

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL

# 2025 EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council
quality care

Santa Barbara County Education Office
Susan C. Salcido, Superintendent

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
# CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL
# 2025 EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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**Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council**
Funded by California Department of Social Services, Child Care and Development Division
Operating under the authority of Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors and
Santa Barbara County Education Office

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**Photos courtesy of Santa Barbara County Education Office**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to the Child Care Planning Council Members:

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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides important data and information for the county and its regions to inform prioritization and planning for early care and education in Santa Barbara County.

Early care and education is a critical support for children, parents, employers and communities as a whole. Extensive longitudinal research reports the positive outcomes for children participating in high quality early care and education programs: improved school performance, decreased need for special education, increased high school graduation rates, decreased crime rates, and increased earnings in adulthood. These findings are found to be magnified for children of families at the lowest income levels. For many parents, care for children is an ongoing challenge both in terms of finding reliable, high quality care that fits their needs, as well as the affordability of the care they would prefer. There is an increasing need for high quality, available, and affordable early care and education, and limited capacity to meet this need.

The high cost of living in Santa Barbara County makes it particularly difficult for families to provide the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. The breakdown of child care arrangements is a major reason for employee absenteeism and decreased performance, resulting in negative impacts on businesses. For all of these reasons, the entire community garners social and economic benefits when high quality early care and education programs are available and affordable.

# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CHILD CARE PLANNING COUNCIL

Every county in California has a state-mandated child care planning council funded by the California Department of Social Services. The Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council (the Council) operates under the joint authority of the County Board of Supervisors and the County Superintendent of Schools. The overarching responsibility of the Council is to plan and coordinate early care and education services, establish local priorities, and develop a county-wide strategic plan in Santa Barbara County. The Council will use findings from this report to create the Santa Barbara County Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education 2025-2030. For more information and history go to the website.

**Mission:** We lead and collaborate in planning, coordinating and advocating for high quality, affordable and accessible early care and education for all children and families in Santa Barbara County.

**Vision:** We envision a community that values all children and families.

# DATA SOURCES

The information included in this report comes from a variety of local, county, state, and national sources. The intent of this document is to share recently available information related to the target child population and their early care and education needs. Chart and table source data are cited throughout this document. In addition to the individuals listed under Acknowledgements, various agencies and organizations assisted with compiling this report.

# DEFINITIONS

**Age ranges** - The primary age groups referred to within this report are infant-toddlers (0-24 months old, which includes children ages 0 to 24 months), preschoolers (2-5 year olds, which includes children who are 2 through all 5 year olds), and school age children (6-12 year olds, which includes children ages 6 through all 12 year olds). At times other age ranges (e.g. 0-2, 3-5) are used depending on the data source.

**Capacity** - The maximum number of children that may be in a child care program at a point in time.

**Child Care Centers** (also referred to as centers and center-based programs) - Programs that are licensed to provide group early learning and care services in a nonresidential setting.

- Less than 24-hour per day of non-medical care and supervision are provided to children in a group setting (CCR, Title 22, Section 101152).
- Can provide care for more than 14 children.
- Directors and teachers are required to have educational college degrees or State teaching permits and experience in the profession of early care and education.
- City and/or county permits may be required.
- Fire clearance from the local fire authority is required.
- A Center must be licensed and maintain Title 22 standards at all times, by the Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing, who regularly monitor compliance.

**Early care and education (ECE)** - The term early care and education (ECE) program is used throughout this report to refer to licensed child care programs (operated in a family child care home as well as child care center settings) for children 0-5 years of age. At times the term child care is used interchangeably with the term early care and education. School age care, also known as after school care refers to care for children 6 to 12 years old.

**Family Child Care** Programs (FCCs) - Licensed care offered in the home of the provider. A small FCC program may care for up to 8 children, depending on their ages. A large FCC has at least two adult staff, who can care for up to 14 children, depending on their ages.

**Licensed Child Care** - Child care centers and FCCs must be licensed by California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD). All programs must meet the regulations and standards specified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 22.

**Parent** - The term parent is used as an inclusive representation of all primary caregivers and guardians.

## THE REGIONS OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

For reporting purposes, the zip codes are grouped into four regions:

- South County (93013, 93067, 93101, 93103, 93105, 93108, 93109, 93110, 93111, and 93117/93106)
- Lompoc Valley (93436 and 93437)
- Santa Ynez Valley (93427, 93440, 93441, 93460, and 93463)
- North County (93254, 93429, 93434, 93454, 93455, and 93458)

At times within this report Lompoc Valley and Santa Ynez Valley are grouped together as Mid County. The following is a breakdown of the geographic areas included in each region:

- South County: Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, Summerland, Goleta, Montecito, Isla Vista
- Mid County: Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, Solvang, Los Alamos, Buellton, Lompoc
- North County: Santa Maria, Orcutt, Guadalupe, Casmalia

Data are broken down by city when that makes the most sense based on the data source. However, smaller cities are often grouped together for the purposes of this report as follows.

- Carpinteria/Summerland
- Goleta
- Guadalupe
- Lompoc
- New Cuyama
- Orcutt/Los Alamos
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Maria
- Santa Ynez Valley
- Santa Barbara County



# CHAPTER 1: THE PEOPLE OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

There are 444,243 residents (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S0101) and 31,826 children (ages 0-5) living in Santa Barbara County (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001). The total county population has recently decreased yet is projected to increase from now until 2060 by 6.3%.

There is a need for services that are culturally and linguistically diverse. Nearly half (47.6%) of Santa Barbara County residents identify as Hispanic or Latino. This varies by community; for example, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino residents is greater in cities such as Guadalupe (88.6%) and Santa Maria (81.3%) (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. B02001). It is estimated there are approximately 50,000 Indigenous people living in Santa Barbara County and Ventura County (Immigration Advocates Network). The number of English Learners (EL) and Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students represents 49.2% of the total student population (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest).

## People Living in Santa Barbara County

The total population in Santa Barbara County is 444,243 (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S0101). Regions with the greatest number of residents are Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Lompoc.

### Exhibit 1. Total population in Santa Barbara County, by city

| | Total Population |
|---|---|
| Carpinteria/Summerland | 17,341 |
| Goleta | 57,838 |
| Guadalupe | 8,451 |
| Lompoc | 59,522 |
| New Cuyama | 794 |
| Orcutt/Los Alamos | 45,246 |
| Santa Barbara | 132,706 |
| Santa Maria | 100,965 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 21,380 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **444,243** |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S0101

There has been an increase of 4.8% in the total county population since 2010 (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S0101). The total population in Santa Barbara County is projected to continue to increase by 6.3% from 2023 to 2060 (California Department of Finance, 2025). The following chart illustrates the historic change in population per city over time.

Exhibit 2. Population change in Santa Barbara County (2010-2023)

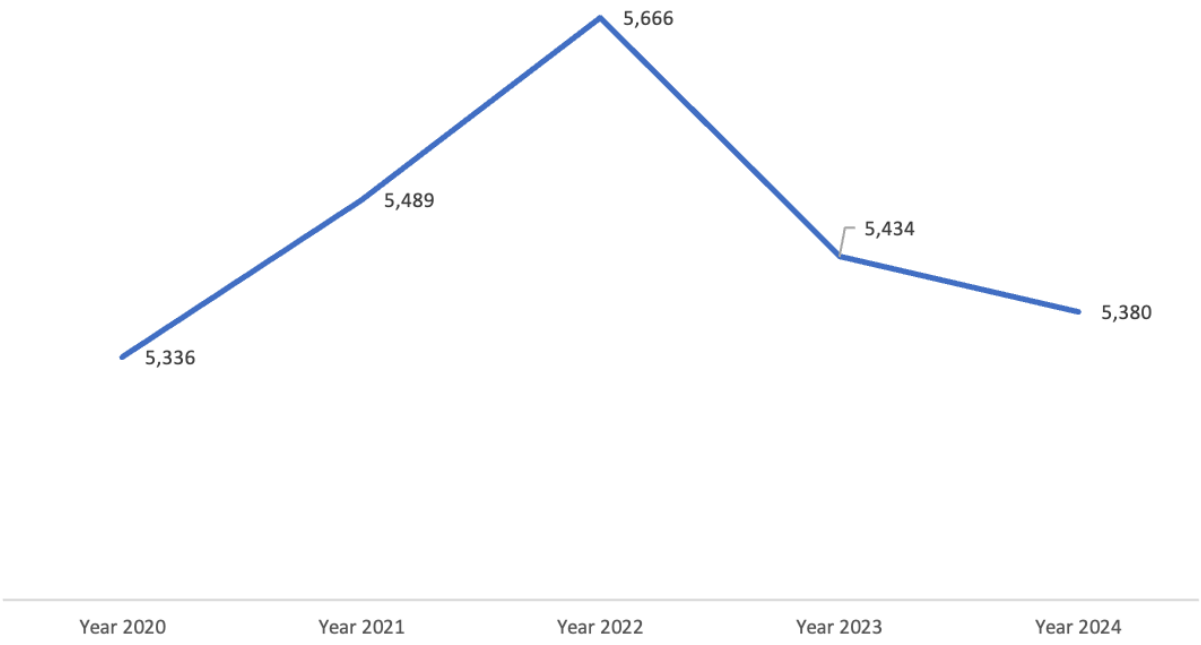
| | Population in 2010 | Population in 2014 | Population in 2019 | Population in 2023 | Population change 2010 to 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Santa Barbara | 88,410 | 91,196 | 91,364 | 132,706 | 50.1% |
| Lompoc | 42,434 | 44,013 | 42,853 | 59,522 | 40.3% |
| Santa Maria | 99,553 | 103,410 | 107,263 | 100,965 | 1.4% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **423,895** | **440,668** | **446,499** | **444,243** | **4.8%** |

Historic data: US Census Quick Facts; US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S0101

## Birth Rates in Santa Barbara County

Birth rates in Santa Barbara County have remained fairly steady over recent years minus an uptick after the pandemic in 2022. There were 5,380 births in 2024, with the majority (2,787 births) in Santa Maria (Santa Barbara County Birth Brief 2020-2024 (2025), County of Santa Barbara Health).

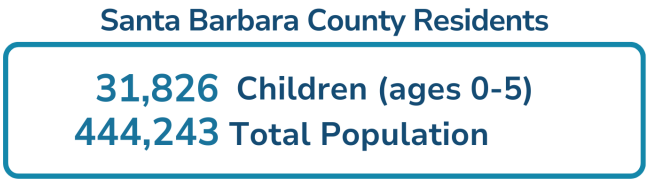
Exhibit 3. Number of births per year in Santa Barbara County temporarily increased in 2022




Santa Barbara County Birth Brief 2020-2024 (2025), County of Santa Barbara Health

## Children Living in Santa Barbara County

There are 31,826 children (0-5 year olds) living in Santa Barbara County (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001).




The number of children (0-12 year olds) in Santa Barbara County has decreased in the past decade from 77,108 in 2015 to 64,990 currently (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001). The following illustrates the number of children by age and region.

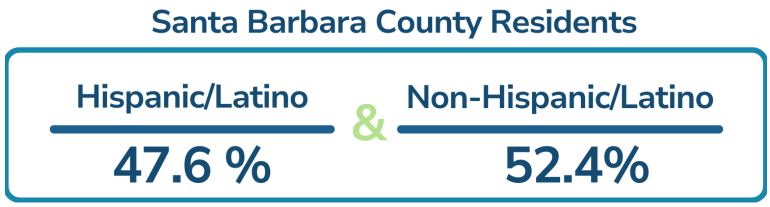
### Exhibit 4. Number of children by age living in Santa Barbara County

| | Infant-toddler 0-24 months | Preschool 2 -5 year olds | School-age 6 -12 year olds | Total 0-12 year olds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South County | 3,473 | 7,346 | 11,329 | 22,148 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 447 | 787 | 1,367 | 2,601 |
| Lompoc Valley | 1,461 | 3,255 | 5,434 | 10,150 |
| North County | 5,162 | 9,895 | 15,034 | 30,091 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **10,543** | **21,283** | **33,164** | **64,990** |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001.

