

ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION IN DOÑA ANA COUNTY

April 24, 2018

Abstract

It is well established that the state of New Mexico struggles with child wellbeing, ranking 49th in the country. However, statistics comparing New Mexico to the rest of the nation do not provide solutions on how to bring our families out of poverty and do not acknowledge the challenges our families face. Access to high quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is essential to improving the quality of life for children as they grow into adulthood. In Doña Ana County, only 36% of children have exposure to free or subsidized, evidence-based early childhood education before kindergarten. We believe that all children should have access to quality early childhood education and this can be achieved through a state-wide, cross-institutional, collective effort. Although the focus of this paper is Doña Ana County, the recommendations and solutions listed at the end of this paper will have a direct impact on the entire state. Despite our many challenges with poverty, we can be hopeful of a positive, long-term change.

Ngage New Mexico and the Success Partnership



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Contents

I.	Introduction	2
II.	Facts: Early Childhood in Doña Ana County	3
III.	Profile of Early Childhood Education in Doña Ana County	3
IV.	Program Descriptions	5
	Home Visiting	5
	Head Start and Early Head Start Programs	6
	Title I Preschool and Preschool for Developmentally Delayed.....	7
	New Mexico Preschool Initiative	8
	Early Childhood Education with CYFD Subsidized Licensed Child Care Providers	9
	Early Preschool and Preschool at New Mexico State University’s Children’s Village	11
	K-3 Plus: Transition and Support into Public Education.....	11
V.	Challenges.....	13
VI.	Solutions	13
VII.	Conclusion	16
	Appendix A. Participating Organizations.....	17
	Appendix B. Works Cited	17

I. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Doña Ana County and solutions on how to increase access to quality ECCE for children and, in particular, for children before they enter kindergarten. Doña Ana County is a microcosm of the entire state with comparable demographics, language, and poverty. Moreover, half of the population lives in an urban setting and the other half live in rural communities. Doña Ana County is the second largest metropolitan area in New Mexico with a population exceeding 200,000 people. However, Doña Ana County is also uniquely located in the borderland region and struggles with higher than average poverty rates (Figures 1 and 2). In Doña Ana 44% of children under 5 live in poverty compared to 34% statewide.

Figure 1. Children under 5 years old living in poverty

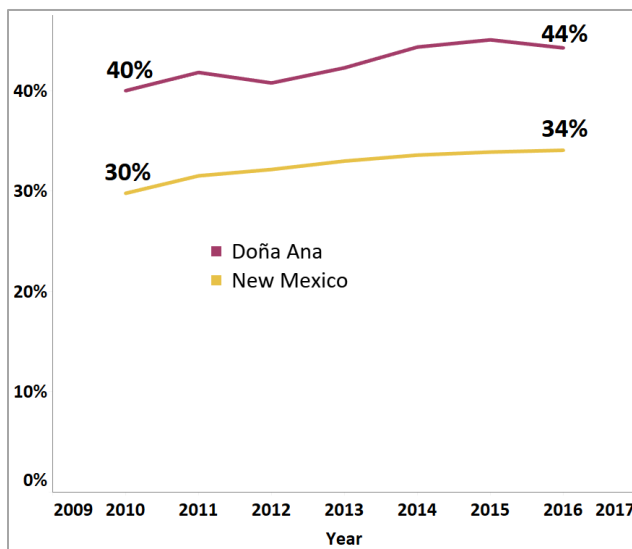
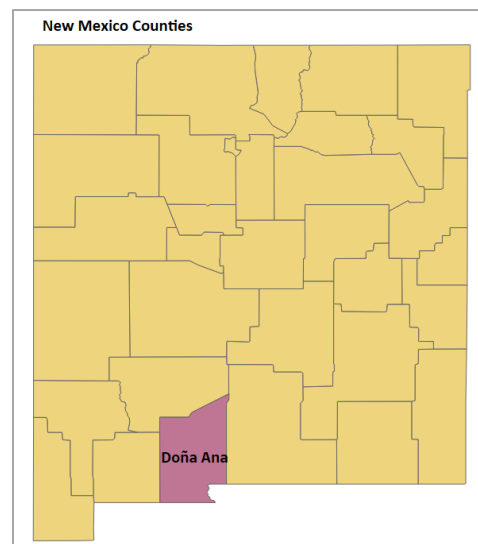


Figure 2. Geographic location of Doña Ana County, NM



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5 year estimates, 2012-2016

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to 8 years old, is a time of incredible growth in brain development. In the first few years of life cognitive skills, the foundation for reading and math, and social-emotional skills, which greatly influence the adult they will become, are developed. During these years children are highly influenced by their environment and their interactions with parents, caregivers, and teachers. High quality early childhood care and education are thus essential in providing children spaces to develop and grow. ECCE is especially relevant for disadvantaged children whose outcomes often lag behind their more advantaged peers. Studies show that the age at which disparities in vocabulary appear is at 18 months for children living in poverty (Harvard, 2017). At 3 years, children with college educated parents or caregivers had vocabularies 2 to 3 times larger than those whose parents never completed high school (Harvard 2017). Benefits of ECCE also include more kindergarten readiness, fewer children needing special education services, higher academic achievement, and increased high school graduation rates. Moreover, exposure to quality ECCE results in fewer children in the juvenile justice system, fewer children needing special education services, and better outcomes in health, social behaviors, and employment as adults.

