shared goals and clear data.**

Refine the goals to reflect what's most needed and what's possible right now. Set up systems to track child care facility data and capture provider input on needs and expansion plans. This will help partners stay aligned, respond to real-time conditions, and adjust the course when needed.

##### **3. Invest in readiness and long-term impact.**

Secure funding not only to build and expand facilities, but also to provide technical assistance and lay the groundwork for future investment. Support communities in closing the most urgent gaps, like infant and toddler care, and help them prepare for longer-term development. Planning should reflect local context—whether reusing space, building new, or integrating child care into housing growth.

##### **4. Act now and stay coordinated.**

The next five years can bring real change if jurisdictions and partners act together. Early wins will show what's possible. With shared leadership and steady progress, the community can deliver more child care spaces and better access for families, while laying a foundation that lasts.

## SAMPLE CHILD CARE FACILITIES ACTION PLAN

The following chart includes examples of planning, action and evaluation ideas for a Santa Barbara County child care facilities coalition, based on the information and strategies in this document.

Phase	Objectives	Actions	Key Indicators
<b>Phase 1</b> (Months 1–18): Build the Foundation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Form and launch the child care facilities coalition</li> <li>2. Identify and train implementation staff</li> <li>3. Develop Year 1 work plan</li> <li>4. Secure interim funding</li> <li>5. Begin implementing ready strategies</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Convene coalition partners</li> <li>● Staff the coalition</li> <li>● Refine Master Plan goals</li> <li>● Develop a resource hub and data tracking system</li> <li>● Provide some technical assistance for startups and expansions</li> <li>● Identify and begin integrating co-location pilots in new housing projects</li> <li>● Support new child care policies in cities and County</li> <li>● Identify early sites for renovation or co-location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coalition active and staffed</li> <li>● Year 1 plan developed</li> <li>● Resource hub launched</li> <li>● 2+ co-located sites initiated</li> <li>● 2+ jurisdictions adopt updated policies</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2</b> (Years 2–4): Expand and Implement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Scale technical assistance</li> <li>7. Formalize coalition governance and funding</li> <li>8. Expand funding pools</li> <li>9. Support new/renovated sites</li> <li>10. Expand pilots and shared services</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full technical assistance to operators.</li> <li>● Launch or expand pooled financing tools</li> <li>● Advocate for tax measures and/or developer fees</li> <li>● Facilitate co-location in more developments</li> <li>● Continue aligning local policies with best practices</li> <li>● Expand data tracking and reporting</li> <li>● Develop model layouts and cost calculators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Additional jurisdictions implement policies</li> <li>● 5+ sites developed or renovated</li> <li>● Expanded funding sources and pilots</li> <li>● Mid-plan evaluation complete</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3</b> (Years 4–5+): Sustain and Grow	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Integrate child care planning into city and County policy</li> <li>12. Secure long-term funding</li> <li>13. Institutionalize the coalition</li> <li>14. Document impact and plan next phase</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Embed child care in General Plans and housing policy</li> <li>● Implement dedicated funding streams</li> <li>● Provide training in workforce - supportive design</li> <li>● Share lessons regionally and state-wide</li> <li>● Conduct final evaluation and plan next steps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sustained funding source</li> <li>● More housing with child care</li> <li>● More infant/toddler slots</li> <li>● Roadmap for next phase published</li> </ul>

## APPENDICES

- A** Key Terms and Definitions - Definitions of key terms and concepts used throughout the Master Plan and Toolkit, including age ranges, licensing types, and facility classifications.
- B** Resource Hub - Tools and references organized by strategy area, including data tracking, land use planning, site feasibility, financing, and program design resources.
- C** Stories from the Field - Real-world case studies and operator experiences from across Santa Barbara County, illustrating challenges, solutions, and lessons learned in facility development.
- D** Toolkit for Child Care Facilities Development - The full set of resources identified in the Master Plan, accessible online through the Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan Toolkit.

