MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Early Education and Care



2026-2030

Strategic Action Plan

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE



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Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Our Mission:

To support the healthy growth and development of all children by providing high-quality programs and resources for families and communities.

Our Vision:

Children, youth, and families reach their full potential now and in the future.

Our Core Values:

- Advance equity and inclusion
- Maintain a holistic perspective
- Embrace collaboration
- Champion innovation
- Center fulfillment

Letter from the Commissioner



As Commissioner of the Commonwealth's Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), I have the immense privilege of working alongside more than 280 dedicated public servants at the Department, who are committed to supporting children's growth and development, and the economic mobility of their families. Every day, we work to ensure more families have access to the child care they need, more educators have access to the professional development and careers in which they'll thrive, and more programs can emerge and grow to serve more children.

With support from the Healey-Driscoll Administration, our colleagues in the Massachusetts State Legislature, and the EEC Board, we have emerged from a national pandemic that shook our institutions to the core, and made significant progress towards our shared commitment as a nation-leading early education and care system in Massachusetts. We have made meaningful changes to sustain and grow our Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program, have continued efforts to improve and expand our Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) programs to reach more families with better services, and we are engaging new communities and expanding access to universal pre-K through our Community Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI). At the heart of our work over the last several years have been efforts strengthening workforce development and opportunities for new and existing educators, engaging deeply with the field as we work towards the development of an educator credential, and expanding higher education offerings and establishing new pathways into the field. As a result of our work, more children than ever before are receiving CCFA, educator wages are rising as educator vacancies are falling, and more early education and care programs are opening every day.

Much of what we have accomplished we owe to partnerships with our stakeholders across the state; none of this would've been possible without the contributions of families, educators, program directors and staff, advocates, legislators, and community-based organizations who share our vision for early education and care, and work with us each day to bring it about.

We want to support families on their path of economic mobility, making sure their children have the best possible opportunities to enter and succeed in school and life. We believe that building the early education and care system that families, children, and the economy deserve will require us to continue to press multiple levers — to address affordability and access for families; educator retention; recruitment and compensation; and program stability and financial viability.

This 2026-2030 Strategic Action Plan is a continuation of the work we've already begun. We believe that with our partners across the state, the goals and strategies within this plan will allow us to continue to build on the accomplishments we have made together, and move closer to a system where all families can access the care and support they and their children need to thrive.

Best,
Amy Kershaw

Importance of Early Education and Care

Decades of research demonstrate that access to reliable high-quality early education and care promotes children's development, school achievement, and long-term success. High-quality programs support children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, all of which are critical for school readiness and for closing opportunity gaps.

Early education is foundational to closing the opportunity gap in Massachusetts — bringing economic equity and mobility to families as well as educational opportunities to their children. Access to affordable child care is also an engine of the state's economy, enabling families of all income levels to participate in the workforce. Early education is both the "workforce behind the workforce" and the beginning of the educational journey for many of our youngest learners, including children in communities that have been most impacted by poverty or have historically lacked equitable educational opportunities.

The Department

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) is an agency within the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and reports to the Board of Early Education and Care. With its creation in 2005, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to create a separate independent department with a primary focus on early education and child care.

The agency has a dual mission: to provide access to stable, affordable child care so families can work or participate in education and training, and to provide safe, high-quality learning experiences to help prepare children for school and life success. EEC has several core functions:

- **Licensing:** EEC licenses, monitors, and provides technical assistance to nearly 9,000 early education and care programs and agencies that serve children and youth across Massachusetts. These include family child care (FCC) programs; center-based programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; out-of-school time (OST) and after-school programs; residential and group care programs; temporary shelters; and agencies offering child placement and adoption services. EEC's child care programs serve children from birth to 16 years old, and its residential group programs serve children up to age 22.
- **Financial Assistance:** EEC administers the state's Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) programs, which support access to subsidized child care for children and their families across the Commonwealth, including families receiving services from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). CCFA is administered in two ways: vouchers, which are issued directly to eligible families and can be used at participating programs, and contracts, which are awarded and attached to seats at specific programs.
- **Universally Accessible Pre-K:** The Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) serves as the agency's primary tool to

expand universally accessible high-quality preschool opportunities for all children and families within the mixed-delivery system through community-level funding to support partnerships between public school districts and community-based early education providers. In addition to serving as a vital avenue to increased access to preschool, CPPI is also focused on strengthening the quality of programs in communities by supporting curriculum alignment and minimizing barriers to special education services for young learners.

- **Professional Development and Operational Support:** EEC also provides an array of professional development support for the state's early educators, staff, and program leaders; quality and operational supports directly to early education and care programs, including capital investments; and, through its community partners, parent support and early literacy services for families across the Commonwealth.

While EEC has broad responsibility for all aspects of the early education and child care system, as reflected by the scope, strategic objectives and key initiatives included in this plan, the agency's specific authority for residential and group homes as well as placement agencies is more narrowly limited to licensing and monitoring. The agency is, however, deeply committed to supporting and promoting improvements and investments in our residential system and its workforce, in partnership with our sister agencies with shared responsibility for the children and youth served.

The Early Education and Child Care Mixed-Delivery System

The early education and care sector encompasses a wide range of programs in diverse settings that care for children from birth through age 13. The mixed-delivery system of formal programs includes nonprofit and for-profit programs, Head Start and Early Head Start, FCC providers, and programs operated by public schools. These programs provide full- and part-day care for children from birth to age five, as well as OST care for children ages five through 13. While EEC-licensed programs are run independently, more than 90% are at least partially publicly funded through EEC grants and/or financial assistance; some receive nearly all their funding from public sources. In addition, Massachusetts cities and towns are increasingly offering public funded pre-kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds. Many families also use Family, Friend, and Neighbor care (FFN), sometimes referred to as informal child care, where children are cared for by individuals who are not licensed but are trusted family members, friends, or neighbors. EEC recognizes and funds some types of FFN care, and those providers are subject to certain health and safety requirements, including background records checks.

There are around 9,000 child care programs in Massachusetts licensed by EEC, including center-based programs (serving children under age five and/or school-aged children), and FCC providers. Altogether, these programs have the capacity to serve approximately 251,000 children from birth through age 13. Center-based programs provide a large share of the

licensed system's capacity (81%). Approximately three quarters of all center-based programs that report enrollment to EEC report enrolling children under age five, and more than half enroll infants and toddlers. More than a third enroll school-aged children, with 14% enrolling both children under age five and school-aged children. Almost 6,000 (or 67%) of licensed programs are FCC providers who care for up to 10 children in their homes. Statewide, FCC providers have the capacity to serve over 47,000 children.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs, which are funded by the federal government, are available to children in families living below the federal poverty level (currently $32,150 for a family of four), and do not require a family copay or fee. EEC supports Head Start programs through the Head Start Collaboration Office, which coordinates partnerships and provides grants to strengthen services for families, and through state supplemental funding. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2024, there were over 8,000 children in Massachusetts enrolled in Head Start, almost 3,000 enrolled in Early Head Start, and over 60 enrolled in the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and local school districts also play a key role in supporting preschool and OST programs in the Commonwealth. Many preschool programs operated by school districts, referred to as "funded programs," receive funding from EEC but are exempt from EEC licensing. Statewide, about 31,000 children are enrolled in public preschool classrooms, most of which are part-day programs. Most municipalities provide district-run preschool opportunities, and some are moving towards offering universal pre-kindergarten (UPK). Public preschool programs can be housed within elementary schools or district-operated early learning centers. Further, some districts work in partnership with community-based organizations to provide preschool services.

EEC also licenses Residential Care Programs, Foster Care Placement Agencies, and Adoption Agencies in Massachusetts. The state has over 300 residential programs, which have the capacity to provide group care and housing for more than 8,000 children and youth in facilities outside of their family home, including temporary shelters and group care programs. Placement agencies oversee the approval of families to provide foster care in a private residence or to adopt a child.

EEC partners with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies and Mass211 to help families find child care and access financial assistance. CCR&Rs guide families through applying for CCFA, managing eligibility, and joining the statewide waitlist when needed, while Mass211 provides a central referral line for quick information and connections. Together, they ensure families receive both local and statewide support in securing affordable child care.