## Race and Ethnicity of Santa Barbara County Residents

Less than half (47.6%) of Santa Barbara County residents identify as Hispanic/Latino and 52.4% identify as not being Hispanic/Latino; however, this varies by region (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B03002).



## Exhibit 5. Percent of Hispanic/Latino residents by region in Santa Barbara County

| | Percent of residents Hispanic/Latino | Percent of residents not Hispanic/Latino |
|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria/Summerland | 40.3% | 59.7% |
| Goleta | 29.6% | 70.4% |
| Guadalupe | 88.6% | 11.4% |
| Lompoc | 53.7% | 46.3% |
| New Cuyama | 52.1% | 47.9% |
| Orcutt/Los Alamos | 40.4% | 59.6% |
| Santa Barbara | 32.1% | 67.9% |
| Santa Maria | 81.3% | 18.7% |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 21.3% | 78.7% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **47.6%** | **52.4%** |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B03002.

The following table illustrates the percent of residents who identify with each race. It is estimated there are approximately 50,000 Indigenous people living in Ventura and Santa Barbara County, collectively (Immigration Advocates Network).

## Exhibit 6. Ethnicity of local residents

| | Percent of all residents |
|---|---|
| African American/Black | 1.7% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 1.8% |
| Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 5.4% |
| Multiracial/other race | 36.8% |
| White | 54.3% |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B02001.

## Home Languages Spoken in Santa Barbara County

The majority (60.0%) of Santa Barbara County residents' primary language spoken in the home is English only; however, 40.0% of local residents speak a language other than English. The most common non-English language is Spanish, spoken by 32.8% of residents (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2023. Table S1601).




There are 67,010 TK-12 students enrolled in Santa Barbara County schools. Nearly half (49.2%) of the total student population is classified as English Learners (EL) and Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest). Of the total population of students, 33.7% are Spanish speaking English Language Learners (California Department of Education, 2025-2026, DataQuest). Children who have support learning their home language are better able to also learn English. Children can more easily learn more than one language at a young age than at any other time in their lives, and being bilingual or multi-lingual offers a multitude of opportunities to them throughout their lives. Research also shows that bilingual children develop stronger thinking skills (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Of the 4,687 Kindergarten students there were 2,052 English Language Learners (representing 43.8% of all Kindergarten students) and of those 80.5% spoke Spanish (2024-2025 school year) (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest). The following data can be used as a proxy to estimate the home languages of younger children (0-4 year olds).




Exhibit 7. Kindergarten English Learner (EL) students by primary language

| | Number of EL Kindergarteners by home language | % of EL Kindergarteners |
|---|---|---|
| Spanish; Castilian | 1,652 | 80.5% |
| Otomian languages (Mixteco) | 335 | 16.3% |

California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest

# CHAPTER 2: MAKING ENDS MEET IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Low wages and the high cost of living make it difficult for many families to make ends meet in Santa Barbara County. Consequently, a smaller percentage of people own homes in Santa Barbara County compared to California and the United States. Additionally, a greater percentage of residents (17.7%) and children (18.7%) are living in poverty in Santa Barbara County compared to California (all residents: 16.9% and children: 17.6%) according to the California Poverty Measure (2023), which takes into account the real cost of living and safety net programs. A family of four in Santa Barbara County with two children and two working adults needs an annual income of $162,153 ($13,513 per month) to make ends meet. The struggle is more pronounced for single parent households who have to earn $156,221 ($13,018 per month) to support two children in order to make ends meet. Child care is the greatest expense out of all essential living expenses for local families.

## Earnings and Unemployment in Santa Barbara County

The median household income in Santa Barbara County is $95,977; however, this varies significantly by region with the highest median household incomes in Summerland ($133,083), Solvang ($118,208), and Goleta ($118,039) and the lowest in Los Alamos ($53,673), New Cuyama ($58,158), and Lompoc ($70,038) (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S1901).

**$95,977**
Median Household Income
Santa Barbara County

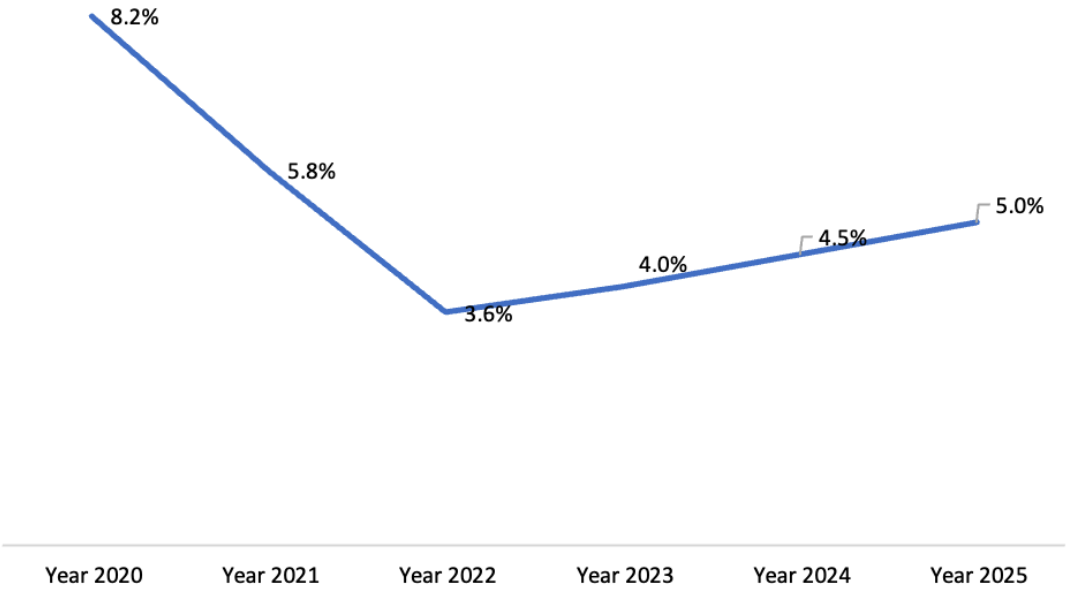
Exhibit 8. Median household income varies by city

| | Median earnings per household |
|---|---|
| Buellton | $96,028 |
| Carpinteria | $104,233 |
| Goleta | $118,039 |
| Guadalupe | $71,048 |
| Lompoc | $70,038 |
| Los Alamos | $53,673 |
| New Cuyama | $58,158 |
| Orcutt | $108,682 |
| Santa Barbara | $101,672 |
| Santa Maria | $84,617 |
| Santa Ynez | $117,500 |
| Solvang | $118,208 |
| Summerland | $133,083 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **$95,977** |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S1901.

The county-wide current unemployment rate (5.0%) has decreased since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, however has been steadily increasing in recent years. Unemployment rates are highest in Guadalupe (9.8%), Lompoc (5.8%), and Santa Maria (5.6%), and lowest in Buellton (2.1%), Solvang (2.3%), and Goleta (3.6%) (Department of Labor, Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for Cities and Census Designated Places 2025).

## Exhibit 9. Local unemployment rate has been increasing after a drop during the pandemic




Note: 2025 is preliminary data from July 2025.
Department of Labor, Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for Cities and Census Designated Places



## Poverty Rates in Santa Barbara County

Currently, 13.8% of Santa Barbara County residents are living at or below federal poverty level (FPL) compared to 12.0% in California (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates). Poverty rates vary by region within the county, with the highest rates in Guadalupe (28.3%), Santa Maria (15.5%), and New Cuyama (14.9%).

There is a greater percentage of children (under 5 years old) living in poverty (15.3%) compared to the overall population, thus underscoring the challenges young families face in making ends meet due to the high cost of living in Santa Barbara County.

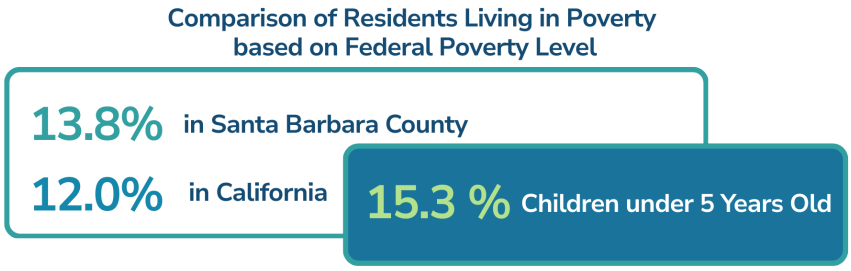


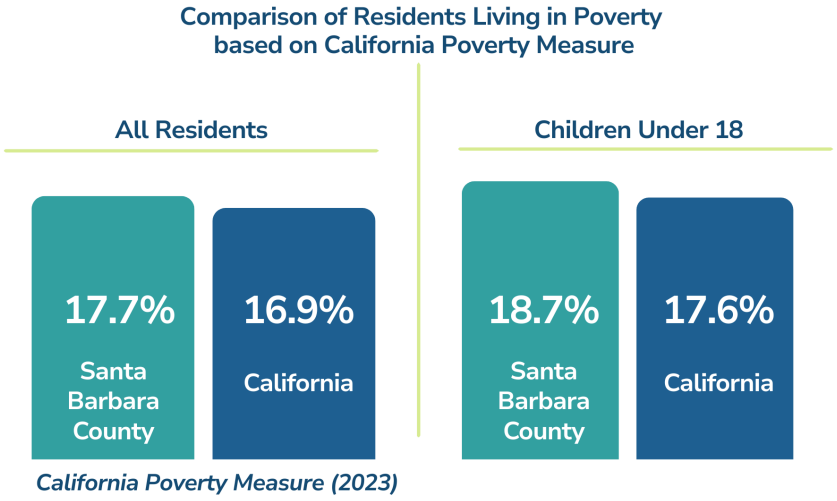

Exhibit 10. Percent of total population and children (under 5) living below FPL varies by region

| | Percent total population living at or below FPL | Percent of children (under 5 year olds) living at or below FPL |
|---|---|---|
| Buellton | 2.9% | 6.2% |
| Carpinteria | 6.0% | 2.6% |
| Goleta | 10.6% | 3.7% |
| Guadalupe | 28.3% | 33.2% |
| Lompoc | 16.8% | 33.0% |
| Los Alamos | 3.3% | n/a |
| New Cuyama | 14.9% | n/a |
| Orcutt | 6.6% | 7.0% |
| Santa Barbara | 13.1% | 12.5% |
| Santa Maria | 15.5% | 19.4% |
| Santa Ynez | 11.3% | n/a |
| Solvang | 7.7% | 27.7% |
| Summerland | 5.4% | n/a |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **13.8%** | **15.3%** |

US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table S1701.

