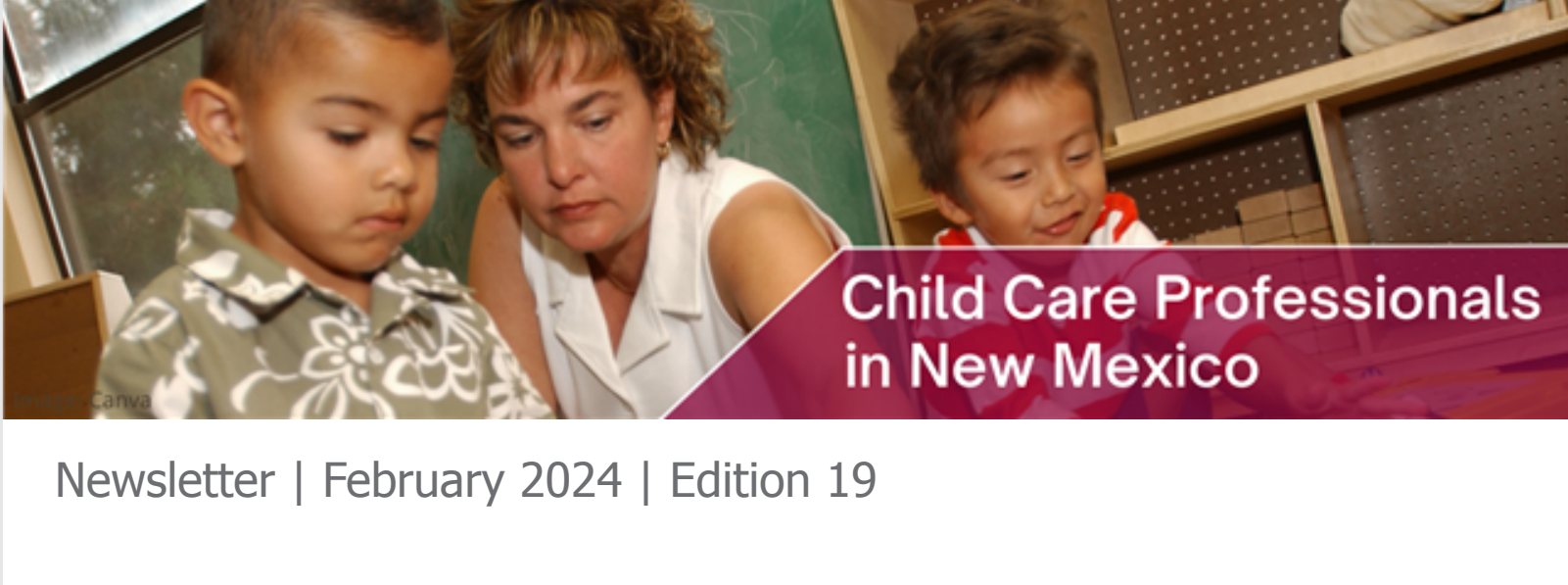




Child Care Professionals in New Mexico

Newsletter | February 2024 | Edition 19

How New Mexico is Tackling the Lack of Child Care Providers in the State

Data dashboard: Early Childhood Education Workforce

In recent years, New Mexico has seen a noticeable effort from the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) to improve the current Early Childhood Education (ECE) system. These improvements include raising the income eligibility for child care assistance from 200% to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level and waiving child care co-pays - starting in May 2022. (1) Since then, over 1,000 additional children in Doña Ana County have enrolled in child care. (2) While this is a significant improvement, we must ask: will we have enough early childhood professionals to meet the demand for child care? As mentioned in our recent newsletters, Doña Ana County has lost approximately 204 childcare facilities since 2020, which equates to losing 1,300 available slots for children. (3)

Studies show that over 80% of the brain forms within the first three years of life, making high-quality education crucial. ECE outcomes include higher graduation rates and improved mental and physical health. (4) Early Childhood Care professionals work with children during their formative years; however, worker shortages often prevent many providers from operating childcare centers at capacity. As a result, providers are unable to expand programming. (5) These shortages highlight the need for more students to pursue degrees in ECE. Unfortunately, the problem is compounded by the fact that graduation rates for these degrees have been declining since 2020. (6) The lack of ECE workers will ultimately put the developmental well-being of New Mexican children at a disadvantage. Local and state-level advocates are working to implement changes that can help provide both childcare workers and children in New Mexico with a better future.

“There has never been a better time to explore a career in early childhood education and care,” said Stephanie M. Rodriguez, Cabinet Secretary for the New Mexico Higher Education Department.

Over 1,000 additional children have enrolled in child care since May 2022.