II. Facts: Early Childhood in Doña Ana County

- 15,229 children live in Doña Ana County under 5 years old
- 8,894 children are 2 years old and younger
- 6,335 children are 3 and 4 years old
- Between 2,500 and 3,000 babies are born every year
- 44% of children under 5 years old live in poverty¹
- 33% of 3rd graders are proficient in reading
- The average family struggles to pay rent, transportation, and child care
- A typical family in Doña Ana County pays 21% of their total income on child care
- A typical single mother pays 37% of her income on child care²

III. Profile of Early Childhood Education in Doña Ana County

There are many types of ECCE, ranging from children cared for by grandparents, family members, and neighbors to regulated child care centers and formal preschool programs run privately or through state and federal programs. In Doña Ana County, 70% of children under the age of 5 live below 200% of the federal poverty level and only 18%³ of families with children under 5 can comfortably pay for private, licensed child care. In light of our county's high poverty rates, it is pertinent to observe the types of child care and education programs available to parents free of charge or at a subsidized rate.

We define free or subsidized, evidence-based, early childhood education services for children under 5 years old as:

- Home Visiting Programs
- Early Head Start and Head Start Programs
- NM PreK and Early NM PreK (CYFD and NM PED programs)
- Title I Preschool and Preschool for the Developmentally Delayed (DD-Pre) in public schools
- Subsidized Child Care and Education Programs Licensed by Children, Youth, and Family Services (CYFD) (typically in private child care centers)
- Early Preschool and Preschool at New Mexico State University's Children's Village

¹ Poverty is defined as children living under 100% of the federal poverty level.

² A "typical family" is defined as one earning the median income in the county. A "typical female" is defined as a female householder with no husband present earning the median income. Averages are based on the annual cost of child care for an infant in a licensed center and median income data.

³ Analysis by New Mexico State University, Center for Community Analysis.

Table 1 illustrates the number of children under 5 years old accessing free or subsidized, evidence-based, early childhood education services in Doña Ana County according to the program in which they are enrolled.

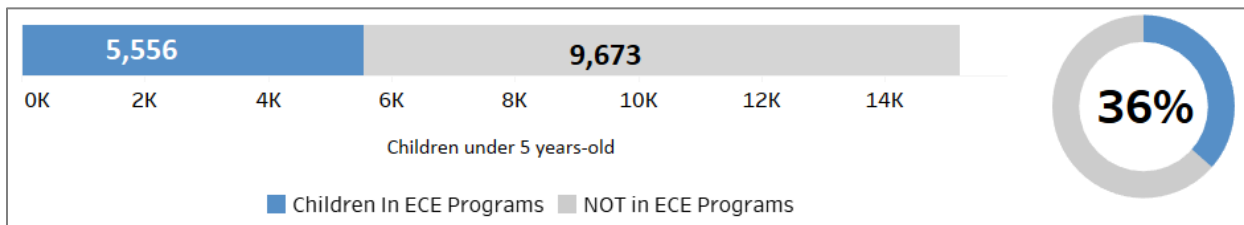
Table 1. Free or subsidized ECE programs: Enrollment summary by age and program, Doña Ana County 2016-2017

Program Name	2 years-old & under	3 & 4 year-olds	Grand Total
NMSU SFYC Program- Children’s Village	14		14
Early Head Start	207		207
Home Visiting Programs	800		800
Subsidized , Licensed Child Care, ≤ 2 years-old	862		862
DD Pre & Title I Preschool		713	713
Early NM PreK/ NM PreK		1,400	1,400
Head Start		715	715
NMSU Preschool- Children’s Village		46	46
Subsidized, Licensed Child Care, Preschool		799	799
Grand Total	1,883	3,673	5,556

Notes: Early Head Start includes children receiving home-visiting services. NMSU program counts do not include children enrolled in Head Start programs or NM PreK. Estimates may contain some duplicates since children may enroll in multiple programs. Early Head Start/ Head Start PIR and Annual Reports, www.helpnm.com, NM Public Education Department Enrollment Reports, NM Department of Health (IBIS) and US Census Bureau population counts, New Mexico State University School for Young Children, (SFYC)/ Children's Village, and New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis.

A maximum of 5,556 children under 5 years old access these programs, representing 36% of children under 5 in Doña Ana County (Figure 3). This leaves a gap of 64% of children under 5 (9,673 children) not enrolled in a free or subsidized, evidence-based, early childhood education program in Doña Ana County.

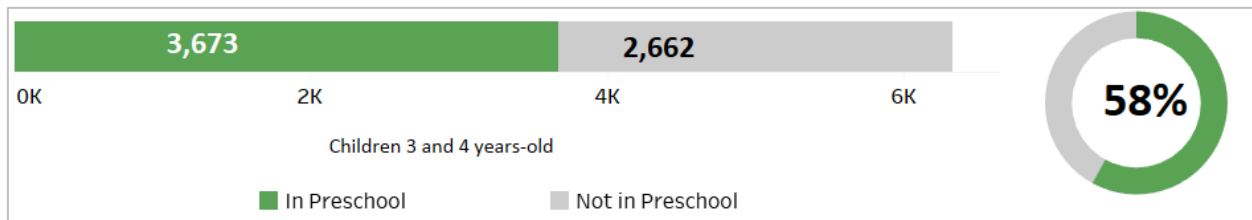
Figure 3. Maximum number and percentage of children under 5 years old in free or subsidized ECE programs in Doña Ana County, 2016-2017



Notes: “Maximum” number of children enrolled recognizes that some children may be simultaneously enrolled in more than one program. Source: New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis.

The following graphs illustrate the gaps in education according to age group. In Doña Ana County, 58% of 3 and 4 year old children (3,673 children) are enrolled in ECE programs and 42% (2,662 children) are not enrolled in a free or subsidized ECE program (Figure 4).