Recent Catalysts in Early Education and Care

In the last few years alone, EEC has made significant progress improving access, affordability, and quality in early education and care programs across the state — supported by historic increases in early education and care funding and statutory changes from the Healey-Driscoll

Administration and the Massachusetts State Legislature, including two statewide initiatives that have deepened statewide attention, collaboration, and resource allocation to the early education and care sector: The Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission, and the Gateway to Pre-K initiative.

Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission: Section 106 of Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020 established the Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission to study the early education and care funding structure and ways to support the Commonwealth's goal to expand equitable access to high-quality early education and care. The Commission, made up of a variety of stakeholders including legislators, providers, professional organizations, business leaders and employers, advocates, and state agency leaders, held 10 public meetings between April 2021 and February 2022. The group developed 14 immediate, short- and long-term recommendations, in the focus areas on the graphic to the left.

Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission Focus Areas



The Commission's findings and recommendations were powerful catalysts to motivate broader engagement and funding in support of progress in the early education and care field, and continue to inform EEC's ongoing work.

Gateway to Pre-K Initiative. In 2024, Governor Healey laid out her Administration's agenda to make early education and child care more affordable and accessible for all families across Massachusetts. The Gateway to Pre-K agenda included four key components:

- **Delivering Universal, High-Quality Preschool Access:** The CPPI grant program provides funding to Massachusetts communities to develop and support partnerships between school districts and private early education and care programs to expand access to high-quality, affordable preschool. CPPI helps communities coordinate, align, and strengthen curriculum, policies, assessments, professional development and job-embedded supports for educators across settings. It also promotes equitable access

to special education services to ensure full inclusion of children with disabilities at all sites. Since its inception, CPPI has grown from supporting nine communities in 2019 to 30 communities — and over 3,200 children — in state fiscal year (FY) 2025.

- **Increasing Child Care Financial Assistance Eligibility and Access:** In January 2026, eligibility for CCFA is increasing from 50% of state median income (SMI) to 85% of SMI, to help an additional 4,000 low- and moderate-income families afford care. State funding for CCFA has increased by 58% since 2022 ($686.6 million in FY22 compared to $1.087 billion in FY26), allowing the state to support more children and families than ever before. Additionally, this funding has helped EEC increase its reimbursement rates for providers to better reflect the cost of providing care, increasing the number of providers accepting CCFA to a high of 6,324 in October 2025.
- **Continuing Commonwealth Cares for Children:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Congress approved nearly $53 billion in relief funding to stabilize the early education sector, of which Massachusetts received $687 million and created the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grant program. Massachusetts continued this program with state dollars when the federal funding ended. C3 funding has been a transformational force in stabilizing the state's child care system since the pandemic, enabling early education programs to remain open, and supporting system-wide growth through investments in workforce, quality, and affordability.
- **Establishing the Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force:** In 2024, Governor Healey signed Executive Order 625 that established a three-year Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force to ensure the state "leads the nation in early education and child care access, affordability, equity, and quality." The Task Force represents a "whole-of-government" approach to improving accessibility and affordability in early education and child care. Comprised of leadership representing each Secretariat in the Executive Branch, the Task Force is focused on developing a shared understanding of the challenges facing the sector in Massachusetts, deepening communication and collaboration within state government, and asking every Secretariat in the Administration to take steps to support the early education and care sector.

  During its first year, the Task Force reviewed effective efforts from other states and nations and gathered input from over 1,100 stakeholders from across the Commonwealth through 14 listening sessions and written submissions. In response, the Task Force put forward 29 recommendations for cross-government collaboration to improve the accessibility and affordability of early education and child care in Massachusetts.

  In year two, the Task Force made significant progress on these recommendations through targeted research, relationship-building, and program development. To learn more about the Task Force's initial recommendations and ongoing progress, click here

Broadened EEC's Enabling Statute: Through the FY25 budget development process, the Legislature included and the Governor approved sweeping legislative changes that are now part of EEC's enabling statute and guide the agency's work moving forwards. These changes:

- Made C3 permanent, codifying the program into law, subject to appropriation, and providing guidance for FY25 and beyond.
- Codified CCFA eligibility in state law, including priority groups, and extended eligibility up to 85% of the state median income (SMI).
- Created a new loan forgiveness program which included early education and care staff.
- Codified the existing higher education scholarship for early education and care staff.
- Required EEC to establish a schedule for revising the CCFA rate structure and parent fee schedule.
- Required the agency to establish an early education and care career ladder.
- Removed the statutory cap (currently 10) for FCC programs, allowing for new regulations to look at FCC group size and ratios.
- Required the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), in consultation with EEC and the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), to prepare a report on supporting early education and care and promoting employer best practices.
- Created a Data Advisory Commission with new data collection requirements and an annual report.

Looking Ahead

With this support, EEC and the sector have made significant gains in the last few years. EEC's budget has almost doubled in the last four years, increasing from $819 million in FY22 to $1.77 billion in FY26. The licensed and funded capacity of the child care system continues to grow and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels, with the capacity to serve over 263,000 children at over 9,000 programs. More programs than ever before — 69% — are participating in CCFA. Teacher wages have also increased, with average hourly wages for center-based early education teachers 21% higher than they were in 2022, and the percentage of vacant positions across the system has decreased from 11% to 9% since 2023.

There remains significant work to ensure that recent gains are sustained and strengthened over the next five years. As EEC looks ahead, it is focused on continuing to build upon the current work happening at the agency, and through partnerships with agencies at the state and community levels. In this challenging financial landscape, EEC must make the most of existing resources, while also creating conditions to expand access and opportunity as additional resources become available. The work laid out in this plan will require strong partnerships with families, providers, staff, advocates, legislators, and other state agencies, to ensure that the right voices are at the table and resources are aligned to continue improving access, affordability, program quality, and stability statewide.

In 2024, in partnership with the Board, EEC developed five **Strategic Objectives** to guide and organize its work:

Family Access

Families have equitable access to quality and affordable early education and care in the communities in which they live, learn, and work.

Program Stability

Programs licensed or funded by EEC are operationally stable and financially sustainable.

Workforce Supports

A diverse field of educators, leaders, and program staff is competitively compensated and supported by clear professional pathways that promote equity, retention, and advancement.

Program Quality

Programs licensed or funded by EEC support children's health and safety and provide high-quality environments that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and support children's learning and development in partnership with families.

Agency Infrastructure

EEC has sufficient internal capacity, organizational structures, and diverse perspectives and expertise to carry out its mission and strategic objectives.

This 2026-30 Strategic Action Plan, and the agency's projects and priorities, are organized around these Strategic Objectives, to ensure the agency's work progresses toward the desired areas of impact.



Family Access

Families have equitable access to quality and affordable early education and care in the communities in which they live, learn, and work.

About

EEC is committed to making child care more affordable for more families, addressing child care deserts where programs are hard to find, and supporting the growth of different types of programs, to support more families and children to access the care they need to grow and thrive.

Many Massachusetts families face challenges finding early education and child care options that are accessible and affordable. The supply of child care seats falls short of demand, leading to long waitlists, especially for infants and toddlers. In areas with few licensed programs, some families must travel long distances to find seats or seek alternative arrangements. Families also face limited availability of full-day and afterschool care that match their work schedules. Child care costs in Massachusetts are among the highest in the country, leading many families to struggle to afford the full cost of high-quality early education, especially low-income working families.

EEC provides direct funding to families, programs, and community partners to expand access to care options. The CCFA program supports

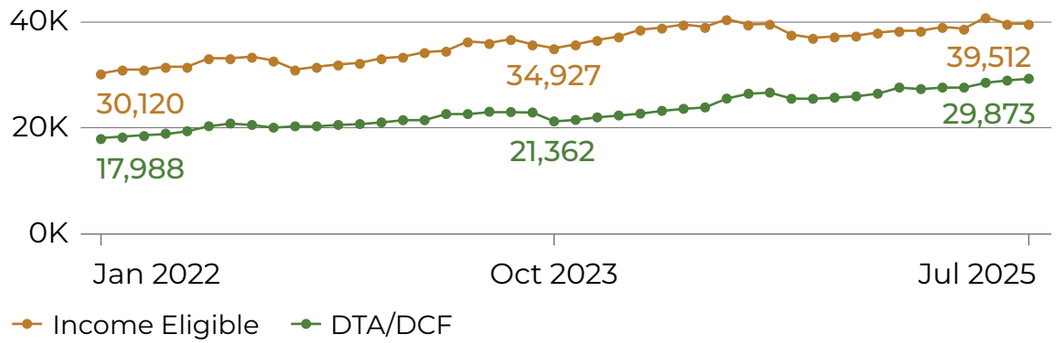
access to subsidized child care for families across the state, and the C3 program provides vital operational support to more than 8,000 programs each month. To receive CCFA because of income, a family must meet a variety of eligibility requirements including (in most cases) work or job search requirements and a household income below 50% of state median income (SMI), which is currently $82,978 annual income for a family of four. In January 2026, this threshold is changing to 85% of SMI, which is currently $141,062 for a family of four.