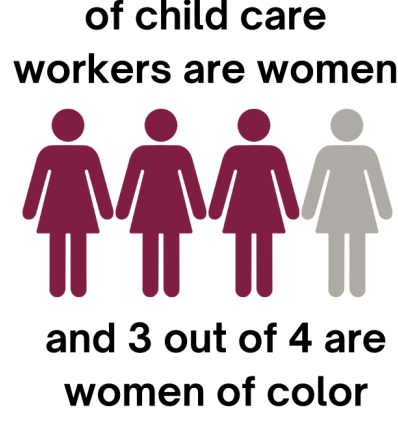


[Click here to see the ECE Workforce Dashboard](#)

Worker wages and improvement

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the hourly wage for childcare workers in New Mexico was lower than \$15 in 2022. Las Cruces, for example, pays a mean hourly wage of \$12.37. Higher-paying towns, such as Santa Fe, pay \$14.93. Statewide, the mean hourly pay for New Mexico childcare workers is \$13.07. New Mexico ranks 30th nationally in childcare worker wages. However, New Mexico ranks higher than its neighbor, Texas. In El Paso, Texas, a childcare worker can expect to earn \$11.05 per hour.

These rates do not reflect the importance of childcare workers. They also reflect gender and racial equity issues. Ninety-one percent of New Mexico's childcare workers are women, and nearly three out of four are women of color. (7) Occupational segregation, which is when people of different races and genders are disproportionately represented in certain jobs, often results in low wages and poor benefits for historically marginalized groups. This is ever-present in the childcare sector. (8)



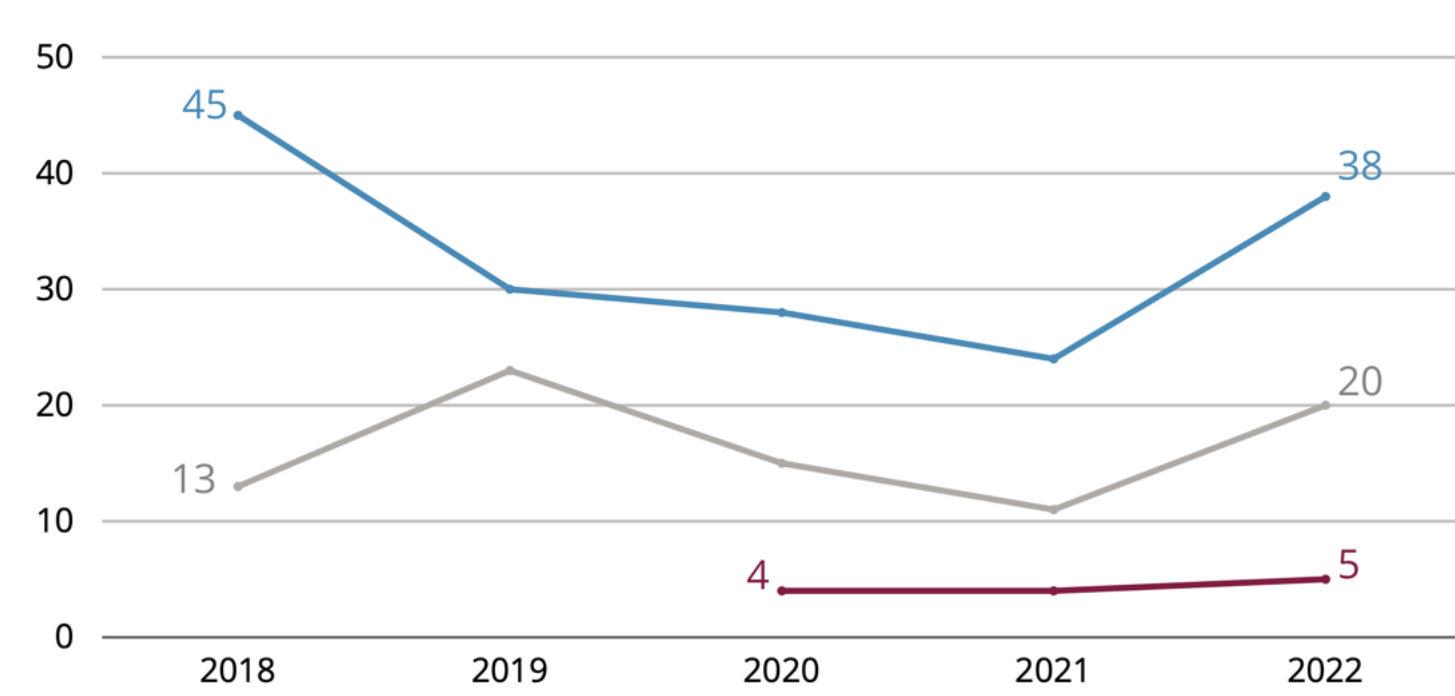
In response to these challenges, the ECECD has recently made significant efforts to boost wages for childcare workers. The Competitive Pay for Professionals (CPP) grant increased pay by \$3 an hour for 7,438 professional childcare workers between September 2022 and September 2023. The enhanced childcare assistance rates will ensure these wage increases remain over time. The grant supports pay of \$15 an hour for entry-level workers and \$20 for lead teachers in licensed facilities rated with two or three stars. The ECECD has also worked on expanding its PreK Parity Program, ensuring PreK teachers make at least \$50,000 a year in community environments. Along with these programs, the ECECD's wage supplement program increased the pay of 949 qualified childcare professionals between January and June 2023. (9)

[Click here to see the ECE Workforce Dashboard](#)