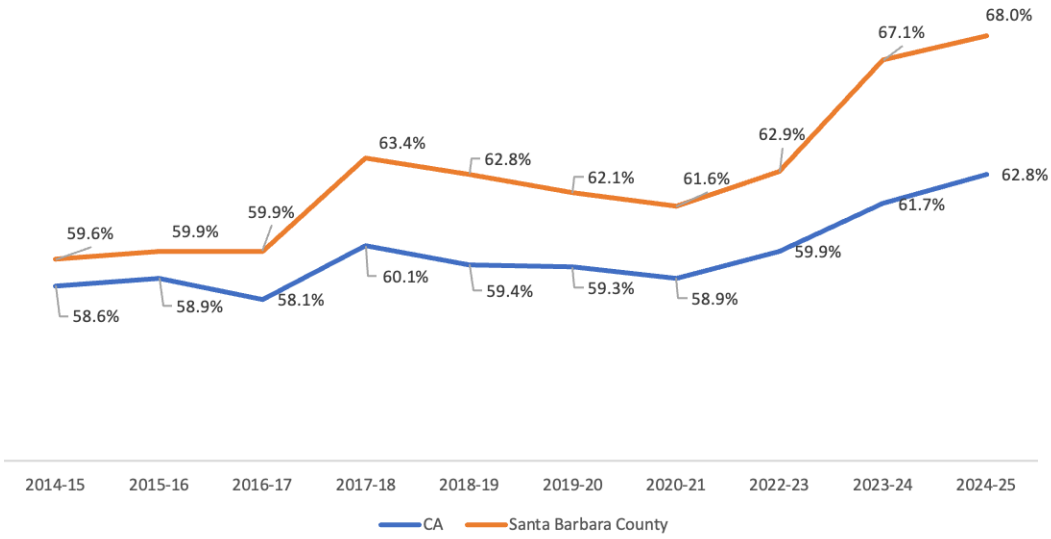
The California Poverty Measure takes into account the cost of living and resources from social safety net programs, unlike the official FPL, and reflects a more realistic threshold for California residents. Based on

the California Poverty Measure (2023), a greater percentage of residents (17.7%) and children (18.7%) are living in poverty in Santa Barbara County compared to California (all residents: 16.9% and children: 17.6%) according to the California Poverty Measure (2023), which takes into account the real cost of living and safety net programs.




Another indicator of the economic status of families is the percent of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL). Students with a household income that is less than 185% FPL typically qualify for FRL, therefore representing a greater percentage of children living in low income households. Approximately two-thirds (68.0%) of students (K-12) are eligible for FRL in Santa Barbara County compared to 62.8% in California (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest). There has been a steady increase in the percent of students eligible for FRL in Santa Barbara County as well as California over the past ten years.

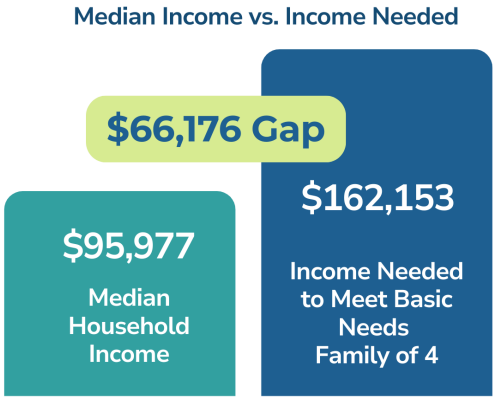
## Exhibit 11. Steady increase in the percent of students (K-12) eligible for FRL over time

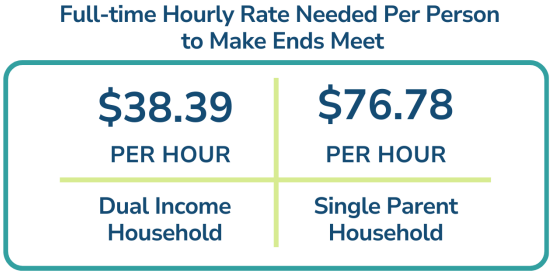



California Department of Education, 2014-2025, DataQuest

## Cost of Living in Santa Barbara County

A living wage is the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support themselves and/or their family, working full-time. The annual household income needed to make ends meet for a family of four (two adults, one infant/toddler, one preschooler) is **$162,153** (Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, 2024). This is more than $66,000 above the median household income in Santa Barbara County ($95,977).




The annual income needed to make ends meet requires **both adults** to earn **at least $38.39/hour** and work full time to earn **$13,513 per month total**. The high cost of living in Santa Barbara County creates additional challenges for single parent households. A single parent with an infant and preschooler needs to earn at least **$73.97/hour** and work full time to earn **$13,018 per month** in order to make ends meet.

The following chart illustrates the monthly cost of living for single income and dual income households (each with one infant and one preschooler).



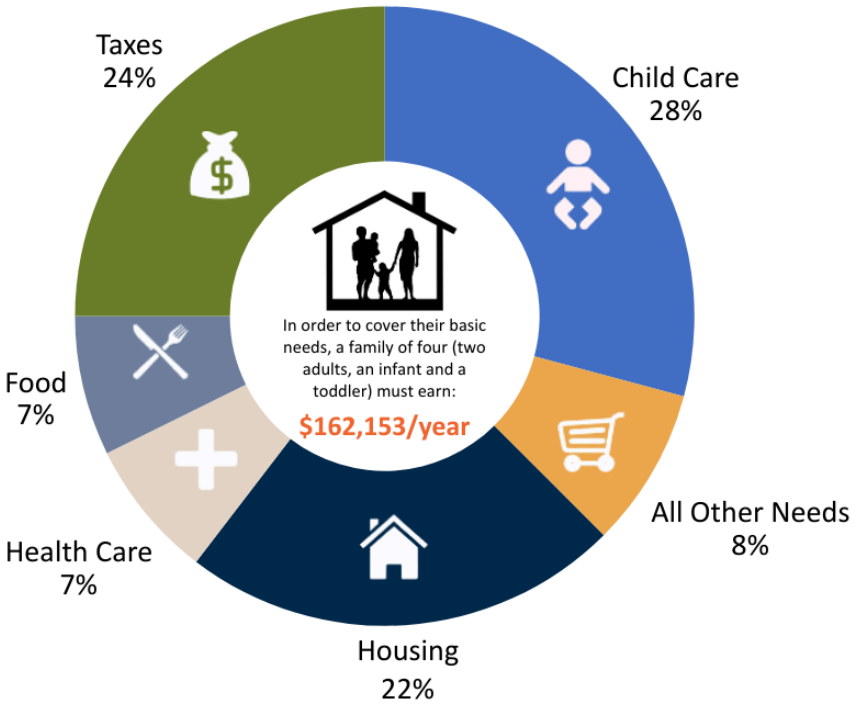
Exhibit 12. Income needed and the associated expenses for local families to make ends meet

| | Two working adults with one infant and one preschooler | One working adult with one infant and one preschooler |
|---|---|---|
| **Monthly Costs** | | |
| Housing | $2,994 | $2,994 |
| Child Care | $3,841 | $3,841 |
| Food | $960 | $691 |
| Transportation | $819 | $428 |
| Health Care | $948 | $844 |
| Premium | $683 | $683 |
| Out-of-Pocket | $265 | $161 |
| Miscellaneous | $1,113 | $993 |
| Broadband & Cell Phone | $156 | $113 |
| Other Necessities | $956 | $880 |
| Taxes | $3,271 | $3,661 |
| Earned Income Tax Credit (-) | $0 | $0 |
| Child Care Tax Credit (-) | -$100 | -$100 |
| Child Tax Credit (-) | -$333 | -$333 |
| **Self-Sufficiency Wage** | | |
| **Hourly** | **$38.39** | **$73.97** |
| **Monthly** | **$13,513** | **$13,018** |
| **Annual** | **$162,153** | **$156,221** |
| Emergency Savings Fund (Monthly Contribution) | $441 | $1,054 |

Note: Variation in totals due to rounding and application of tax credits.
The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California 2024; Source: Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington.
https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/california/

More than a quarter (28.4%) of a family's essential expenses are allocated to the cost of child care, an expense that is even greater than housing as illustrated by the following exhibit.

Exhibit 13. Cost of child care is the top expense for dual income families with young children in Santa Barbara County

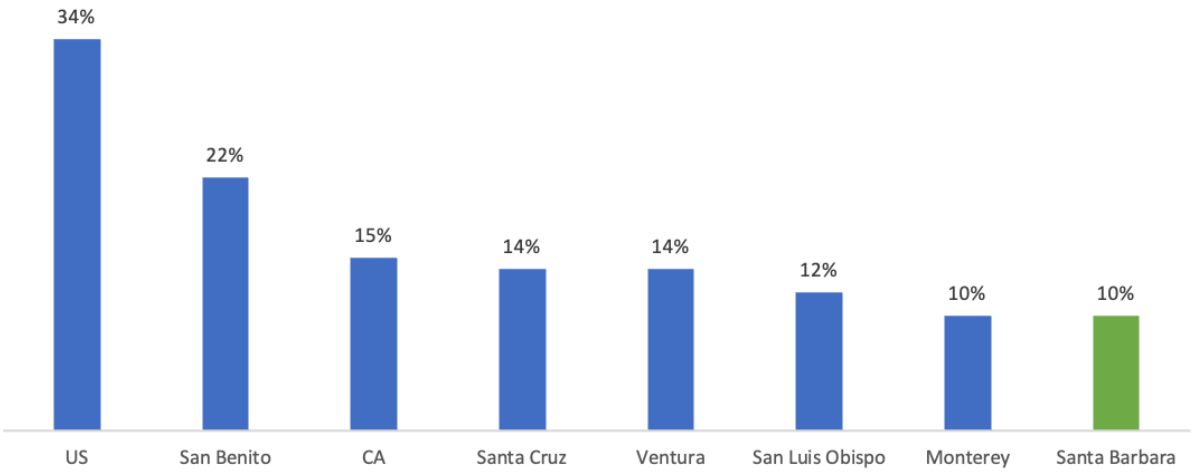



The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California 2024; Source: Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington.

## Cost of Home Ownership in Santa Barbara County

The median price of a home in Santa Barbara County is $1,397,000. Ten percent of residents in Santa Barbara County are able to purchase a median-priced single-family home (California Association of Realtors, Housing Affordability Index, Quarter 2, 2025). More than half (52.9%) of housing units are owner occupied in Santa Barbara County (US Census Quickfacts, 2023).

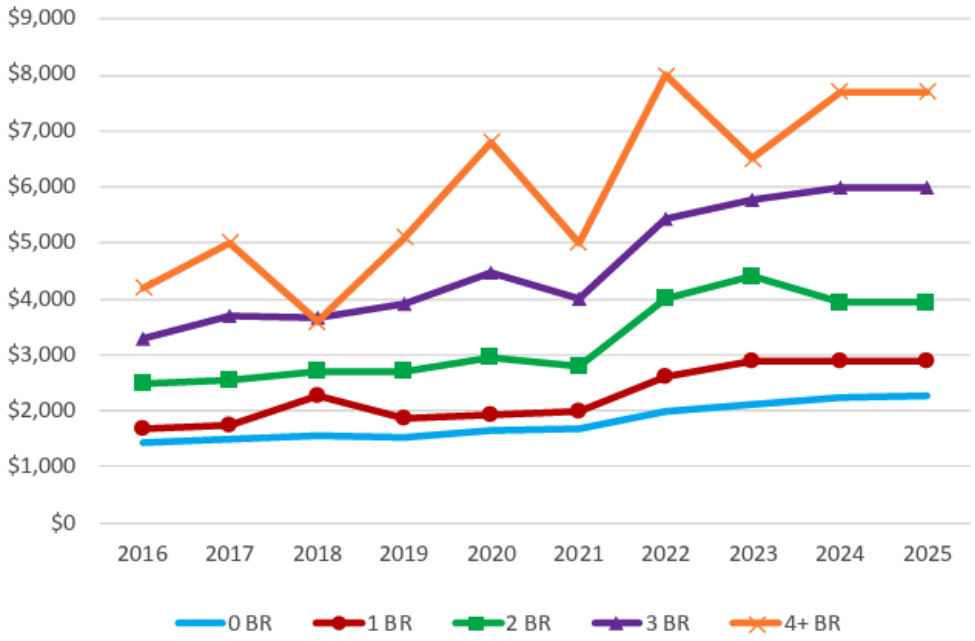
## Exhibit 14. Comparison of housing affordability among the US, CA, and counties in the central coast




Second quarter 2025. Percent able to purchase a median-priced single-family home per county.
California Association of Realtors, Housing Affordability Index, Quarter 2, 2025

Rent costs have steadily increased over time and are prohibitive for many residents. The median rent for two bedroom housing in South County Santa Barbara is $3,941 (ranging from $3,775 in Summerland to $7,200 in Montecito for 2 bedrooms) (2025 Rent Survey for the South Coast, City of Santa Barbara, May 2025).