## APPENDIX A: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used throughout the Master Plan and **Toolkit**:

**Age ranges** – The primary age groups referred to within this report are infants and toddlers (0-2 years defined as 0-35 months) and preschoolers (3–5 years).

**Capacity** - The total number of children that are allowed to be in a program at a time.

**Child Care Center** (Center) - A program that is licensed to provide group early learning and care services in a nonresidential setting. Directors and teachers are required to have educational credits and experience. City or county permits may be required, along with fire clearance and business license.

**Facilities Development:** The process of planning, designing, constructing, and equipping child care facilities to meet the needs of the children and staff. Facilities development includes acquiring land, choosing the site, constructing buildings, and ensuring that the facility meets safety, accessibility, and regulatory standards. This also includes interior design, outdoor spaces, and the necessary infrastructure for operations.

**Family Child Care Program (FCC):** Licensed care offered in the home of the operator. A small FCC program may care for up to 8 children, depending on their ages. A large FCC requires at least two adults (one being the operator) and cares for up to 14 children depending on their ages.

**Licensed Child Care** - Child care centers and FCCs must be licensed by the Division of the California Department of Social Services. All programs must meet the regulations and standards specified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 22.

**New Site:** An entirely new location where a child care facility is established. A new site may involve constructing a new building or setting up a facility from scratch on undeveloped land.

**Remodeled Site:** A facility that has undergone a substantial transformation or reconfiguration of the interior and possibly exterior spaces. Unlike renovation, which focuses more on repairs and updates, remodeling involves a more extensive overhaul, such as changing the layout of rooms, expanding or reducing space, and completely updating the design. This ensures the facility better meets the current needs of children, staff, and program activities.

**Renovated Site:** An existing child care facility that has undergone significant changes or updates to improve functionality, safety, or appearance. This may include upgrading electrical or plumbing, improving accessibility, or modernizing the overall look of the space.

## APPENDIX B: RESOURCE HUB

<p><b>Strategy 1 Tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Tracking Assessment</li> <li>• Child Care Intermediary Job Description</li> <li>• County Facilities Readiness Tool</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy 1 Key Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Build Up San Mateo County</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Children First San Diego</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Early Learning Nation Collective</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">National League of Cities Early Learning Nation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">National Association of Counties</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">US Chamber Foundation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Collective Caregiving Framework</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy 2 Tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Use Planning Glossary</li> <li>• Child Care Land Use Best Practices</li> <li>• Goleta Guide to Zoning Day Care Facilities</li> <li>• Local Child Care Land Use Policies and Practices</li> <li>• Parking and Child Care</li> <li>• Template for City/County Child Care Permit Process</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy 2 Key Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Planning for Child Care in California</a>, Kristen Anderson, Solano Press</li> <li>• <a href="#">City of San Diego Early Learning and Care</a> section for new child care permits</li> <li>• <a href="#">Redwood City</a> child care webpage</li> <li>• <a href="#">City of South San Francisco</a> Child Care Master Plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy 3 Tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Construction Types</li> <li>• Co-Location of child care with other developments</li> <li>• Potential Local Child Care Sites and Development</li> <li>• Co-Location Examples</li> <li>• Child Care Co-Location Guide</li> <li>• Child Care Facility Assessment Criteria</li> <li>• Child Care Site Feasibility Framework</li> <li>• Assumptions - Square Footage and Capacity</li> <li>• Steps to Identify potential child care sites</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy 3 Core Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Child Care Design Guide</a> - Anita Rui Olds</li> <li>• Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">A Community Win-Win: Co-Locating Child Care with Affordable Housing in San Diego County</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Including Family Child Care in Affordable Housing Developments</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Co-Location of Child Care with Community Resources</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Child Care Aware - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Opening and Running a Child Care Center</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Opening a Child Care Center Business Guide</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Opening a Child Care Center: Action Steps</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Starting Your Child Care Business</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">NCFN Child Care Facilities Cost Estimator</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy 4 Tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding and Financing Options for Child Care Facilities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy 4 Key Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operator <a href="#">Cost of Quality Calculator</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Opportunities Exchange - Shared Services for early childhood programs</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy 5 Tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programming - Classroom Ages and Staffing.</li> <li>• Foundations for Designing a Child Care Center.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategy 5 Key Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Child Care Aware Center and FCC Startup Guides</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Provider Cost of Quality Calculator</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GSA Child Care Center Design Guide</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Spaces for Children</a></li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C: STORIES FROM THE FIELD

