

EARLY CHILDHOOD FOOD PROGRAM ACCESS IN HAWAI'I

WHAT ARE CACFP AND NSLP?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are federally-funded nutrition programs intended to provide affordable and healthy meals in child/adult care and school settings, respectively. Both programs offer schools and care providers cash reimbursement towards the cost of meals and snacks. NSLP also lowers out-of-pocket costs to eligible children. This fact sheet focuses on CACFP and NSLP access for children ages birth to five enrolled in early care and education (ECE) programs statewide.



CACFP AND NSLP ELIGIBILITY AND RATES

Reimbursement rates are based on children's household income or categorical eligibility, such as SNAP receipt or being in foster care. In some cases, all children may be eligible based on school or area demographic characteristics, or the ECE provider's own income. Hawai'i's CACFP reimbursement rates are adjusted annually and are set higher than those of the continental United States.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF YOUNG CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR ECE FOOD PROGRAMS

Island	Number of children ages 0-5 < 185% FPL ¹	Eligible children per food seat ²
Hawai'i	4,295	3.1
O'ahu	16,848	2.4
Kaua'i	1,436	3.0
Maui	2,266	3.4
Moloka'i	166	1.5
Lāna'i	71	1.6
State	25,082	2.6

Data sources: American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 Population Estimates Table B17024; State of Hawai'i Department of Education, Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs Office, SY 2024-2025.

¹ Children who fall below the 185% FPL threshold are generally eligible for free or reduced price meals under both CACFP and NSLP.

² Eligible children divided by the capacity of ECE programs in NSLP or CACFP.

FUTURE CHANGES TO NSLP ELIGIBILITY IN HAWAI'I

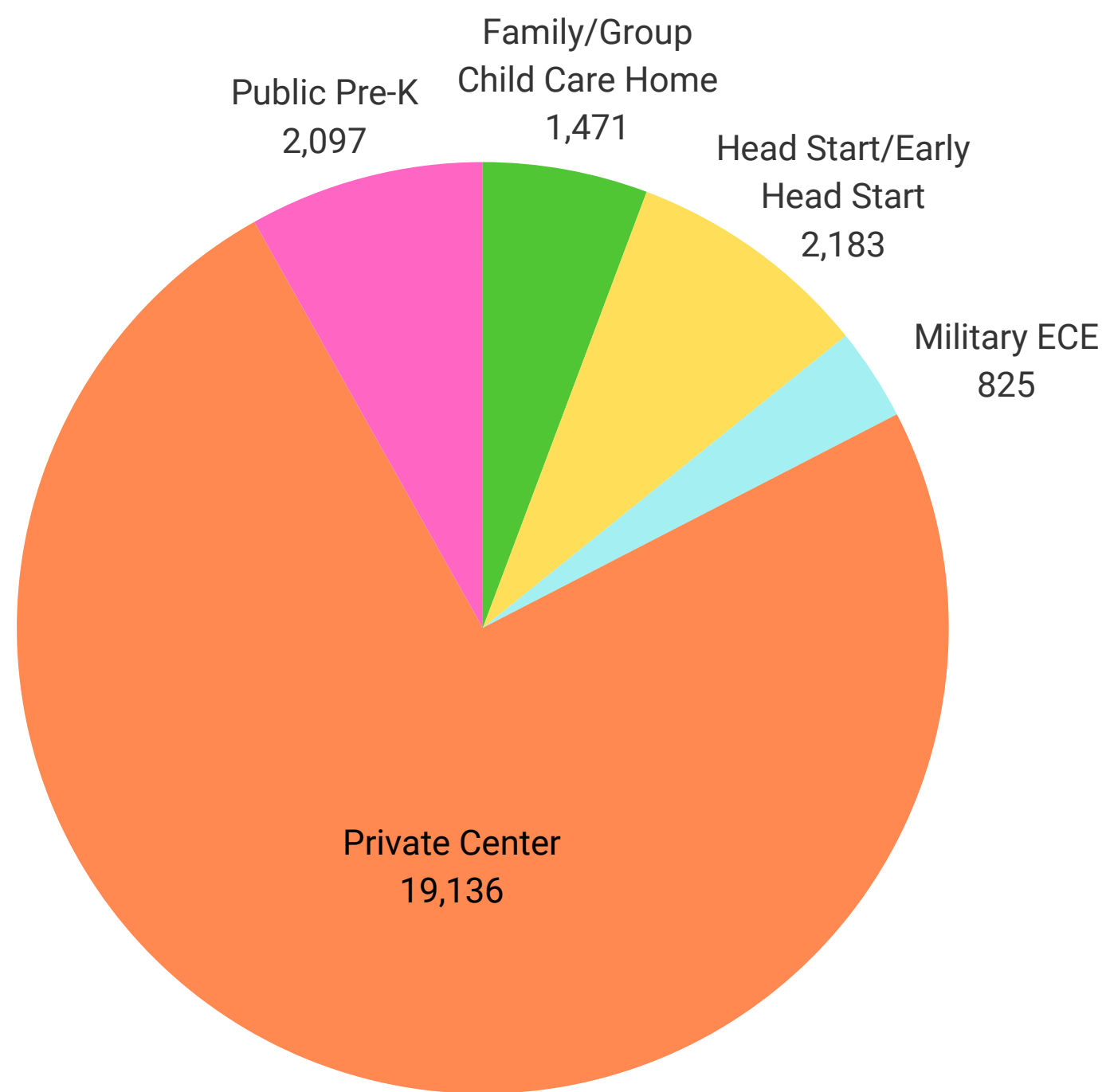
Hawai'i SB1300, passed in May 2025, expanded NSLP eligibility for the 2025-2026 school year (SY) and onwards. Prior to SB1300's passage, children with household incomes below 130% FPL qualified for free meals and students with household incomes below 185% FPL qualified for reduced price meals. Under SB1300, all students with household incomes below 185% FPL newly qualified for free meals in SY 2025-2026. SB1300 will further extend free lunch eligibility to students from households earning below 300% FPL, beginning SY 2026-2027. According to 2022 ACS 5-year population estimates, approximately 44,823 children below age six are from households that earn below 300% FPL statewide.



