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Photo by Ronald Felton

Early Childhood Education

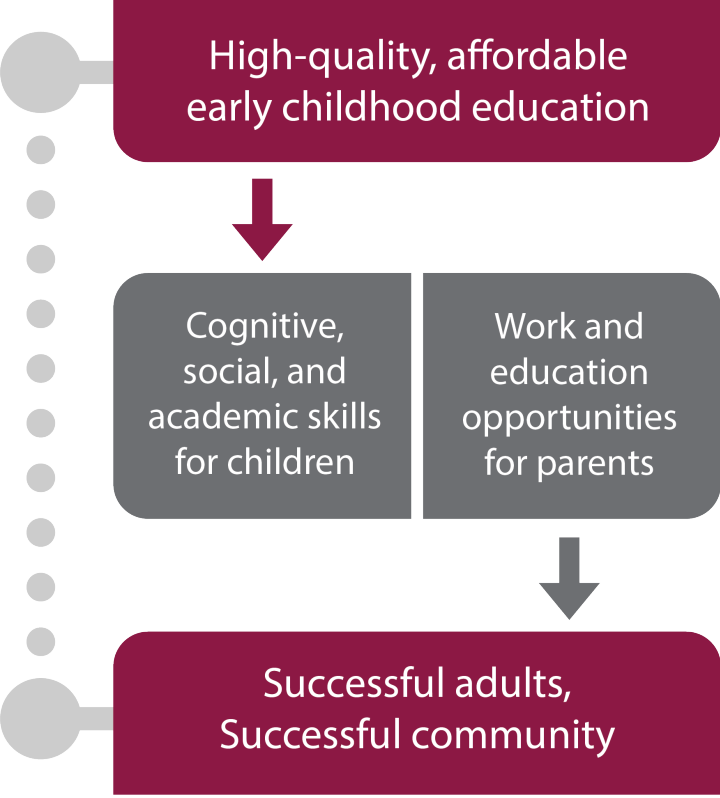
Costs, Benefits, and the potential impact of additional funding for ECE in Doña Ana County and New Mexico

Over the past few weeks, early childhood education (ECE) advocates have celebrated numerous advancements. On March 11, President Biden [signed the American Rescue Plan](#), which includes \$39 billion in child care relief funding and expands eligibility for programs. On Thursday, the New Mexico Senate [voted in favor of a ballot question](#) which will allow voters to designate 0.75% (approximately \$127 million a year) of revenues from the New Mexico Land Grant Permanent Fund towards early childhood services. The social and economic benefits of these additional funding sources could be tremendous. Although it's not clear how these acts would impact Doña Ana County directly, let's take a look at what we do know.

1. The benefits of ECE reach far beyond the individual

Recognized benefits of high-quality early childhood education include increased cognitive abilities, decreased vocabulary gaps found between disadvantaged children and their peers, and better developed socio-emotional skills like sociability, self-esteem, and managing behavior.⁽¹⁾

ECE is also associated with fewer children retained in a grade, fewer children in special education, higher educational attainment, and fewer children incarcerated as adults.⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, studies show that affordable, high-quality childcare improves parents' productivity at work, resulting in fewer missed days and more education opportunities for parents. Conversely, parents who cannot afford childcare may be forced to leave the workforce to become full-time caregivers instead.⁽¹⁾



2. Cost is one of the greatest barriers to child care



Median monthly cost of care from a 5-STAR child care center, by age (2018):

- **Infant - \$894**
- **Toddler - \$890**
- **Preschool - \$810**

Monthly full-time tuition at NMSU (2018):