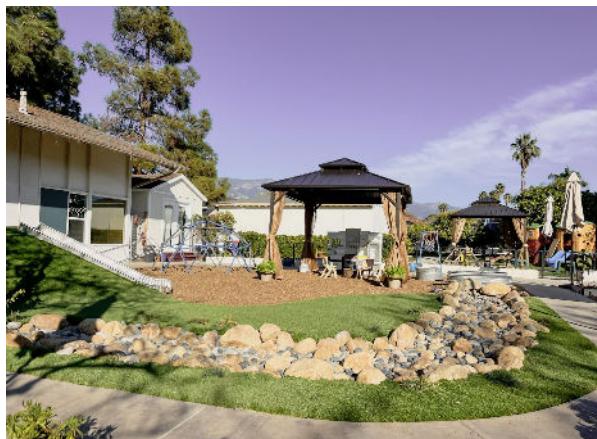
### *Taundra Pitchford - More Mesa Preschool (also Cathedral Oaks) Center*

We recently expanded our program at More Mesa Children's Center, growing from 17 children between 12 and 24 months to a licensed capacity of 60. That includes 18 under two, 20 between 24 and 36 months, and 24 over 36 months. We were lucky to find an existing licensed preschool, which meant we could transfer the license instead of starting from scratch. That made things a lot easier. Setting up a brand-new facility would have been incredibly tough. Even with the license transfer, we still ran into a few hiccups. Some of our paperwork got lost along the way, which slowed things down, though the analysts we worked with were helpful and got us across the finish line just in time. My biggest tip: keep copies of everything.

Renovating the site happened in stages, and we kept a close eye on the budget. We reused whatever we could. Wood from my old backyard pergola turned into planter boxes. We found furniture and supplies through thrift stores, Facebook Marketplace, and even on the side of the road. The church we lease from donated old equipment and materials, and we went through it all to see what might work. We turned a large shed into an art studio and made sure we had enough storage to support our classrooms and curriculum. The playground was our biggest expense. The old climbing structure wasn't safe, so we had to remove it. We replaced it with a safer setup that offers more shade and a larger garden. Inside, there are still a few upgrades on our list.

We did get some ARPA funding, which helped us furnish the space. Even so, the total cost was more than we expected. We filled the gap with fundraising and some of our reserve funds. Infant and toddler care remains in high demand, and we have a long waitlist, though it's hard to make that side of the program financially sustainable. We rely on our preschool enrollment to help cover costs. Expanding infant and toddler care at our Cathedral Oaks site would take serious funding and a new building.

Despite all the work and things still left to do, we've done our best to create a calm, welcoming environment at More Mesa that lives up to the quality we're known for at Cathedral Oaks.





Images courtesy of Cathedral Oaks Center

#### *Lori Goodman - LEAP: Learn. Engage. Advocate. Partner (Lompoc) Center*

We recently opened a new facility in Lompoc, adding 58 child care spaces. We're also looking into shifting six spaces at our Goleta and Isla Vista site to serve infants. Finding the right location has always been one of our biggest challenges. Before we opened in Lompoc, we tried to secure a new space in Goleta without any luck. Then we connected with a church whose preschool had closed during the pandemic. When we met, they were just starting to think about reopening their classrooms. The timing worked out well for both of us.

Once we had a verbal agreement, it still took some time for their board to approve the partnership. We also had to negotiate a rental agreement that reflected our shared values.