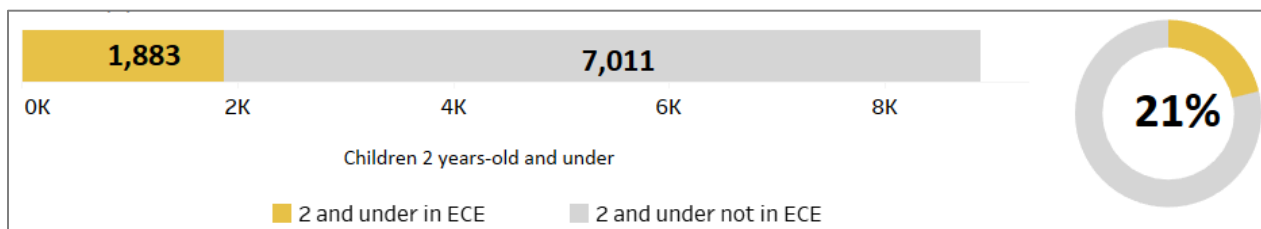
Figure 4. Maximum number and percentage of children 3 and 4 years old in free or subsidized ECE programs in Doña Ana County, 2016-2017



Source: New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis

Comparatively, fewer children 2 years old and younger are participating in early childhood education indicating a need to reach out to this demographic. Only 21% of children 2-years-old and younger (1,883 children) access programs and 79% of children (7,011 children) do not (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Maximum number and percentage of children 2 years old and younger in free or subsidized ECE programs in Doña Ana County, 2016-2017



Source: New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis

Program Descriptions

The following sections give brief descriptions of the types of educational programs offered in Doña Ana County for children under 5 years old.

Home Visiting

The first few months and years of a child’s life lay the foundation for future success and wellbeing. However, new parents sometimes lack the skills or resources to meet all of their child’s needs. Home visiting programs provide education based services in the home for children from birth to 3 years of age. Home visitors partner with families to promote child development and basic parenting skills by supporting the relationship among the family, home visitor, and the community.

Since the Home Visiting Accountability Act of 2013 was passed there has been an increase in funded openings across New Mexico. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of funded openings increased 19.8% (452

openings) and state and federal funding increased 29.2% (CEPR and CYFD 2017). However, approximately 7,000 eligible families in New Mexico went without home visiting services in 2016, highlighting the need for the continued expansion of funding and services (LFC, 2016; O'Donnell, 2016). In 2016, approximately 800⁴ children in Doña Ana County received home visiting services through five providers; Avance⁵, Ben Archer, CHI St. Joseph's, La Clinica de Familia, and Gadsden Independent School District's Parents as Teachers Program. These programs typically target families who are first-time parents and children who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACE). By some estimates, 61% of the need is met for traditional home visiting services in Doña Ana County, however, 567 children still likely need traditional home visiting services⁶.

Members of the Doña Ana County Early Childhood Education Coalition believe there is a need for more education services that go directly to the families, regardless of whether the families meet the profile of the traditional home visiting target demographic. The coalition recognizes that some families may reject traditional home visiting services for a variety of reasons. Reasons may include families that are undocumented migrants who are concerned about their status, families concerned about the real or imagined potential involvement of Child Protective Services in their lives, cultural reasons, or simply not wanting strangers in their home. It is also understood that many families take great pride in keeping their babies and toddlers at home or with other family members instead of in child care centers. However, this does not mean they would not benefit from early education services or that they do not want services. Families may want services in a form different from what is currently available. This is why programs such as First Teacher and Abriendo Las Puertas⁷ are important.

Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) are programs funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provide comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Children under 5 years old in families with an income below 100% of the federal poverty guideline are eligible as well as foster care children⁸, families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Funds, Supplemental Security funds, or who are Homeless as per the McKinney-Vento Act. Early Head Start serves children from birth until age 3 while Head Start is a preschool program primarily serving 3 and 4 year-old children⁹. In Doña Ana County, 207 children are enrolled in Early Head Start and 715 children are enrolled in Head Start services (Table 2).

Table 2. Early Head Start/ Head Start Participation in Doña Ana County 2016-2017

Early Head Start	Head Start	Grand Total
207	715	922

Source: Early Head Start/Head Start Annual Reports

⁴ An additional 95 slots are funded through Early Head Start (EHS) programs. In this report, EHS home visiting numbers are included under Early Head Start, not under home visiting.

⁵ Avance will no longer provide services in the county. Tresco is planning to start services in 2017 or 2018.

⁶ Based on University of New Mexico, Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) Home Visiting Analysis.

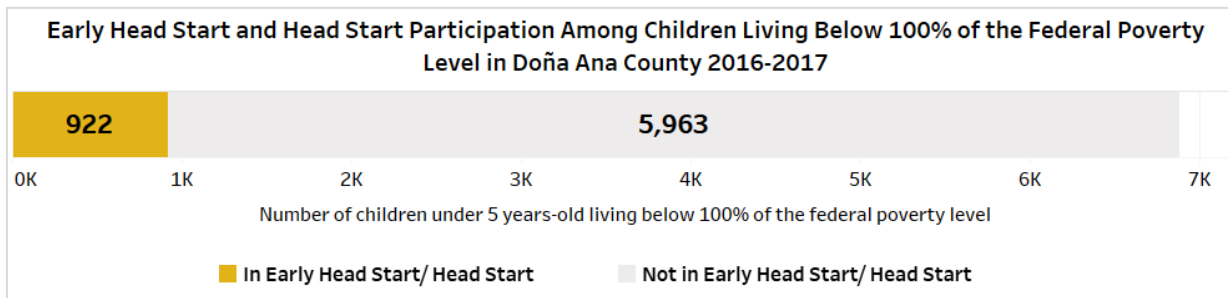
⁷ The First Teacher program and the Abriendo Las Puertas program prepare parents to act as their child's teacher before their child enters the kindergarten classroom. Parents learn about child development, how to help children build language skills, engage in interactive learning through play activities, form good reading habits, and other skills required for the beginning of kindergarten.