## Exhibit 15. Median rent has increased in South County Santa Barbara




Note: Data represents median rent for all housing types by number of bedrooms
2025 Rent Survey for the South Coast, City of Santa Barbara, May 2025

Low vacancy rates can lead to higher rents by limiting the number of available units and influencing market pricing. When fewer options are on the market renters have less choice, which can increase competition and drive up rents. The following exhibit illustrates how vacancy rates vary by region.

## Exhibit 16. Rental and homeowner vacancy rates vary by region and are consistently low

| | Average rental vacancy rate | Average homeowner vacancy rate |
|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria | 1.3% | 6.4% |
| Goleta | 0.7% | 5.1% |
| Guadalupe | 0.0% | 2.3% |
| Lompoc | 0.7% | 2.6% |
| New Cuyama | 7.3% | 0.0% |
| Orcutt/Los Alamos | 0.3% | 3.5% |
| Santa Barbara | 0.6% | 2.9% |
| Santa Maria | 0.4% | 1.6% |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 0.2% | 0.5% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **0.8%** | **4.2%** |

Note: Summerland vacancies are not included due to the associated high margin of error.
US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table DP04.



# CHAPTER 3: COST OF LICENSED CHILD CARE

The cost of care is prohibitive for many families living in Santa Barbara County. Tuition for infants and toddlers has historically been the highest, currently ranging from $1,244/month to $2,118/month depending on the setting and location. On average, in center-based settings families are spending $23,058/year for infant/toddler care and up to $19,002/year for preschool care. These figures represent average child care tuition, some programs charge significantly more and others charge less. The cost of care has increased across all ages, types of care, and regions since the last reporting period.

## Average Cost of Child Care By Type of Care and Region

Child care tuition rates have been steadily increasing, particularly for infant-toddler care. The high cost of care makes it difficult for families to afford quality care. Tuition rates in Santa Barbara County vary significantly from region, age group, and type of care. Even with state rate reform approved by the legislators for lower income families, child care affordability continues to deteriorate. The cost of care for school age children varies by type and amount of care and is therefore not included in the following full-time care comparison.

Exhibit 17. Average monthly cost of full-time care by age and type of care

| | Average monthly cost of infant-toddler care | | Average monthly cost of preschool care | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Centers | FCCs | Centers | FCCs |
| South County | $2,118 | $1,541 | $1,960 | $1,431 |
| Mid County | $1,725 | $1,319 | $1,207 | $1,159 |
| North County | $1,244 | $1,475 | $1,170 | $1,379 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **$1,922** | **$1,430** | **$1,584** | **$1,295** |

South County Average rates included: Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, Summerland, Goleta, Montecito & Isla Vista
Mid County include: Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, Solvang, Los Alamos, Buellton & Lompoc
North County Average rates included: Santa Maria, Orcutt, Guadalupe & Casmalia
Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County, January 2026

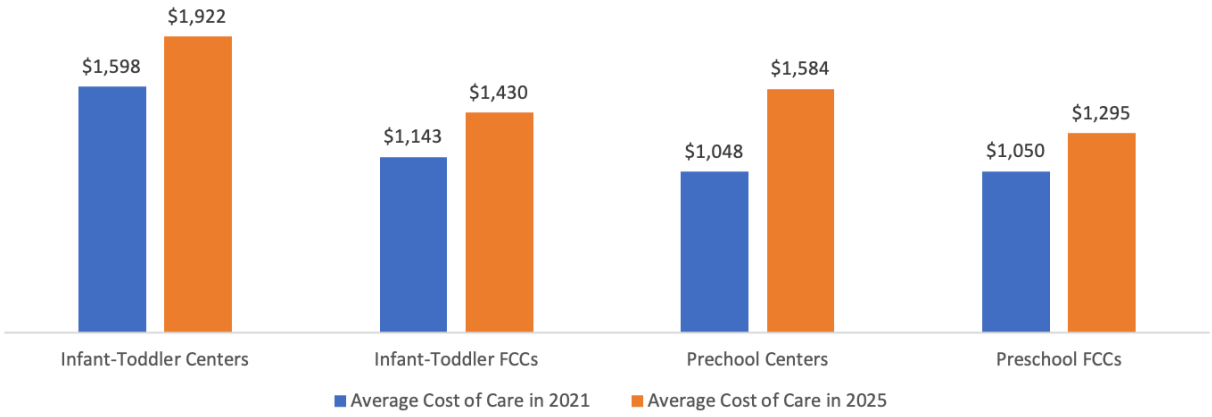


## Increase in Cost of Care Over Time

The cost of care is typically higher for younger children due to the higher adult to child ratio required for care. As children get older, the cost of care typically decreases. The average monthly cost of care increased across all age groups and care types between 2021 and 2025.

- The average monthly tuition for infant-toddler care rose by 20% in centers ($1,598 to $1,922) and 25% in FCCs ($1,143 to $1,430), remaining the most expensive care.
- The cost of care for preschoolers increased from $1,048 to $1,584/month in centers (51% increase) and $1,050 to $1,295/month in FCCs (23% increase).

### Exhibit 18. Cost of full-time care has increased for all ages and in all settings




Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County, January 2026



# CHAPTER 4: SPECIAL POPULATIONS

There are a variety of special populations of children in Santa Barbara County including youth who experience homelessness and foster care, children at risk of maltreatment, children with special needs, migrant children, and children of teen parents. There were 346 children (0-15 year olds) in foster care and 4,820 children had one or more allegations of abuse as of September 2025 (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 2). Additionally, 9,337 children experienced homelessness (Transitional Youth Services, Santa Barbara County Education Office, 2025), 2,351 migrant children (0-12 year olds) were served by the Migrant Education Program. Lastly, there were 1,088 cumulative active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2) (Tri-Counties Regional Center, February 2025-26) and 1,594 cumulative active IEP cases for children (3-5 year olds) and 4,732 for children (6-12 year olds) (Santa Barbara County SELPA, February 2025).

## Youth in Foster Care

There were 95 infant/toddlers (0-2 year olds) and 56 preschoolers (3-5 year olds) in foster care according to a point in time count in July 2025 (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2024, CWS/CMS 2024 Quarter 4).

Exhibit 19. Number of children in foster care in Santa Barbara County, by age

| | Number of children in foster care |
|---|---|
| Children ages 0-2 | 95 |
| Children ages 3-5 | 56 |
| Children ages 6-15 | 195 |
| **Total Children ages 0-5** | **151** |
| **Total Children ages 0-15** | **346** |

Note: Point of time data: July 1, 2025
California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 5

## Children Experiencing Homelessness

The current annual count of children experiencing homelessness (9,337) has returned to what was previously reported in 2015 (9,462) after a temporary drop in 2019-2020 (7,538 children) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of children (0-18 year olds) experiencing homelessness are located in North County (78.4%) whereas only 46.3% of the county's population of children reside in North County. Nearly all (95.5%) of the children who experience homelessness throughout Santa Barbara County are doubled up in housing with other families out of economic necessity. The remaining families are in a homeless shelter, hotel/motel, car, campground, or the street.

Exhibit 20. Children who experience homelessness

| | Children ages 3-5 year olds | Children ages 6-12 year olds | Children ages 13-18 year olds | Total children ages 0-18 years old |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South County | 53 | 675 | 640 | 1,368 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 0 | 0 | * | * |
| Lompoc | 22 | 355 | 284 | 661 |
| North County | 402 | 4,047 | 2,966 | 7,415 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **472** | **4,990** | **3,875** | **9,337** |

Cumulative totals for the year.
*Totals under 10 have been suppressed to protect individual privacy.
Transitional Youth Services, Santa Barbara County Education Office, retrieved from CalPads, September 2025

Children experiencing homelessness often face frequent moves due to housing instability, which can interrupt consistent child care attendance. High quality child care can offer children stability and routine to counterbalance this challenge. Regular attendance helps support learning and development while providing a predictable environment.

## Children Eligible for Special Education Services

Families with children identified as eligible for special education services through either the Tri-Counties Regional Center or Santa Barbara County Education Office have an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individual Education Program (IEP). An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed for children from birth to age three who have developmental delays or disabilities, focusing on early intervention services and family involvement. Once a child turns three, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is created for children who qualify for special education services from a school district, outlining specific educational goals, services, and supports in a school setting. Both plans are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child and are developed in collaboration with families and professionals.

There were 1,088 cumulative active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2) (Tri-Counties Regional Center, February 2025-26) and 1,594 cumulative active IEP cases for children (3-5 year olds) and 4,732 for children (6-12 year olds) (Santa Barbara County SELPA, February 2025).

Exhibit 21. Cumulative active cases of IFSPs and IEPs

| | Active IFSP cases children 0-2 year olds | Active IEP cases children 3-5 year olds | Active IEP cases children 6-12 year olds |
|---|---|---|---|
| Santa Barbara County | 1,088 | 1,594 | 4,732 |

Cumulative active IFSP cases for children (ages 0-2): Tri-Counties Regional Center, February 2025-26
Cumulative active IEP cases for children (3-5 year olds and 6-12 year olds): Santa Barbara County SELPA, February 2025
Note: Previous year reports presented the number of IFSP and IEP cases that were initiated based on a point of time, rather than cumulatively.

## Services for Children with Special Needs

Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) offers the Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP), funded by the CDE. IEEEP provides resources, training, and support for educators to create a

welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students. This includes training on shifting common classroom practices and strategies for supporting students with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, as well as workshops on creating inclusive classrooms and promoting positive social and emotional learning.

Inclusive classrooms are designed to support the academic and social requirements of students with and without disabilities. Students receive individualized accommodations and modifications to help them access the curriculum and participate in classroom activities alongside their peers.

Inclusive classrooms are filled with diverse learners who can learn together, grow together, and benefit from each other's strengths and perspectives. Through these classrooms, students learn to appreciate and respect differences and develop important skills for success in a diverse and inclusive society.

The goals of the IEEEP grant program are:

1. Ensure children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, have greater rates of enrollment in inclusive subsidized early learning programs.
2. Increase access and building capacity for inclusive early learning subsidized programs for example, by encouraging LEAs to establish partnerships with their local child-care community agencies that have contracts to directly serve subsidized children, including both public and private agencies.
3. Increase access to inclusive early learning care for children representing a broad range of disabilities and levels of support needs.
4. Provide the individualized and necessary supports to enable children with disabilities to meet high expectations within the early learning settings.

## Children at Risk of Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse and neglect can create a multitude of short- and long-term negative consequences including psychological implications, such as cognitive delays or emotional difficulties, and challenges forming healthy and secure attachments. More than 1,500 children (0-5 year olds) experienced one or more allegations of child maltreatment in the past year (July 2024 - June 2025). This is a slight decrease since 2014-2015 when 1,835 children (0-5 year olds) experienced one or more allegations (California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 2).

### Exhibit 22. Number of children for whom there were one or more allegations of child abuse/neglect, by age

| | Children with one or more allegations |
|---|---|
| Children ages 0-2 | 737 |
| Children ages 3-5 | 834 |
| Children ages 6-15 | 3,249 |
| **Total Children ages 0-5** | **1,571** |
| **Total Children ages 0-15** | **4,820** |

Note: Data is from July 2024-June 2025; A child is counted only once, in the category of highest severity.
California Child Welfare Indicators Project. University of California at Berkeley, California Department of Social Services, 2025, CWS/CMS 2025 Quarter 2

## Children of Families Who Are Migrant Workers

It is estimated that there are 2,351 children (ages 0-12) of migrant families in Santa Barbara County. These numbers fluctuate from month to month and may be underreported due to the transient nature of migrant families, limitations in data collection, and fear related to immigration status or potential consequences of sharing personal information.

