



2026

San Mateo County Child Care Blueprint

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1

Introduction & Call to Action

- A Shared Vision
- The Values
- The Development
- Goals Overview
- The Goals
- A Closer Look



Introduction

SAN MATEO COUNTY IS AT A TURNING POINT and we* have a real opportunity to strengthen our child care system for the future. As a high cost region marked by deep income disparities, demographic change, and significant policy shifts, the urgency to strengthen and align our child care system has never been greater. Too many families struggle to find and afford care. Providers and educators are underpaid and undervalued. Facilities must adapt to meet pressing gaps in infant, toddler, and school-age care. Simply put, we must act together now—to support families, stabilize the workforce, and build the child care infrastructure essential to San Mateo County’s economic vitality and long term prosperity.

Together we envision a future where every child and every family has access to affordable, high quality care—regardless of neighborhood, income, language, race, or cultural background. That system must be sustained by a well-compensated workforce and delivered in safe, healthy, and climate-resilient spaces. The San Mateo County Child Care Blueprint is a comprehensive, multi-year plan that turns this shared vision into clear goals, coordinated strategies, and measurable action. Building on years of investment and collaboration, it aligns and strengthens existing efforts while charting a focused path forward, creating a child care system that works for every child, every family, and every provider in San Mateo County.

The Blueprint calls for collective action, as no single sector can achieve this vision alone. Change will only occur if the whole community—county and city governments, school districts and higher education, the business community, philanthropy, community-based organizations, and state and federal partners—acts together. For many years, partners across San Mateo County have worked to strengthen the child care system—studying challenges, piloting solutions, and keeping children at the center of decision-making. This Blueprint builds on that foundation of knowledge, relationships, and real-world experience.

Rooted in a commitment to child care as a public good, the Blueprint calls for collective action and bold investment to build a thriving, inclusive system for all.

* Throughout this narrative, “we” is used intentionally to reflect the collective nature of this work. It refers to the broader ecosystem of partners whose shared effort is needed to drive lasting systems change.



The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point, revealing both the fragility of the system and the power of coordinated action. In response, a coalition of early childhood educators, family child care providers, community-based organizations, funders and public agencies came together as the San Mateo County COVID-19 Response Team. Over time, the group recognized that beyond responding to the immediate crisis, there was a critical opportunity to fundamentally strengthen the county's child care system. This evolution led to the formation of The Children's Collective (TCC)—a cross-sector coalition committed to driving coordinated, system-level change.

In October 2024, TCC launched the process to develop the Child Care Blueprint with 12 core partners, united around a clear goal: to advance an actionable, countywide strategy, while building a sustained movement of support and investment. Today, The Children's Collective has grown to include more than 40 organizations and numerous individual leaders, reflecting a powerful and expanding coalition working together to improve child care across San Mateo County. The Children's Collective is not just a convening body, but an organized group of stakeholders improving outcomes for children and families by aligning community voices, advancing policy solutions, and supporting coordinated, system-level change across San Mateo



County. Through collaboration, connection, and community leadership, the Collective brings together families, providers, public agencies, and cross-sector partners to strengthen the systems that support early childhood, family stability, and long-term opportunity.

Guided by its vision—a just and thriving community where every child and family has the support they need to flourish—the Collective fosters alignment and shared action to create lasting, equitable impact.

Now is the time to act - together.



A Shared Vision

Every child in San Mateo County, from birth to age 12, has equitable access to high-quality care, supported by a well-compensated workforce in safe, climate-resilient environments.

The Blueprint is a multi-year, countywide action plan to turn this vision into a system where providers are supported, families have real options for care, and San Mateo County is truly a great place to raise a family.

The Blueprint assumes that implementation will look different in different communities while still advancing shared goals. From the outset, it acknowledges that sustained progress will require new resources and better coordination of the state and federal funds that stakeholders already receive.



Photo credit: Build Up SMC

The Values

Five core values guide every decision and action in the Blueprint.

These values serve as a shared compass for partners across the county, ensuring that as conditions change and new opportunities emerge, our collaborative work remains aligned with the same north star.

1. **Commitment to high-quality care**

Quality means giving every child a great start through equitable and welcoming experiences that are joyful, language-rich, and culturally affirming. It's about creating spaces where children feel seen and learning reflects the identities, languages, and cultures of our community while building on each child's unique abilities and strengths. Grounded in strong family and community partnerships and guided by data-driven, reflective practice, quality child care fosters curiosity, belonging, and a lifelong love of learning for every child.

2. **Advancing affordability and access**

Affordable, high-quality child care boosts children's wellbeing

and families' economic stability. When care is within reach, parents can work or study while children learn and thrive.

3. **Honoring all types of care**

All forms of care are valued—centers, family child care homes, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care. This mix is essential for meeting families' needs for trust, flexibility, and cultural connection.

4. **Centering family choice and fit**

Families should be able to choose care that fits their location, schedules, language, culture, and specific needs. A strong system offers multiple options so each family can find the right fit.

5. **Flexibility in implementation to reflect community priorities**

The Blueprint sets shared countywide goals while allowing strategies to adapt to local conditions and priorities. This flexibility lets communities act on common values in ways that work on the ground.

The Development

To develop the plan described in this report, the Blueprint design team drew on a literature review, landscape and fiscal analyses, and extensive community engagement with more than 250 participants across the child care ecosystem.

That engagement surfaced the key concerns and priorities that our community must address together: affordability and access barriers, shortages of infant-toddler and school-age slots, workforce compensation and stability challenges, the need for culturally and linguistically responsive care, and strong calls for sustained public funding and cross-sector coordination.

The Blueprint offers a shared framework to guide how local, state, federal, and community partners align their efforts and resources to address these issues.



Photo credit: All Five

Goals Overview

After an iterative process of community engagement, data analysis, and incorporation of feedback, the Blueprint focuses on four key goals, along with the strategies and actions on the pages that follow. These are lofty goals, and their achievement will depend on the sustained energies of diverse partners working in collaboration.



GOAL 1

High-quality child care is affordable, easy to find, and supportive of all families and children.



GOAL 3

Child care facilities are preserved, developed, maintained, and renovated to ensure safety, high quality, and climate resilience.



GOAL 2

Child care teachers and staff are highly-trained, well-supported, valued as professionals, and paid competitive wages.



GOAL 4

The child care ecosystem is well-funded and coordinated.

The Goals

To address San Mateo County's child care needs, the Blueprint has identified four key goals—as well as strategies and actions to realize each one.

Goal 1: High-quality child care is affordable, easy to find, and supportive of all families and children.

Goal 1 calls for making care more affordable through expanded subsidies, accessible via a strengthened family navigation system. Goal 1 also focuses on expanding capacity while systematically enhancing quality across all settings.

Why is Goal 1 important?

High-quality, affordable child care is essential for children's healthy development and for families' economic stability. When families can find and afford care, parents are able to work or pursue educational opportunities, while children benefit from safe, enriching environments that support school readiness and long-term wellbeing. Expanding access and quality is also a key strategy for advancing equity and strengthening San Mateo County's overall economic vitality.



How do we get there?



Make child care more affordable for all families.



Make child care more accessible by helping families understand their options and easily identify and secure care that meets their needs.



Expand capacity to meet the greatest supply and demand gaps while supporting and sustaining child care providers.



Systematically enhance child care quality across different types of child care.



How do we get there?

- Increase compensation for the child care provider workforce.
- Expand and strengthen the child care workforce pipeline.
- Increase access to and strengthen the professional development system.
- Invest in child care workforce retention.

Goal 2: Child care teachers and staff are highly-trained, well-supported, valued as professionals, and paid competitive wages.

Goal 2 prioritizes workforce wage and benefit improvements, career pathway expansion through community colleges and apprenticeships, professional development access, and retention supports including substitute pools and job-sharing models.

Why is Goal 2 important?

The quality of child care depends on the stability and expertise of the workforce. When teachers and staff are well-trained, fairly compensated, and supported as professionals, children experience consistent, nurturing relationships that promote their learning and development. Improving wages, benefits, and career pathways is critical to retaining skilled educators, reducing turnover, and honoring a workforce largely made up of women and people of color.

Goal 3: Child care facilities are preserved, developed, maintained, and renovated to ensure safety, high quality, and climate resilience.

