



Newsletter | June 2025 | Edition 26

Survey Results: Early Childhood Education in New Mexico and Doña Ana County

Insights on Equity and Access in Early Childhood Services

In New Mexico, early childhood education (ECE) faces ongoing and dynamic challenges. Access remains critical for parents seeking high-quality care and education for their children. To better understand these barriers, the 100% Community Survey, conducted in 2019 and 2024 by the [Doña Ana County Resilience Leaders](#), provides valuable insights. This survey identifies community needs and uncovers the root causes of access issues. The 100% Community initiative, spearheaded by [NMSU's Anna, Age Eight Institute](#), offers a collaborative framework to transform under-resourced areas into thriving, fully supported communities.

While the ECE landscape continues to evolve, many promising developments are underway to support families, educators, and communities. In this newsletter, we explore the latest updates and initiatives shaping the future of early childhood education in New Mexico.

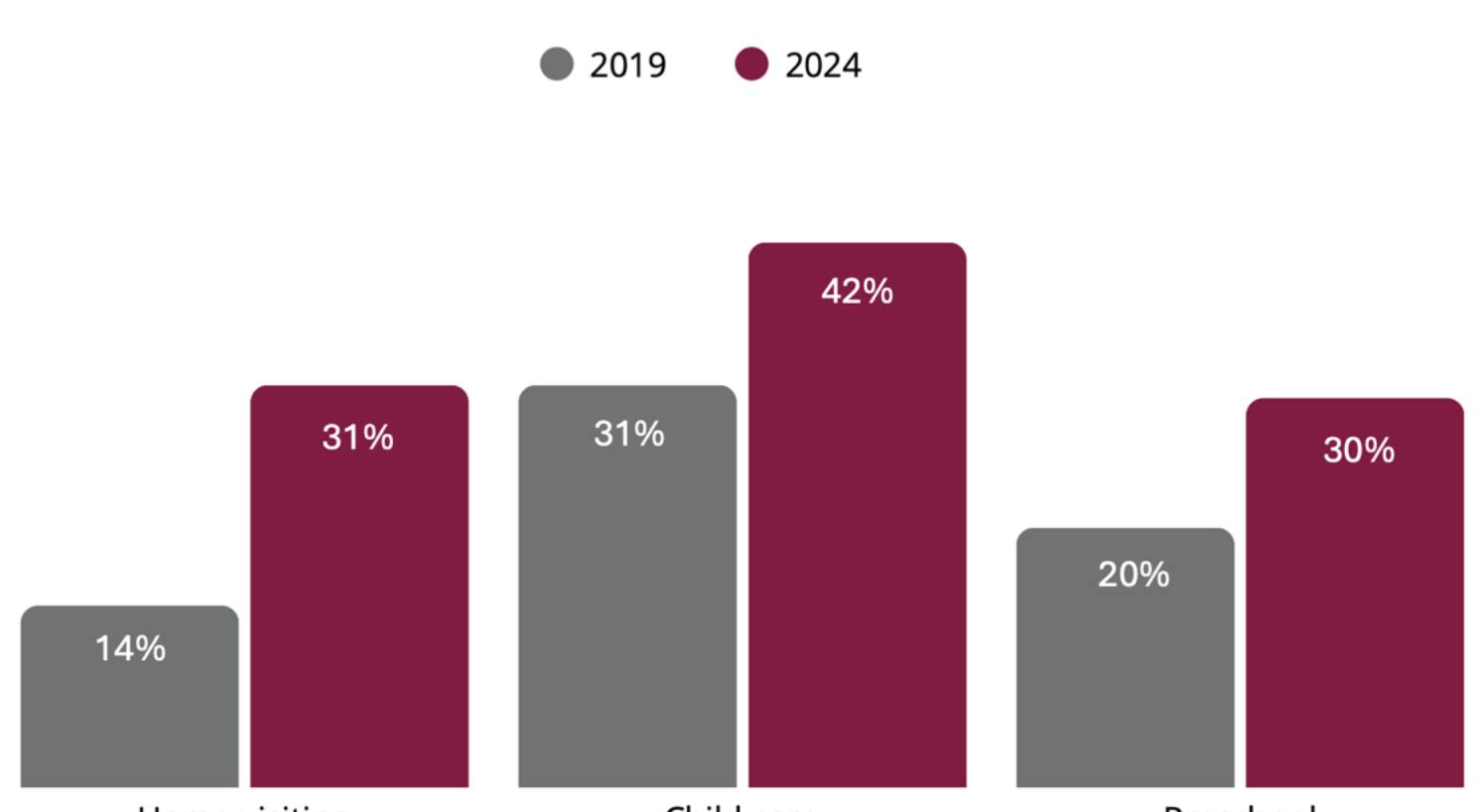
[Click here to explore the 100% Community Results for ECE Services](#)