EEC also supports individual communities through CPPI, which builds partnerships between independent providers and public school systems, and Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) programs, which provide child development services and resources in local communities.

Current Programs and Initiatives

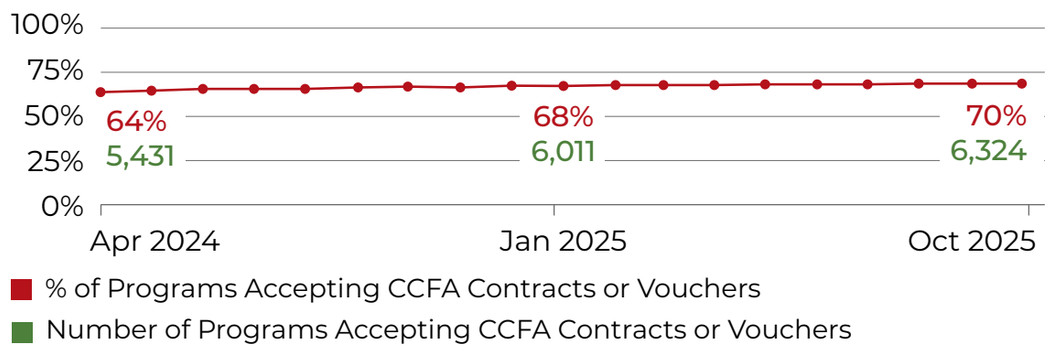
- **Child Care Financial Assistance:** As of August 2025, more than 69,000 children in Massachusetts receive CCFA. Of these children, almost 40,000 (57%) receive assistance through an income-eligible voucher or a seat at a contracted provider, almost 14,000 (20%) receive a DCF-related child care voucher or contract, and almost 16,000 (23%) receive a DTA-related child care voucher. School-aged children make up the largest share of CCFA participants (50%), followed by preschoolers (31%), toddlers (15%), and infants (5%). As of September 2025, approximately 30,000 children are currently on the state's centralized waitlist for income-eligible CCFA.

CCFA Caseload (by Children Count) Over Time by Program Type/ Funding Source



Source: CCFA via ECISDWH. These data are based on Child Care Financial Assistance billing, which currently occurs after services are provided, resulting in a two month lag in reporting for a given service month. Caseload numbers are subject to change.

EEC-Licensed and -Funded Programs Participating in CCFA



Source: LEAD via ECISDWH. The graph above includes EEC-licensed FFC & center based programs as well as EEC-funded public/private schools. It does not include informal child care providers. Participation in CCFA is defined as having programs with an active voucher agreement or contract to serve children with CCFA.

Family Access

As of October 2025, 6,324 licensed early education and care programs (69% of all licensed programs) accept children receiving CCFA.

- **Commonwealth Cares for Children:** Originally designed to keep programs open and accessible to families during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, C3 has helped both the number of licensed programs and the state's licensed capacity rebound and now exceed pre-pandemic levels.
- **Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative:** The goal of CPPI is to build a system of high-quality and accessible preschool opportunities in Gateway communities, and other high-need and rural districts, that provide affordable access to all and ensures consistency and alignment of programming, including the provision of special education services, across the mixed-delivery system. In FY25, CPPI supported 30 communities to provide pre-K to over 3,200 children.
- **Coordinated Family and Community Engagement:** CFCE programs are locally based programs in the community that provide child development services and resources to families with young children. EEC currently supports 80 CFCE programs, which had touchpoints with over 260,000 children in over 200,000 families in FY25.
- **Family Portal:** Through Governor Healey's FutureTech Act, EEC is developing a new family portal and case management system for CCFA. This modern, mobile-friendly, accessible, and multilingual portal is designed to deliver a more dignified and user-centered experience and will replace and consolidate multiple outdated systems and manual processes into one streamlined digital solution. For the first time, families will be able to apply directly to the statewide waitlist and complete a streamlined CCFA application in one place, giving them clearer, faster, and easier access to CCFA.
- **Family Advisory Council:** EEC is launching a Family Advisory Council to ensure families are heard in shaping our work, and engaging them directly to improve CCFA digital services, policies, and procedures.

Recent Milestones

- **Created EEC's first Family Access and Engagement Division:** In 2022, EEC launched a new Family Access and Engagement team, expanding internal capacity to build programs, policies, and systems that address family needs and preferences, and break down barriers to access.
- **Made C3 Program Permanent:** Massachusetts made the C3 program permanent in FY25, subject to appropriation.
- **Increased CCFA Funding:** State funding for CCFA has increased by 58% since 2022 ($686.6 million in FY22 compared to $1.087 billion in FY26).
- **Shifted to Cost of Care Reimbursement Rate Setting for CCFA:** In 2024, Massachusetts became the sixth state approved by the federal government to use the cost of providing care when setting CCFA provider reimbursement rates, making significant progress in addressing geographic and age-based inequities in rate levels, and

shifting the focus from setting CCFA rates based on the prices charged to private-pay families to covering the cost of providing care.

- **Incentivized Participation in CCFA:** In the FY25 budget, the Legislature established a statutory requirement that all programs receiving C3 funds demonstrate a willingness to enroll children receiving CCFA. This new policy was implemented in fall 2025.
- **Simplified CCFA Processes:** In 2023, through approval from the Board of Early Education and Care, EEC significantly updated CCFA regulations and policies to simplify the application process, reduce paperwork for families and programs, and better support homeless families, families with disabilities, and families facing domestic violence.
- **Re-Procured CCFA Contracts:** In 2024, EEC re-procured the state's CCFA contracts with child care providers for the first time in 15 years, prioritizing statewide seats for infants and toddlers and in areas where demand exceeds supply, as well as for families with the most needs.
- **Launched Staff CCFA Pilot:** In January 2023, EEC launched a pilot to provide priority access to CCFA for income-eligible staff working in licensed or funded early education and care programs. In 2025, EEC added this to the state's CCFA regulations, making it a permanent policy.



Family Access

5-Year Goals To build on recent progress and continue strengthening the accessibility and affordability of early education and care programs over the next five years, EEC has identified the following goals and actions:

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
Key Actions, 2026-30	• Expand income eligibility for CCFA from 50% to 85% of SMI; use new family portal to identify and prioritize children <50% SMI • Make progress towards CCFA reimbursement rates covering the true cost of care • Leverage the family portal to reduce CCFA waitlist time and the burden of the application process	• Maintain and continue developing the C3 program to support operational costs at center-based and FCC programs • Maintain and continue developing the CPPI program, to support further expansion of universal pre-K • Regularly update CCFA contracts • Strengthen training, technical assistance, and supports for Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care	• Create a family guide to accessing child care • Make EEC's child care search more user-friendly • Prioritize language accessibility for family resources/systems • Continue development, rebranding, and promotion of Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) offerings • Continue to collaborate with CCR&Rs and Mass211 to ensure families have support navigating education and care options	• Launch family portal to streamline and modernize the CCFA enrollment process for families • Continue to modernize the CCFA system, including updates to improve language accessibility and mobile compatibility • Organize CCFA eligibility processing to ensure consistent experiences for families • Support CCR&Rs to align procedures across regions
Goals	EEC systems are positioned to maximize the use of available funding to make early education and care more affordable for more families.	Families will have a greater variety of early education and care options available in their communities that offer a wide range of services.	Families will be able to access information about early education and care programs and community resources, so they can find and enroll in the care they need.	Families who need assistance paying for child care will have centralized access to the information they need to learn about and easily apply for financial assistance.