Goal 3 focuses on facility development and renovation, streamlined licensing, climate resilience, and leveraging school district, employer, faith-based, and publicly owned spaces.

Why is Goal 3 important?

Children's health, safety, and learning are directly shaped by the environments where they spend their days. Safe, well-designed, and climate-resilient facilities allow programs to offer high-quality care and to maintain or expand the number of available slots in neighborhoods where families live and work. Child care facilities are also essential community infrastructure that support economic vitality, workforce participation, public health, and community resilience.



How do we get there?



Help improve, expand, and/or transition child care facilities to meet the greatest supply needs while making sure existing spaces are protected.



Work with providers and partners to understand and follow local, state, and licensing rules for child care.



Promote child care facilities that are sustainable, climate resilient, and aligned where appropriate with the San Mateo County Early Childhood Climate Action Plan (ECCAP).



How do we get there?

- Maximize existing funding for child care.
- Identify pathways for ongoing funding streams dedicated to child care.
- Build intentional and innovative partnerships with the business community.
- Strengthen family voice.
- Advocate for systems improvements at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Strengthen cross-agency collaboration to maximize resources and minimize redundancies.
- Ensure long-term Blueprint implementation.

Goal 4: The child care ecosystem is well-funded and coordinated.

Goal 4 emphasizes maximizing existing funding, exploring dedicated local revenue streams, engaging employers as partners, establishing a parent advocacy group, and building a backbone infrastructure to ensure sustained, coordinated implementation.

Why is Goal 4 important?

A well-funded, well-coordinated child care ecosystem is the backbone that allows all other goals to succeed. Adequate, stable funding ensures providers can offer quality care without overburdening families, while coordination across agencies and sectors helps make the system easier for families to navigate and reduces duplication. Aligning resources and decision-making around shared goals is essential to expanding access, improving quality, and advancing equity for all families in San Mateo County.

A Closer Look

Development of the Blueprint

The Blueprint is grounded in a deep understanding of community needs from families, educators, employers, policymakers, and direct service providers. Planning drew on existing research, prior surveys, new landscape and fiscal analyses, and robust community engagement with more than 250 voices across the child care ecosystem.

Over the course of 14 months, a Steering Committee of seven local leaders guided the work of the Blueprint design team, while The Children's Collective met monthly to refine goals, strategies, and actions. Additional work groups translated those ideas into an implementation-ready action plan, with specific steps, timelines, and roles. The result is a Blueprint that reflects lived experience, local data, and the expertise of those who will be responsible for making it real.



Key components in the development of the Blueprint included:

- A literature review, landscape scan, and commissioned research on supply and demand, Family Child Care providers, and Coastside communities.
- Focus groups and Interviews with stakeholders in San Mateo County and across California.
- Regular meetings of The Children's Collective Steering Committee.
- Larger, monthly meetings of The Children's Collective.
- Intensive meetings of work groups organized around the Blueprint's four key goals.

Literature review + landscape scan

The Blueprint design team reviewed previously-collected survey data, annual reports, and research briefs describing parent perspectives, early childhood education workforce challenges, and supports for children with special needs. In addition, a landscape scan provided a high-level overview of the supply and demand for child care in the county. This work was supplemented by new fiscal mapping and cost modeling.

Community input

Community engagement from a wide swath of the child care ecosystem was a critical piece of Blueprint planning. The Blueprint design team solicited input from family child care home and center-based educators, Board of Supervisors members and staff, community-based organizations, the business community, County Office of Education, school districts, pediatricians, afterschool providers, and families to inform Blueprint priorities.

Steering committee meetings

A core group of seven members of The Children's Collective met regularly to provide the feedback and strategic guidance necessary to drive the project to completion.

The Children's Collective meetings

This group met monthly in facilitated work sessions to provide input, strategize on goals, and ultimately shape the Blueprint.

Work group meetings

Over a series of implementation-focused work group meetings, goals and strategies were vetted and refined to arrive at the specific action plan found on pages [insert correct pages here once layout is complete].



2

What are the Needs in San Mateo County?

- Setting Context
- Child Care Supply & Demand
- What We Heard from the Community



San Mateo County is a diverse, economically prosperous (but high-cost) Bay Area county of about 740,000–750,000 residents.¹ The county is home to a growing Latino/a population and substantial Asian population. Currently about 86,000 of the county's residents are children aged 0-12.² However, the county's child population is declining due to falling birthrates and families leaving the area, as is true across many Bay Area counties and several major metropolitan areas across the country.

Though San Mateo County is economically prosperous, the benefits of that prosperity have been unevenly accrued. Many families are challenged by the high cost of housing, which can push them out of the county in search of more affordable areas. The cost of child care is also a substantial burden for many families, requiring some parents to opt out of the workforce in order to care for their children.

Investing in children today is the best way to encourage a more robust, sustainable future.

Source for first 3 bullet points is U.S. Census Bureau (2023). ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table S0101. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S0101>. Accessed on February 25, 2025.

Source for last bullet point is kidsdata.org. All other languages were identified by 1% or fewer English learners. <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/45/english-learners-language/table#fmt=474&loc=4&tf=141&ch=106,100,736,737,107,738,104,112,99,102,734&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>



Demographics Snapshot

- Children under 15 comprise about 1:6 residents in SMC.
- Latino/a children are the largest ethnic group among SMC's children, comprising 32% of the under-15 population. 26% of the county's under-15 population are White, 27% are Asian, and 1.5% are Black.
- Poverty is a challenge for many children and families in San Mateo County – 16% of the under-12 population live below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- The Latino/a and Asian child population is projected to grow, while the White child population is projected to decline.
- Among the 17,224 English Learners in public schools in San Mateo County, 72% speak Spanish as their primary language.

Child Care Supply & Demand

The expansion of TK and other policy changes have contributed to a shifting child care landscape, presenting both benefits and challenges for families and providers.

The child care landscape in San Mateo County has seen significant changes in recent years. The statewide expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) has shifted a portion of 4-year-olds into public school settings. This shift has reduced demand for traditional child care slots while increasing demand for before- and after-school care and summer programming. At the same time, changes to California State Preschool Program (CSPP) eligibility, combined with a declining child population, have changed the mix of ages and settings in which children receive care in the county.³

When choosing care for their children, families can opt for center-based care or care offered in their home or a provider's home. Currently San Mateo County is host to 543 licensed child care centers and 473 family child care homes, accounting for almost 45,000 child care spaces. Whereas there has been an uptick in the number of



centers since 2022, there has been a 24% reduction in the number of Family Child Care Homes over the past several years.⁴

Many families choose friends, family members, or neighbors to care for their children. Families across income levels rely on such Family, Friend, and Neighbor care (FFN) because it can offer trusted relationships, flexible hours, and culturally and linguistically familiar environments that formal programs often cannot match. FFN care is

especially important for infants and toddlers, parents working non-standard or changing shifts, immigrant and multilingual families, and families with limited transportation options. It often fills gaps where licensed care is unavailable, unaffordable, or cannot meet specific needs, such as caring for siblings together or accommodating last-minute schedule changes.

An updated Child Care Supply & Demand analysis (2025) revealed some strengths in the child care system.⁵ For example, the number of child care slots has increased in comparison to 2022 levels, and progress has been made on preschool availability.

However, critical needs still remain. The analysis also revealed large gaps between the number of licensed child care slots available and the number of children who likely need care, with the largest shortages for infants and toddlers and school-age children. A significant need also exists for more subsidized care, as the number of children eligible for subsidies far outpaces the number of funded spaces across all age groups. Discussions with families validated these data: even where care slots exist, families cannot afford them.



Landscape Snapshot

- The need for subsidized care for all ages remains high.
- A significant need continues for infant care and afterschool care.
- More children are being served now than in 2022, and a majority of the need is met for preschool care.