### Exhibit 23. Children of families who are migrant workers

| | Number of migrant children | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Children ages 0-2 years old | Children ages 3-5 years old | Children ages 6-12 years old | Total children ages 0-12 |
| Santa Barbara County | 252 | 566 | 1,533 | 2,351 |

Note: Region 18 spans San Luis Obispo County and Santa Barbara County. Since county-level data were not available the region-wide total was split evenly between the two counties to produce an estimate per county.
Migrant Education Program Region 22 and Region 18, 2025-2026

Finding child care can be particularly difficult for migrant parents who work in agricultural jobs. They often work 12 hours a day and start early in the morning before many child care programs open. Center-based and family child care migrant Head Start programs offer hours of operation that more closely align with agricultural field work.

## Births to Teen Parents

There were 348 teen births in 2024 representing 6.5% of all births. Of the 348 births to teens, 256 were to teens who live in Santa Maria (County of Santa Barbara Health, 2025, Santa Barbara County Birth Brief 2020-2024). Teen parents are more likely than their peers to experience challenges such as lower educational attainment and a higher risk of dropping out. Their children also face increased risks of health, educational, and social difficulties, though these outcomes are influenced by socioeconomic conditions, access to support, and community resources.

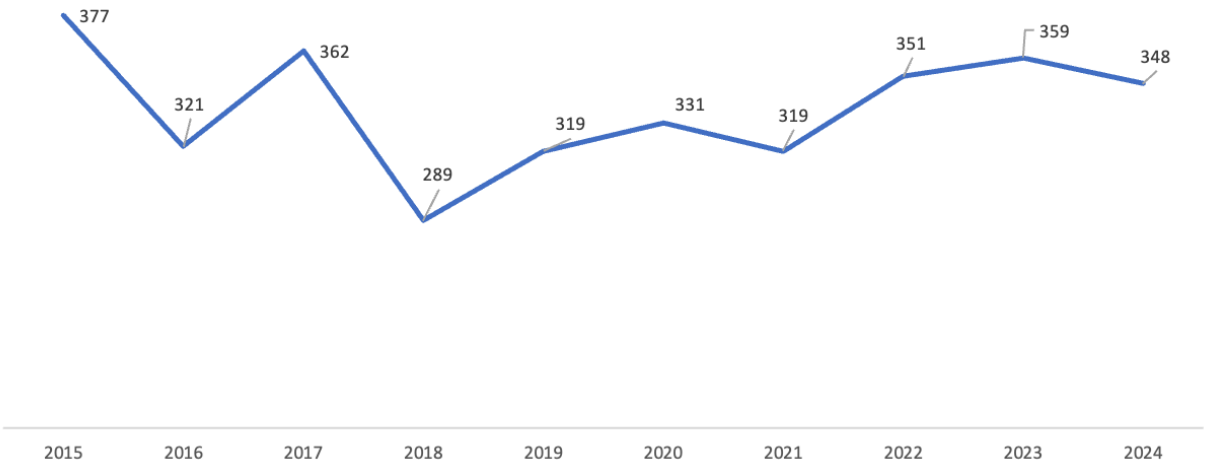
### Exhibit 24. Majority of Santa Barbara County's teen births (ages 15-19 years old) occurred in Santa Maria

| | Total births per year | Total teen births (ages 15-19) | Percent of births to teens (ages 15-19) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria | 157 | 0 | 0.0% |
| Guadalupe | 135 | 13 | 9.6% |
| Lompoc | 739 | 32 | 4.3% |
| Santa Barbara | 1,367 | 44 | 3.2% |
| Santa Maria | 2,787 | 256 | 9.2% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **5,380** | **348** | **6.5%** |

County of Santa Barbara Health, 2025, Santa Barbara County Birth Brief 2020-2024

The number of teen births has decreased since 2015, however, the teen birth rate has increased since the pandemic.

## Exhibit 25. Number of teen births over the past ten years




County of Santa Barbara Health, 2025, Santa Barbara County Birth Brief 2020-2024



# CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS & SUPPORT SERVICES

CalFresh, CalWorks, and Medi-Cal are essential public programs serving low-income families and children in Santa Barbara County. CalFresh participation has also grown, serving nearly 34,000 households (up from nearly 24,000 in 2021) and more than 17,000 children (0-12 year olds). More than half (60.8%) of Santa Barbara County children (0-12 year olds) are enrolled in Medi-Cal. More than four thousand children received services through CalWORKs in September 2025 (County of Santa Barbara Department of Social Services, September 2025). The percent of the total population who are enrolled in Medi-Cal has doubled since 2012 (from 19.0% to 39.8%) *(California Health Foundation, 2025).*

## Public Assistance Programs

The following is an overview of the broad public assistance child care programs. More specific programs are presented in the Child Care Funding Sources section.

**CalFresh** - CalFresh is California's implementation of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), delivering monthly food benefits via an EBT card to low-income individuals and families to purchase nutritious groceries at stores and farmers' markets. There were 17,313 children (0-12 year olds) served by CalFresh in September 2025. The number of households served by CalFresh has steadily increased from 23,994 in January 2021 to 33,892 in August 2025 (California Department of Social Services, 2025).

**California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS)** - CalWORKS provides temporary cash aid and services, to help eligible families obtain food, shelter, and essential services. Most adults are limited to receiving up to five years of cash aid over a lifetime. Unless exempt, CalWORKS participants are required to participate in welfare-to-work activities. For CalWORKS recipients participating in such activities that lead to employment and self-sufficiency, subsidized child care is available for their children up to age 12 and children with disabilities up to 18 years of age.

**Medi-Cal** - Medi-Cal is a public health insurance program that provides needed health care services for eligible low income Californians. Cencal is the designated Medi-Cal managed care provider in Santa Barbara County. The percentage of the local population enrolled in Medi-Cal has doubled from 19.0% in January 2012 to 39.8% in May 2025 (California Health Foundation, 2025). More than half (60.8%) of Santa Barbara County children (0-12 year olds) are enrolled in Medi-Cal (County of Santa Barbara Department of Social Services, September 2025).

**Women, Infants & Children (WIC)** - California's WIC program provides families across the state by providing nutrition education, breastfeeding support, healthy foods and referrals to health care and other community services. WIC is an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) based program in which food benefits are aggregated on a family basis.

Exhibit 26. Number of children (ages 0-12) receiving public assistance, by type

| | # Children Receiving CalFresh | # Children Receiving CalWORKS | # Children Receiving Medi-Cal |
|---|---|---|---|
| South County | 2,510 | 443 | 8,540 |
| Mid County | 2,683 | 810 | 6,755 |
| North County | 12,019 | 2,846 | 28,037 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **17,313** | **4,134** | **43,741** |

Totals reflect those served in September 2025
Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services, September 2025



# CHAPTER 6: CHILD CARE OPTIONS

A variety of child care options are available throughout Santa Barbara County including center-based care, family child care (FCCs), and informal care from family, friend, and neighbors (FFN). Systems of support are in place to help offset the high costs of care including subsidy programs such as CalWORKS, Head Start, and state-funded preschool, all of which depend on family eligibility. Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is available throughout Santa Barbara County to 4 and 5 year olds; there were 2,512 children enrolled in TK in the 2024–2025 school year. Additionally, expanded learning options are available to school age children.

There are a number of child care options for families to choose. When determining the best option that meets a family's needs there are many considerations including location, kind of care, and the cost of care, including the subsidies that may be available to offset the cost of child care. This chapter provides additional information on some of the available child care options.

## Child Care Settings

**Center-Based Care** - Licensed child care centers are facilities that operate in a commercial setting. These programs are licensed through the CDSS CCLD and may obtain licenses for infant, preschool, and/or school age care. Some center-based care may be license-exempt if they abide by special regulations. Note: School districts and local education agencies (LEAs) may operate child care as well as before and after school programming, which have different regulations.

**Family Child Care Homes (FCCs)** - FCC is licensed child care offered in a provider's home, licensed by CDSS CCLD. A FCC must be in the licensee's own home and reflect a home-like environment. Small FCCs serve up to 8 children and large FCCs serve up to 14 children, depending on the combination of the ages of the children (0-12 year olds) enrolled.

**Military Base Child Care** - Child care is available to military families at Vandenberg Space Force Base in Lompoc, and includes the Child Development Center (CDC) for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old, a School Age Care (SAC) program for children ages 5-12 years old, and a Family Child Care (FCC) program. The child care programs located off the military base are registered with Community Care Licensing and are included in the capacity totals within this report. The child care programs located on the military base are licensed through the Department of Defense and are not included in the capacity totals within this report.

**License-Exempt Care** - Legally permitted child care arrangements that are not required to be licensed under Community Care Licensing. This may include relatives or friends, or by a provider who cares only for the children of one other family, certain parent co-ops, and public or non-profit recreation and school-based child care programs. For more information about whether a program is license-exempt under state regulations see the Department of Social Services.

**Family, Friend, & Neighbor Care (FFN)** - FFNs is care provided in the child's or child care provider's home by a person who is a relative, friend, neighbor, or other license-exempt provider. This type of care is not required to be licensed by the state of California.

## Child Care Funding Sources

Now more than ever, there is a need for more options to help pay for the cost of child care. Eligibility criteria for subsidized child care varies by program. For example, the income eligibility for federally funded Head Start programs ($33,000 for family of four) is lower than the income eligibility for California State Preschool Programs ($127,338 for a family of four); some programs serve only a particular age group; and some programs require families to be income eligible and for parents to be employed or in an educational or job training program.

There are multiple types of state or federally funded programs that offer child care to eligible families in Santa Barbara County (some included in Public Assistance list above).

- The Alternative Payment Program
- California State-Funded Preschool
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- CalWorks
- After School Education and Safety (for school age children)

**Alternative Payment Program (AP)** - Funded by the state of California, these programs subsidize the child care costs for eligible families. Parents may choose from family child care homes, child care centers, or license-exempt child care providers. Children are eligible for child care services until their 13th birthday.

**State-Funded Preschool (CSPP)** - The California Department of Education funds state-funded preschools administered through local education agencies, colleges, community-action agencies, and private non-profits. Household income must be below 100% State Median Income (SMI) in order for a family to be eligible. The threshold for a family of four income must be under $127,338 per year (California Department of Education, 2025-26).

**General Child Care and Development (CCTR)** – The California Department of Social Services funds General Child Care and Development programs administered through licensed child care centers and family child care home networks. CCTR provides subsidized, full-day and year-round child care for eligible families, generally serving children from birth through school age. Eligibility is based on income and need. Household income must be below 85% SMI in order for a family to be eligible. The threshold for a family of four income must be under $108,237 per year (California Department of Social Services, 2025–26).

**Head Start** - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds Head Start and Early Head Start. CommUnify is the Head Start grantee in Santa Barbara County. Head Start eligibility is based on multiple factors related to need. The income eligibility factor is based on the federal poverty level, which is $33,000 for a family of four (Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2026).

**Tuition (Private Pay)** - Non-subsidized spaces are utilized by private pay families in child care centers and family child care homes that are operated by community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, individuals, nonprofit and for-profit agencies.

**CalWORKS** - CalWORKs child care subsidies are available to families with a child or children in the home who are deprived of parental care, due to absence, unemployment, disability, or death of a parent; and

to needy caretaker relatives of a foster child or children. More than four thousand children received services through CalWORKs in September 2025 (County of Santa Barbara Department of Social Services, September 2025).