Need and Access to Early Childhood Education Services

The most recent 100% Community Survey highlights persistent challenges in accessing ECE services across Doña Ana County. Although the overall need for these services has remained relatively stable over the past five years, access has grown significantly more difficult.

- Home Visiting Services:** In 2019, 35% of respondents reported needing these services, increasing to 41% in 2024. However, difficulty accessing them more than doubled, from 14% in 2019 to 31% in 2024.
- Child Care Services:** While those who reported needing child care services slightly decreased from 47% in 2019 to 45% in 2024, the percentage of respondents struggling to access care rose from 31% to 42%. Key barriers include high costs, a shortage of quality providers, and long waitlists. Among families not receiving a child care assistance subsidy, 38% were unaware of the program, and 27% were informed they did not qualify.
- Preschool Services:** Those who reported needing preschool services decreased marginally, from 50% in 2019 to 49% in 2024. However, difficulty accessing these services grew significantly, rising from 20% to 30%. Among those struggling, 40% cited the lack of quality providers as the primary issue.

Percentage of Respondents in Doña Ana County Who Experienced Difficulty Obtaining the Service of Those Who Needed It, by Year

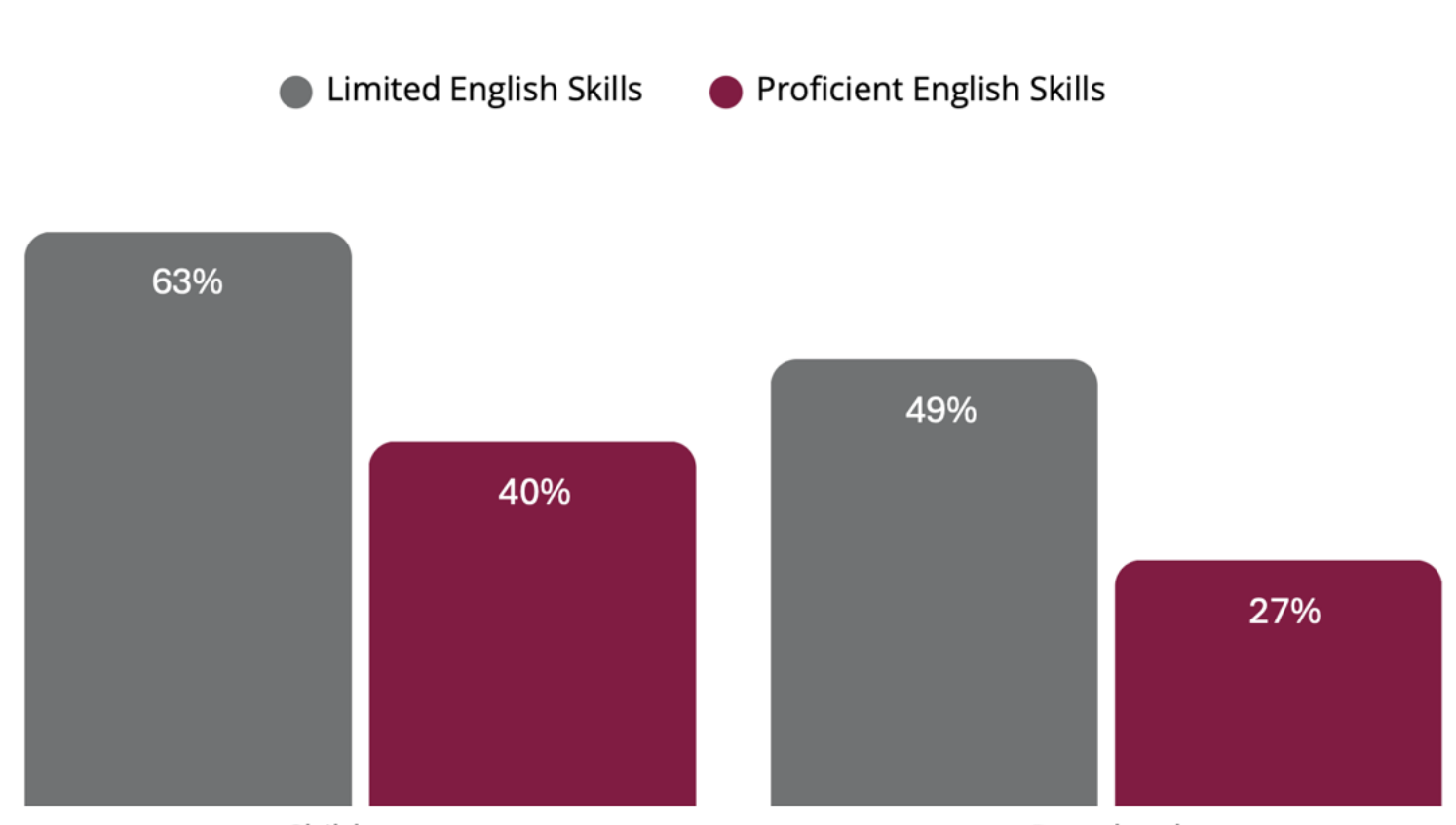


Note: Pearson chi-square tests showed more respondents reported difficulties accessing home visiting, child care, and preschool services in 2024 compared to 2019 ($p<0.001$, $p=0.01$, and $p<0.01$, respectively). Source: 100% Community Surveys for Doña Ana County, 2019 and 2024.

Unequal Access: How Language and Location Shape Child Care Availability