⁸ Regardless of family income.

⁹ Head Start may include some 5 year-olds who did not turn 5 before the cutoff date for kindergarten enrollment or who are disabled. However, 3 and 4 year-olds are the target demographic and represent the majority of children participating in Head Start.

However, approximately 6,885 children under 5 years old live below 100% of the federal poverty level, leaving 5,963 children who potentially qualify for EHS or HS not enrolled in those programs (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Early Head Start/ Head Start Participation in Doña Ana County 2016-2017



Sources: Early Head Start/ Head Start Annual Reports and American Community Survey, 5-year estimates

Head Start has faced many challenges in recent years due to the fractured nature of the early childhood education network across the state. The increase in support for state funded programs such as NM Pre-K likely contributed to a drop in four-year-old enrollment in Doña Ana County’s Head Start programs and a loss of \$75,000 in federal funding. Although many children benefit from the expansion of NM Pre-K, better communication could have prevented state funds from supplanting federal funds. For example, one solution could have been expanding Early NM Pre-K spots serving three-year-olds, since fewer ECCE programs are available to them. It is essential that we have better communication between state and federal programs so we do not lose irretrievable education funds. The Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Doña Ana County serve a critical role not only in educating our most disadvantaged children, including the disabled, but also connecting families to other services such as medical and dental care, job training programs, and social programs that create opportunities.

Title I Preschool and Preschool for Developmentally Delayed

There are two additional types of federally funded preschool programs provided at public schools, Preschool for Developmentally Delayed students (DD PreK) and Title I PreK. DD PreK is a federally funded program through IDEA Part B at public elementary schools and serves children with identified learning disabilities. Title I PreK serves children in Title I¹⁰ schools and is funded through the Title I program. DD Pre programs are crucial to helping children transition from Part C intervention services, such as Family Infant, and Toddler (FIT) programs¹¹, to attending a preschool before entering kindergarten in the public schools. In addition Title I preschool programs serve children in areas of deep poverty. Approximately 713 children in Doña Ana County receive services through these programs.

¹⁰ Title I, formerly known as Chapter 1, is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and is the foundation of the federal commitment to closing the achievement gap between low-income and other students. <https://www.naeyc.org/policy/federal/title1>

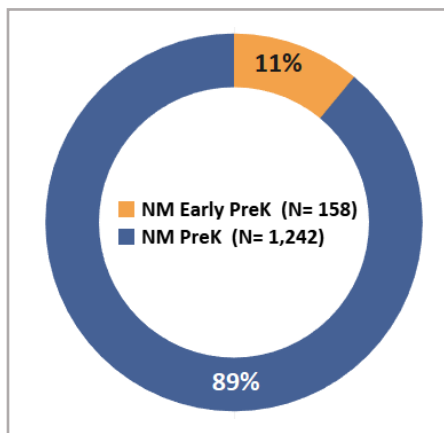
¹¹ There are three FIT providers in Doña Ana County: Tresco, Meca, and Aprendamos. FIT programs serve children under 3 years-old.

New Mexico Preschool Initiative

The New Mexico Preschool Initiative (NM PreK) provides two state-funded, Pre-Kindergarten programs for children 3 and 4 years old. NM Early PreK¹² serves 3-year-olds and NM PreK serves children who turn 4 before September 1st and are not age-eligible for kindergarten. The program is not based on income eligibility, however, priority is given to programs in communities with Title I elementary schools and that have at least 66% of the children served living within the attendance zone of a Title I elementary school (NMPED 2016) . Priority is also given to schools participating in a K-3 Plus program. NM PreK is based on a public/private mixed delivery model jointly administered by two organizations; Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) and NM Public Education Department (PED). NM PreK administered through CYFD typically occurs in community based child care settings, such as licensed centers, whereas PED programs are conducted in public schools. Services for 4 year-olds are provided on a per-child reimbursement rate of \$3,206.20 for half-day programs and \$6,412.40 for extended day services (NMPED 2016). The reimbursement rate for NM Early PreK (for 3-year-olds) is slightly higher at of \$4,000 for half-day programs and \$8,000 for extended day services.

Currently, 1,242 4-year-olds in the county are enrolled in NM PreK and 158 3-year-olds are enrolled in the NM Early PreK program. 3-year-old children represent only 11% of the total enrollment (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Enrollment Distribution in NM Early PreK and NM PreK in Doña Ana County, 2017



A lack of available educational programs for 3-year-olds in the county (and hence lack of participation in ECCE) is a concern voiced by many ECCE providers in the community. A preliminary analysis indicates this belief is likely correct. It is advisable that the majority of expansion to the program be directed at 3-year-old enrollment.

