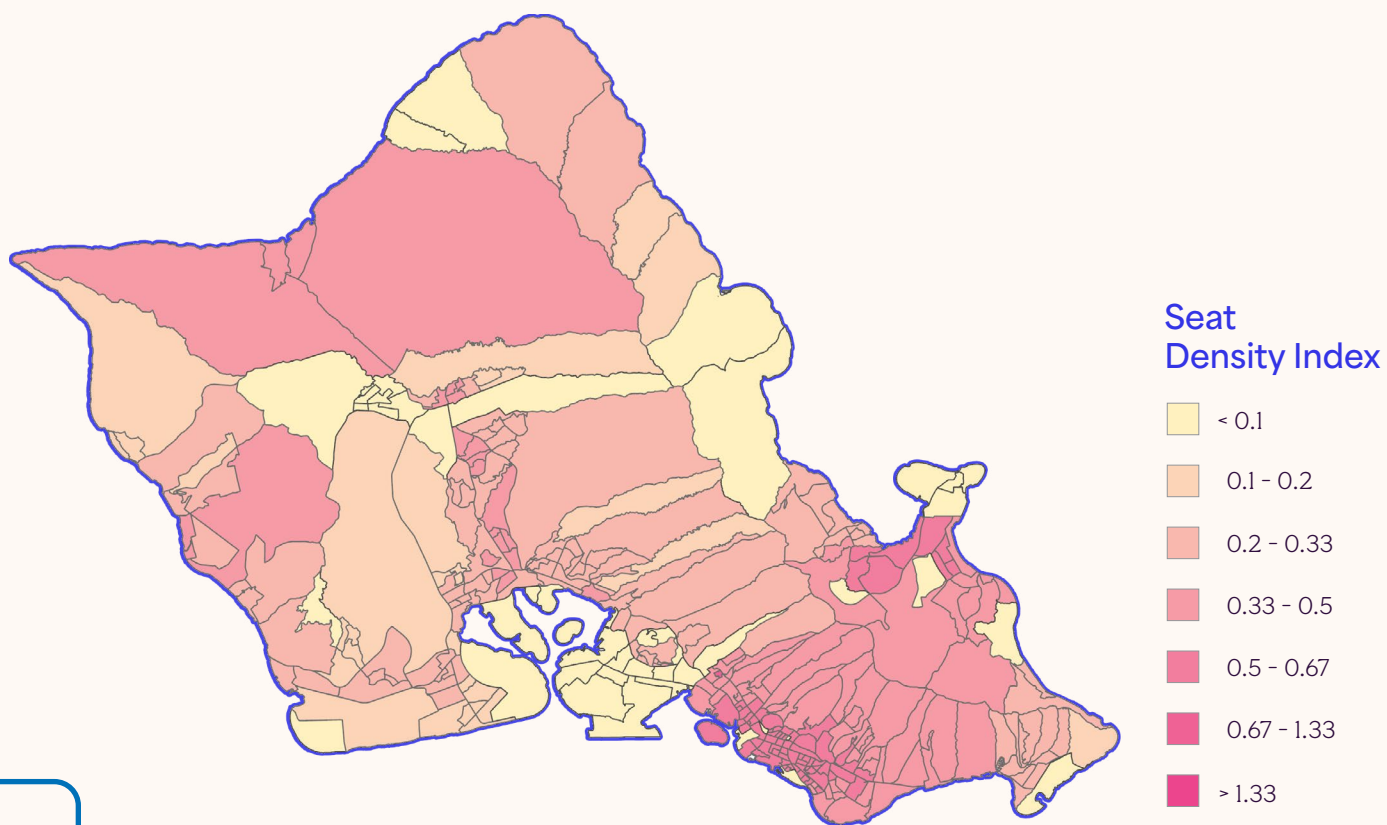


# Access to Early Childhood Care and Education:

## City & County of Honolulu



## Introduction

Access to affordable, conveniently located, and high-quality early care and education (ECE) supports the well-being of Hawai‘i’s youngest keiki and helps their families and our local communities thrive. High-quality ECE programs set the stage for lifelong learning, health, and well-being.<sup>1</sup> ECE is also essential to working parents and promotes women’s workforce participation, pay equity, and career advancement.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, economists estimate that the benefits realized for workforce productivity, family self-sufficiency, and long-term child outcomes make ECE one of the best-known returns on the public dollar.<sup>3</sup>

Hawai‘i’s current ECE supply is insufficient—especially for infants and toddlers—and expensive, with access depending on where a family lives.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, the state is taking steps to expand affordable, high-quality ECE. However, as Hawai‘i moves toward universal access for 3- and 4-year-olds by 2032,<sup>5</sup> the needs of children under age 3 must also be addressed.