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ECE SEATS BY PROVIDER TYPE



Data sources: Hawai'i Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) ; Hawai'i Public Charter School Commission; People Attentive to Children (PATCH), all SY 2024-2025.

PERCENTAGE OF ECE SEATS IN A FOOD PROGRAM

Island	Family/Group Child Care Home	Head Start/Early Head Start	Military ECE	Private Center	Public Pre-K	Total
Hawai'i	52.7%	100%	N/A	19.4%	97.0%	43.6%
O'ahu	58.9%	100%	100%	21.7%	98.7%	37.8%
Kaua'i	81.9%	100%	100%	14.0%	100%	37.4%
Maui	46.7%	100%	N/A	3.9%	100%	26.0%
Moloka'i	N/A	100%	N/A	37.5%	100%	73.2%
Lāna'i	N/A	N/A	N/A	46.2%	100%	61.1%
State	57.3%	100%	100%	19.6%	98.5%	37.6%

Data sources: State of Hawai'i Department of Education, Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs Office and PATCH, both SY 2024-2025.
Notes: Table values are the percentage of seats in an ECE program participating in CACFP or NSLP, i.e., number of food program seats divided by all ECE seats. N/A indicates the island does not have this type of provider.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION TRENDS

All public schools (including public pre-K) and most public charter schools participate in the NSLP, and Head Start/Early Head Start programs are required to participate in CACFP. In Hawai'i, family child care providers are eligible for third-party CACFP sponsorship that helps reduce administrative burdens. Although private centers make up the bulk of ECE seats statewide, they have the lowest food program participation rates. This may be due to ineligibility of children served, limited awareness of CACFP, or low perceived benefit of participation. There has been a net loss of total CACFP seats statewide since 2022-2023, mostly from private centers, due to a combination of site closures and withdrawal from CACFP.

See the State of Hawai'i Department of Health's [Ono for Hawai'i](#) map for more information on ECE food programs, farms, food hubs, and farmers' markets.