



Early Childhood in Doña Ana County

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Early Childhood Needs Assessment Results from the Doña Ana County ECE Coalition's Needs Assessment, 2022

It is a common misconception that cognitive and social development in children begins during elementary school. But did you know that children learn several critical social, emotional, and basic skills before kindergarten?(1) Early Child Education (ECE) teaches children how to interact with others and can lay the groundwork for a successful life in adulthood. It also provides parents with techniques to promote their child's development and create stronger socio/emotional bonds. For these reasons, the [Success Partnership's Doña Ana County ECE Coalition](#) aims to ensure every child in Doña Ana County has access to quality ECE.(2)

Recently, the Doña Ana ECE Coalition conducted a [Community Needs Assessment \(CNA\)](#) to better understand what is needed locally to increase quality ECE in the county.(3) This assessment comes at a crucial time. On November 8th, New Mexico will vote on an amendment to increase annual funds for New Mexico childcare providers, early learning programs, and public skills.(4) The findings from the CNA support the Coalition's three goals. Here's what we know about the impact and need for ECE in our community according to the Coalition's goals.

On November 8th, New Mexicans will vote on whether to allocate Land Grant Permanent funds to ECE and public education.

This amendment would allocate 1.25% of the five-year average of year-end market values of the money in the Land Grant Permanent Fund to ECE (60% of the allocation) and public education (40% of the allocation).

Goal 1: Children are born into healthy homes.

A child's home environment can play an important role in preparing them for a successful future. Our assessment highlighted several essential data points that reflect the overall health of our homes and communities.

Mothers need improved access to prenatal care.

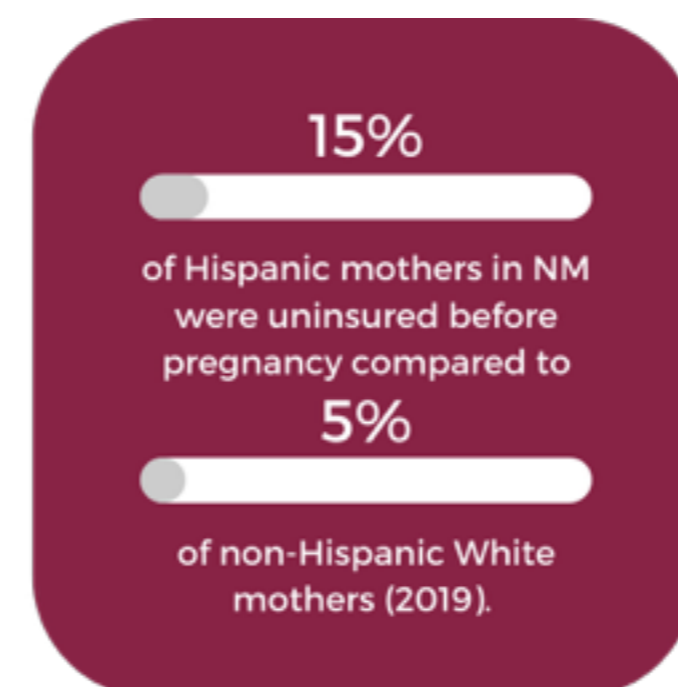
Data revealed that only 60% of pregnant mothers received prenatal care in their first trimester. The Doña Ana County Early Childhood Education Coalition aims for 80.5% of mothers to access prenatal care.

Disparities in access to benefits exist.

Compared to 5% of non-Hispanic white mothers, 15% of Hispanic mothers in New Mexico were uninsured before pregnancy in 2019. Health insurance is needed to access quality health care before, during, and after pregnancy.

High-quality, affordable childcare is a priority.

Families indicated the need for more high-quality, affordable childcare – including childcare options with flexible hours for working parents.



Families need essential services and support.

Families are experiencing housing and food insecurity exacerbated by the increased cost of healthy foods and rising housing costs. Parents also lack employment opportunities that earn an equitable working wage to support their families.

In addition, paid time off is crucial for the health of parents and their babies. Data shows that only 40% of mothers in New Mexico took paid leave after delivering a baby.