The equitable allocation of ECE resources requires data on which communities and populations are underserved. With this need in mind, the [Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in Hawai‘i](#) web tool was created to inform Hawai‘i’s expansion planning. The interactive maps posted there show (a) the supply of nearby ECE seats, (b) the average cost as a percentage of family income, and (c) whether these seats are high quality. Using data from the web tool, this snapshot provides a profile of how the City and County of Honolulu fares on these measures of ECE access. We highlight two communities with high needs, one with low ECE access and another with more favorable access. We also offer recommendations for improving equitable access in Honolulu County.

Note that the ECE data included in this snapshot were collected July–October 2022 and do not reflect subsequent changes that may have occurred. We present this profile as a baseline for setting goals and measuring future progress.

### ECE Access Indexes

This project provides a new method for measuring the availability, affordability, and quality of ECE within a set distance of each home in the state. For every house, condominium, and apartment building, we took into account the number and characteristics of ECE seats as well as the number of young children living nearby. The resulting indexes provide a highly localized measure of the ECE resources available to families within their neighborhoods.

The **seat density** index represents the number of ECE seats per child within a five-mile radius of a family’s home. It indicates whether capacity is sufficient to serve the number of children who live nearby. Scores lower than .33 (i.e., more than three children per seat) are often considered to indicate a shortage of ECE seats.

The **cost burden** index expresses the average cost of a nearby seat as a percentage of that area’s median family income. The federal government defines affordable costs as no more than 7% of family income and has set this level as the copayment cap for families receiving child care subsidies.<sup>6</sup>

The **quality** index measures the likelihood that a nearby seat is in a center with a national ECE accreditation (NAEYC, NECPA, NAFCC), a public pre-K classroom, or a Head Start/Early Head Start program.<sup>7</sup> Because these programs meet standards beyond those required for state licensing, they are likely to provide developmentally appropriate, responsive, and thoughtfully planned care; this does not mean that other programs cannot also be of high quality. High-quality ECE is associated with better child outcomes and is especially important for children facing challenges such as poverty, homelessness, or developmental delays.

## City & County of Honolulu ECE Access Profile

Approximately seven in 10 of the state's young children (an estimated 62,345 children under age 5) live in the City and County of Honolulu. The median family income is the highest in the state at \$103,845 as compared to the state average of \$97,813. Slightly over one-quarter of the county's children under age 18 (25.8%) are from poor or low-income households.<sup>8</sup>

The City and County of Honolulu has a total of 17,385 ECE seats (see Table 1). The large majority (86.1%) of these seats are in licensed child care centers serving preschool-aged children. A little less than 2% of seats are in public pre-K classrooms, with a slightly larger share (4.6%) in family or group child care homes. The City and County of Honolulu has the largest share of infant-toddler center seats (7.5%), surpassing the other counties and the state overall (6.3%). Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide about one in 10 of the county's ECE seats. The average cost of ECE in Honolulu is the highest in the state, \$1,137, compared to the state average of \$1,063.

**Table 1: ECE Program Characteristics and Cost<sup>9</sup>**

Variable	City & County of Honolulu		State	
<b><i>Seats by Provider Type</i></b>	<b><i>Count</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>	<b><i>Count</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
Family or Group Child Care Home	801	4.6	1,622	6.6
Licensed Infant-Toddler Center	1,301	7.5	1,528	6.3
Licensed Preschool Center	14,970	86.1	20,538	84.1
Public Pre-K*	313	1.8	742	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,385</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>24,430</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><i>Seats by Other Provider Characteristics</i></b>	<b><i>Count</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>	<b><i>Count</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
Early Head Start or Head Start	1,684	9.7	2,411	9.9
Accredited Private Providers	7,635	43.9	9,313	38.1
<b><i>Cost</i></b>				
All Providers**	\$1,137	---	\$1,063	---
Fee-based Providers	\$1,278	---	\$1,215	---