UNMET NEED — NUMBER OF SLOTS

School Age

7,501

Infants

1,403

0 1,000 2,000 3,000 4,000 5,000 6,000 7,000

NUMBER OF LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTERS = 543

300

250

200

150

100

50

0

304

172

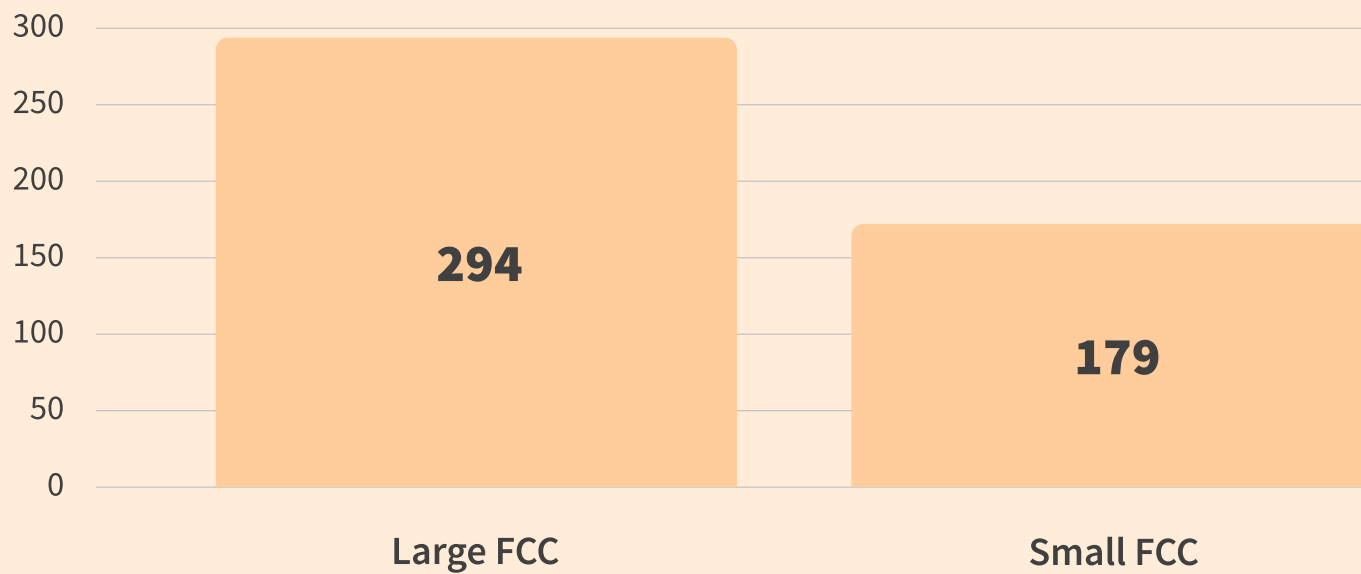
67

Infant/Todler

Pre-Schools

Before & After School

NUMBER OF LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES = 473



Sarah Kinahan Consulting, 2025

What We Heard from the Community

Community engagement was significant

To ground the Blueprint in community voices, a significant community engagement effort was launched alongside a review of existing literature and research. This helped avoid duplicating past efforts while identifying voices that may not have been fully engaged previously. Listening sessions, focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys were used to gather feedback from more than 250 community members to better understand the complexities of child care need across the county.

Families, providers, employers, and systems leaders all described a child care system strained by affordability, limited supply, workforce instability, and navigation barriers, with strong calls for more flexible, culturally and linguistically responsive care. San Mateo County communities need:

Affordable, flexible child care

“Gap” families – those whose incomes are too high for subsidy assistance but for whom child care is prohibitively expensive – report relying on friends, family members, and neighbors. The expense of formal care can lead to underemployment, unemployment, or working from home to manage care. One parent said, “I want to go back

to work, but how is that even going to work with the hours that you have for child care?” underscoring that cost and limited hours jointly constrain employment.

Insufficient supply & long hours

Families describe long waitlists, few spots for infants and toddlers, and acute challenges when families have multiple children, noting that “cost doubles for multiple kids.” Other community members recognize these issues, as well. For example, pediatric providers in Medicaid clinics report that childcare waitlists are long and that families often need care hours outside of the traditional work week. Even when a program opening exists, the schedule may not match parents’ work patterns.

Affordability remains the key decision-making factor for parents in choosing child care.

**Culturally and linguistically matched care**

Families who speak languages other than English often prefer care that matches their language and culture, but such culturally- and linguistically-aligned care can be difficult to find. Some Chinese-speaking families report traveling to San Francisco for care because they are more familiar with resources in that county. Coastside Spanish-speaking families also expressed a desire for culturally-consistent care.

Navigation help & clear info

Families are often unsure how to find care that will meet their needs, and awareness of local supports is generally low. Families and pediatricians alike call for “family navigators”—in-person assistants who can provide tailored, in-language help.

Conversations with multiple groups highlighted the need for family education, awareness-building, and centralized information about options and eligibility. Families in particular call for more translated resources and community hubs “where families can share resources.”

Workforce wages, benefits & support

Workforce listening session participants identify low wages, housing insecurity, and limited access to high-quality benefits as key pressures. Early childhood educators also report managing challenging child behaviors as an increasing strain.

“Some parents need to work but can’t find anyone to care for their child. They’ve never known how to apply for child care, how to access subsidized services, or they’ve been stuck on a long waiting list. It feels like they’ve simply given up on the system.”

*– Mandarin-speaking Parent**

**See Appendix D: “Community Engagement” (page 78)*

Child care center directors echo these concerns, citing “key challenges [that] include staffing, cost of care, [and] TK.” They ask for higher wages, education stipends, and shared resources to stabilize and retain staff.

Coordinated systems, funding and advocacy

Leadership at the Child Care Partnership Council and other key informant interviews stress the need for coordination among ecosystem partners. A strong, countywide grassroots organizing base, a compelling narrative, sustainable funding streams, and a designated champion to carry the Blueprint forward are also necessary ingredients to a solid plan.

Business and employer-responsive solutions

Representatives of large employers and chambers of commerce state that child care is directly affecting their ability to recruit and retain staff, “even [for] high income employees.” Their employees need options with flexible hours and drop-in care to support return-to-office expectations.

Business stakeholders suggest solutions such as smaller companies banding together in co-ops, nanny shares, or using extra employer space for child care centers. However, they report feeling “very squeezed” and want clear information and policy guidance that they can then communicate to employees.

Engagement consisted of listening sessions, focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys.



3

Next Steps

- Where do We Begin?
- Year One: Focused & Action-Oriented
- A Collaborative Backbone Structure



Where do We Begin?



When a challenge is complex, the important thing is to just start.

The Blueprint is not the finish line. It is the starting point. The task now is to move from planning to coordinated action and to build on the incredible work that agencies, cities, school districts, providers, employers, and community partners are advancing. The Blueprint provides a shared roadmap to align and accelerate existing efforts into a unified framework, while also launching new initiatives with the potential to transform child care across San Mateo County.

Year One: Focused & Action Oriented



Implementation will begin in July 2026 with a disciplined set of Year One priorities. Each priority is anchored by a designated lead agency responsible for defining a clear workplan, timeline, and measurable outcomes. Rather than attempt to advance every strategy at once, lead agencies identified high impact actions designed to:

- Deliver visible progress for families and providers
- Strengthen cross-sector coordination
- Build the foundation for long term systems change

In addition, implementation will move forward across two complementary tracks:

Leverage and align

Strengthen, connect, and align existing efforts—including funding, policy, programs, communications, and data—to maximize impact and reduce duplication.

Launch new initiatives

Where gaps persist, secure funding and partnerships to design and implement new strategies that expand child care supply, stabilize providers, strengthen the workforce, and improve affordability for families.

A Collaborative Backbone Structure

The Child Care Partnership Council (CCPC)—a state-mandated, local council charged with planning and advocating for high quality child care—and The Children's Collective will jointly steward implementation of the Blueprint, sharing responsibility for coordination, activation, and accountability.

- The CCPC will coordinate and implement strategies by convening partners, leading workgroups and the advocacy platform, aligning systems, and tracking progress through outcomes based evaluation.
- The Children's Collective will mobilize and activate the broader community through its collaborative steering body (the Action Roundtable), the elevation of parent voices, and municipal policy coordination, support communications, and engage employers as key partners.

Together, these complementary backbone functions ensure that implementation is both operationally disciplined and community driven, grounded in measurable outcomes while responsive to families and stakeholders across the county.