Family Access

Outcomes/Measures

Currently, EEC tracks and shares the following **Family Access** metrics on its KPI Dashboard:

- The number and percentage of Massachusetts children participating in formal early education and care programs, over time
- The number and percentage of Massachusetts children who are eligible for CCFA who receive it
- The number of children receiving CCFA, by CCFA type, region, and age group
- The number and percentage of EEC licensed and funded programs participating in CCFA, over time

In addition to tracking and sharing the above metrics, over the next five years EEC will also focus on tracking progress towards the following outcomes to measure progress on its **Family Access** goals and actions:

- Increase in the number and capacity of Massachusetts child care programs
- Increase in the number and percentage of children that live in a locality where there is sufficient supply of child care seats
- Decrease in the length of time from CCFA referral and eligibility determination to enrollment and placement
- Increase in child care search website traffic
- Decrease in the average family copay as a percentage of household income
- Increase in the percentage of eligible low-, moderate-, and middle-income families accessing CCFA
- Positive feedback from families about their experience using the EEC child care search page and working with CCR&Rs
- Increase in multilingual usage of the family portal and CCR&R services



Program Stability

Programs licensed or funded by EEC are operationally stable and financially sustainable.

About

EEC is committed to improving operational and financial support for child care and OST programs, so that more programs can open and stay open.

Even before the pandemic, the early education and care system was fragile, with programs long struggling to balance affordability for families with providing sufficient wages for staff and investing in critical quality support. High operating costs impact providers' ability to run sustainable businesses, attract and retain talent, and keep tuition costs low. They face challenges paying living wages and offering competitive benefits, which affects staff retention and puts them at risk for closures due to staffing shortages, forcing them to rely heavily on family tuition. Directors also experience burnout from juggling multiple operational and administrative responsibilities, and challenges in hiring and maintaining staff.

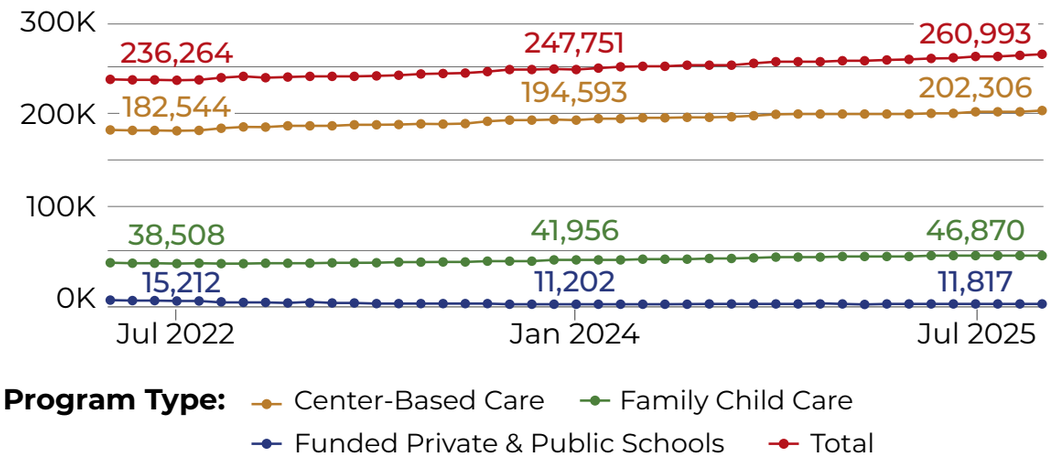
State funding programs such as C3 and recent increases in CCFA rates have been critical in stabilizing finances for providers, helping cover fixed expenses and support workforce compensation. For child care providers across the state, the C3 grants have been crucial to their ability to remain

open and maintain licensed capacity; in fact, the number of licensed and funded programs in Massachusetts has grown by 18% since 2022, and the number of newly opened programs has outpaced program closures over time, resulting in net growth. As of October 2025, EEC licensed and funded programs have the capacity to serve over 263,000 children, more than 26,000 more than in 2022.

Current Programs and Initiatives

- **Commonwealth Cares for Children:** In FY25, over 8,000 programs (90% of center-based programs, 90% of FCC programs, and 95% of programs that participate in CCFA) received C3 funds to support their day-to-day operational costs, including compensation and additional workforce and quality investments that enable programs to better recruit and retain their staff while mitigating increased costs for families.
- **Capital Grants:** EEC administers several capital grant programs to support renovations and construction projects to expand capacity and improve the quality and accessibility of learning environments for children. Since 2013, the capital grant program has awarded over $65 million to help fund over 125 projects, including building classrooms and bathrooms, roof replacement, outdoor sensory paths, and new keycard security systems.

Aggregate Licensed and Funded Capacity by Program Type



Source: LEAD via ECISDWH. Capacity data reported here refers to the licensed capacity of programs. Some programs may not be able to serve their full licensed capacity.

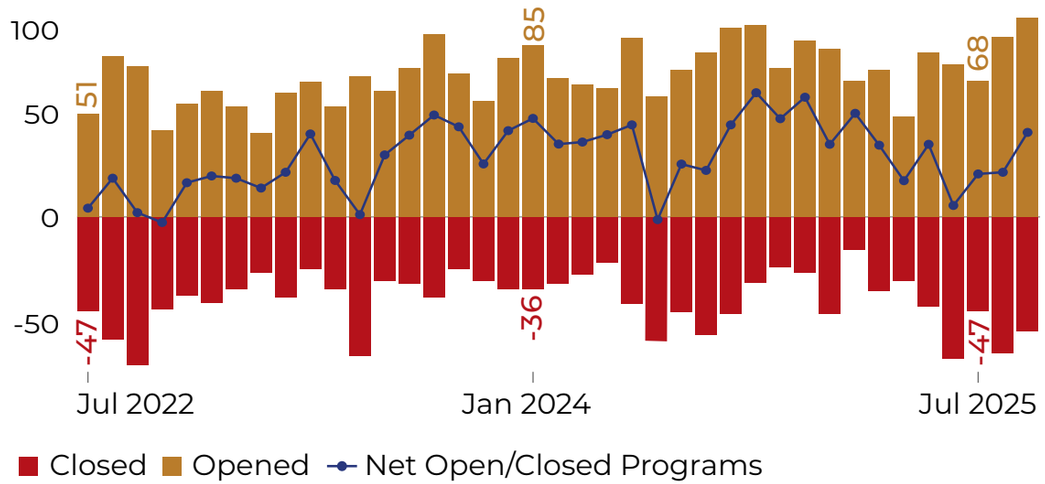
Recent Milestones

- **Established C3 program, and made it permanent in FY25:** In 2021, Massachusetts created the C3 program with federal stabilization grant funds. Massachusetts maintained funding after federal funding ended and made it permanent in FY25, subject to appropriation.
- **Shifted to Cost of Care Reimbursement Rates for CCFA:** In 2024, Massachusetts became the sixth state approved by the federal government to use the cost of providing care when setting CCFA

provider reimbursement rates, making significant progress in addressing geographic and age-based inequities in rate levels, and shifting the focus from setting CCFA rates based on the prices charged to private-pay families to covering the cost of providing care.

- **Created FCC Capital Grant Program:** In 2024, EEC worked with MassDevelopment, within the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), to establish the first dedicated FCC Capital grant program, using $7.5 million from the FY24 budget. These grants have helped FCC providers improve their spaces and build program capacity, supporting their unique capital needs as small businesses.

Number of Newly Opened and Closed Licensed and Funded Programs



Source: LEAD via ECISDWH.

- **Expanded Center-Based Early Education and Out-of-School Time Capital Grants Program:** In 2024, EEC expanded capital funding to for-profit child-care centers and OST Programs that served at least 50% of children who receive CCFA. The Administration's FY26-30 Capital Investment Plan increased these grants to $11.3 million a year. In coordination with the Governor's Office of Climate Innovation and Resilience, EEC prioritized projects that focused on clean energy and decarbonization.
- **Launched $2.5 million Employer Child Care Innovation Fund:** In FY26, in collaboration with EOLWD, and EOED, and with input from the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education and the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, EEC is launching this pilot program to explore how employers can directly contribute to their employees' early education and care needs by directly or indirectly reducing out-of-pocket costs.
- **Created Business Front Door:** In July 2025, EOED launched the Business Front Door, a centralized portal designed to help businesses of all sizes access state resources more easily. EEC was identified as a priority sector and has a trained navigator to support providers with financing, workforce assistance, and general business guidance.