\*Includes Executive Office on Early Learning and Public Charter School classrooms

\*\*Includes public pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start at \$0 tuition

## City & County of Honolulu ECE Access Profile

The City and County of Honolulu's supply of ECE seats within a five-mile radius of a family's home is the best in the state. Quality is also a bright spot, especially for the youngest keiki (see Table 2). For all age groups combined, the county has .33 nearby seats per child. As is the case for the state as a whole, there is a much smaller supply of seats for infants and toddlers compared to those 3 to 4 years of age (.11 vs. .65 seats per child, respectively). On average, a nearby seat costs 13.8% of the median area family income. ECE seats for 3- to 4-year-olds are more affordable than infant-toddler seats, with costs representing 13.2% vs. 16.6% of median family income, respectively. Quality access in the City and County of Honolulu surpasses that of the other three counties due to a high share of accredited private ECE centers. Over half (56.2%) of nearby seats are in programs likely to be of high quality (i.e., accredited programs, public pre-K, Head Start, or Early Head Start), with only slight variation by age group; 58.5% of nearby infant-toddler seats are of high quality, compared to 55.5% of seats for 3- to 4-year-olds.

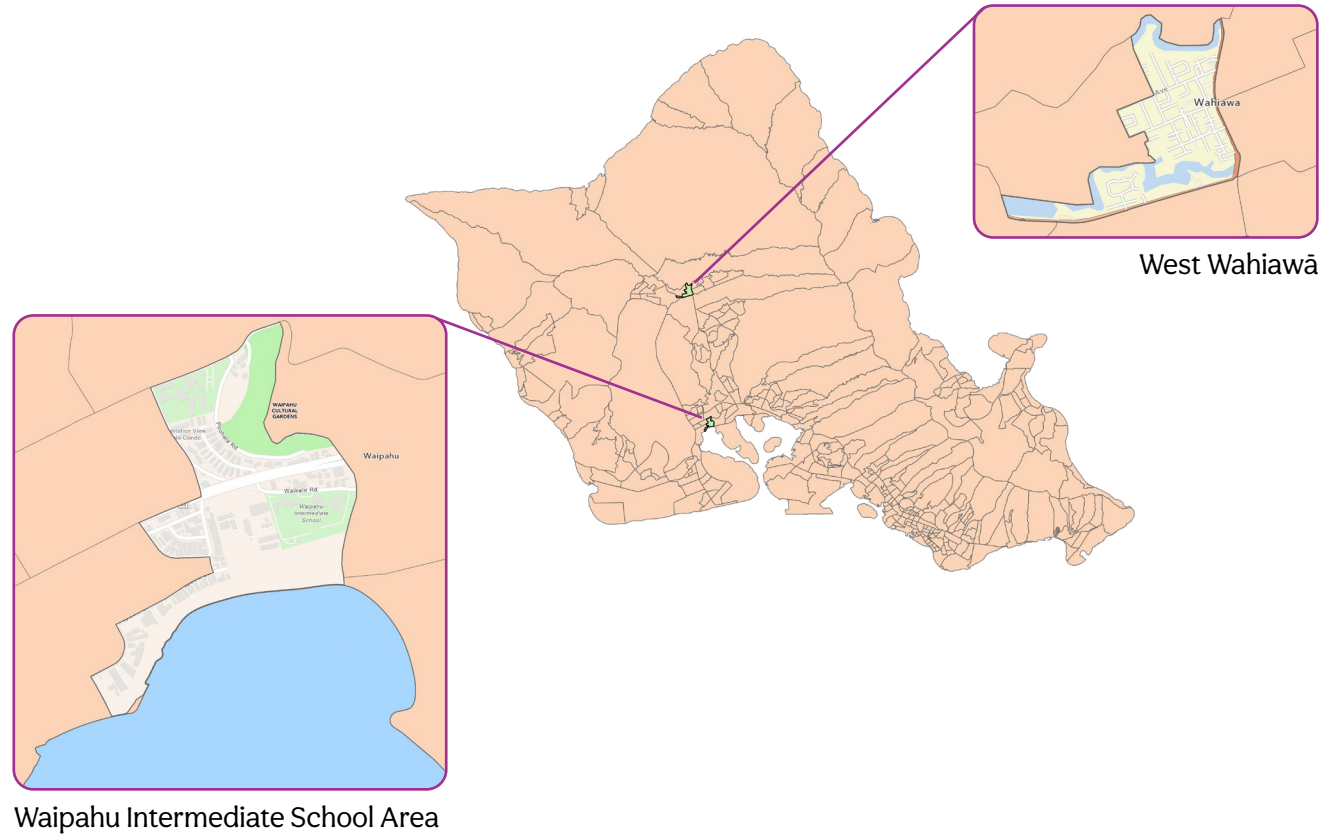
**Table 2: ECE Access Within 5 Miles<sup>10</sup>**