- Champion progress toward shared outcomes
- Center community and practitioner perspectives
- Identify opportunities to accelerate impact
- Foster learning, adaptation, and alignment

- Own strategy direction and execution
- Develop and manage cross-sector workplans
- Coordinate partners and track progress
- Monitor outcomes and elevate challenges



LEAD AGENCIES

*Lead, Coordinate,
and Advance*



ACTION ROUNDTABLE

*Align, Learn,
and Accelerate*



THE CHILDREN'S COLLECTIVE

*Mobilize, Activate,
and Connect*



CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

*Coordinate, Align,
and Implement*

**Better
Outcomes
for Children
and Families**

- Convene partners across systems
- Coordinate implementation efforts
- Track outcomes and system progress
- Ensure accountability and delivery

- Connect communities and elevate parent voice
- Support policy and systems change
- Coordinate partners and track progress
- Engage employers as key partners

4

Child Care Blueprint Action Plan

- Strategic Framework
- Goal Spotlights & Action Plans



Strategic Framework

The Blueprint Action Plan consists of the set of goals, strategies, and recommended actions set forth on the following pages. Child care stakeholders will convene partners for ongoing refinement, implementation, and evaluation of this Blueprint until the vision for San Mateo County's children, families, and providers is realized. The Blueprint offers a set of preliminary objectives for each goal that reflect the highest priority strategies. Lead Agencies are also identified for each strategic area. These Lead Agencies will serve as points of contact, and are responsible for convening stakeholders, overseeing the refinement of objectives, the development of targets, and the creation of specific work plans.





Goal 1 Spotlight

High-quality child care is affordable, easy to find, and supportive of all families and children.

Strategies:

1. Make child care more affordable for all families.
2. Make child care more accessible by helping families understand their options and easily secure care that meets their needs.
3. Expand capacity to meet the greatest supply and demand gaps while supporting and sustaining child care providers.
4. Systematically enhance child care quality across different types of child care.

Preliminary Objectives:

1. Licensed infant and toddler child care slots in San Mateo County will increase each year between 2026 and 2031 until the need is met.
2. By Q3 in FY 2026-2027, a local and state advocacy plan is developed, with clear messages, timelines, and target audiences.
3. An enhanced child care navigation system is piloted by Q4 FY 2026-2027, supported by a multilingual and culturally responsive public education and outreach campaign.



Why this is important:

Ensuring the availability of high-quality, affordable child care is a critical investment in human capital and economic vitality in San Mateo County. It directly impacts the well-being of children, the economic stability of families, and long-term community prosperity.

Quality child care lays the groundwork for children's future academic and career success by fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development. For parents, accessible child care is a vital economic lifeline, allowing them to stay in the workforce, increase household income, and contribute to the local economy. Ultimately, high-quality child care is a powerful tool for social equity, helping to break the cycle of poverty and build a more resilient and thriving community for everyone.



Goal 1 Action Plan

Strategy 1.1—Make child care more affordable for all families.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Secure and grow sustainable funding to lower child care costs for families.		
	1. Establish dedicated local funding streams to increase affordability options.	See Goal 4	See Goal 4
	2. Strengthen local, state, and federal advocacy to expand subsidy eligibility for low- and middle-income families	CCPC	Year 1–2
	3. Explore local funding to support child care pilots, such as sliding-scale assistance or gap funding for families who don't qualify for subsidies but cannot afford market-rate care.	SMC CEO	Year 1–2
b.	Ensure fair and equitable provider compensation so families can access high-quality child care at more affordable rates.		
	1. Advocate for higher subsidy rates across all care settings to reflect the true cost of quality care.	CCPC	Year 1–2
c.	Advance child care-friendly local policies, building on city models within the County.		
	1. Create a practical toolkit—featuring case studies, model policies, and proven strategies—to help cities implement effective child care solutions.	TCC	Year 1–2

* CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; SMC CEO = San Mateo County Executive Office; CC = Children's Collective

Strategy 1.2—Make child care more accessible by helping families understand their options and easily secure care that meets their needs.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Strengthen and expand the child care navigation system with the right technology, people and adequate funding so families can quickly find and secure care.		
	1. Enhance technology tools to streamline access, potentially including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A centralized eligibility list (CEL) for subsidized care that is integrated across programs • An updated child care portal/website with advanced search functions, a benefits eligibility calculator and inclusion of programs serving children ages 0 to 12 • A common inquiry form • A common application 	SMC CEO & 4Cs	Year 1–2
	2. Provide staffing and infrastructure to administer the system, support families and providers, and coordinate outreach. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify staff to manage the system. • Encourage providers to keep information up to date, including vacancies and subsidy enrollments. • Create a culturally and linguistically responsive family navigators program. • Build partnerships with Promotores, safety net agencies, pediatricians, and other trusted messengers. 	SMC CEO & 4Cs	Year 1–2
	3. Identify the funding to implement an enhanced system.	SMC CEO	Year 1–2

*SMC CEO = San Mateo County Executive Office; 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County

Strategy 1.2 (*continued*)—Make child care more accessible by helping families understand their options and easily secure care that meets their needs.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
b.	Develop a communications and outreach campaign to help families understand and identify the child care options that best fit their needs.		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop linguistically- and culturally-responsive messages to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market enhanced navigation system. Emphasize the value of early childhood experiences. Help families assess the quality of child care options, showing what high-quality, play-based care looks like and ensuring that linguistic- and culturally-consistent care is highlighted. Explain the range of child care options for children 0–12 and why high-quality care can be expensive. Guide families in selecting care that best fits their needs. Inform families about available subsidies/vouchers and how to apply. 	4Cs	Year 1–2

*SMC CEO = San Mateo County Executive Office; 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County

Strategy 1.3—Expand capacity to meet the greatest supply and demand gaps while supporting and sustaining child care providers.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Support and expand Family Child Care (FCC) capacity.		
	1. Establish subsidized slots through the development of a Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN) model.	4Cs SMCOE	Year 1–2
	2. Provide business supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore a Shared Services Alliance or coaching to offer business, finance and marketing services, including how to maximize enrollment and access subsidy slots. • Explore pooled benefits (e.g. health and retirement benefits). • Encourage providers to access labor organization supports and benefits. 	TBD	Year 3–4
b.	Support and expand Family Child Care (FCC) capacity.		
	1. Identify potential provider pilots in the areas of greatest need (infant/toddlers and school age care) and determine initial funding sources.	CCPC & SMC CEO	Year 1–2
	2. Provide technical assistance, training and coaching to help providers serve infants, toddlers, and school-age children.	SMCOE	Year 1–2

* 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County; SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education; TBD = To Be Determined; CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; SMC CEO = San Mateo County Executive Office

Strategy 1.3 (*continued*)—Expand capacity to meet the greatest supply and demand gaps while supporting and sustaining child care providers.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
c.	Enhance opportunities for Family, Friends, and Neighbor (FFN) care.		
	1. Include FFN providers in the countywide navigation system (see Strategy 1.2) to increase visibility and access.	TBD	Year 3–4
	2. Expand shared care opportunities and help families identify care arrangements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support partnerships in the county to implement share care training for FFN caregivers and how to create share care arrangements for families. Create and utilize an online resource “hub” to connect families seeking share care with caregivers trained to do share care. (see Strategy 1.2) 	TBD	Year 3–4
	3. Connect FFN providers with opportunities to receive training, coaching, subsidy payments, and other financial supports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify successful FFN support networks in other regions and look to replicate. Determine and employ innovative solutions to connect FFN providers to subsidies. 	TBD	Year 3–4

*TBD = To Be Determined

Strategy 1.3 (*continued*)—Expand capacity to meet the greatest supply and demand gaps while supporting and sustaining child care providers.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
d.	Expand capacity of programs to address the needs of school-age children countywide currently without care.		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop mechanisms to increase before/after-school and summer slots. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure full utilization of ELOP allocations and other afterschool program funding. Bring together providers and districts to strengthen coordination and quality. Build an extended learning coalition to align efforts, share best practices, and advocate collectively. Partner with The Big Lift to ensure continuity and expansion of summer learning programs. Identify and implement transportation supports to improve access for school-age children. 	SMCOE	Year 3–4
e.	Incentivize the development of care during non-traditional hours.		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Gather data on the countywide need for care outside of 8am-5pm. 	TBD	Year 3–4
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explore opportunities to increase non-traditional care options. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scale proven models (e.g., Palcare) and explore opportunities to replicate or adapt them countywide. Explore opportunities to pilot an incentive program to offer evening, overnight, weekend, and flexible-hour care. Leverage employer partnerships to co-fund or sponsor extended-hour child care programs for workers in industries with nontraditional schedules. Pilot flexible scheduling initiatives (e.g., shared staffing models, rotating care teams, or networked FCCs) to help providers meet demand without burnout. 	TBD	Year 3–4

SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education; TBD = To Be Determined

Strategy 1.4—Systematically enhance child care quality across different types of child care.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Identify sustainable funding streams for Quality Counts San Mateo County and encourage providers to join and actively participate.		
	1. Continue pursuing funding streams to support high quality care.	SMCOE, First Five	Year 1–2
	2. Offer incentives to encourage more providers to enroll in Quality Counts San Mateo County and to encourage current enrollees to reflect on strengths and develop action plans to address improvement areas. Recognize, acknowledge, and reward providers who uphold the highest standards of care.	SMCOE, First Five, 4Cs	Year 1–2
	3. Adopt and implement a shared countywide definition of quality early learning, using it to guide quality improvement, inform planning and investment decisions, align partners, and communicate what quality care looks like across workforce, facilities and family engagement.	SMCOE, First Five, 4Cs	Year 1–2
b.	Explore additional areas to include in the Quality Counts framework.		
	1. Crosswalk Quality Counts elements with best practice efforts regionally and nationally.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 3–4
	2. Determine viability of expanding the Quality Counts framework if gaps are identified.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 3–4

* SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education; First Five = First 5 San Mateo County; 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County



Goal 2 Spotlight

Child care teachers and staff are highly-trained, well-supported, valued as professionals, and paid competitive wages.

Strategies:

1. Increase compensation for the child care provider workforce.
2. Expand and strengthen the child care workforce pipeline.
3. Increase access to and strengthen the professional development system for the child care workforce.
4. Invest in child care workforce retention.

Preliminary Objectives:

1. The average local child care workforce salary increases year over year, using other regions to guide parity.
2. There is an increase in the number of child care entrants, degrees and credentials awarded each year, resulting in increased numbers of qualified child care educators in San Mateo County.



Why this is important:

Prioritizing a highly-trained, well-supported, fairly-paid child care workforce is fundamental as the quality of care is directly linked to the quality of the educator. A skilled and professional workforce is better equipped to provide the nurturing and stimulating environments that are crucial for a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, leading to greater school readiness and long-term success. Investing in this workforce ensures that the most critical element of the child care system—the direct interaction between a teacher and a child—is as effective as possible.

Valuing child care staff with competitive wages and professional support is essential for a stable and sustainable system. The child care sector is plagued by high turnover due to low pay, which disrupts children's development and makes it harder for families to find consistent care. By improving compensation and working conditions, the county can attract and retain qualified professionals, building a reliable workforce that meets the high demand for child care. Investments in this area not only strengthen the local economy by enabling parents to work but also promotes social equity by providing financial stability for a workforce largely occupied by women of color.



Goal 2 Action Plan

Strategy 2.1—Increase compensation for the child care provider workforce.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Explore approaches for short- and long-term increases in child care teacher and staff compensation, including financial support for housing.		
	1. Develop a research-based wage and benefits scale and policy recommendations to guide compensation increases for child care teachers and staff across all settings.	SVCF	Year 1–2
	2. Advocate for higher compensation for early childhood and school-age educators.	CCPC, TCC	Year 1–2
	3. Explore supports for housing costs, including access to workforce teacher housing.	SVCF	Year 3–4

* SVCF = Silicon Valley Community Foundation; CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; CC = Children's Collective

Strategy 2.2—Expand and strengthen the child care workforce pipeline.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Identify clear pathways into the workforce across all settings (center, home-based and school-age care).		
	1. Address barriers to entry, such as enrollment and requirements in the community college system.	SMCOE	Year 1–2
	2. Advocate for sustainable, increased funding for exploring and entering the child care workforce.	SMCOE	Year 1–2
	3. Increase funding pathway supports for permits, credentials, units, and degrees.	SMCOE	Year 1–2
	4. Strengthen existing pipelines (e.g., Skyline Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program, Izzi CDA, Cañada pre-ap-prenticeships) and add standardized success metrics.	SMCOE	Year 1–2
	5. Launch a multilingual communications campaign to recruit diverse candidates, including men and high school students.	SMCOE	Year 3–4

* SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education

Strategy 2.3—Increase access to and strengthen the professional development system.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Strengthen professional development opportunities for educators.		
	1. Promote available professional development opportunities and communicate ways for providers, educators, and staff to access them.	SMCOE, 4Cs, SMCCCD	Year 3–4
	2. Create a shared menu/calendar of trainings across SMC, including SMCOE, 4Cs, community colleges and others.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 1–2
	3. Identify, communicate and increase uptake of available funding that can reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket professional development costs.	SMCOE, 4Cs, SMCCCD	Year 3–4
	4. Promote best practices for supporting staff PD, including paid training outside regular hours and planning during the workday.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 3–4
	5. Provide training in culturally responsive family engagement and communication.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 3–4
	6. Expand training in areas such as leadership development, special needs, classroom behavior, and infant/early childhood mental health consultation.	SMCOE, 4Cs, SMCCCD	Year 3–4
	7. Identify or develop training for site supervisors to grow leadership skills around managing staff.	SMCOE, 4Cs	Year 3–4
	8. Ensure communications and trainings are accessible to providers who speak languages other than English.	SMCOE, 4Cs, SMCCCD	Year 1–2

SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education; 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County; SMCCCD = San Mateo County Community College District

Strategy 2.4—Invest in child care workforce retention.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Develop supports that help make child care a sustainable career.		
	1. Explore effective retention models from other institutions and regions.	CCPC	Year 1–2
	2. Create substitute pools to increase time off for illness, vacation, medical appointments, etc. and advocate to changes in the 80/20 rule for FCCs.	CCPC	Year 1–2
	3. Design supports that educators find meaningful, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and culturally responsive peer support groups. • Job-sharing models to increase Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP) hours. • Financial incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness, housing preferences). 	CCPC	Year 3–4
b.	Raise recognition of early educators as essential professionals.		
	1. Create a communications strategy to share appreciation for educators.	First 5 & 4Cs	Year 1–2
	2. Create recognition programs that explicitly value child care providers.	First 5 & 4Cs	Year 1–2

CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; First 5 = First 5 San Mateo County; 4Cs = Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County



Goal 3 Spotlight

Child care facilities are preserved, developed, maintained, and renovated to ensure safety, high quality, and climate resilience.

Strategies:

1. Help improve, expand, and/or transition child care facilities to meet the greatest supply needs while making sure existing spaces are protected.
2. Work with providers and partners to understand and follow local, state, and licensing rules for child care.
3. Promote child care facilities that are built to be sustainable and able to handle the impacts of climate change.

Preliminary Objectives:

1. Advocate for local policy and planning changes that encourage at least 10% of new public, private, commercial, and mixed-use developments to consider, where feasible, dedicated child care space by June 2028.
2. Develop a plan for a multi-partner effort to raise \$1.5 million for facilities grants by June 2027.



Why this is important:

Child care facilities directly impact the health, safety, and development of children. A well-maintained and thoughtfully designed facility is a foundational element for delivering a high-quality program, providing a secure environment free from hazards like lead, mold or outdated infrastructure, with access to spaces conducive to learning and growth.

Developing and maintaining child care facilities is also vital for the economic stability and long-term resilience of the entire child care system. Many existing facilities are aging and may not meet current health and safety codes or requirements, creating significant barriers for providers to operate and expand. By dedicating resources to facility development, maintenance, and renovation, a county can support the necessary supply of child care slots to meet community demand. This investment helps providers remain sustainable and profitable, which in turn strengthens the local economy by enabling more parents to work. Ultimately, a strong focus on child care facilities ensures the system has the physical infrastructure it needs to support both children and the workforce for years to come.