The 100% Community Survey highlighted several key challenges families face when accessing child care services—most commonly high cost, a lack of quality providers, and long waitlists. Language barriers make these issues even harder to navigate. Among respondents with limited English skills, 63% said they had trouble accessing child care, compared to 40% with proficient English skills. A similar pattern emerges with preschool access: 49% of limited-English speakers reported difficulty, compared to 27% of those with proficient English skills.

Percentage of Respondents in Doña Ana County Who Needed ECE Services and Experienced Difficulties Obtaining Them, by English Proficiency (2024)



Note: Pearson chi-square tests showed respondents with limited English proficiency are more likely to report difficulties accessing child care ($p=0.02$) and preschool services ($p=0.01$). Source: 100% Community Surveys for Doña Ana County, 2024.

The survey highlighted significant disparities in child care access across communities. In Hatch, 64% of respondents reported a need for child care; however, over half (52%) faced challenges in obtaining it. In contrast, in the village of Doña Ana, 58% expressed a need for child care, yet only 30% encountered difficulties accessing it. Preschool services followed a similar pattern—50% of families in Hatch Valley Public Schools had difficulty accessing preschool, compared to 21% in Gadsden and 26% in Las Cruces. These barriers are also prevalent in Tribal communities. Residents in these areas were more likely to report needing home visiting services, and among those who needed them, 59% experienced difficulty accessing them. Preschool and child care remain ongoing challenges, with 57% and 59% of Tribal respondents, respectively, reporting access issues. Despite these challenges, targeted efforts are underway to close service gaps and improve access for all families.