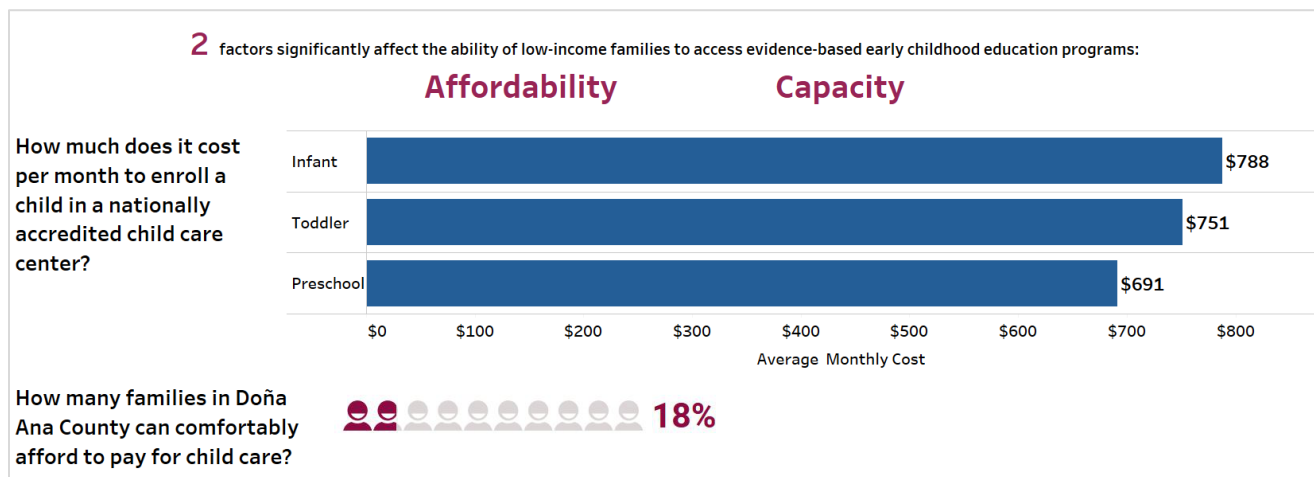
Sources: New Mexico Children, Youth and Family Services Department

¹² This is the first year of Early NM PreK, the NM PreK program was initially only directed at 4-year-olds.

Early Childhood Education with CYFD Subsidized Licensed Child Care Providers

Many children receive subsidized early learning experiences with child care providers that are either registered with Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) or have been licensed by CYFD. Licensed providers are more regulated than registered providers and follow a quality rating structure. A licensed program can be a child care center, licensed home, or an after-school programs that follows New Mexico’s child care licensing regulations. Licensed programs follow a STAR level quality rating. The higher the STAR System level, the higher the level of quality. 1-STAR programs do not qualify for child care subsidies while 2-STAR programs meet basic requirements. 5-STARs indicate the program has received national accreditation. Licensed providers with 3 to 5 STARs follow evidence-based, early learning guidelines. There are two significant factors affecting the ability for underprivileged families to access high quality programs; affordability and capacity (available openings) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Obstacles to accessing ECCE



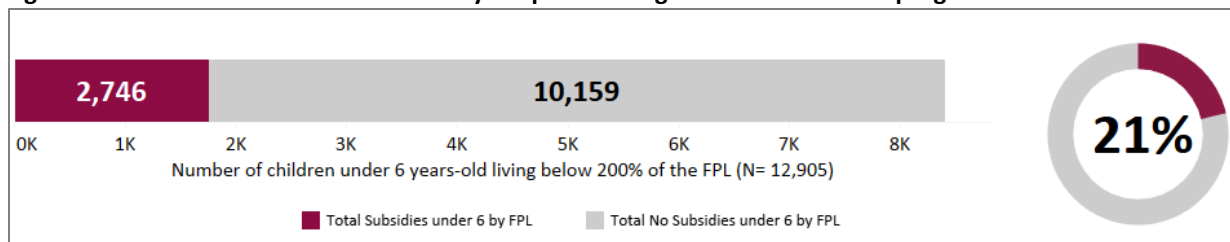
Notes: Capacity refers to available openings (space available) in a center as a percentage of the total population. High-quality center, in this example, is defined as a licensed center that has received a 3-5 Star quality rating by CYFD. Nationally accredited is defined as a 5 Star center licensed by CYFD and reflects the average market rate in a "metro" area in New Mexico (CEPR). Affordability is based on estimates from ACS data, the Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget calculator, and the least expensive type of child care for children under 6 years-old; registered child care. Sources: New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis, 2015 Child Care Market Rate Survey; University of New Mexico Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR), American Community Survey 2010-2014, Economic Policy Institute (EPI)

Affordability for many families in Doña Ana County surrounds the availability of child care subsidies issued by CYFD. Child care subsidies can be used to help pay for care with a registered child care provider or a licensed child care provider (licensed center, licensed group home, or licensed family home). A family potentially qualifies for a subsidy if a parent/guardian is going to school or work and earning less than 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)¹³. Once they qualify they can remain eligible up to 200% of the FPL. Semi-annually CYFD opens enrollment up for families up to 200% of the FPL. There are 2,746 children under 6 years of age¹⁴ currently

¹³ Approximately 10,645 children under the age of 6 live below 150% of the federal poverty level. This represents 57% of the population under 6 years-old. 1661 children under 5 are in subsidized *licensed* child care, figure 5 represents total subsidy recipients regardless of quality and includes registered providers.

receiving a subsidy, this represents 21% of children living below 200% of the FPL in the county. There are also 10,159 children under 6 who potentially qualify, but are not receiving a subsidy (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Total child care assistance subsidy recipients in registered and licensed programs



Notes: Families must be earning less than 150% of the FPL to initially qualify but can continue receiving aid up to 200% of the FPL. Children on waiting list as of July 2017: 162 children. Sources: New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis estimates derived from subsidy counts provided by CYFD Public Records Department as of 7.27.2017, New Mexico Community Data Collaborative, and US Census Bureau ACS 2011-2015 5-year estimates.