Goal 3 Action Plan

Strategy 3.1—Help improve, expand, and/or transition child care facilities to meet the greatest supply needs while making sure existing spaces are protected.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Conduct a comprehensive study of child care supply, demand, and facilities (both number and quality and both commercial and residential), to be updated every 5 years.		
	1. Include an assessment of current facilities, discussion of facility expansion opportunities, and identification of possible public funding mechanisms to bring to San Mateo County.	CCPC & Build Up SMC	Year 3–4
b.	Sustain Build Up’s Technical Assistance (TA) resource hub that offers self-supported assistance to any public or private seeking to improve or develop its facility.		
	1. Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate TA to providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain a provider resource library. • Support FCC business owner/operators who are not homeowners in understanding their rights and support them to connect with legal representation. • Make licensing information and documentation available in threshold languages. 	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2

* CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; Build Up SMC = Build Up San Mateo County

Strategy 3.1 (*continued*)—Help improve, expand, and/or transition child care facilities to meet the greatest supply needs while making sure existing spaces are protected.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
c.	Identify and leverage underutilized school district facilities to expand child care capacity.	Build Up SMC	Year 3–4
d.	Increase awareness and utilization of innovative public-private child care facility financing models.	Build Up SMC & SVCF	Year 1–2
e.	Expand Capital Fund to \$1.5 million by fiscal year 2030-31 and provide supports to child care providers to access these funds.		
	1. Create a fundraising plan to grow the Capital Fund.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2
	2. Implement a system for referrals by maintaining a list of vetted vendors, contractors, land use attorneys, and child care facility designers/architects to implement a system for referrals.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2
	3. Assist in funding and incentivizing the expansion of existing family child care providers from small to large licenses.	Build Up SMC	Year 3–4

* Build Up SMC = Build Up San Mateo County; SVCF = Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Strategy 3.2—Work with providers and partners to understand and follow local, state, and licensing rules for child care.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Advance policy and funding solutions to expand and sustain child care facilities.		
	1. Advocate with cities to utilize developer impact fee dollars to expand and preserve facilities.	Build Up SMC, TCC	Year 1–2
	2. Advocate for zoning and permitting reforms that facilitate the addition or expansion of child care facilities.		
	3. Advocate to State policy makers to fully fund and continually allocate new rounds of State facilities funding.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2
b.	Advocate for administrative reforms that make child care easier, faster, and more sustainable to open and operate.		
	1. Streamline State licensing regulations, requirements, and process for opening, renewing, and maintaining child care licenses.	Build Up SMC, TCC	Year 3–4
	2. Use innovations such as acting as master leaseholders, creating community land trusts, etc.		
	3. Creation of a State level public-facing dashboard to increase transparency and accountability around the Community Care Licensing process.	Build Up CA with Build Up SMC, CCPC	Year 3–4
c.	Integrate child care as a core component of community benefit agreements and land use planning.		
	1. Include child care as a required component in community planning for city and County of San Mateo planning commissions, regional planning, land use development, etc.	Build Up SMC, TCC	Year 1–2
	2. Partner with local planning agencies to prioritize developments that incorporate early learning and care spaces through added incentives in funding and scoring criteria.		

* Build Up SMC = Build Up San Mateo County; Build Up CA = Build Up California; CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education; TBD = To Be Determined

Strategy 3.3—Promote child care facilities that are built to be sustainable and able to handle the impacts of climate change.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Promote and implement Early Childhood Climate Action Plan-SMC.		
	1. Explicitly include child care providers and facilities in municipal climate action plans.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2
	2. Adjust eligibility for climate-related rebates and grants to include child care providers, ensuring equitable access.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2
	3. Equip families and providers with resources to adopt climate-conscious practices, such as implementing up-grades in child care setting such as solar panels, shaded play areas, air conditioning, and air filtration systems.	Build Up SMC	Year 1–2

* Build Up SMC = Build Up San Mateo County



Goal 4 Spotlight

The child care ecosystem is well-funded and coordinated.

Strategies:

1. Maximize existing funding for child care.
2. Identify pathways for ongoing funding streams dedicated to child care.
3. Build intentional and innovative partnerships with the business community.
4. Strengthen family voice.
5. Advocate for systems improvements at the local, state, and federal levels.
6. Strengthen cross-agency collaboration to maximize resources and minimize redundancies.
7. Ensure long-term Blueprint implementation.

Preliminary Objectives:

1. By July 2026, establish a governance structure to guide and oversee Blueprint implementation.
2. Initiate a process and outcome evaluation plan to monitor progress on initial blueprint priorities by October 2026.
3. Establish a parent advocacy group by October 2026.



Why this is important:

A well-funded and well-coordinated child care ecosystem is critical for both the immediate stability and long-term success of the community. A well-funded system ensures that providers can offer high-quality care without placing an unbearable financial burden on families. It allows for the development and maintenance of safe facilities and the payment of competitive wages to attract and retain a professional workforce. Without adequate funding, the entire system is precarious, leading to child care deserts, high staff turnover, and a decline in the quality of care.

A well-coordinated ecosystem is the key to maximizing the impact of that funding. By aligning across stakeholders the county can create a seamless and efficient network that is easy for families to navigate, prevents fragmented services and redundant efforts, and ensures that resources are used effectively. A coordinated system enables all policy makers and stakeholders to make informed decisions that promote equitable access for all families.



Goal 4 Action Plan

Strategy 4.1—Maximize existing funding for child care.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Conduct a comprehensive study of child care supply, demand, and facilities (both number and quality and both commercial and residential), to be updated every 5 years.	SMCOE	Year 1–2
b.	Ensure full utilization of subsidy contracts.		
	1. Explore a San Mateo County pilot to allow greater flexibility in how state funds are spent locally.	CCPC	Year 1–2
	2. Utilize existing mechanisms for re-distributing funds among contractors.	CCPC	Year 1–2

* SMCOE = San Mateo County Office of Education; CC = Children's Collective; CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo County Office of Education

Strategy 4.2—Identify pathways for ongoing funding streams dedicated to child care.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Evaluate options for dedicated local funding mechanisms (e.g., city/county set-asides, revenue measure, developer fees) to support the child care ecosystem.		
	1. Recommend a path forward that includes a variety of the most viable funding mechanisms.	TCC	Year 1–2
	2. Assess what a child care ballot measure would entail and outline first steps if feasible.	TCC	Year 1–2
	3. Identify lessons, successes, and challenges from child-focused funding mechanisms in neighboring counties and beyond, and assess their applicability to San Mateo County.	TCC	Year 1–2

* TCC = The Children's Collective

Strategy 4.3—Build intentional and innovative partnerships with the business community.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Increase awareness of the importance of child care through education and outreach.		
	1. Share models such as EPIC (Colorado) that provide TA and advocacy to support employer investment.	TCC	Year 1–2
b.	Engage as stakeholders, ensuring small and large business input informs child care solutions.		
	1. Create opportunities for businesses to share their needs and challenges as employers through convenings, presentations and listening sessions.	TCC	Year 1–2
c.	Promote Family-Friendly Policies.		
	1. Develop and distribute templates of family-friendly employer policies throughout the business community.	TCC	Year 1–2
	2. Partner with chambers, business associations and commissions to encourage adoption, peer learning, and public recognition for employers who demonstrate leadership in this area.	TCC	Year 1–2
d.	Create partnership and incentive opportunities.		
	1. Research and promote tax benefits, financial incentives, and public/private partnership models (e.g., TriShare, EPIC) to expand employer participation in child care solutions.	TCC	Year 1–3
e.	Assess feasibility of larger initiatives, such as an extended countywide paid family leave program, in partnership with businesses, government, and community organizations.	TBD	Year 3–4

* CC = Children's Collective; TBD = To Be Determined

Strategy 4.4—Strengthen family voice.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Establish and resource parent advocacy group.		
	1. Identify parent organizing lead agencies as potential partners.	First 5, SVCF	Year 1–2
	2. Partner with parent organizer on landscape scan and a plan for building parent/family/caregiving voice.	First 5, SVCF	Year 1–2

* First 5 = First 5 San Mateo County

Strategy 4.5—Advocate for systems improvements at the local, state, and federal levels.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Identify barriers and opportunities for increased levels of system coordination.	CCPC	Year 1–2

* CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo Office of Education

Strategy 4.6—Strengthen cross-agency collaboration to maximize resources and minimize redundancies.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Establish shared structures and tools to strengthen communication, agency collaboration, streamline resources, and deliver more consistent, effective support for families.		
	1. Map current efforts and resources across agencies (County, SMCOE, 4Cs, First 5, nonprofits, etc.) to identify overlap, duplication, and gaps.	TCC	Year 3–4

* TCC = *The Children's Collective*

Strategy 4.7—Ensure long-term Blueprint implementation.