There are three stages of CalWORKS child care:

- Stage 1 is funded by the California Department of Social Services and is locally administered by Child Development Resources through contracts with local Alternative Payment Program (AP) agencies. Stage 1 begins with a parent's entry into a County-approved welfare-to-work program or employment and continues serving them for up to six months or until their work or child care is stable.
- Stage 2 is available to families on welfare and with stable employment. Families may receive Stage 2 Child Care for up to 24 months after they stop receiving cash aid. Parents may select from 1) licensed providers such as center-based and family child care homes; or 2) license-exempt child care providers such as family, friend, and neighbor care.
- Stage 3 supports families as they move off welfare and into self-sufficiency and have exhausted up to 24 months of eligibility for Stage 2. Families can continue to receive Stage 3 Child Care until they no longer meet the income eligibility requirements or their children exceed the age limit. Parents may select from 1) licensed providers such as center-based and family child care homes; or 2) license-exempt child care providers such as family, friend, and neighbor care.

More information on CDSS funding streams, including Children with Severe Disabilities (CHAN), Migrant Child Care and Development Programs (CMIG), and general child care (CCTR) can be found on the CDSS website.

## Expanded Learning for School Age Children

Many school districts and community agencies operate expanded learning programs (including before school, after school, summer, and intercession). The following is a summary of the out of school options offered in Santa Barbara County.

**After School Education and Safety (ASES)** - ASES programs are created through partnerships between schools and local community resources to provide literacy, academic enrichment, and safe constructive alternatives for students in TK through ninth grade (TK-9). ASES is primarily funded through the state and administered by the California Department of Education.

**Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P)** - ELO-P provides funding for afterschool and summer school enrichment programs for TK through sixth grade. ELO-P funds are provided to local education agencies (LEAs) and are to be used to create activities that support the whole child, including social-emotional learning and child development. ELO-P funds are provided by CDE; each LEA has flexibility in determining how ELO-P funds are spent. Licensed, license-exempt community programs, as well as district-run programs deliver ELO-P services.

## Universal PreKindergarten (UPK)

UPK is an umbrella term that includes California State Preschool Programs (CSPPs), Transitional Kindergarten (TK), Head Start, district and local community-based preschool programs, early learning services for students with disabilities, private pay preschools, and expanded learning options to support access to a full day of services. California's goal is to serve more children ages 3 and 4 in high-quality preschool programming. California intends to meet this goal through the implementation of universal TK,

as well as investments in other state-funded programs, such as state preschools and other subsidized programs. UPK also provides funding to Local Planning Councils (LPCs) for workforce development and funding.

## Transitional Kindergarten (TK)

TK is the first of a two-year Kindergarten program that is developmentally appropriate and aligned to the California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations. TK serves as a bridge between preschool and Kindergarten, utilizing a modified Kindergarten curriculum taught by a credentialed teacher.

TK is one component of the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) mixed-delivery system. While families may choose care from across this system, local education agencies (LEAs - school districts and charters) are mandated to offer TK to all age-eligible children. School districts and charter schools must maintain a TK class enrollment average of not more than 24 pupils per classroom for each school site and an average adult-to-child ratio of 1:10 for each classroom.

Universal TK (UTK) means that by 2025–26, and each year thereafter, regardless of background, race, zip code, immigration status, or income level, every child who turns 4 years old by September 1st of the given school year will have access to TK as a quality learning experience the year before Kindergarten.



# CHAPTER 7: CHILD CARE CAPACITY

While the total supply of child care has increased in Santa Barbara County over time, the unmet need for care is most pronounced for younger children (0-24 months). It is estimated that 2 in 10 infant-toddlers (0-24 months) have access to a licensed child care space and approximately 7 in 10 preschoolers (2-5 year olds) have access to a licensed child care or TK space.

## Child Care Supply

Licensed child care adheres to the state regulatory standards and reporting requirements; therefore, licensed child care capacity is used to determine the current child care capacity in Santa Barbara County within this report. Informal child care (e.g. FFN), although valuable in the community, is typically excluded from community needs assessments as these settings are difficult to reliably track.

## Factors that Impact the Understanding of Child Care Capacity

Licensed capacity is the maximum number of children a child care program can serve at one time in a specific facility; however, it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the operating capacity nor an indication of how many children are currently enrolled. The availability, demand, and use of child care spaces fluctuate in any community. The following is a brief description of the many moving factors that impact the understanding and depiction of current child care capacity.

- Increased availability of TK
- Defined age groupings
- Shift in how centers are licensed
- FCC capacity estimations
- Under-enrollment trends
- AM and PM sessions
- Family preferences regarding care
- Family demand for care

The following is a description of the many factors that impact the understanding of child care capacity.

- **Increased availability of TK** - As previously mentioned, TK expansion has increased the number of spaces available throughout Santa Barbara County. Consequently, families with 4-5 year olds may opt to enroll their child in TK instead of a community preschool.
- **Defined age groupings -** There is variation in how age groups are defined, which creates challenges in tracking and analyzing capacity related data.
    - The licensed capacity within centers has historically been allocated to child age ranges that slightly overlap (e.g. 0-24 months, 18-36 months, and 2-6 years) which create tracking and analysis related challenges. Additionally, these age ranges do not align with child population data ages, which makes it difficult to accurately assess the need/demand for care against the licensed capacity.
    - The capacity data in the 2–5 year old age group includes TK and licensed child care spaces, yet TK spaces are only accessible to children that turn 4 by September 1 of the school year, or once they turn 4 during the school year. There are also challenges related to tracking how licensed child care capacity for this age group as a whole breaks down for each age. Licensing requirements related to classroom configurations and adult:child

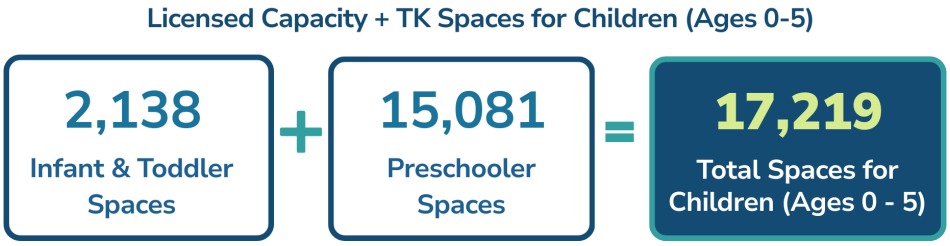
ratios as well as best practice makes it difficult to determine the number of spaces that are accessible to preschool age children, particularly by individual age.

- **Shift in how centers are licensed** - Historically, child care centers were licensed based on children's ages. This has recently changed, and Community Care Licensing has started issuing single licenses to centers (similar to how FCCs are licensed). This shift creates challenges in determining the capacity and unmet need by age group, as data is reported for all children and not by age.
- **FCC capacity estimations** - FCCs can serve children ages 0-12 and are licensed for a total maximum capacity (8 for small FCCs and 14 for large FCCs). The Resource and Referral has used a formula for calculating FCC capacity by age: 15% of FCC licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% are allocated to school age children. Caring for younger children reduces the total number of children FCCs can legally serve, which often makes it economically infeasible.
- **Under-enrollment trends** - There are various reasons why programs may not be enrolled to their full licensed capacity.
    - **By choice to achieve higher quality** - Some programs limit enrollment in order to allow more space per child and/or smaller groups per teacher.
    - **Logistical limitations** - Limitations related to facility design, quality, staffing, and/or funding.
    - **Lack of demand** - Due to the increased availability of TK, many programs are under-enrolled in their classrooms that serve 4 year olds.
- **AM and PM sessions** - Some programs offer part-day, part-time options. In these cases, the number of enrolled children may be greater than the licensed capacity. Additionally, some programs may opt to offer night and evening hours rather than enrolling to full capacity.
- **Family preferences regarding care** - Families have different preferences regarding the kind of care (e.g. home based or center based), quality of care, cost of care, hours of care (e.g. full day or part-day), and the location of care (e.g. near home, work, or transit routes). All of these preferences impact enrollment decisions.
- **Family demand for care** - Not all families need or want child care. Some parents choose to stay home, some culturally prefer receiving care inside the home, and some families enroll in care solely based on their needs while they work whereas others prioritize enrollment for the social-emotional-cognitive development benefits. All of these factors impact the demand for and enrollment in child care.

"A new Stanford research paper estimates that universal child care would enable over 100,000 mothers to enter the workforce, adding $23 billion to California's GDP—more than covering the cost of universal child care. A companion study from UC Irvine and UC Berkeley found that 600,000 children under age 3 lack access to licensed care, costing the state up to $53 billion in annual economic losses." First 5 Association

## Supply of Child Care Varies by Region and Child Age

The following charts present the number of children living in each region by age compared to the total number of licensed child care and TK spaces in that area. TK data has been included since families with 4 year olds may choose to enroll their child in TK or licensed child care. See Appendix A and B for child care capacity by age and city.




### Exhibit 27. Child care capacity in Santa Barbara County, by age and region

| | Licensed capacity for children 0-24 months | | | LIcensed capacity for children 2-5 years | | | | Licensed capacity for children 0-5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Centers | FCCs | TOTAL | Centers | FCCs | TK | TOTAL | Total Capacity |
| South County | 508 | 110 | 618 | 3,953 | 506 | 689 | 5,148 | 5,766 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 0 | 26 | 26 | 330 | 128 | 103 | 561 | 587 |
| Lompoc | 103 | 140 | 243 | 633 | 651 | 159 | 1,443 | 1,686 |
| North County | 152 | 1,099 | 1,251 | 1,187 | 5,128 | 1,615 | 7,929 | 9,180 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **763** | **1,375** | **2,138** | **6,103** | **6,413** | **2,566** | **15,081** | **17,219** |

Note: In order to estimate total child care capacity by age for FCCs, the R&R uses the formula that has been applied by other counties: 15% of FCC licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children. Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL, December 2025; TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest

### Exhibit 28. School age care capacity in Santa Barbara County, by region

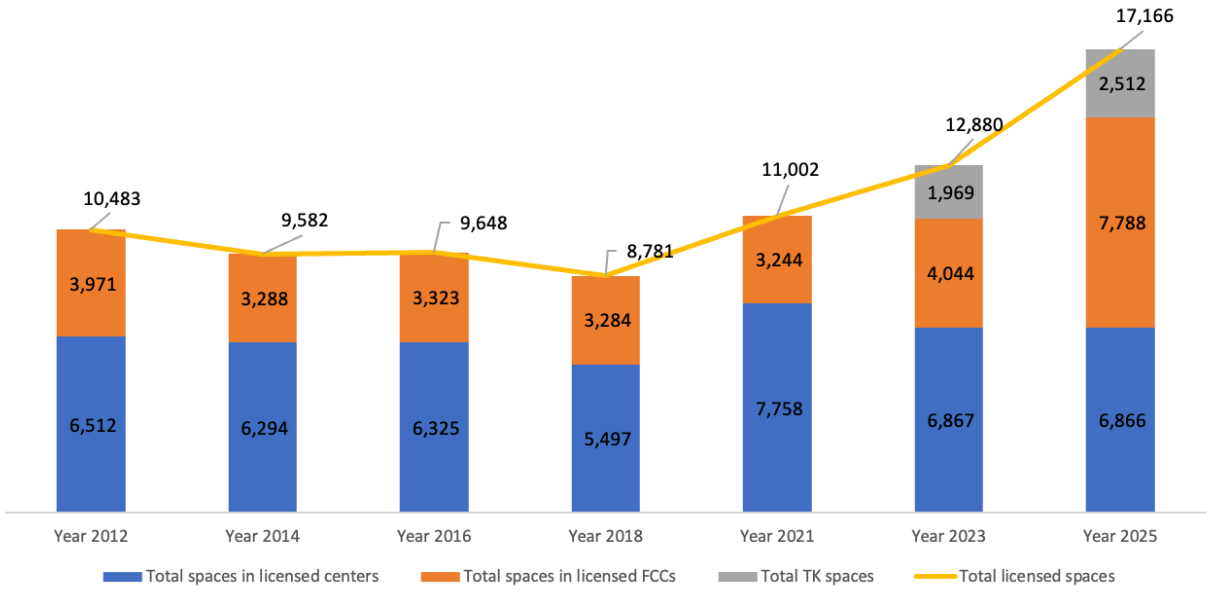
| | Capacity in centers | Capacity in FCCs | Capacity in License Exempt | Total school age capacity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South County | 655 | 110 | 1,179 | 1,944 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 145 | 26 | 140 | 311 |
| Lompoc | 0 | 140 | 135 | 275 |
| North County | 24 | 1,099 | 1,990 | 3,113 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **824** | **1,376** | **3,444** | **5,643** |

Note: In order to estimate total child care capacity by age for FCCs, the R&R uses the formula that has been applied by other counties: 15% of FCC licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children. Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL December 2025; Licensed Exempt spaced data: CRR January 2026

## Overall Increase in Child Care Capacity Over Time

The overall supply of child care for children (0-5 year olds) in Santa Barbara County has steadily increased since 2012. TK contributes to this upward trend as do local child care expansion efforts. Children's Resource and Referral of Santa Barbara County (CRR) has been deeply engaged in increasing the number of family child care providers with community partners since the pandemic. Since 2024 CRR has supported the licensing of more than 1,200 new child care spaces and continues to partner with local agencies, school districts, and family networks to sustain and expand access.