[Click here to explore the 100% Community Results for ECE Services](#)

Improvements in Early Childhood Education Across New Mexico

New Mexico has made substantial strides in improving ECE over recent years. These positive developments include:

- Eliminating Copays:** Families earning up to 400% of the federal poverty level are now eligible for free child care through subsidy programs, potentially saving up to \$23,000 annually (1). According to the 100% Community Survey, among respondents who reported receiving a child care subsidy, 56% earned below \$25,000, 72% earned between \$25,000 and \$54,999, and 55% earned \$55,000 or more. These figures show notable increases from 2020, when the rates were 38%, 32%, and 21%, respectively. Despite this progress, cost remains one of the most commonly reported barriers.
- Rising Quality Standards:** The percentage of licensed child care providers earning 4- or 5-star ratings increased from 40% in 2018 to 50% in 2024. This increase in quality has led to better care for children and an average annual savings of \$23,000 for families (2).
- Enhanced Training for Educators:** In 2024, ECECD made Executive Functioning training mandatory for lead teachers and administrators. The training focused on classroom management and strategies for addressing challenging behaviors (3).
- Fair Wages for ECE Workers:** Entry-level pay has risen to \$15 an hour, reducing the percentage of ECE workers living in poverty from 27% in 2020 to 16% in 2024 (4). Additional payment incentives—including bilingual bonuses, wage supplements for lower-wage earners with ECE coursework, and pay parity programs—further support fair compensation across the workforce (5).

In April, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed a major bill doubling New Mexico's investment in early childhood education to \$500 million, supporting over 85,000 children from birth to age 5 (6). The bill increases annual funding from the Early Childhood Trust Fund and adds \$202 million in FY 2026 without risking long-term sustainability. The funding guarantees ongoing support to key programs such as Home Visiting, Family Infant Toddler (FIT), Child Care Assistance, New Mexico PreK, Tribal partnerships, and quality improvement initiatives. Other recent legislation wins consist of the creation of a Child Care Revolving Loan Fund to help providers launch or expand child care services. This goes along with a \$10 million budget allocation for building child care supply, especially in areas with limited access. Senate Bill 66 was also introduced, which tightens background check policies to enhance child safety. With this commitment, New Mexico is building a future where every child has a chance to thrive.

100% Family Center Opens in Las Cruces

The consistent demand for ECE services in Doña Ana County underscores these programs' vital role in shaping our communities. Despite the growing access challenges, New Mexico is making measurable progress in improving quality and affordability. In March 2025, the 100% Family Center opened in Doña Ana, offering a comprehensive range of resources for parents and children (7). This long-awaited one-stop hub for early childhood education and other essential services, championed for years by organizations like the [Success Partnership](#), became a reality through the collaborative efforts of the [Doña Ana County Resilience Leaders](#) and [NMSU's Anna, Age Eight Institute](#). The opening of the 100% Family Center marks a significant achievement for our county.

In our community this summer, the Las Cruces Museum System is rolling out a slate of Pre-K programs to boost early childhood learning: the Museum of Nature & Science will host sessions every Thursday, while the Railroad Museum will welcome little explorers on two Fridays each month—full details are available by following @LCMuseums on social media. On June 21st, FYI+ is hosting a free backpack and resource giveaway (see the [FYI+ Facebook page](#) for updates). And on June 13th, you can make your coffee run count: Dutch Bros will donate \$1 from every drink sold at its Las Cruces locations to support children and families in the Early Head Start program—so grab a cup, spread the word, and share your support with #LCDFEarlyHeadStart.

If you are interested in joining the Success Partnership's ECE Coalition, visit their [website](#).

Sources:

- (1) [The Child Care Crisis: How New Mexico is Tackling Access to Care](#)
- (2) [Ensuring the future of early childhood in New Mexico](#)
- (3) [Save the Date: Mandatory Executive Functioning Training](#)
- (4) [New Mexico made childcare free. It lifted 120,000 people above the poverty line](#)
- (5) [Scholarship and Pay Incentive Programs](#)
- (6) [Governor doubles down on kids with historic \\$500M early childhood investment](#)
- (7) [100% Family Centers Open in San Juan and Doña Ana Counties](#)



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[cca.nmsu.edu](#) | 575-646-3352 | [ccadata@nmsu.edu](#)
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