Program Stability

5-Year Goals To build on recent progress and continue strengthening the stability of early education and care programs over the next five years, EEC has identified the following goals and actions:

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Key Actions, 2026-30	• Continue and expand business and administration training, including through the Business Front Door • Support new and aspiring FCC providers to launch programs and stay in business • Explore potential support of shared services • Launch new Learning Management System (LMS) • Provide support and mentoring for emerging program leaders and directors	• Maintain and continue developing the C3 program • Continue development and implementation of capital grant strategy to support programs' facility needs • Shift from reimbursement process to prospective payments for providers, providing funding based on enrollment before expenses are incurred • Pursue private/public partnerships to deepen financial support of programs beyond available public resources	• Build out and refine cost and revenue models, and use them to adjust EEC funding for programs and systems • Create funding map and financing strategy that reflects how different funding streams come together to support the sector
Goals	Program directors and administrators will have access to trainings and resources that empower them to succeed as small businesses, supporting their effective management of operations and business administration.	Programs will have access to predictable funding opportunities that help support priority investment areas, including infrastructure and staffing.	EEC will further analyze how current funding streams work together to support program operations and identify gaps to inform future funding opportunities.

Program Stability

Outcomes/Measures

Currently, EEC tracks and shares the following **Program Stability** metrics on its KPI Dashboard:

- The capacity of EEC licensed and funded programs
- The number of EEC licensed and funded programs
- The number of EEC licensed and funded programs that have opened and closed, by month
- The number of EEC licensed Residential and Placement programs
- The aggregate licensed capacity of Residential programs

In addition to tracking and sharing the above metrics, over the next five years EEC will also focus on tracking progress towards the following outcomes to measure progress on its **Program Stability** goals and actions:

- Increase in the participation rate in EEC's business and operational trainings for programs
- Decrease in number of programs closing (including the number of programs closing within the first year of opening and within the first three years of opening)
- Increase in the average amount of time licensed programs stay open
- Increase in the number of programs using EEC funding, including capital grants, to support priority investment areas
- Increase in how much of the true cost of care is covered by CCFA, C3, and other public revenue over time





Workforce Supports

A diverse field of educators, leaders, and program staff is competitively compensated and supported by clear professional pathways that promote quality, retention, and advancement.

About

Providers in Massachusetts cite a need for better compensation and benefits, faster background record check processes, and increased access to career advancement opportunities through education and training, to improve recruitment and retention of early education and care staff.

The early education and care workforce is one of the lowest-paid occupations in the United States. Research consistently finds that low wages, lack of benefits, and limited opportunities for professional support and advancement are key contributors to turnover and workforce shortages in the sector. While average hourly wages in Massachusetts have made substantial gains in recent years — increasing by 21% for center-based early education teachers in the last three years alone (from $19.85 in 2022 to $24.02 in 2025) — they are still too low.

EEC conducts rigorous and thorough Background Record Checks (BRC) of staff in accordance with state and federal laws to ensure the safety of

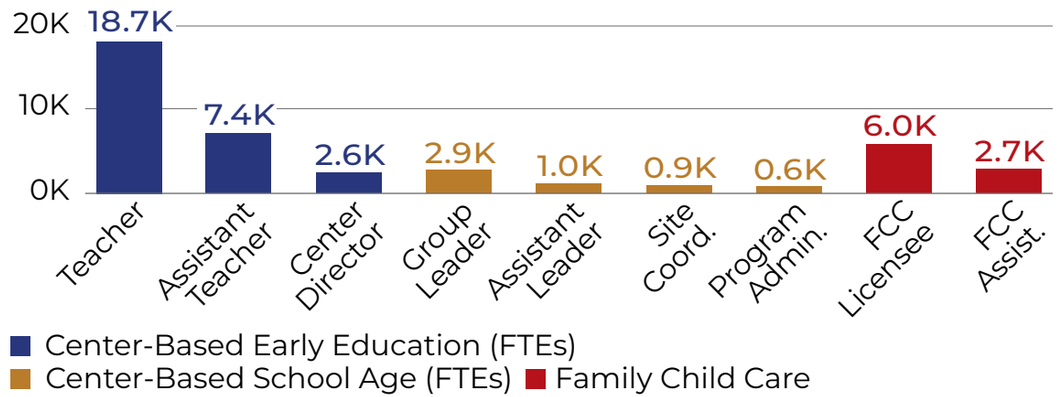
children in early education, residential, and OST programs In recent years, EEC has been focused on modernizing and improving the BRC process, including moving BRCs into a new, more modern technology system and expanding the capacity of the unit, work that will continue over the next five years

To support staff career advancement opportunities, EEC is expanding financial support for staff to access higher education and is developing a robust set of competency-driven credential requirements supported by high-quality and flexible professional learning pathways to build the professional skills of the field This new credential will map career pathways that define opportunities for advancement from entry level to high level leadership roles, recognizing the expertise that develops through professional learning and practice, and provide opportunities for ongoing professional development through both higher education and job-embedded practice

Current Programs and Initiatives

- **Developing New EEC Credentials:** EEC's new credentialing system will attract and retain educators, provide them with clear pathways to advancement, and support ongoing professional learning across the field
- **Developing Standardized Early Childhood Education Certificate:** In collaboration with all Massachusetts community colleges, EEC is developing a 16-credit foundational certificate that will form the backbone of the higher education pathway for educators early in their career and will be aligned to promote future degree attainment and transfer across the state for advanced degrees
- **Early Childhood Educator Scholarship:** Since 2006, EEC and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) have been collaboratively administering this Early Childhood Educator (ECE) scholarship program for educators in the early education and care sector
- **Career Pathways Program:** This partnership with the state's 15 community colleges and Urban College provides support to current

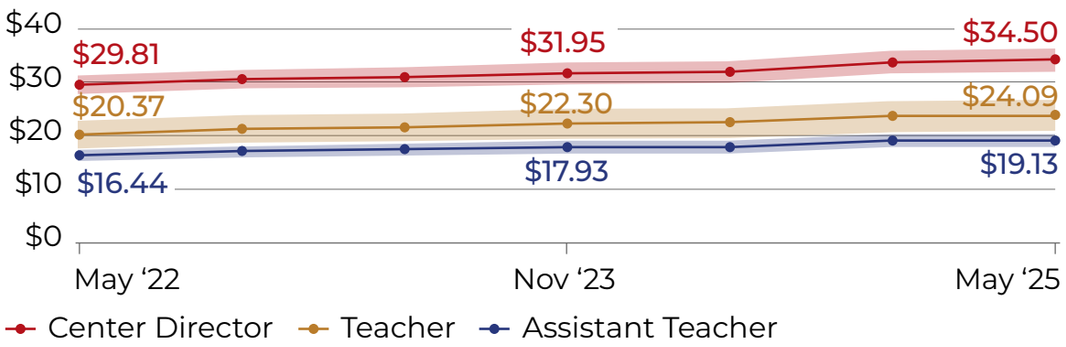
Estimated Number of Educators Systemwide Across C3 Participating Programs



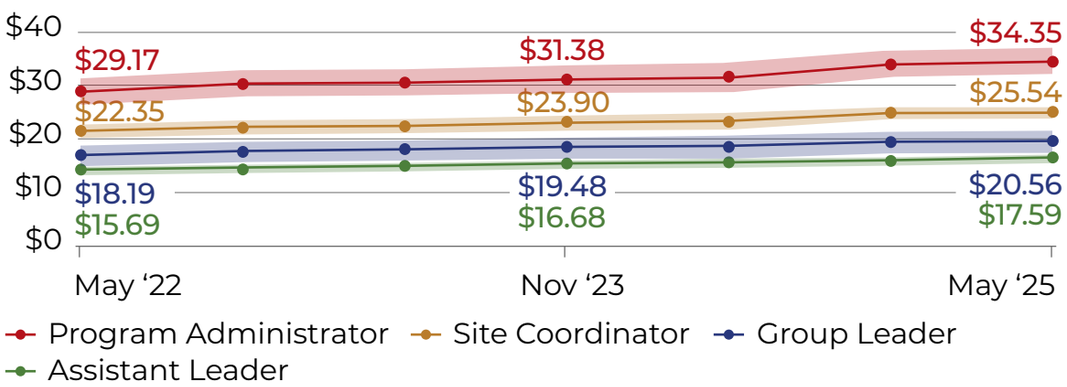
Source: The FCC Licensee data are from LEAD. The remaining data are from each program's latest C3 application and include all educators reported by programs applying for C3 funds in the last year. Over the past year, this represents 7,888 programs or approximately 87% of all licensed and funded programs across the Commonwealth. FTE is number of full time equivalent educators reported by a program.