### Exhibit 29. Increase in the total number of child care spaces for children (0-5 year olds) over time in Santa Barbara County




Historic licensed capacity: Child Care Portfolio is produced by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
2020, 2023, 2025 capacity: Licensed capacity data: CCR and CCL
TK data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.

## Enrollment in TK and Kindergarten Trends

Both child care programs and school districts are having to adjust in response to the roll-out of Universal TK. Child care programs are enrolling fewer 4 year olds and are having the ages that are served and school districts are having to expand services and make adjustments to meet the needs of younger children.



It is estimated that there are approximately 5,261 four-year-olds and 5,261 five-year-olds in Santa Barbara County (US Census Data. 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001) and as of the 2024-25 school year there were 2,512 children enrolled in TK and 4,687 children enrolled in Kindergarten (California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest). It can therefore be estimated that 48% of 4 year olds in Santa Barbara County enrolled in TK and 90% of 5 year olds enrolled in Kindergarten. Due to the age eligibility threshold for enrollment in TK (which has been expanding each year recently) and Kindergarten, it is impossible to make an exact calculation regarding the number of eligible children per age group and grade.

The percent of eligible 4 year olds enrolled in TK in Santa Barbara County is lower than California as a whole. There are varying estimates regarding California TK enrollment ranging from 59% of eligible children (Learning Policy Institute, 2024) to 70% (Public Policy Institute, 2025). The variation is likely due to the evolving eligibility age criteria and sources using different means to calculate the number of eligible children. The enrollment rate range in California is somewhat comparable to those in other states that offer universal TK (e.g. Florida, Iowa, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin), ranging from 66% to 76% (Learning Policy Institute, 2024).

Santa Barbara County's Kindergarten enrollment rate aligns with California trends. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the California Department of Education (CDE) estimated that around 95% of eligible children attended Kindergarten (public & private combined), however current estimates post-pandemic are closer to 90% (California Assembly Committee on Education, 2024).



# CHAPTER 8: MET AND UNMET NEED FOR CARE

There are enough licensed child care and TK spaces for 5 in 10 children (0-5 year olds) in Santa Barbara County; however, as previously noted, a space does not always equate to a space open for enrollment. The number of licensed child care and TK spaces available to children varies significantly based on their age, location, and the kind of care. Based on the current supply of licensed care in Santa Barbara, 2 in 10 infant/toddlers have access to a space and 7 in 10 preschool age children have access to a licensed child care or TK space.

Local efforts have invested in increasing the supply of care, particularly for younger children. As a result of these efforts in combination with the implementation of Universal TK, capacity for children 0-5 years old in Santa Barbara County has improved in the past five years, thus positively impacting the potential met need for care.

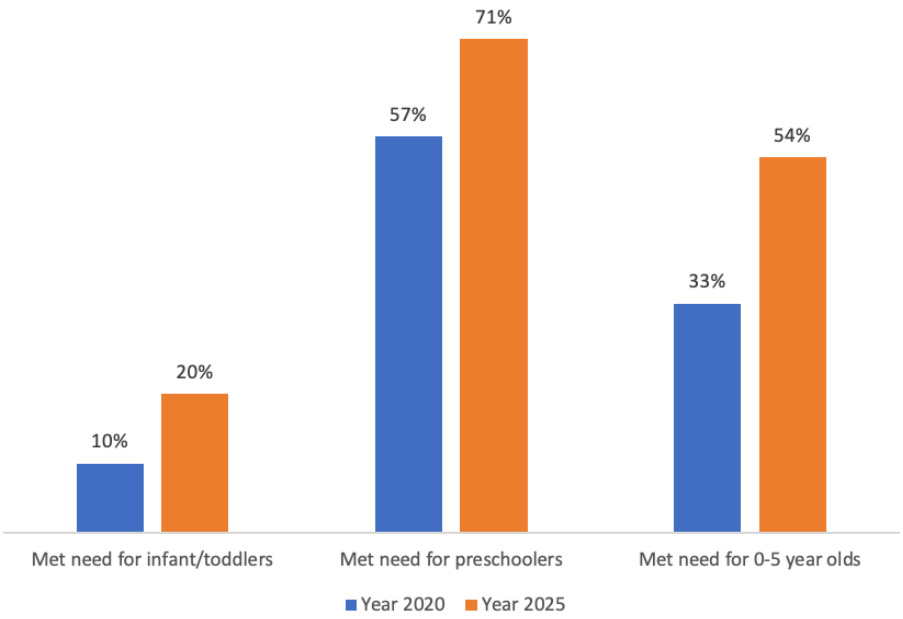
While the local total met need for care has improved over time, the distribution of that improvement across age groups should be interpreted with caution. Beginning in 2025, child age groupings used to calculate met and unmet need were revised from 0–2 year olds and 3–5 years olds to 0–24 months and 2–5 year olds in order to better align child population counts with licensed child care capacity categories.

Previously, two-year-olds were included in the 0–2 child population, however the licensed capacity serving two-year-olds was counted within the 3–5 capacity category. The updated age groupings correct this misalignment by directly matching child population groups to licensed capacity categories. However, this shift increases the total number of children included in the 2–5 age group and reduces the number of children in the 0-24 month group, which serve as the denominators for calculating met and unmet need, even when the total child population remains unchanged. As a result, some of the observed improvement in met need across age groups reflects reclassification effects rather than changes in supply alone.





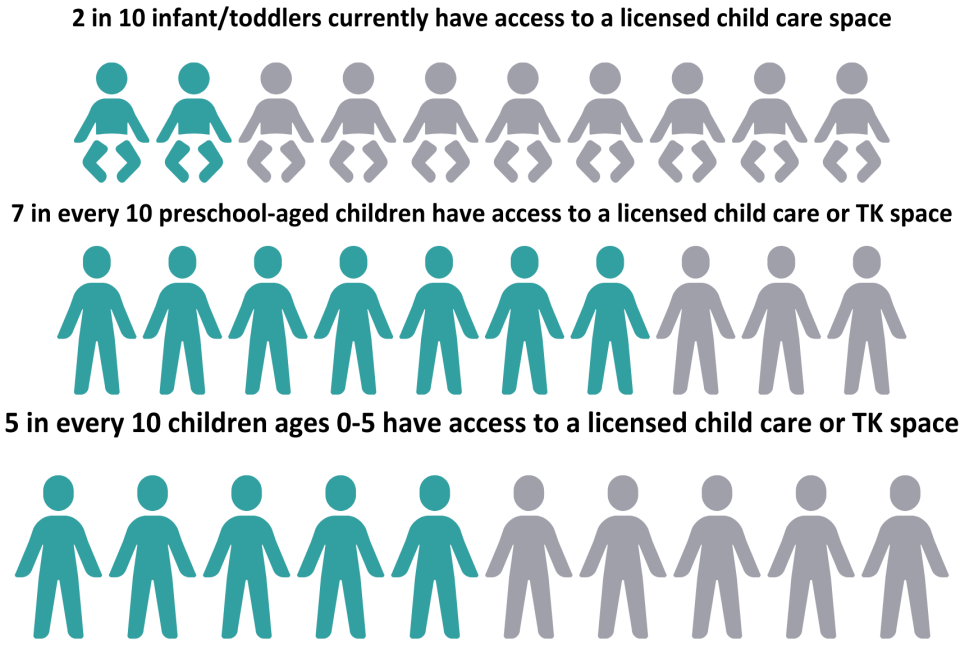
## Exhibit 30. The potential met need for care has improved in the past 5 years for all age groups




Children population data: US Census, 2019 and 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR 2020 and October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL 2020 and December 2025; TK data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.



## Exhibit 31. Greater capacity for care for preschoolers compared to infant/toddlers




There are not enough licensed child care and TK spaces for every child living in Santa Barbara County for children (0-5 year olds).

- The unmet need for care is most pronounced for infants and toddlers; 80% face an unmet need for care.
- Nearly a third (29%) of preschool age children (2-5 year olds) face an unmet need for care
- As a whole, almost half (46%) of children (0-5 year olds) face an unmet need for care.

## Exhibit 32. Unmet need for care is most pronounced for infant/toddlers

| | Number of children | Total capacity | Percent of children who face a met need for care | Percent of children who face an unmet need for care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Children ages 0-24 months | 10,542 | 2,138 | 20% | 80% |
| Children ages 2-5 years | 21,284 | 15,082 | 71% | 29% |
| **Children ages 0-5 years** | **31,826** | **17,219** | **54%** | **46%** |

Children population data: US Census, 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL December 2025; TK data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.

The potential met and unmet need for care varies by location within Santa Barbara County. Regions with the highest **met need** for infant/toddler care are Santa Maria (27%), Goleta (21%), and Orcutt/Los Alamos (19%). Locations with the greatest **unmet need** for infant/toddler care are Santa Ynez Valley (94%), and Santa Barbara (84%).

Exhibit 33. Unmet need for care for infant/toddlers (0-24 months) varies by location

| | Number of children 0-24 months old | Total capacity | Percent of children who face a met need for care | Percent of children who face an unmet need for care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria/ Summerland | 307 | 52 | 17% | 83% |
| Goleta | 896 | 192 | 21% | 79% |
| Guadalupe | 543 | 97 | 18% | 82% |
| Lompoc | 1,461 | 243 | 17% | 83% |
| New Cuyama | 16 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Orcutt/ Los Alamos | 1,089 | 208 | 19% | 81% |
| Santa Barbara | 2,269 | 374 | 16% | 84% |
| Santa Maria | 3,513 | 947 | 27% | 73% |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 447 | 25 | 6% | 94% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **10,542** | **2,139** | **20%** | **80%** |

Children population data: US Census, 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL December 2025; TK data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.

There is an overarching unmet need (29%) for preschoolers (ages 2-5) within Santa Barbara County. However, the projected capacity for the entire preschool age group is an over-representation of what is actually available to each age group. In some situations (such as TK and certain child care classrooms), the capacity is primarily available to 4-5 year olds. For this reason, caution is suggested when assessing the regions with the greatest unmet and met need for preschool age care.



