



Hawai'i KIDS COUNT E-Bulletin

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Center on the Family | University of Hawai'i at Mānoa-CTAHR

Early Childhood Programs in Hawai'i Special Issue

A new study from the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family provides a state-wide assessment of the early learning system for children birth through age five. This study, conducted in partnership with the Hawai'i Children's Action Network and funded by the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation, serves as a key tool to evaluate and improve how our state supports the development of all of our children.

The early childhood period is a critical window of opportunity to create healthy, resilient keiki who will grow up to become Hawai'i's next generation of compassionate, competent adults. Thus, supporting young children supports the wellbeing of the entire community.

According to the report, a strong early childhood system is an extraordinarily wise public investment. High quality early learning programs help children develop to their full potential. Reliable, affordable childcare allows parents to remain in the workforce, increasing family self-sufficiency and ensuring stability for employers. As a result, each dollar spent on early childhood results in three to eight dollars in long-term savings to society.



Hawai'i Early Learning Needs Assessment

The report focuses on childcare and preschool centers, family childcare homes, and family-child interaction learning programs. Findings reveal both bright spots and areas of crucial need. Hawai'i has many childcare centers with national accreditation, which is an indicator of quality. Public preschool is growing. There are also unique options available, such as Hawaiian language immersion, family-child interaction groups where parents and children play and learn together, and programs for children who are homeless.

The report stresses the need for quality in all early childhood settings. Quality requires teachers and caregivers who are sensitive to children's needs and know how to support development through play and responsive, back-and-forth interactions. Areas in need of action include increasing the number of childcare and preschool seats. Overall, there are enough seats to serve about one in four children, but many communities are childcare deserts with few or no options for families. There is an especially severe shortage of infant-toddler care. Hawai'i has 37 children under age three for every licensed infant-toddler center seat, and some islands have no infant-toddler centers. Not every family has a grandparent or neighbor who can provide childcare, and it is not surprising that parents try to get their children on a waiting list long before their babies are born.

Cost is a second key concern. Hawai'i has the nation's least affordable center-based care, relative to family income. The federal government defines affordable childcare as 7% of family income for all children combined, but care for only one child takes about 13% of the typical Hawai'i family paycheck. There needs to be a reduction of out-of-pocket costs for both low- and middle-income parents.

A third area of need is support for the early childhood providers themselves, many of whom do not earn a living wage. Some providers need access to on-site professional development and a pathway to earning a credential or college degree in the early childhood field. Finally, the cost of running a childcare program is prohibitive. Centers and family childcare providers struggle to keep tuition as low as possible while remaining a viable as a business.

The report ends with policy recommendations for increasing the capacity of early childhood programs, decreasing out-of-pocket costs for families, providing high quality early childhood experiences in all settings, investing in the early childhood workforce, and developing data systems and readiness assessments.

To read the report, please visit:

http://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/publications/brochures/e8998_HawaiiEarlyLearningAssessment-Web.pdf.

The summary report can be found at:

http://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/publications/brochures/3f139_EarlyLearnSum.pdf.

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