Greater access to high-quality ECE will improve educational outcomes in Dona Ana County.

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Goal 2: Children Are Ready for School.

Access to high-quality early education is highly related to school readiness and long-term educational outcomes. Research indicates the number of words a child knows by age three predicts 3rd-grade reading scores, which predict high school graduation rates. ECE access is vital for children in families with low-educational attainment.(5) Studies show that children with caregivers or parents who have completed high school have vocabularies 2-3 times larger than those with parents who did not.(6) The percentage of children funded for high-quality, free ECE in Doña Ana County reflects a remarkable lack of services for children ages two years older and younger.

The percentage of children accessing free, high-quality ECE has increased.

Only 36% of our children under five years old are funded for free or subsidized, evidence-based early childhood education. However, we have seen improvement in the percentage of children funded for ECE since the SUCCESS Partnership baseline in 2017 (28%).(7) The need for increased access to ECE is highest for children two years old and younger. While 67% of three and four-year-olds are funded, only 14% of children two years old or younger are funded for free or subsidized programming.

We need to improve kindergartner readiness and social development.

Although kindergarten readiness is a factor for academic success, it encompasses much more than learning the basics of letter and number recognition or reading skills. Being prepared also means focusing, demonstrating self-control, and interacting socially with new peers and adults. The Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) indicates that only 29% of students in the county are meeting age-level expectations for Reading and Math, and 53% are meeting expectations for Physical Development, Health, and Well-Being.



How else can we improve educational outcomes in Dona Ana County?

Goal 3: The Workforce is Supported.

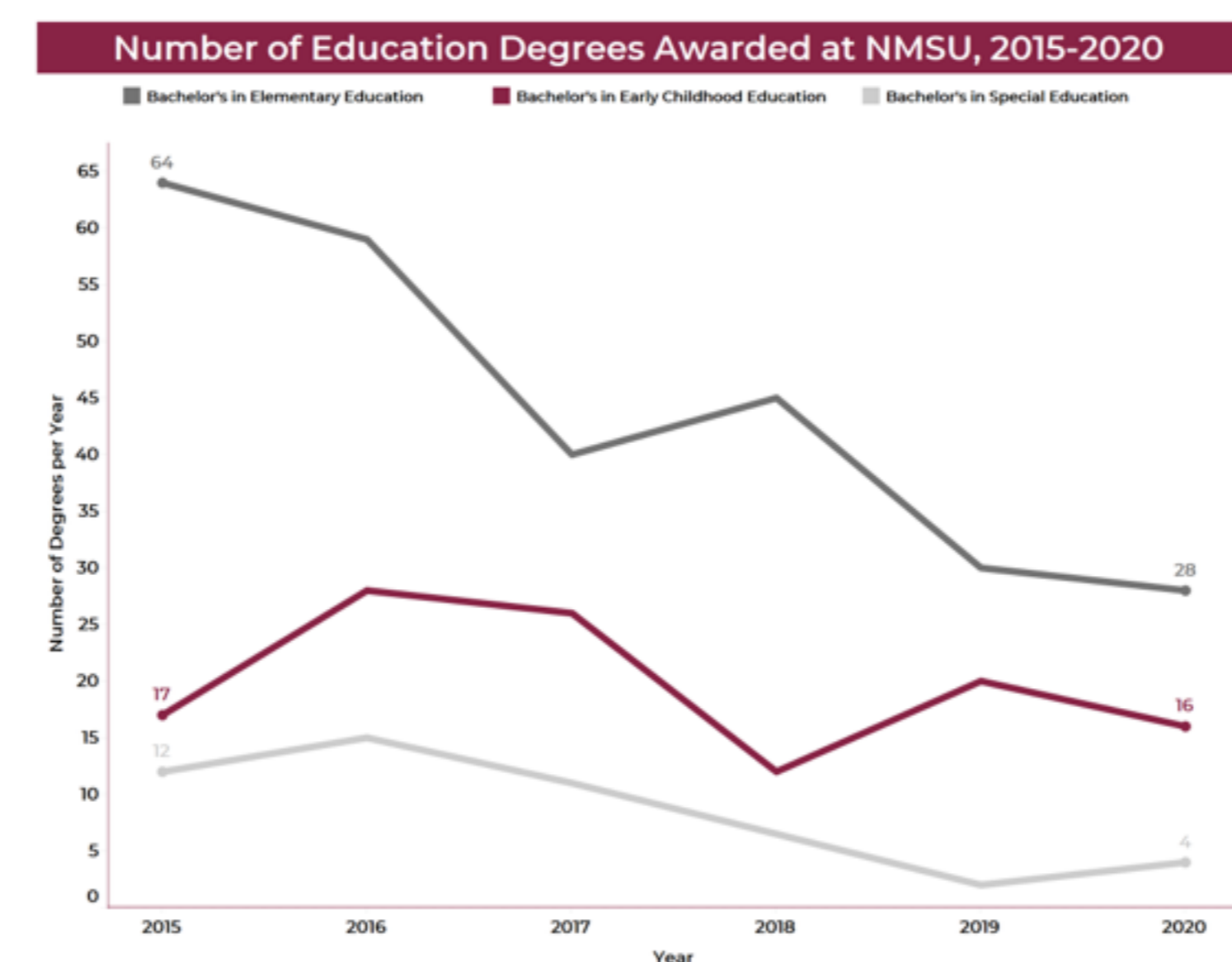
Exceptional ECE and care start with a highly qualified ECE workforce. It is important to retain the ECE workforce and encourage people to pursue the field. To do this, the workforce should be well-compensated and supported.