Early Childhood Education degrees

After two years of declining numbers of bachelor's degrees at NMSU during COVID (2020 and 2021), we are seeing an uptick in the number of ECE and Elementary Education degrees awarded. The increased opportunities to obtain teaching certificates through alternative licensure programs may help increase these numbers in future years. (10) (11) NMSU Global now offers alternative licensure programs in Early Childhood Education. (12) The ECECD has also provided scholarships to support and motivate educators to earn new credentials and skills. In the 2023 spring and summer semesters, the ECECD provided \$1.2 million in scholarships to people seeking Early Childhood Education degrees. Along with this, the ECECD is offering stipends to qualifying students to assist them in completing their degrees. (13) The ECECD also launched the “Developing Futures” campaign to motivate more students to pursue ECE work. (14)

Number of ECE- related Bachelor's Degrees Awarded at NMSU, 2018-2022



Data Source: New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department data request.

New Mexico is experiencing a shortage of bilingual teachers

New Mexico currently has efforts in place to promote bilingual learning. The New Mexico State constitution requires teachers to be proficient in English and Spanish. (15) In addition, the Martinez and Yazzie Consolidated Lawsuit requires New Mexico schools to include culturally and linguistically responsive instruction in schools to meet their student's social, emotional, and academic needs. In response to the lawsuit, the ECECD appointed an Assistant Secretary for Native American Education and Care, Cotillion Sneddy. New Mexico is the first state to create this position, showing a commitment to improving ECE. (16) In early 2022, the New Mexico Senate passed a bill that guaranteed equal pay for Native American language and culture teachers. This bill promotes culturally and linguistically relevant education in the classroom. There are plans to increase the opportunities available to bilingual child care workers and offer incentives to those pursuing bilingual educational work, including scholarships and incentive payments. The department has provided wage supplements to child care workers based on their level of education, along with a one-time payment of \$1,500 to certified bilingual educators. (17) With such incentives offered, the time to pursue a career path in Early Childhood Education has never been better.

Addressing the issue, locally and statewide

The Doña Ana ECE Coalition has begun transformative work in our area to address the ECE workforce shortage. Members of the Doña Ana Coalition have been actively advocating for ways to increase credentials and research in Early Childhood Education. Starting in the summer of 2024, New Mexico State University will offer an online Early Childhood Ph.D. program providing 80% of tuition coverage to qualifying candidates. For more information about the Ph.D. program, contact Dr. Rhianna Thomas at thomaskr@nmsu. In addition, Las Cruces City Council adopted a resolution to amend the City's American Rescue Plan Act funding priorities and allocations. (18) The Council approved five new projects, including a child care provider program in collaboration with [Ngage New Mexico](#). The funding for this program can support a two-year accelerator program for registered home providers. In this program, registered home providers will gain support and training to increase their credentials and revenue as they transition to increase capacity.

Statewide, the ECECD requested funding in the legislative session to increase the professional development of ECE workers and invest in a wage and career ladder for infant and toddler teachers and assistant teachers. The ECECD sought funds for policy, research, and quality initiatives, which include increasing funding for bilingual and Indigenous higher education endowments. (19)

Catch up on our last newsletters that looked at [access to child care](#) and [child care capacity](#). To get involved in our local efforts to build child care capacity in Doña Ana County, you can join the Doña Ana County ECE Coalition at: <https://www.succesdac.org/ece/>.

[Click here to see the ECE Workforce Map](#)

Sources:

- (1) [Child Care Assistance Co-payments Waived](#)
- (2) [Child Care Subsidy Recipients in Doña Ana County, New Mexico Dashboard](#)
- (3) [CCA December 2023 Newsletter: Child Care Capacity in Doña Ana County: Do we have enough space to fill the child care demand?](#)
- (4) [ECECD budget request sustains important gains for families and providers and increases access to high-quality programs and services](#)
- (5) [ECECD Tackles Early Childhood Workforce Shortage with New Recruitment Campaign](#)
- (6) [Early Childhood Community Needs Assessment, Doña Ana ECE Coalition](#)
- (7) [Early Childhood Education Workforce in Doña Ana County and New Mexico Dashboard](#)
- (8) [Women's Work Is Undervalued, and It's Costing Us Billions](#)
- (9) [Florecer Progress and Accountability Report 2023](#)
- (10) [Alternative Licensure Program Opportunities](#)
- (11) [NMSU Alternative Licensure](#)
- (12) [NMSU Global Campus](#)
- (13) [Florecer Progress and Accountability Report 2023](#)
- (14) [ECECD Tackles Early Childhood Workforce Shortage with New Mexico Recruitment Campaign](#)
- (15) [New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Program Evaluation: Bilingual and Multicultural Education Programs](#)
- (16) [Cotillion Sneddy of Navajo Nation appointed as new ECECD Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care](#)
- (17) [New Mexico ECECD Annual Outcomes Report for Fiscal Year 2022](#)
- (18) [City Council Action and Executive Summary](#)
- (19) [ECECD budget request sustains important gains for families and providers and increases access to high-quality programs and services](#)