Average Hourly Wages for Staff in Center-Based Programs Receiving C3 Funding

Center-based Early Education Programs



Center-based School Age Programs



Source: C3 application data. Data on hourly wages include all full- and part-time employees. Upper and lower hourly wages are the average highest and lowest reported hourly wages, respectively, across programs by role in a given month's C3 applications.

and aspiring educators interested in pursuing an early childhood certificate or degree. Supports include FAFSA completion, access and navigation of the MassEducate/MassReconnect funding opportunities, the DHE ECE scholarship, mentoring, career counseling, and academic advising.

- **Developing New Learning Management System:** EEC is developing a new online LMS platform to host asynchronous trainings and professional development opportunities for staff in the early education and care field. This new LMS will have a modern, intuitive design, be fully mobile-responsive, and offer clear, structured learning paths to support career progression, credentials, and role-based training, including a growing library of robust self-paced trainings in multiple languages.
- **Developing Educator Portal:** EEC's new educator portal will provide a single "front door" for those working in or affiliated with early education and care organizations to create a registry profile for interacting with EEC, apply for, advance, or renew a credential, and access the LMS.
- **Developing Model Salary Scale:** In response to legislative language, EEC is working with a team at American Institutes of Research (AIR) to develop a salary scale model for the early education and care field aligned with public school salary scales, to inform and support ongoing conversations around improving compensation in the field.

Workforce Support

Recent Milestones

- **Expanded Access to ECE Scholarship:** In 2024-25, EEC and DHE simplified the application process, expanded eligibility (including the addition of eligibility for residential program staff), increased funding, and enhanced program promotion. As of September 2025, almost 600 students have been approved for the scholarship in FY26, for a total of $5 million.
- **Created Early Childhood Educator Student Loan Repayment Program:** In 2025, the Legislature established the Early Childhood Educator Student Loan Repayment program, to provide up to $7,500 in loan forgiveness per year to staff working in EEC licensed or funded programs. Administered by DHE, this program was funded at $7.5 million in FY25 and will launch in 2026.
- **Expanded Funding for Apprenticeship Programs:** In 2024, EOLWD's Division of Apprentice Standards (DAS) awarded more than $1.5 million to registered apprenticeship programs focused on developing the early education and care workforce. To support these efforts, EEC awarded an additional $1.4 million to support existing early childhood apprenticeship programs and fund regional intermediaries for center-based and FCC programs. These intermediaries support workforce development pathways by recruiting apprentices, connecting them to employers, helping manage pathways and requirements, and providing participating child care program employers with funding to cover costs for mentor stipends and wages for apprentices. In fall 2025, EOLWD was awarded more than $6 million from the U.S. Department of Labor to support Registered Apprenticeship and early childhood educator apprenticeships, including a $5 million competitive grant to support 275 early childhood educator apprenticeships, the largest grant the apprenticeship program has received. As of March 2025, EEC and DAS have supported the enrollment of over 350 apprentices over the lifetime of eight apprenticeship programs. Additional apprentice cohorts, and new apprenticeship programs (including those for FCCs) are launching in FY26.
- **Launched MassEducate:** In 2024, the Healey-Driscoll Administration launched one of the most accessible, equitable and comprehensive free community college programs in the country for part- and full-time students, regardless of income, which will further contribute to defraying the costs of education for current and future early education and care educators. This builds on Governor Healey's MassReconnect program, which provides free community college to students 25 and older, and their expansion of MassGrant Plus, which enables Pell grant-eligible students (those making up to $85,000 a year) to go tuition- and fee-free at four-year colleges and universities and reducing out-of-pocket expenses by up to half for middle-income students (those making $85,000 - $100,000 a year).

Workforce Support

5-Year Goals To build on recent progress and continue strengthening the compensation, retention, and quality of the early education and care workforce over the next five years, EEC has identified the following goals and actions:

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
Key Actions, 2026-30	• Upgrade the background check unit's capacity (staffing, training, and resources) • Improve the efficiency of background check processes to decrease wait times • Improve external communications about background check processes to help programs and applicants navigate and understand the process	• Roll out new educator credentials and aligned regulations • Launch and regularly update the new educator portal, to facilitate the administration of the new credentialing system • Strengthen and expand Professional Development Pathways and Apprenticeship Models • Create salary scale model to inform further assessment of supports needed for compensation and track progress towards wage targets • Expand access to and knowledge about affordable professional development opportunities for all educators • Create pipelines of qualified candidates for residential and placement programs • Help residential programs create clear advancement tracks • Collaborate with partner agencies to identify and implement workforce development initiatives that enhance recruitment, training, and retention of staff in residential programs	• Develop and implement new LMS • Establish multiple navigation supports across settings (e.g., PDCs, community colleges, EEC staff) • Help potential educators understand the early career education pathways and entry points available to them
Goals	Educators, direct care staff, and providers will have a transparent, efficient, and predictable background check experience.	Educators of all levels will have access to multiple defined pathways to enter the field, advance in their careers, and demonstrate qualifications for increased compensation that reflect what programs seek.	Educators, direct care staff, and providers will have convenient, centralized access to the information and support they need to develop their skills and advance professionally.

Outcomes/Measures

Currently, EEC tracks and shares the following **Workforce Supports** metrics on its KPI Dashboard:

- Estimated number of educators statewide in programs receiving C3 funding, by role and program type
- Average hourly wages for center-based programs receiving C3 funding

In addition to tracking and sharing the above metrics, over the next five years EEC will also focus on tracking progress towards the following outcomes to measure progress on its **Workforce Supports** goals and actions:

- Decrease in educator turnover rates
- Improvements in educators' access to benefits and compensation/ earnings compared to salary scale model
- Increase in the number of educators (total and by role) advancing through the new credential system
- Increase in the number of educators reached by EEC-funded supports (e.g., Professional Development Centers, Early Childhood Support Organizations, Career Pathways, ECE Scholarship, Professional Pathways)
- High/increasing user satisfaction surveys with the educator portal
- Decrease in time from BRC submission to completion





Program Quality

Programs licensed or funded by EEC support children's health and safety and provide high-quality environments that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and support children's learning and development in partnership with families.

About

High-quality early education and care programs work with families to support children's unique needs, provide safe opportunities for children to learn, grow, and explore, and develop the foundation for lifelong learning and curiosity. At EEC, three primary levers support and drive program quality: 1) licensing regulations around health and safety; 2) investments in workforce development, training, and support; and 3) support for program leaders around ongoing continuous quality improvement and professional learning.

For years, Massachusetts's strong licensing requirements have succeeded in creating an ecosystem where many of its licensed programs meet robust quality standards — in fact, they meet the quality standards of the U.S. military child care program, which is widely acknowledged to have some of the highest quality standards in the nation. However, many of these regulations are out of date, and in need of modernization, a process

which EEC began in 2024 and will continue for the next several years, across all program types.

Educators' professional skills drive their ability to create high-quality learning and care environments. EEC staff provide a significant amount of technical assistance to child care, OST, and residential program staff and leadership, and in recent years has grown its investment in regional staff to provide these supports, including sustaining a regional quality team, adding behavioral health specialists, and collaborating with external partners, including regional Professional Development Centers (PDCs), the Statewide Professional Development Academy (the Academy), Early Childhood Support Organizations (ECSOs), Early Childhood Mental Health Grantees (ECMH), and FCC Systems. The new educator credential will also set standards for educator skills to support program quality and be aligned with new professional learning opportunities.

EEC also understands that educator effectiveness relies on the professional learning opportunities and supports programs provide for their staff. EEC has focused particular attention on ensuring that the new credential supports the skills that educational leadership needs to effectively manage professional learning, utilizing ongoing Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) as a framework for planning. EEC will help programs utilize ongoing CQI cycles to build professional learning and support at the program level, a process that is replacing the former Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) as an approach to improving the quality of all early education and care programs.