The hardest part came during the build-out. We ran into unexpected plumbing problems, including blocked pipes. Then the fire marshal required us to install sprinklers, something that hadn't been enforced at that site before. That single change led to a series of additional costs. Adding sprinklers meant applying for a new building permit, which brought in the inspector and led to more upgrades. One of those was expanding a bathroom to meet ADA requirements. What we expected to cost around

\$250,000 ended up costing over \$800,000. It also delayed our opening by about four months.

Even with all that, we were able to cover the project costs using startup funds from our expanded contract along with a few one-time grants. The licensing process moved fairly quickly. Our paperwork and licensing program analyst visit happened just two weeks apart. We had hoped for same-day licensing, but a playground waiver caused a short delay. Still, we were licensed within a month, which we've heard is one of the fastest turnarounds in the County.



*Images courtesy of LEAP*

We're open to creating more centers in the future, though finding affordable and appropriate space continues to be a major obstacle. Infant and toddler care also comes with higher costs and is physically demanding. Our staff deal with frequent lifting and bending, which increases the risk of injury and makes long-term staffing more difficult.

#### *Cathy Smith - Island View Preschool (Santa Barbara) Center*

We opened Island View Preschool last November in historic Riviera Park, drawing inspiration from Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and Outdoor Classroom approaches. The program currently serves eight infants, from two months to two years old, ten two-year-olds, and ten children ages 2-5 years. Two spots in the preschool room are set aside for children moving up from the infant program. The infant room filled almost immediately, and demand has stayed incredibly high. We already have a waitlist of 15 families for June 2026.

Bringing toddlers into the same license as preschoolers has come with its own set of challenges. We're still figuring out how to support different developmental needs while keeping our Montessori-inspired

mentoring structure in place within a larger classroom.



*Images courtesy of Island View Preschool*

Finding the location was both a blessing and a challenge. The school is housed in what used to be the old Dean's residence from UCSB's original campus. It really feels like a home, which has been a big positive for both staff and children. At the same time, turning the space into a preschool has required a lot of time and creativity. The building's historic designation helped in some ways, since it reduced certain ADA and fire sprinkler requirements. At the same time, it added complexity and cost. For example, when we built the new play yard, we had to match the existing wrought iron fencing, which wasn't cheap.

Choosing a location for the outdoor space also took longer than expected. Our first two proposals were rejected by the Historic Landmarks Committee. We eventually found a spot that worked for both the school and the aesthetics of the park.

The permitting process was similar to what you'd expect for a home or business, though it made us wish there were a separate path designed specifically for early childhood programs. Something like that could really help speed things up and make it easier to respond to the County's growing need for child care.

Funding has been another challenge. We received a loan from the Economic Development Collaborative and several restricted grants that helped us improve the play yard, support teacher training, and furnish the infant room. These funds didn't cover our start-up operating costs, which left us looking for other ways to make it work.

Licensing went smoothly overall. We did have to revise our application when the guidance around toddler licensing changed, which set us back a bit. Still, the school is now up and running, and even with all the effort it took to get here, we've created a warm and engaging environment for young children that reflects what we believe in as educators.



*Images courtesy of Island View Preschool*

***Cinthia Roldan Lopez - Senso Roots Child Care Family Child Care (Goleta)***

I run Senso Roots Child Care, a small licensed program in Goleta that serves two infants and six toddlers. Our focus is on sensory and motor development, and we see each child as a unique seed with unlimited potential.

Opening the program went smoothly. Licensing, setting up the space, and getting the environment ready all came together without major issues. I had the support I needed along the way, which made the process easier and more positive overall.

While things have gone well, funding has been a challenge. It's been difficult to find resources to cover start-up costs. I'm part of a local program in Goleta that will be offering some financial support soon, which will help. I haven't had any trouble caring for infants and toddlers. I really enjoy working with this age group.

What I'd love most is more access to child development tools and materials that support learning and growth. I've made the most of what I have, but with more support, I could offer even more to the children in my care.