The ECE workforce needs better compensation.

The people we trust to keep our children safe and provide them with loving care and early education, which is crucial in the early years, are among the lowest-paid workers in our community.(8) Data reveals that childcare workers earn \$22,190 per year.(9) We must pay our early childhood professionals a fair wage that reflects the great importance they have in our community. What else can we do to support our teacher workforce?

We need to enroll more teachers in post-secondary education.

The pandemic exacerbated existing teacher shortages in New Mexico and much of the country. To produce an excellent education system, we must promote high-quality teaching through effective recruitment, preparation, mentoring, and ongoing professional learning. New Mexico has made great efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers, including; grow-your-own programs, teacher residencies, and loan-for-service and loan repayment programs.(10) Regardless, the number of students at NMSU completing degrees in early childhood or elementary education is steadily declining.(11) (12) Since 2015, there has been a 56% decrease in students completing bachelor's degrees in elementary education.



[Click here to read the full report.](#)

Final Thoughts

The findings from the Community Needs Assessment will guide the Coalition's priorities and strategies for the coming years. To improve these issues in ECE, community engagement is needed. Per our analysis, parenting classes, increased access to high-quality ECE, professional development, education, public outreach, and more are recommendations to achieve our goals. By joining the Coalition today, you can be a part of the collective impact to make these changes. For more information on how to become involved, contact succesdac.org/ececoalition.

About the ECE Coalition:

The ECE Coalition is comprised of dozens of local ECE organizations and community members. Four backbone organizations that support the ECE Coalition are La Clinica de Familia Family Services (LCDFFS), Ngage NM, the Community Action Agency of Southern NM (CAA), and the NMSU Center for Community Analysis (CCA).

Sources:

- (1) Intellectual and Cognitive Development in Children and Teens
- (2) ECE Coalition - SUCCESS Partnership
- (3) ECE Coalition of Doña Ana County Community Needs Assessment, 2022
- (4) What New Mexico voters need to know about the Permanent School Fund
- (5) Third Grade Reading Level Predicts of Later Life Outcomes
- (6) Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development
- (7) Children Funded for Free or Subsidized ECE in DAC Dashboard
- (8) Early Childhood Workforce Index 2020 - The Early Childhood Educator Workforce
- (9) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - New Mexico Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics
- (10) Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies
- (11) Fewer People Are Getting Teacher Degrees, Prep Programs Sound the Alarm
- (12) Teachers are leaving and few people want to join the field. Experts are sounding the alarm