Another important consideration for families is the availability of high quality, licensed-providers in the area. There are approximately 139 child care providers licensed by CYFD in the county. However, only 28% of the total seats available are with a provider that is considered “high-quality,” meaning they received a 3-STAR, 4-STAR, or 5-STAR quality rating. In other words, if all children under 5 years old needed child care with a high-quality, licensed provider, there would potentially be seats for only 4,194 children (28% of the total number of children under 5). Moreover, if all children needed care with the highest ranked providers which are nationally accredited (5-STAR), there would be space for only 2,593 children (17% of the total population under 5) (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratio of Children Under 5 to Seats in High Quality Centers in Doña Ana County, 2017

Licensed Care Capacity for Children Under 5	
•	The total number of seats potentially available with 3-5 Star (high-quality) providers: 4,194 seats (28% of children under 5).
•	There are potential seats for 2,593 children (17% of children under 5) with a nationally accredited, 5 Star provider.

Sources: New Mexico Children, Youth and Family Services Department, and New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis

Examining the available seats for children 2 years old and younger only, reveal a serious scarcity of licensed, high-quality providers for children under 2. If all children 2 years old and younger needed child care with a high-quality, licensed provider, there would potentially be seats for only 922 children (17% of the total population of children 2 years old and younger). If all children 2 years old and younger needed care with a nationally accredited 5-STAR provider, there would be seats for only 630 children (11% of the total population 2 years old and younger) (Table 4).

Table 4. Ratio of Children 2-years-old and Younger to Seats in High Quality Centers in Doña Ana County, 2017

Licensed Child Care Capacity for Children Under 2

- The total number of seats potentially available with 3-5 STAR (high-quality) providers: 992 children (17% of children 2-years-old and younger).
- There are potential seats for 630 children (11% of children 2-years-old and younger) with a nationally accredited, 5-STAR provider

Sources: New Mexico Children, Youth and Family Services Department, and New Mexico State University Center for Community Analysis

Early Preschool and Preschool at New Mexico State University’s Children’s Village

The Children’s Village at New Mexico State University offers early childhood education programs for NMSU students, faculty, staff, and community families and children, 6 weeks to 5 years of age. There are 5 programs offered at the Children’s Village; Compañeros/Head Start, La Clínica de Familia Early Head Start, Doña Ana County Early Head Start/Head Start, NMSU School for Young Children (SFYC), and Amistad Preschool. NMSU School for Young Children (SFYC) includes 3 classrooms, one of which is a NM PreK classroom. Excluding Early Head Start, Head Start, and NM PreK programs, 60 additional children are served at NMSU preschools, all of which are free or accept child care assistance subsidies.

K-3 Plus: Transition and Support into Public Education

Although not included in the gap analysis for children under 5 years old, the Early Childhood Coalition considers the K-3 Plus program an important early childhood education program. Considering the high rates of disadvantage in our county, it is important that extra support for early childhood education continues even after children are age-eligible for kindergarten until age 8, creating seamless transition from ECCE to public school education. To serve this need, in 2007 the K-3 Plus program was established in New Mexico as a 6-year pilot project that permitted schools with high numbers of at-risk¹⁵ students to begin the school year 25 days earlier for kindergarten through third grade. The program runs on weekdays from 8:00am – 3:30pm.

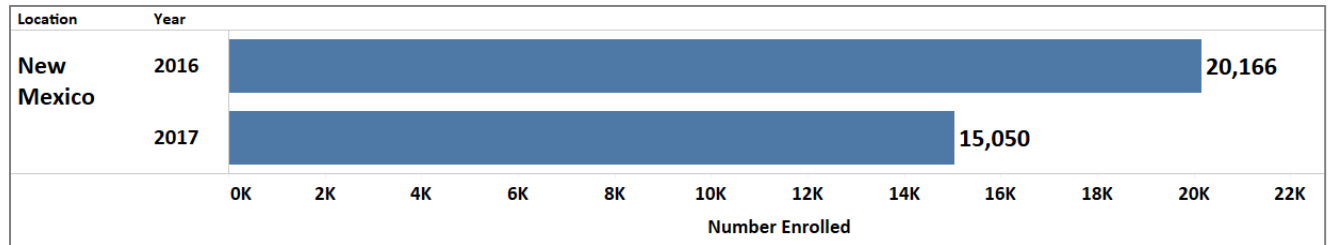
The purpose of the K-3 Plus program is to demonstrate that increased instructional time in kindergarten and the early grades narrows the achievement gap between at-risk students and other students and leads to increased cognitive skills and higher achievement scores for all participants. K-3 Plus is conducted in high-poverty public schools that are public elementary schools in which either 80% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at the time the school applies for the program or the school has earned a D or F school grade the previous year. All students within eligible schools are able to attend the K-3 Plus program (NMPED December 2015).

In 2015, all elementary schools in Gadsden and Hatch offered the K-3 Plus program while 18 schools in the Las Cruces Public School District (LCPS) offered the program. The program was expanded in 2016 to 22 schools in Las Cruces and served 2,679 students. However, in 2017, approximately \$7.2 million was cut from K-3

¹⁵ The term **at-risk** is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school, as determined by the school district. <http://edglossary.org/at-risk/>

Plus program statewide, resulting in a 25% drop in funded enrollment across the state from the previous year (Committee 2017). These severe cuts resulted in 5,116 fewer students participating in the program (Figure 10).