***Adela Ortiz – Ortiz Family Child Care (Santa Barbara)***

My goal has always been to help children learn, grow, and be prepared for whatever comes their way. At Ortiz Family Child Care, I care for eight children, including three infants and three toddlers. I truly enjoy working with this age group and would love to care for more if I had the space and resources.

Getting started wasn't easy. It took about a year to get licensed, and in the beginning, I had a hard time figuring out the process on my own. Once I connected with CRR, everything changed. They gave me the coaching and support I needed to complete the steps and finally get licensed.

I didn't run into any major problems with my site, and I received start-up funding from CRR, which made a big difference. I'm now part of a business cohort and looking forward to receiving materials that will continue to support my program as it grows.

For anyone going through this process, I strongly recommend reaching out to CRR. Their training and coaching gave me the tools I needed to succeed, and I'm truly thankful for the support they offer operators like me.

*Cindy Rodriguez – Rodriguez Family Child Care (Lompoc)*

At Rodriguez Family Child Care, I've created a space where children can explore, grow, and feel supported. My program now serves 14 children, including both infants and toddlers.

One of the bigger challenges I faced was getting fire alarm clearance. It was a confusing process at first, but with help from the team at Children's Resource & Referral, I was able to find the right information and move forward with confidence.

The licensing process went smoothly, thanks to the steady support of my CRR coach. They also helped me get reimbursed for some of my start-up costs. I'm now part of the business cohort program, which has provided additional materials and training to support my work.

Renovating my home to meet the needs of children at different stages of development was not easy. It took a lot of planning to create the right environment for mixed ages. Whenever I had questions or ran into challenges, CRR was there to guide me. Their support has made a real difference in this journey, and I'm truly grateful for everything they've done to help me succeed.

*Emily Korpela – Korpela FCC (Lompoc)*

My goal with Korpela FCC has always been to provide a safe, loving, and healthy environment where children feel cared for and supported. I offer eight child care spaces, including for infants and toddlers. I love working with this age group and find a lot of joy in helping them grow. That said, one of my biggest challenges has been finding full-time children, which has created some financial stress.

Converting parts of my home to create a suitable child care space also came with some challenges, especially around space and layout. Financial start-up costs were difficult to manage, but the overall process of becoming licensed and launching my program was smooth. I'm grateful for the support I've received so far and look forward to continuing to build and improve the care I offer.

*Maria Santos Rodas Hernandez – Rodas Hernandez Family Child Care (Guadalupe)*

When I first opened my program, there weren't many family child care homes in my area. Now there are more, but that hasn't impacted my enrollment—in fact, I've been at full capacity. I currently serve two infants (ages 1-2), three toddlers (ages 2-4), and four school-age children. My child care mission has always been to help families in my community, and I love what I do. I even encourage other women who share this passion to open family child care programs. I often refer people to Children's Resource & Referral, which supported me throughout my licensing journey.

Recently, I moved into a larger home (one of my personal goals) and I'm now preparing to apply for a large license. While the licensing process went smoothly overall, there was a delay in getting my inspection. I was ready in April but didn't receive the visit until August. Still, I'm excited about expanding my program and grateful for the support I've received, especially from CRR and their coaching team. This career brings me joy, and I'm proud of the care I provide.

*A Family Child Care Operator from Santa Maria chose to respond anonymously*

As a small licensed operator caring for children from birth through age 12, my focus is on offering a safe and supportive environment for all the children in my care. Getting my program started was fairly easy, especially with the help of my mother, and I didn't run into major issues with the site or licensing process.

The biggest challenge has been maintaining full enrollment and accessing enough funding. There just isn't enough financial support for operators or for the families we serve. I've found that many of us are doing our best with limited resources, and I believe more funding opportunities would make a huge difference, not only in expanding programs like mine, but also in making care more accessible for families in need.

## APPENDIX D: **TOOLKIT** FOR CHILD CARE FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

The Santa Barbara County Child Care Facilities Master Plan Toolkit includes the resources identified in the Master Plan and can be found here: [Link to Master Plan Toolkit](#)