ECE Access Index	City & County of Honolulu	State
Seat Density (overall)	.33	.31
Seat Density (ages 0-2)	.11	.09
Seat Density (ages 3-4)	.65	.63
Cost Burden (overall)	13.8	13.6
Cost Burden (ages 0-2)	16.6	14.9
Cost Burden (ages 3-4)	13.2	13.2
Quality (overall)	56.2	51.1
Quality (ages 0-2)	58.5	46.3
Quality (ages 3-4)	55.5	51.2

*Note.* Due to its large population, Honolulu County weighs heavily in the state averages.

## A Closer Look: Waipahu Intermediate School Area & West Wahiawā

Below we highlight two O'ahu communities that differ on ECE access.



**Table 3: Community Profiles<sup>11</sup>**

Indicator	Waipahu Intermediate School Area	West Wahiawā
Children under age 5	462	218
Median family income	\$49,266	\$67,866
% of low-income children	41.5	21.2
% of children in poverty	29.0	48.7
Seat density ages 0-4	.28	.42
Cost burden ages 0-4	24.4	13.3
Quality ages 0-4	32.1	71.8

## A Closer Look: Continued

### Waipahu Intermediate School Area

The area close to Waipahu Intermediate School (census tract 15003008705) is a community with high needs and low ECE access (see Table 3). With an estimated 462 young children, the Waipahu Intermediate community is in the top 10% in Honolulu County for economic risk and the bottom 10% for overall ECE access. This area's median family income is \$42,996, and 70.5% of its children are from poor or low-income households. The Waipahu Intermediate area has .28 nearby seats per young child. A nearby seat costs 24.4% of the median neighborhood family income, and 32.1% of seats are in high-quality programs. The Waipahu Intermediate School neighborhood is notable for having a high share of adults with less than a high school education (11.9%), many residents of Pacific Islander ethnicity (46.6%), and a moderately high representation of limited English-speaking households (10.5%). This community would benefit from an infusion of ECE resources to improve the affordability and quality of the ECE supply. Attention to language access and cultural responsiveness is also warranted.

### West Wahiawā

The area around the Wahiawā Medical Arts Clinic west of Kamehameha Highway (census tract 15003009402) is an example of a high-needs community with relatively good ECE access (see Table 3). This neighborhood is in the top 10% in Honolulu County for economic risk but also the top 10% for overall ECE access, with quality being especially strong. An estimated 218 young children live in the west Wahiawā area. This neighborhood's median family income is \$67,866, and 69.9% of its children live in poor or low-income households. West Wahiawā has .42 nearby seats per young child. A nearby seat costs 13.3% of the median family income, and 71.8% of seats are in high-quality programs. This neighborhood has high shares of Native Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian residents (38.7%), Pacific Islander residents (14.2%), and adults with less than a high school education (16.1%), as well as a moderately high number of limited English-speaking households (9.8%). The presence of Head Start and nationally accredited private child care centers contribute to the neighborhood's access to high-quality and relatively affordable ECE.

## Recommendations for the City and County of Honolulu

The provisions of Act 46 require statewide planning for the rapid and equitable expansion of public and private preschool access, increased support for providers to attain accreditation and demonstrate high-quality care, and constraining out-of-pocket costs to families. While working towards these goals, the need for infant-toddler care cannot be overlooked, along with the challenges of staffing and inflation. Suggestions to inform ECE expansion efforts in the City and County of Honolulu are given below.