## Exhibit 34. Unmet need for care for preschoolers (2-5 year olds) varies by location

| | Number of children 2-5 years | Total capacity | Percent of children who face a met need for care | Percent of children who face an unmet need for care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria/ Summerland | 801 | 514 | 64% | 36% |
| Goleta | 1615 | 1,256 | 78% | 22% |
| Guadalupe | 572 | 714 | 125% | -25% |
| Lompoc | 3,255 | 1,443 | 44% | 56% |
| New Cuyama | 28 | 32 | 114% | -14% |
| Orcutt/ Los Alamos | 1,896 | 1,448 | 76% | 24% |
| Santa Barbara | 4,931 | 3,378 | 69% | 31% |
| Santa Maria | 7,400 | 5,770 | 78% | 22% |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 787 | 526 | 67% | 33% |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **21,284** | **15,081** | **71%** | **29%** |

Children population data: US Census, 2023, ACS 5-Year Estimates. Table B09001.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025; Licensed Center spaces data: CCL December 2025; TK data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.



# CHAPTER 9: WORKFORCE

The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley recently conducted a comprehensive workforce study of child care providers throughout the state. Findings specific to the survey of 845 child care programs (129 centers and 716 FCCs) in Santa Barbara County were reported in the State of the Early Care and Education Workforce in Santa Barbara County (2025) report. The following summarizes key results from the report.

The annual child care workforce turnover rate is slightly higher across all child care positions in Santa Barbara compared to California. Additionally, in Santa Barbara County more than a third (38%) of center teachers and 19% of FCCs indicated that they plan on getting a different job or retiring in the next three years.

### Exhibit 35. Turnover rates among child care workers

| | Santa Barbara County | California |
|---|---|---|
| Lead teachers in all centers | 28% | 22% |
| Assistant teachers in all centers | 30% | 26% |
| FCC providers (small and large) | 36% | 30% |

State of the Early Care and Education Workforce – Santa Barbara County (2025). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

The majority (77%) of local FCC operators identify as Latina and speak Spanish (82%) whereas only 66% speak English. About half (51%) of center-based teaching staff identify as Latina and 47% speak Spanish, whereas 100% speak English. Less than half (40%) of FCCs and 20% of center-based teaching staff were born in a different country.

More advanced teacher training, skills, and competencies lead to higher quality programs for children. There are different educational requirements for different positions and child care settings. A greater percentage of local FCCs (37%) have a high school degree or less compared to 18% in California, and fewer local FCCs have a higher degree (11% have an Associates degree and 9% have a Bachelor's degree or more) compared to those in California (22% have an Associates degree and 29% have a Bachelor's degree or more). A higher education is more common for teachers in centers. Locally, 34% of center-based teachers have an Associates degree and 34% have a Bachelor's degree or higher (compared to California - 27% have an Associates degree and 42% have a Bachelor's degree or higher).

Child care workers have historically been paid low wages making it difficult to attract and sustain quality teachers, which in turn impacts the quality of programs. Local wages have neither kept pace with the cost of living, nor with the increased education levels of child care professionals. Large FCC operators have the highest earning potential of all child care workers in Santa Barbara County averaging $36.06-$38.46/hour or $75,000-$80,000/year. Head Start/Title 5 Center workers and FCCs are earning less than those throughout the southern region and the state. The following chart is based on self reported median hourly rates, which were converted into annual income based on a full time 40 hour/week work schedule schedule.

## Exhibit 36. Median self reported wages of child care workforce

| | Santa Barbara County | California |
|---|---|---|
| Title 22 Center Lead Teachers | **$24.63/hour<br>$51,230.40/year** | $22.00/hour<br>$45,760.00/year |
| Title 22 Center Assistant Teachers | **$20.00/hour<br>$41,600.00/year** | $19.25/hour<br>$40,040.00/year |
| Head Start/Title 5 Center Lead Teachers | $25.00/hour<br>$52,000.00/year | **$27.00/hour<br>$56,160.00/year** |
| Head Start/Title 5 Center Assistant Teachers | $19.70/hour<br>$40,976.00/year | **$23.56/hour<br>$49,004.80/year** |
| All FCC Providers (small and large average) | $16.83-$22.69/hour<br>$35,000-$47,200/year | **$21.63-$26.92/hour<br>$45,000-$56,000** |

State of the Early Care and Education Workforce – Santa Barbara County (2025). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

The median hourly rate for child care workers in Santa Barbara County is $17.27/hour and $29.49/hour for Education and Child Care Administrators, Preschool, and Daycare workers according to The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). In addition to low pay, many child care workers struggle with food insufficiency, rely on public assistance, and lack health insurance and retirement savings according to State of the Early Care and Education Workforce in Santa Barbara County (2025).

## Exhibit 37. Child care workforce faces economic struggles

| | Santa Barbara County | California |
|---|---|---|
| FCCs enrolled in health insurance | 69% | 90% |
| Center teachers enrolled in health insurance | 93% | 94% |
| FCCs with any retirement savings | 13% | 27% |
| Center teachers with any retirement savings | 43% | 54% |
| FCCs who are food sufficient | 56% | 60% |
| Center teachers who are food sufficient | 53% | 57% |
| FCCs enrolled in public assistance programs | 52% | 41% |
| Center teachers enrolled in public assistance programs | 49% | 34% |

State of the Early Care and Education Workforce – Santa Barbara County (2025). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

## Local Child Care Workforce Building Efforts, Opportunities, and Challenges

Several child care business and workforce expansion efforts are underway in Santa Barbara County. SBCEO operated the two-year (2023–2025) ARPA Infant/Toddler Units Stipend Program. The initiative was designed to strengthen the early care and education workforce by expanding enrollment in infant and toddler coursework required for early care educators. The program helped build a pipeline of qualified teachers, fill open infant and toddler classroom positions, and support program expansion by supporting current students and early care professionals returning to school. More than one hundred (104) teachers were supported in completing coursework from 2023-2025.

SBCEO's Workforce Pathways Stipend program supports the professional advancement and retention of early care educators (including current and prospective TK teachers, state preschool teachers, family child care providers, and others pursuing a degree/coursework in early childhood) by incentivizing activities that promote educator effectiveness, retention, and degree and/or credential attainment. There were 203 applicants in 2025-26. There were 132 stipend recipients in 2024-25 and 137 stipend recipients 2023-24.



CRR supports the early care and education workforce through a coordinated, systems level approach that focuses on entry, stabilization, quality improvement, and long-term sustainability. Efforts include individualized coaching and navigation for prospective and existing early care providers, technical assistance around licensing and compliance, and ongoing professional development aligned with state and local priorities. CRR works closely with FCCs and centers to reduce administrative burden, strengthen operational capacity, and help programs remain viable in a challenging climate.

CRR invests in workforce resilience and business sustainability through targeted initiatives such as business training in partnership with Women's Economic Ventures, fiscal and operational coaching, and support with contracts, subsidies, and reimbursement navigation. CRR also plays a central role in connecting educators to stipends, workforce incentives, and quality improvement pathways, while advocating for policies that recognize the workforce as essential infrastructure. These efforts are designed to grow the workforce and retain it by addressing burnout, financial instability, and systemic barriers that disproportionately impact early educators.

The United Way of Santa Barbara County offers the Brighter Futures Child Care fund and Child Care Business Development Opportunities fund. These funds support business training to build operational capacity and expand service offerings in partnership with UC Santa Barbara. Recent workforce training included emergency preparedness and business development opportunities that promote child care workforce development and career pathways.

# CHAPTER 10: QUALITY CARE

Research highlights the critical role of early care and education (ECE) program quality for children's optimal outcomes. Children who participate in high-quality early childhood programs experience greater academic success, including improved school readiness (Barnett, 2011) and higher graduation rates (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These children require less time in special education services due to early developmental gains (Reynolds et al., 2011). Longitudinal studies illustrate that participation in high-quality early education leads to greater productivity and success in adulthood, including higher educational attainment, increased earnings, and improved life outcomes (Heckman et al., 2010).

Quality programs have environments, relationships, interactions, and activities to support children's growth and development in order to prepare them for success in school and life.

Quality improvement is a continuous process undertaken by programs striving to provide the best opportunities for children's optimal development. Improving the quality of ECE services in Santa Barbara County has been an ongoing effort by individuals, programs, and agencies for many years. The following projects support quality improvement:

- Santa Barbara County Quality Counts
- Family Child Care Steps to Quality Network of Children's Resource and Referral
- California Preschool Instructional Network
- Workforce Pathways Stipend Project
- California Collaborative on the Social-Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CA CSEFEL)
- Outdoor Classroom Project
- Child Development Training Consortium
- The Inclusive Child Care Action Team of the Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council

## Quality Counts

There are 76 child care centers and 50 FCCs enrolled in Quality Counts (2024-25 fiscal year), which is supported by SBCEO. These child care programs are committed to quality improvement and go beyond regulatory licensing requirements to support the children in their care by providing a strong foundation for school readiness. Quality Counts and the associated requirement for participation changed over recent years, which impacted the number of engaged centers.

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# APPENDIX A

## Child care capacity in Santa Barbara County, by age and city

| | Licensed capacity for children ages 0-24 months | | | Licensed capacity for children 2-5 years | | | | Licensed capacity for children 0-5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Centers** | **FCCs** | **TOTAL** | **Centers** | **FCCs** | **TK** | **TOTAL** | **Total Capacity** |
| Carpinteria/ Summerland | 43 | 9 | 52 | 421 | 41 | 52 | 514 | 566 |
| Goleta | 175 | 17 | 192 | 1,032 | 78 | 146 | 1,256 | 1,448 |
| Guadalupe | 31 | 66 | 97 | 162 | 308 | 244 | 714 | 811 |
| Lompoc | 103 | 140 | 243 | 633 | 651 | 159 | 1,443 | 1,686 |
| New Cuyama | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 8 | 32 | 32 |
| Orcutt/ Los Alamos | 15 | 193 | 208 | 349 | 901 | 198 | 1,448 | 1,656 |
| Santa Barbara | 290 | 84 | 374 | 2,500 | 387 | 491 | 3,378 | 3,752 |
| Santa Maria | 106 | 841 | 947 | 678 | 3925 | 1,168 | 5,771 | 6,717 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 0 | 25 | 25 | 304 | 122 | 100 | 526 | 551 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **763** | **1,375** | **2,138** | **6,103** | **6,413** | **2,566** | **15,082** | **17,219** |

Note: In order to estimate total child care capacity by age for FCCs, the R&R uses the formula that has been applied by other counties: 15% of FCC licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025
Licensed Center spaces data: CCL, December 2025
TK enrollment data: California Department of Education, 2024-2025, DataQuest.

# APPENDIX B

## School age care capacity in Santa Barbara County, by city

| | Capacity in Centers | Capacity in FCCs | Capacity in License Exempt | Total School Age Capacity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carpinteria/ Summerland | 100 | 9 | 150 | 259 |
| Goleta | 24 | 17 | 0 | 41 |
| Guadalupe | 0 | 66 | 250 | 316 |
| Lompoc | 0 | 140 | 135 | 275 |
| New Cuyama | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Orcutt/ Los Alamos | 0 | 193 | 1,140 | 1,333 |
| Santa Barbara | 531 | 84 | 1,029 | 1,644 |
| Santa Maria | 24 | 841 | 740 | 1,605 |
| Santa Ynez Valley | 145 | 245 | 0 | 170 |
| **Santa Barbara County** | **824** | **1,375** | **3,444** | **5,643** |

Note: In order to estimate total child care capacity by age for FCCs, the R&R uses the formula that has been applied by other counties: 15% of FCC licensed spaces are allocated to infants and toddlers, 70% to preschoolers, and 15% to school age children.
Licensed FCC spaces data: CRR October 2025
Licensed Center spaces data: CCL December 2025
Licensed Exempt spaced data: CRR January 2026