ACTIONS & STEPS		LEAD AGENCY*	TIMING
a.	Identify and resource a backbone structure to drive collective impact and ensure long-term Blueprint implementation.		
	1. Secure funding to seat a dedicated role to coordinate Blueprint activities and stakeholder engagement.	SVCF	Year 1–2
	2. Explore and recommend a governance structure.	SVCF	Year 1–2
b.	Develop an implementation and outcome evaluation plan with clear metrics to track progress toward goals.		
	1. Formulate objectives and specific targets for each strategy with relevant working group members.	TCC/CCPC	Year 1–2
	2. Build feedback loops to adjust strategies and actions in response to new data, community needs, and lessons learned.	TCC/CCPC	Year 1–2
	3. Institute a transparent reporting framework (e.g., annual evaluation report/dashboard).	TCC/CCPC	Year 1–2
c.	Create a communications plan to keep partners, families, policymakers, and the public informed and engaged in Blueprint progress.		
	1. Gather working partners across all Goal areas on at least an annual basis for updates on objectives met and next steps.	TCC	Year 1–2

* SVCF = Silicon Valley Community Foundation; TCC = The Children's Collective; CCPC = Child Care Partnership Council, San Mateo Office of Education

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Appendices

- The Children's Collective Membership
- Research & Resources
- Glossary of Terms
- Community Engagement
- Endnotes
- About The Children's Collective



APPENDIX A:

The Children's Collective Membership as of March 2026

Government Partners

- Supervisor Speier
- Supervisor Gauthier
- Supervisor Corzo
- Supervisor Mueller
- County Executive Office
- City of Redwood City
- Redwood City Together
- The Big Lift
- First 5 San Mateo County

Education, Business, and Foundation Partners

- Ravenswood Early Learning
- San Mateo County Community College District
- San Mateo County Office of Education
- San Mateo County Economic Development Association
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation
- San Mateo County Central Labor Council
- Chamber of San Mateo County
- Foster City Chamber of Commerce
- Gardner Center for Youth and Their Families - Stanford

Community Leaders

- Sara McDowell, Consultant
- Sarah Kinahan, Strategy Consultant
- Karen Molinari, Principal/Founder KM Consulting
- Dr. Kristen Anderson, Child Care Planning Consultant
- Pranita Venkatesh, Director Paragon Montessori
- Amy Buckmaster, President & CEO of Chamber San Mateo County

APPENDIX A:

Children's Collective Membership as of March 2026 (continued)

Community Organizations

- Ability Path
- Build Up San Mateo County
- Child Care Coordinating Council of San Mateo County (4C's)
- Community Equity Collaborative
- Footsteps Child Care
- Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County
- Izzi Early Education
- Job Train
- Kidango
- Kids Connection Foster City
- Newton Center
- Peninsula Family Service
- Peninsula Jewish Community Center
- Puente de la Costa Sur
- Redwood City Education Foundation
- Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center
- San Mateo County Family Childcare Organization
- Thrive Alliance of Nonprofits
- The Institute for Families and Nannies (TIFFAN)
- Unitedly
- Upward Scholars
- Y of San Francisco

APPENDIX B: *Research & Resources*

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APPENDIX B: *Research & Resources (continued)*

San Mateo County Child Care Supply and Demand Analysis:

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the supply and demand for child care in San Mateo County in 2025, highlighting significant changes in demographics, policy, and funding that affect child care availability for children birth to age twelve. It identifies persistent deficits in infant and school-age care, emphasizes affordability challenges for subsidized child care, and offers data-driven recommendations to address gaps at the county, city, and school district levels.

San Mateo County Child Care and Early Learning Fiscal Mapping and Cost Modeling:

This report provides a comprehensive fiscal map of San Mateo County's child care funding, revealing that while \$182 million in public funds support the sector, significant gaps remain in affordability, workforce wages, and facility supply. Seven high-level cost model scenarios, such as funding the true cost of care, raising wages, and expanding subsidies, show that addressing these gaps would require substantial new investments but promise economic and social returns.

Child Care and Early Learning Funding Case Studies - County and City Programs:

This report presents twelve case studies of county and city-funded child care and early learning initiatives across the United States, illustrating a variety of funding mechanisms such as sales taxes, parcel taxes, and general fund allocations to support affordability, workforce development, and facilities. It highlights key lessons and successful strategies—including dedicated funding, clear governance, workforce investments, and family navigation systems—to guide San Mateo County in implementing its Child Care Blueprint.

Strengthening the San Mateo County Coastside Child Care System:

Strengthening the San Mateo County Coastside Child Care System is a companion report to the broader countrywide Child Care Blueprint effort, offering a focused, in-depth look at the unique needs of families living on the Coastside and identifying strategies to ensure the Blueprint's goals are met in this geographically distinct region.

APPENDIX B: *Research & Resources (continued)*

Early Childhood Climate Action Plan (ECCAP):

A countywide framework developed to support climate-resilient, healthy, and sustainable early childhood environments. ECCAP helps guide strategies related to child care facilities, environmental health, emergency preparedness, and long-term climate adaptation to better support young children, families, and providers.

Family Child Care Insight Report:

This report highlights the experiences and insights of San Mateo County family child care business owners to guide organizational strategies and system planning in San Mateo County.

APPENDIX C: *Glossary of Terms*

TERM	REPORT USAGE & DEFINITIONS
80/20 Rule	In California family child care licensing, the “80/20 rule” is a supervision rule about how often the licensee must personally be with children in care. The licensed family child care provider must be physically present in the home and supervising children at least 80% of the time that children are in care each day. The provider may be temporarily absent for up to 20% of the child care hours in a day (for example, for appointments or brief errands), but only if a qualified substitute adult is present and supervising the children during that time. https://www.cdss.ca.gov/
The Big Lift	A countywide initiative focused on improving early literacy and third-grade reading proficiency through high-quality preschool, summer learning, and family engagement. https://www.thebiglift.org
California State Preschool Program (CSPP)	California’s largest state-funded preschool program providing part-day and full-day early learning services to eligible 3- and 4-year-olds (and some 2-year-olds) through school districts and community-based agencies. See CA Dept. of Education CSPP page: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/op/csppfaq.asp
Capacity	The total number of children a licensed child care program is approved to serve at one time, often broken out by age group (infant, preschool, school-age) and by setting (center-based or family child care home). Licensing capacity is used in supply-and-demand analyses to estimate available spaces.
Center-Based Care	Early care and education provided in a non-residential facility (such as a child care center, preschool, or school-based classroom) licensed by Community Care Licensing, typically serving larger groups of children with multiple staff and defined classrooms.

APPENDIX C: *Glossary of Terms (continued)*

TERM	REPORT USAGE & DEFINITIONS
Centralized Eligibility List (CEL)	A coordinated list or database that collects information from families seeking subsidized child care and ranks them based on eligibility and priority rules, allowing multiple programs to draw from one shared queue instead of maintaining separate waitlists
Child Care Pilot	A time-limited program or policy test (such as a new subsidy model, navigation tool, or cost-sharing approach) implemented on a small scale to learn what works before expanding or making permanent changes to the broader child care system.
English Learners	English learners, as defined by the California Department of Education (CDE), are students whose primary language is not English and who are in the process of acquiring proficiency in English.
Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP)	A California K–12 funding stream that supports before- and after-school, intersession, and summer learning programs for TK–6 students, expanding access to enrichment and care beyond the regular school day. See CDE ELOP: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/elopinfo.asp .
Family Child Care (FCC) or Family Child Care Home (FCCH)	Licensed child care provided in the caregiver’s home, serving a small mixed-age group of children; FCCs offer more home-like settings and often provide flexible hours and culturally specific care. Licensing distinguishes between small and large FCCs based on maximum number of children. See CA Community Care Licensing: https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-licensing .
Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN)	A network model in which a sponsoring agency contracts with and supports multiple family child care homes, providing training, curriculum support, quality monitoring, and administrative services.