Current initiatives are being used to pilot a range of quality supports from EEC and other contracted professional learning entities, including embedding expectations for staffing and CQI training in CCFA contracts, and integrating quality supports into grants that support collaborations between districts and community-based providers to expand preschool and improve language and literacy instruction.

Current Programs and Initiatives

- **Updating EEC Licensing Regulations:** EEC is in the process of reviewing and updating licensing regulations, corresponding policies and procedures, and enforcement regulations for residential and placement programs, FCC programs, and center-based programs (child care and OST). This is a long-term project that will affect all licensed programs, establishing updated standards for health, safety, staffing, and child development to support improved program quality across the state. EEC has made significant progress in the last year updating its residential regulations, which haven't been comprehensively revised since 1995. The agency is centering significant engagement into their review and revision process, through surveys, provider working groups, discussions with sister agencies, program visits, and conversations with trade and advocacy groups. Through this engagement, the agency identified three primary areas of reform: 1) modernizing language, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing alignment with sister agencies; 2) incorporating a trauma-informed lens, permanency, and best practices to better support children and staff; and 3) enhancing clarity to promote compliance,

transparency, and accountability. These regulations are scheduled to be promulgated and go into effect in 2026, when the agency will shift its focus to FCC regulations.

- **Aligning New EEC Credentials with Program Quality Expectations:** EEC's new credentialing system will align the expectations for educators at different levels of expertise with clear program quality expectations.
- **Supporting Regional PDCs and the Academy:** EEC funds these centers, which provide a robust infrastructure of professional development and coaching across the state. In FY25, PDCs and the Academy offered 467 trainings, 50% of which were offered in languages other than English, reaching over 9,000 early education and care staff, and delivered over 13,000 hours of coaching. Upcoming offerings will include the management of ongoing CQI and supporting credential advancement.
- **Supporting ECSOs and FCC Systems:** EEC funds these organizations, which provide intensive coaching and training to educational leaders in managing and investing in the ongoing professional learning of their staff. In FY25, ECSOs reached 72 program leaders and 313 classrooms.
- **Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative:** CPPI grants support collaboration between districts and with private early education programs to build high-quality preschool programs through investments in curriculum, professional development, and job-embedded supports for educators.
- **Literacy Launch - Reading Success from Age 3 through Grade 3:** Governor Healey established this initiative in 2024 as a multi-year, cross-secretariat initiative to provide Massachusetts preschool programs with access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction through literacy materials, technical support, coaching, and professional development for educators. Programming includes Partnership for Reading Success in Massachusetts (PRISM) grants and Literacy Institutes. In 2025, 53 school districts and collaboratives received $12.9 million in PRISM I, II, and III grants.
- **Investing in Trauma-Informed Care:** Through funding in the FY25 budget and a new partnership with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA)'s Center on Trauma and Child Wellbeing, EEC is increasing investment in early educators' training in trauma-informed care.
- **Early Childhood Mental Health Grant:** The ECMH grant program supports organizations to provide direct consultation and training to programs in support of best practices around working with children presenting with a range of mental health needs and behaviors.
- **Developing Birth-to-College Mental Health Framework:** In FY25, the Healey-Driscoll Administration secured $5 million to develop a Birth-to-College Mental Health Framework. EEC is working on this framework in collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education.

Program Quality

Recent Milestones

- **Increased Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services Grants:** The Healey-Driscoll Administration increased these grants, used to train providers and improve program processes to promote the developmental, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being of infants and young children, from $3.5 million in FY23 to $5 million in FY26.
- **Launched the Strategies for Trauma Responsive Early Educator Training (STREET) Initiative:** In 2025, EEC collaborated with the OCA to develop and implement the STREET Initiative. This initiative focused on training and technical assistance on trauma, equity, and resilience for adults working with children in EEC licensed programs and EEC staff who support them, including licensors and investigators, behavioral health specialists, and professional development specialists.
- **Re-Procured CCFA Contracts with Quality Criteria:** In 2024, EEC re-procured the state's CCFA contracts with child care providers for the first time in 15 years, instituting staffing expectations for programs and staff, setting training and professional development criteria, and introducing Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and a collaborative approach to monitor ongoing performance, program effectiveness, and compliance with core service requirements.
- **Developed Curriculum Rubric:** In 2025, EEC worked with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to create a curriculum rubric, which the agency will use to examine how curriculums address EEC's criteria for quality.



Program Quality

5-Year Goals To build on recent progress and continue increasing the number of quality early education and care programs over the next five years, EEC has identified the following goals and actions:

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
Key Actions, 2026-30	• Complete and implement new licensing regulations for residential, FCC, center-based, and OST programs • Strengthen statewide and regional support systems to provide technical assistance and training to all programs on regulation and policy implementation, including external engagement during regulation updating process	• Provide technical assistance, coaching, training, and mentoring opportunities for staff and educational leadership, in collaboration with higher education and other partners, to strengthen staff skills • Develop and implement new LMS • Continue development and implementation of Literacy Launch Institutes and PRISM grants • Implement child care educator and education leadership credentials • Pilot support systems within funding initiatives, identify most effective support systems, and build out to system-wide participation		• Review EEC funding to identify opportunities to better target investments in quality • Establish a data-driven framework to track funding impact
Goals	Programs will have sufficient time and support to meet updated state standards for safety, responsive and appropriate practice, and partnerships with families.	Educators, direct care workers, program leadership, and FCC system staff will have access to and participate in training and technical assistance to support ongoing skill development.	Program leadership and FCC system staff will be supported in planning and organizing program-level professional learning and applying on-the-job supports towards ongoing continuous quality improvement.	EEC will manage funding strategically to support program investments in areas that drive quality, such as total compensation, professional development, curriculum, and comprehensive services.

Outcomes/Measures

EEC does not yet track agency-wide **Program Quality** metrics on its KPI Dashboard.

Over the next five years EEC will build the capacity to measure and track progress towards the following outcomes to measure progress on its **Program Quality** goals and actions:

- Increase in the number of programs reached by EEC-funded program supports (e.g., Professional Development Centers, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Early Childhood Support Organizations, Pyramid Model coaching, FCC Systems)
- Improvement/positive results on key program health and safety metrics
- Increase in the number of technical assistance, coaching, and training sessions provided and participation rates
- Improvement/positive results on standardized program quality observation metrics
- Increase in the number of programs using high-quality curriculum

Program Quality

EEC Quality Initiatives in FY2025

Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) grants reached
3,249 CHILDREN AND 217 CLASSROOMS.