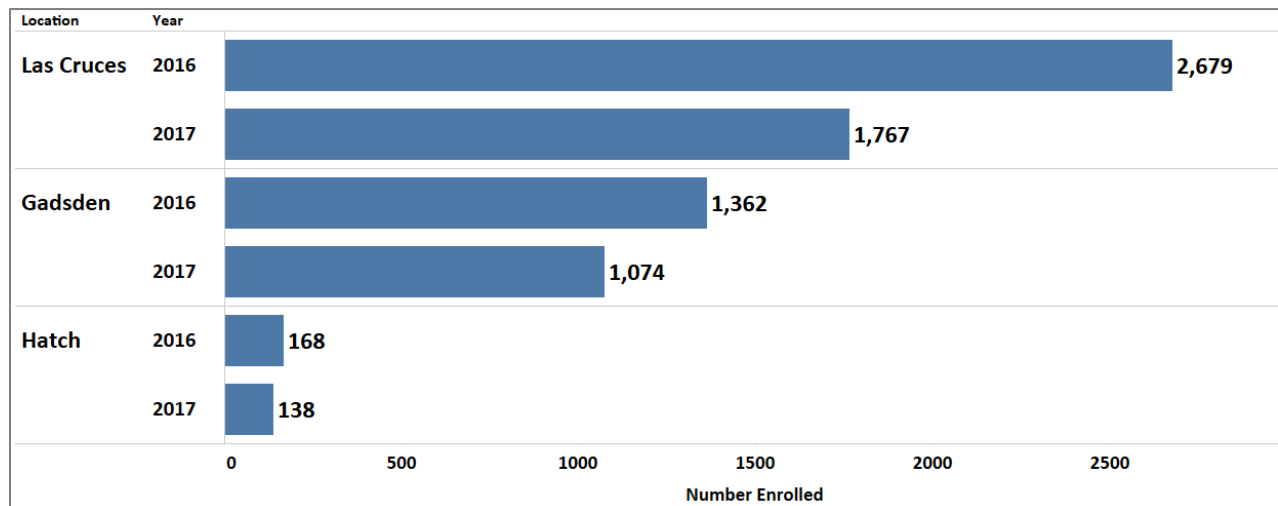
Figure 10. K-3 Plus Enrollment Reductions in New Mexico Public Schools, 2016-2017



Source: K-3 Plus: Program History and Summer 2017 Awards, Legislative Education Study Committee

In the summer of 2017 only eighteen schools in LCPS offered the program to 1,767 students even though approximately 5,698 children in kindergarten through third grade received free and reduced priced lunches. This was a significant reduction, with 34% fewer kids in LCPS participating in the program compared to the previous summer. Likewise, Gadsden Independent Schools and Hatch Valley Schools experienced an enrollment reduction of 21% and 18% respectively (Figure 11).

Figure 11. K-3 Plus Enrollment Reductions, Las Cruces, Gadsden, and Hatch Public Schools, 2016-2017



Source: K-3 Plus: Program History and Summer 2017 Awards, Legislative Education Study Committee

IV. Challenges

- There is no simple solution. Funders must recognize that there are *many* organizations, agencies, providers and programs that provide early childhood education in Doña Ana County.
- The quality of early childhood education varies.
- Not all families are aware of the benefits of early education and child development.
- Some families prefer family members to care for their children for financial or cultural reasons.
- Approximately 27% (615) of families receiving child care subsidies in Doña Ana County use registered child care providers instead of licensed providers. This is far more than the state average (11% of families in New Mexico use registered providers).
- Registered providers are less regulated than licensed providers.
- *Low compensation* of early childhood education workers results in *high worker turnover* in early childhood education which influences quality.
- Quality early childhood education is interconnected with early childhood workforce.
- State departments, such as CYFD and PED, must develop systems to align with the local programs to better fund programs through the state.
- The cost of child care is a burden on working families whose income is just above the FPL and do not qualify for services.

VI. Solutions

A. Global State-wide changes

1. Adopt state policy that embraces the following:
 - Learning begins prenatally
 - New Mexico children are our greatest asset
 - Solutions require cooperation and collaboration between local, state, and federal efforts
2. Ensure that federally funded programs such as Head Start are not reduced and replaced by state dollars duplicating services that are already provided through federal funding.

B. Increase Number of Children in Free or Subsidized Evidence -Based ECCE Programs.

1. Increase Early Childhood Education services to 3,964 additional children under 5 by supporting increased enrollment in the following programs (Table 5):
 - 130 more children in Early Head Start and 180 children in Head Start¹⁶
 - 567 children in Home Visiting Programs¹⁷
 - Expand child care assistance subsidies to accommodate 2,276 more children in licensed child care centers¹⁸.

¹⁶ Based on current waiting lists.

¹⁷ Based on University of New Mexico CEPR Home Visiting Needs Analysis.

¹⁸ Based on doubling the current number of children under 5-years-old receiving subsidies.

- 500 additional children in Early NM PreK and 311 additional children in NM PreK¹⁹

Table 5. Proposed Additional Enrollment in ECCE, by Program, for Children Under 5 Years-Old

Age	Program	
2 years-old and younger	Early Head Start	130
	Home Visiting	567
	Subsidized Licensed Care (Early Years)	1,366
	Total	2,063
3 and 4 year-olds	Early NM PreK	500
	NM PreK	311
	Head Start	180
	Susidized Licensed Care (Preschool)	910
	Total	1,901
Grand Total		3,964

An addition of 3,964 children enrolled in free or subsidized Early Childhood Education programs would mean that instead of serving only 36% of children under 5 years old in our county, we would be serving 63% of children under 5 (Table 6).

Table 6. Current ECCE Enrollment and Proposed Increase in ECCE Enrollment, for Children Under 5 Years Old

Age	Total Population	Current Children in ECCE	GAP: Children NOT in ECCE	Current % in ECCE	Current % NOT in ECCE	Proposed New Enrollment	New Total in ECCE
2 and younger	8,894	1,883	7,011	21%	79%	2,063	3,946
3 and 4 year-olds	6,335	3,673	2,662	58%	42%	1,901	5,574
Total Under 5	15,229	5,556	9,673	36%	64%	3,964	9,520

C. Expand Early New Mexico PreK and New Mexico PreK Services

Approximately 2,662 children 3 and 4 years old are not attending a free or subsidized high quality preschool. Expanding Early NM Pre-K and NM PreK would help fill this gap. Currently, 1,400 children in Doña Ana County attend NM PreK. There are 621 children attending NM PreK in PED administered programs, which are only available in Hatch and Gadsden School Districts, not Las Cruces Public Schools. There are 779 children attending NM PreK in a CYFD administered programs, typically in licensed child care centers available across the county.