- With a preschool seat density index of .65 seats per child, the county has the most favorable ECE supply for 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. However, this still falls short of the goal of having sufficient seats to serve 80% of the preschool population set for the Lieutenant Governor's Ready Keiki initiative.<sup>12</sup> The ECE access web tool along with site location data on recently planned or opened public pre-K sites can identify underserved, low-income communities to prioritize, followed by middle-income, then high-income areas.
- With an infant-toddler seat density of .11, slightly more than one of 10 very young children can be served in infant-toddler centers or family child care homes. Develop a strategic plan to increase infant-toddler seats and address the issues of pay equity, the shortage of qualified infant-toddler staff, and the very high cost to providers of serving our youngest keiki.
- The City and County of Honolulu has the best quality access in the state. Continue this positive trend by offering supports such as coaching, technical assistance, and financial incentives to raise overall quality, and encourage more private providers to seek accreditation.
- As policies to reduce family copayments are enacted, monitor progress to ensure widespread awareness and enrollment of eligible children in subsidy programs.
- Collect data on the needs and preferences of commuting parents and those working nontraditional schedules to address the availability of ECE options close to employment centers and providers offering evening and weekend care.

For ECE access data in other parts of the state or specific communities within the City and County of Honolulu, please visit [Access to Early Childhood Care and Education in Hawai'i](#).

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). *The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: Working paper No. 5*. [https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/Timing\\_Quality\\_Early\\_Experiences-1.pdf](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/Timing_Quality_Early_Experiences-1.pdf); Phillips, D., Lipsey, M., Dodge, K. A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M., & Weiland, C. (2017). *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. New York: Brookings Institution and Duke Center for Child and Family Policy; Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2016). When does preschool matter? *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 21–35.
- <sup>2</sup> Malik, R. (2018). *The effects of universal preschool in Washington, DC: Children's learning and mothers' earnings*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; Morrissey, T. W. (2017). Child care and parent labor force participation: A review of the research literature. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 15, 1–24; OECD (2019). *Education at a glance 2019: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- <sup>3</sup> Council of Economic Advisors (2015). *The economics of early childhood investments*. Washington, DC: Author. <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Council+of+Economic+Advisors+%282015%29,+The+economics+of+early+childhood+investments>; Karoly, L.A. (2016). The economic returns to early childhood education. *The Future of Children*, 26(2), 37–56.
- <sup>4</sup> DeBaryshe, B., Stern, I., Nguyen, M., Azuma, J., & Chen, Q. (2023). *Hawaii's critical shortage of infant-toddler care*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Center on the Family. <https://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/publications>; Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood education and care in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>
- <sup>5</sup> Relating to access to learning, Act 46 (2020). <https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/sessions/session2020/bills/GMI151.PDF>.
- <sup>6</sup> Improving child care access, affordability, and stability in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) (Final rule). *Federal Register*, 89:42 (March 1, 2024) pp 15366–15415. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/03/01/2024-04139/improving-child-care-access-affordability-and-stability-in-the-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>
- <sup>7</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, National Association for Family Child Care.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B01001: Sex by age*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B19125: Median family income in the past 12 months by presence of own children under 18 years*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B17024: Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months*.
- <sup>9</sup> Data sources: State of Hawai'i Executive Office on Early Learning, People Attentive to Children (PATCH), Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission, State of Hawai'i Department of Human Services Child Care Office.
- <sup>10</sup> Data source: Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood care and education in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>. For age-specific indexes, seat counts were based on license type and reported enrollment of children 0–2 vs. 3–4.
- <sup>11</sup> Data sources: Center on the Family (2024). *Access to early childhood care and education in Hawai'i*. [Website] <https://ecemaps.uhfamily.hawaii.edu>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B01001: Sex by age*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B19125: Median family income in the past 12 months by presence of own children under 18 years*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B17024: Age by ratio of income to poverty level in the past 12 months*.
- <sup>12</sup> Office of the Lieutenant Governor (2023). *Ready Keiki*. [Website] <https://www.readykeiki.org/>

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