APPENDIX C: *Glossary of Terms (continued)*

TERM	REPORT USAGE & DEFINITIONS
Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care	Informal, often license-exempt child care provided by relatives, friends, neighbors, or babysitters in the child's or caregiver's home; FFN care is widely used by families who need flexible hours, culturally and linguistically matched care, or who cannot access or afford licensed programs.
Family Navigators Program	A coordinated effort to deploy trained staff who provide one-on-one, culturally and linguistically responsive assistance to families in understanding child care options, eligibility, and applications, helping them navigate subsidies, enrollment, and other early childhood services.
Navigation System	The combined tools, staff, and processes that help families find and secure child care—typically including a website or portal, centralized eligibility list, common application or inquiry form, and human navigators who offer in-language, personalized support.
Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)	A formal public announcement issued by a government agency that funding is available for specific project types (such as affordable housing, child care facilities, or community development) and inviting eligible entities to apply within a stated timeframe.
Palcare	A nonprofit child care program in Burlingame that specializes in full-day, year-round, and extended-hours care for infants through school-age children. Palcare is partnered with San Francisco International Airport and the County of San Mateo and is often cited as a model for non-traditional-hours care. See https://www.palcare.org .

APPENDIX C: *Glossary of Terms (continued)*

TERM	REPORT USAGE & DEFINITIONS
Quality	In early care and education, “quality” is the degree to which a program provides safe, developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and culturally responsive environments, staffed by well-trained and stable educators who support children’s learning and social-emotional development; quality is often assessed using standards such as staff qualifications, ratios, curriculum, and family engagement.
Quality Counts	San Mateo County’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) initiative that supports early learning programs to improve quality through coaching, professional development, financial incentives, and quality ratings. See Quality Counts San Mateo: https://www.smcoe.org/learning-and-leadership/early-learning/quality-counts.html .
Shared care	Shared care is when an adult cares for the children from two families such as a nanny caring for two infants.
Technical Assistance (TA)	Targeted support—such as coaching, consulting, training, or troubleshooting—provided to agencies, providers, or partners to help them design, implement, and sustain child care strategies, comply with requirements, or improve program quality and operations.
Transitional Kindergarten (TK)	The first year of a two-year public school kindergarten program in California, serving age-eligible 4-year-olds in school district classrooms. Provides a bridge between preschool and kindergarten.
TriShare	A cost-sharing model in which child care expenses are split among three parties—typically the family, the employer, and a public sector funder—designed to make care more affordable for families while engaging employers and leveraging public dollars.

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
Child Care Partnership Council - Access & Quality Group	In person	May 19, 2025	Clarity Social Research Group	18	Excellent access means having many options, finding a fit, and affording care. Families need navigators for help. We need to address wait times. Conversations about quality are in progress at the county-level. We need to solve the inflexibility of transferring funds between providers who are full to those with vacant spaces. We need to address the affordability needs of gap families. Diversity must be met with appropriate languages and services. Family education and awareness-building is needed to clarify options for families.
Child Care Partnership Council - Workforce Group	In person	May 19, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	10	The main needs of the ECE workforce include low wages, feeling like they make a difference, and challenging behaviors of children. Other needs include housing, access to high quality benefits, and support for professional development. We need to connect with high schools for workforce development.

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement (continued)*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
Child Care Partnership Council - Leadership Group	In person	May 12, 2025	Clarity Social Research Group	6	We need to build a grassroots organizing base countywide. Consider "Advocacy" or "Choose Children" days to train new electeds on relevant issues. We need a strong narrative and person to champion the Blueprint full-time.
San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce	In person	April 24, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	35	Child care is impacting businesses' ability to recruit, retain, and support employees. Even high income employees are struggling. Care must have flexible hours. Drop-in care is needed to support return-to-office. Solutions might include smaller companies banding together in co-op or nanny share agreements. Extra office space could be used for center care.
Heads of Chamber of Commerce	In person	May 12, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	7	Businesses experience employee loss due to parents staying home to care for multiple children. Chambers should be advocating for policy change, should spread information, and act as messengers. Businesses feel very squeezed, but if they are provided the information, they can communicate it.

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement (continued)*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
Large Business Leaders	In person	May 12, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	8	Any ballot measure must appeal to and help people across income spectrum. Offerings include family leave, CCCs, hybrid, list-serve, flex hours, etc.
Community College Students	In person	April 23, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	20	Apprenticeship programs help students apply learnings right away and boosts retention. Students enter the program for practicality and a love of children.
Early Care and Education (ECE) Directors	In person	May 20, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	15	Key challenges include staffing, cost of care, and TK. Families are stressed. ECE workers need higher wages, educational stipends, and other shared resources.
California State Preschool Program (CSPP) Directors	In person	May 29, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	15	Similar feedback as other center based directors. Tk has changed the equation as 4 year olds are utilizing their programs at much lower rates and they can't easily transition to infant/toddlers

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement (continued)*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
Extended Learning Providers - RCSD	In person	March 25, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	6	Multiple departments involved for out of school time care. There are challenges in maximizing space. Streamlined processes for registration and site support are important.
SMCOE Directors Meeting	In person	May 20, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	15	Key challenges include staffing, cost of care, and TK. Families are stressed. ECE workers need higher wages, educational stipends, and other shared resources.
Pediatricians - Medicaid Clinics	In person	May 20, 2025	Andrea Jones, Consulting Director, The Children's Collective	8	Waitlists are long. Families need extended hours of care. Doctors provide information about Head Start and Ravenswood, but not much else. Families need family navigators.

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement (continued)*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
"Gap Families"	Virtual	July 22, 2025	Clarity Social Research Group	10	Most rely on FFN care; other forms of care are too expensive. Families have made many economic tradeoffs because child care is unaffordable - they are underemployed, unemployed, and/or working from home. Word of mouth is the primary way families find out about child care options. The level of information about child care options and resources to find childcare is low. There is a definite need for financial support for this group, along with more flexible hours of care. The toll of child care instability is heavy.
Chinese-Speaking Families	Virtual	July 25, 2025	Unitedly	11	Families are unable to find care that matches their language and culture. Many need to go to San Francisco for care. Families are more familiar with San Francisco resources than resources in San Mateo County. Child care is a big financial burden. Families need more translated resources and subsidized support for enrichment activities. They desire family navigators and community hubs where families can share resources.

APPENDIX D: *Community Engagement (continued)*

	FORMAT	DATE	FACILITATOR(S)	PARTICIPANT NUMBER	KEY THEMES
Spanish-Speaking Families on the Coastside	Virtual	August, 2025	Solutionary Advisors	5	Families report a lack of available slots, especially for young children. Waitlists are lengthy. Families are paying way too much and cost doubles for multiple children. FFN care is unreliable and of questionable quality. Immigration concerns can make access difficult. There is a lack of centralized information. Applications can be complex.
Asian/ Asian American Families	Survey	August, 2025	Unitedly	61	Half of respondents have struggled to access services due to language barriers, even some who are comfortable in English. 65% of families report affordability as their top priority. Convenient location and providers who speak their home language/respect their cultural values are other top priorities. Awareness of subsidies was limited. Families need care that is lower cost, closer to home/work, and in their own language.

APPENDIX E: *Endnotes*

1. US Census Bureau Quick Facts: San Mateo County.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanmateocountycalifornia/PST045224>
2. Child Population, by Age Group and Gender (2025).
<https://www.kidsdata.org/region/4/san-mateo-county/summary#6/demographics>
3. San Mateo County Child Care Supply and Demand Analysis. (August 2025). Sarah Kinahan Consulting.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

APPENDIX F: *About The Children's Collective*



The Children's Collective is a community-driven coalition in San Mateo County that brings together public agencies, families, providers, advocates, businesses, and cross-sector partners to improve outcomes for children and families.

Born from partnerships strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Collective has grown into a coordinated effort to address the interconnected systems that shape early childhood and family wellbeing. By aligning diverse stakeholders around shared goals, The Children's Collective works to elevate children and families as a central priority, advancing solutions that strengthen communities, support working families, and create the conditions for every child to thrive.

About the Authors

Clarity Social Research Group (Clarity) was founded in 2012 and grew from prior experiences in research and non-profit consulting that left us wanting for greater impact on issues of social justice and equity. Clarity is a small woman- and minority-owned organization, dedicated to uplifting vulnerable voices seldom heard and contributing to upstream, broad-based, inclusive, and community-supportive efforts.

TCC leadership and members are deeply grateful to Lynne Mobilio, PhD, Clarity Assistant Director, and Penelope Huang, PhD, Clarity founder, for their partnership in co-designing the blueprint and for helping translate the collective ideas, experiences, and aspirations of this work into a comprehensive roadmap designed to improve the child care eco-system for children, their families and providers.