- **Undergrad - \$738**

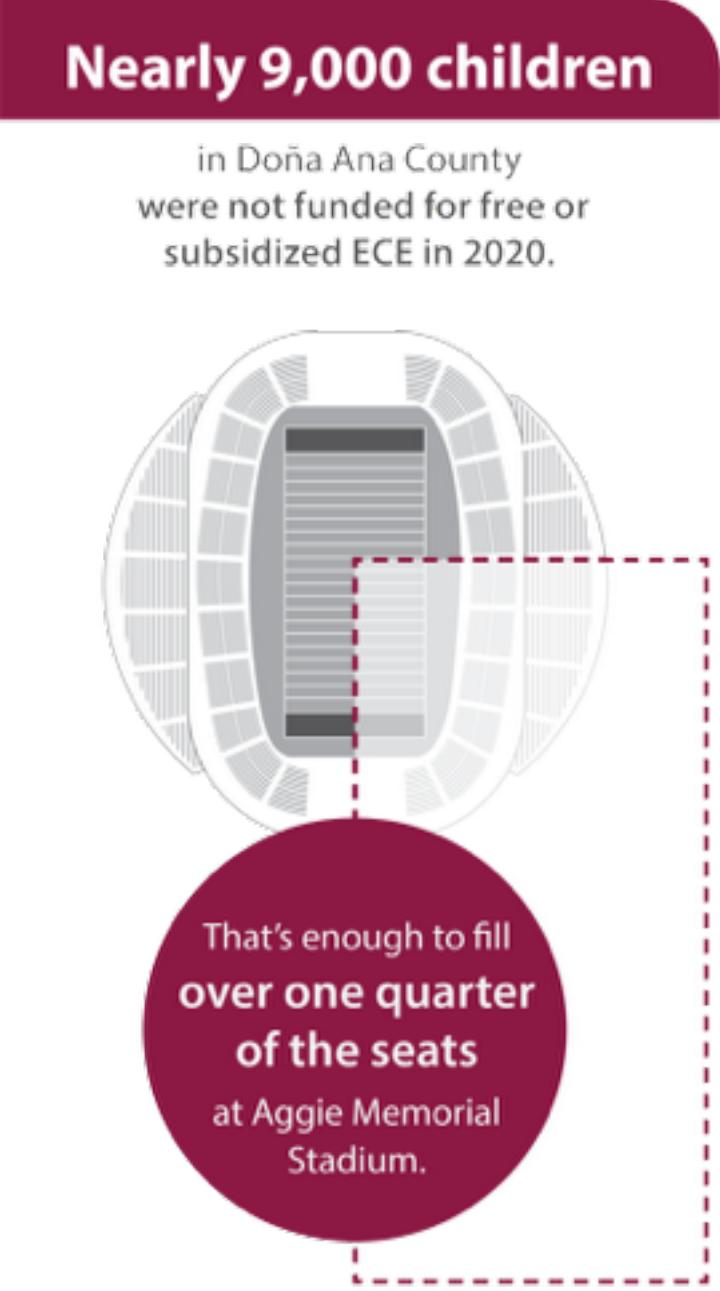
While the benefits of early childhood education are well-established, ECE can be prohibitively expensive or even unobtainable for many families. In 2018, the median monthly cost of care from a high-quality (5-STAR) child care center was \$894 for infants; for toddlers, it was \$890; and for preschool-aged children, it was \$810.⁽²⁾ That's higher than the cost of tuition for a full-time undergraduate student at NMSU, which was about \$738 per month in 2018.⁽³⁾

Such high costs could be a huge burden to parents living in Doña Ana County. Half of the county population lives below 200% of the federal poverty level; 42% of babies are born to women living in poverty; and the median incomes of single mothers and single fathers are \$18,881 and \$26,492, respectively.⁽⁴⁾ Sure enough, Doña Ana County parents cite cost as the number one barrier to child care services and the third most common barrier to preschool services.⁽⁵⁾

3. More funding could lead to higher ECE enrollment in Doña Ana County

In 2020, just over one-third (35%) of children under 5 years-old in Doña Ana County were funded for a free or subsidized, evidence-based early childhood education program.⁽⁶⁾ This leaves nearly 9,000 children unfunded, whose parents may face difficulty paying for similar services. Many of these families may have to settle for low-quality ECE or none at all. (For more information about ECE subsidies, [see our dashboard on early childhood education](#).)

Organizations such as the [Doña Ana County Early Childhood Education Coalition](#) are actively working to improve both the quality and accessibility of ECE, but these efforts cost time and money. Whether from the state of New Mexico or the nation, additional funding could bolster access to high-quality early childhood education and other child care services. Greater accessibility could mean higher enrollment in evidence-based ECE and a stronger foundation for our children's future.



[Click here to see our dashboard on Early Childhood Education](#)

Sources:

- (1) [5 Reasons Why the Importance of ECE is Impossible to Ignore](#)
(2) [New Mexico Child Care Market Rate Survey Report, 2018](#)
(3) [New Mexico State University Tuition & Fees, Las Cruces Campus, Fall 2018](#)
(4) American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2019
(5) [100% Community Survey, Doña Ana County, 2020](#)
(6) [The Doña Ana County Education Context Report, 2020](#)

Note: The total number of children under 5 years old living in Doña Ana County in FY 2020 was 13,817.



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