¹⁹ Based on preliminary analysis indicating lack of ECE programs for 3-year-olds and popularity of the program for 4-year-olds.

1. Expand Early NM PreK by 500 slots and NM PreK by 311 more slots in PED and CYFD administered programs.
2. Distribute Early NM PreK/NM PreK services more equitably across the county.
 - Of all children enrolled in NM PreK programs (PED and CYFD) only 29% of 3 to 4-year-olds living within Gadsden School District boundaries, and 27% of 3 to 4-year-olds in Hatch are in the program. Only 11% of *potentially* eligible children living within Las Cruces Public School District boundaries are in the program.
3. Offer PED administered programs in Las Cruces Public Schools.

D. Support Existing Parent Education Programs

1. Provide grant opportunity for nonprofit organizations teaching parents about child development with curriculums such as First Teacher or Abriendo Puertas to accommodate 1,000 more families in the county. Currently, the First Teacher program serves 233 parents and 378 children.

E. Support a Fully Integrated Learning System

1. Support a fully integrated learning system to connect families to services already in the community. For example, an information outreach center to disseminate available early childhood education services to families, and coordinate communication between early childhood programs.

F. Improve Quality of Subsidized Services and Qualifications of Workers

1. Provide every qualified center and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provider with incentives to increase education level of ECCE workers and quality of centers.
2. Restructure the subsidy reimbursements to providers with an increase of the subsidy designated for increased compensation for ECCE workers or training for ECCE workers.
3. Support the quality program (similar to FOCUS) that CYFD is implementing for registered providers

G. Increase Child Care Subsidies to an Appropriate Level and Restructure Distribution Practices

1. Increase the income eligibility for entry into the child care assistance program to 200% of the federal poverty level instead of 150% of the federal poverty level. The median income for families with children under 18 in Doña Ana County is \$36,204. A family of 4 who earns just \$700 over the median income for families with children would not qualify because they are earning more than 150% of the FPL for a family of four (\$ 36,900).
2. Provide subsidies to an additional 2,262 children, this is 25% of children under 5 years old who need subsidies, by next year.
3. Do not require families to pay co-payments. Many families struggle to pay, resulting in substantial financial losses for child care providers.

H. Expansion of K-3 Plus Summer Services

1. Expand the K-3 plus program to all elementary schools in the county. All schools in Hatch and nearly every school in Gadsden offers K-3 Plus, while only 68% of elementary schools in Las Cruces offer the program.
2. Provide for K-3 Plus for all students regardless of the grade and free and reduced price lunch status of the school. This would ensure all students in our county receive K-3 Plus services.

VII. Conclusion

Increasing access to Early Childhood Care for children and improving conditions for early childhood workers in Doña Ana County is essential to improving the quality of life for generations to come. The benefits to high-quality ECCE are both economic and social. Economically, research reveals there is a high return on investment. Well focused investments in early childhood yield high public and private rates of return. For example, for every dollar invested in child care worker wages, an estimated \$1.24 is generated in the state economy (CEPR 2015). Moreover, a 3% increase in child care workers' wages would result in 54 new jobs created outside the child care sector, and more than \$8 million dollars in additional economic activity in New Mexico (CEPR, 1). Investing in ECCE also prevents costly financial and social interventions once a child enters the public school system and beyond. These benefits include:

- Preventing the achievement gap before it occurs
- Higher third grade reading proficiency scores
- Decreased grade level retention
- Decreased need for special education services
- Decreased involvement with the juvenile and adult justice systems
- Higher high school graduation rates
- Higher college enrollment rates
- Increased lifetime earnings

Considering the enormous benefits resulting from exposure to quality ECCE and investing in ECCE, it is imperative that Doña Ana County is supported on a local and state level.

APPENDIX A. Participating Organizations

This document is the result of input from many early childhood education experts in Doña Ana County, including community leaders, early childhood providers, teachers and parents. The Doña Ana County Coalition has been instrumental in its deliberate effort to improve the quality and access to early childhood care and education. The following organizations participated in the creation of this document:

- Doña Ana County Head Start
- Las Cruces Public Schools Head Start
- La Clinica De Familia Early Head Start
- Healthy Start La Clinica de Familia
- Aprendamos
- Children’s Reading Alliance
- Community Action Agency- Family Wellness
- New Mexico State University Children’s Village
- CHI St. Joseph’s
- Center for Community Analysis, New Mexico State University
- Ngage New Mexico

For more information please contact:

Ngage New Mexico at (575) 521-2957, www.ngagenm.org

APPENDIX B. Works Cited

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EARLY CHILDOOD EDUCATION & INTERVENTION SERVICES: BIRTH- AGE 8:

Prenatal	Birth to One Year	One Year	Two Years	Three Years	Four Years to Kindergarten Entry	Grades K-3
Home Visiting						
IDEA Part C, Early Intervention - NM FIT PROGRAM				IDEA Part B, EC Special Education		
Early Head Start				Head Start		
				NM Early PreK	NM PreK	K-3 Plus
Health Agencies and Healthcare for Mothers and Children						
Nonprofit Organizations that Provide Early Childhood Education						
Childcare Providers						Before & After School