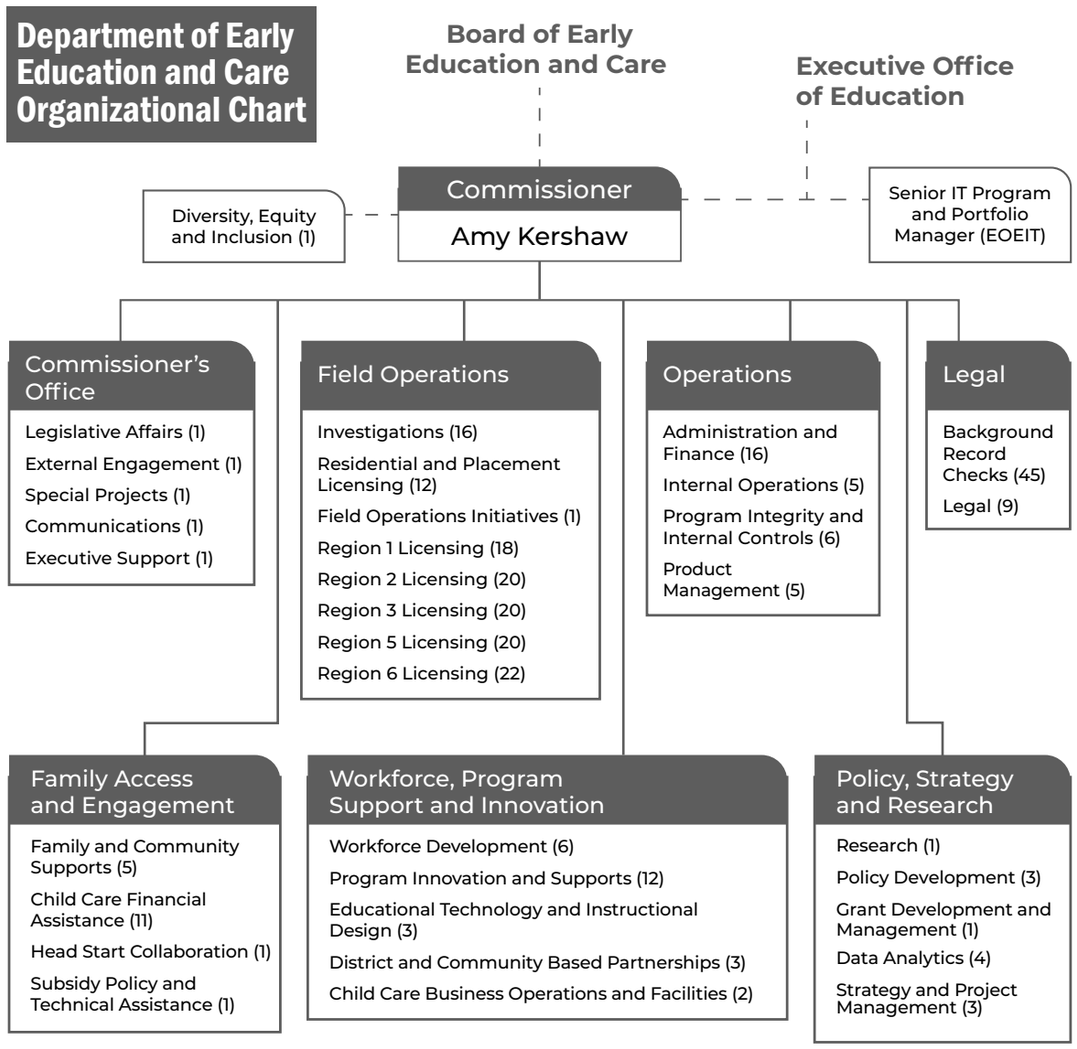
385 programs received
5,204 HOURS
of Early Childhood Mental Health consultation services.

Early Childhood Support Organizations (ECSOs) reached
72 PROGRAM LEADERS AND 313 CLASSROOMS.

15 DISTRICTS
received Partnership for Reading Success in Massachusetts (PRISM) I grants.

9,709 EDUCATORS AND STAFF
registered for 467 trainings offered by Professional Development Centers and the Academy.

20,253 CHILDREN
were served in contracted seats through the agency's November 2024 re-procurement with increased quality expectations.



Agency Infrastructure

EEC has sufficient internal capacity, organizational structures, and diverse perspectives and expertise to carry out its mission and strategic objectives

About

Growing investment and participation in the early education and care sector requires expanded state system infrastructure and staffing to support the oversight and implementation of grants, policies, regulations, research activities, and supports for families and programs.

EEC has grown significantly in the last few years, with a current workforce of 288 staff spread across one central and five regional offices. This recent growth included the creation of three new teams at EEC: Family Access and Engagement; Product; Policy, Research, and Data Analytics (now called Policy, Strategy, and Research). Each has strengthened EEC's capacity to support stakeholders, be responsive to the field, improve the user experience in technology systems, and center data in its decision-making.

This increased staff capacity requires a parallel growth in the infrastructure to support the agency's growing work and responsibilities, including knowledge management, communications, technology, culture building, and professional development, which EEC has and will continue to prioritize

in the years ahead. Families, educators, and providers describe the need to continue reducing administrative burdens, modernize systems, and improve communication for families, programs, and educators interacting with EEC. This requires a continued focus on internal staff development and support systems, user-centered design, family and provider input, and clear and ongoing communications with all parts of the field.

Engaging and representing a range of perspectives is also key to supporting the agency's work. Internally, EEC's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Council is working to create an environment where staff feel included and valued and the agency is recruiting staff with diverse perspectives and experiences in the field to inform its work. Externally, EEC is developing and expanding authentic opportunities for engagement with families, providers, staff, community advocates, policymakers, and legislators to expand the range of voices it considers and includes in its decision-making and ensure its policies and initiatives are more reflective of what the field wants and needs.

Current Programs and Initiatives

- **EEC Key Performance Indicator Dashboard:** EEC regularly updates this public data dashboard, tracking the progress of metrics aligned to EEC's Strategic Objectives and priorities, and increasing transparency and public access to metrics of importance.
- **Promoting Research and Data-Driven Decision-Making:** EEC is building internal research and data capacity to 1) better support external research partnerships and help translate findings into action, and 2) engage internal program teams to apply research and data principles and promote continuous learning and improvement.
- **Improving Research and Data Transparency:** In addition to the KPI Dashboard, EEC has created opportunities for internal and external stakeholders to engage with and learn from EEC research and data. This includes presentations to EEC's Board and advisory councils about ongoing research, as well as publishing data briefs on key programs at EEC and building out EEC's research and data website to include overviews and summaries of key research initiatives.
- **Developing Family Portal:** Through Governor Healey's FutureTech Act, EEC is developing a new family portal and case management system for the CCFA programs, building a more modern, mobile-friendly, accessible, multilingual, and dignified technology system.
- **Developing Educator Portal:** EEC is currently building a new educator portal, to facilitate the administration of the new credentialing system.
- **External Engagement:** EEC hosts regular opportunities for stakeholders in the field (educators, providers, families, advocates) to learn about EEC's work and share their input to inform policies and practices. These opportunities include:
  - Legislatively created oversight groups, including the Data Advisory Commission on Early Education and Care, Early Education and Care Workforce Council, and Advisory Council on Early Education and Care

  - Groups of providers, advocates, and families who help EEC identify challenges in the field and discuss potential solutions, including focus groups and working groups (Residential & Placement, Workforce, Policy, CCFA)
  - Open engagements to share policies or new information, including webinars, office hours, trainings, and community listening sessions

- **Developing New Family Advisory Council:** EEC is creating its first formal Family Advisory Council to elevate family and caregiver voices to inform EEC's policies and programs, promote family engagement in decision-making, inform state-level resource allocation, and strengthen partnerships between families, providers, and state agencies.
- **Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force:** The Task Force catalyzed a "whole-of-government" approach to early education and child care, resulting in new collaborations, expertise, and resource-sharing to augment EEC's capacity and address key challenges in the sector.

Recent Milestones

- **Created Family Access and Engagement Division:** In 2022, EEC created the Family Access and Engagement team to improve families' access to and experience in child care programs and resources, including CCFA, CFCEs, and other community-based programs.
- **Created the Policy, Research, and Data Analytics Division:** In 2022, EEC expanded its data and research capacity through the launch of its Policy, Research, and Data Analytics Division (now called the Policy, Strategy, and Research Division). This team leads efforts to collect, analyze, and apply research and data to improve policies, programs, and services.
- **Created Product Team:** In 2023, EEC created a Product team within the Operations Division to ensure that its technology systems are user-friendly, accessible, and responsive to the needs of families, educators, and providers.
- **Hired Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** In 2024, EEC hired its first Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, to support the agency in embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in all its work, internally and externally.
- **Hired Director of Residential and Placement Services:** In 2025, EEC hired its first Director of Residential and Placement Services, to oversee the health, safety, and well-being of children and youth in residential and placement care.
- **Launched Data Advisory Commission:** The Data Advisory Commission on Early Education and Care was enacted as part of the Legislature's FY25 state budget to make recommendations to improve the use of state, provider, and program-level data related to the cost, quality, and utilization of early education and care services.

Agency Infrastructure

- **Launched KPI Dashboard:** In 2024, EEC created the KPI Dashboard to share data publicly on key metrics concerning early education and care across the Commonwealth.
- **Published EEC Research Agenda:** In 2024, EEC developed a research agenda aligned with the agency's strategic priorities. The research agenda is designed to bring transparency to knowledge gaps and align researchers and other interested stakeholders behind some of the most pressing questions, efforts, and challenges facing the field, with the goal of promoting continuous learning and improvement within and outside of EEC.
- **Published EEC Data Briefs:** In 2025, EEC published three data briefs focused on C3, CPPI, and CCFA. These briefs provide an overview of existing programs and available data to bring greater awareness to EEC services and summarize learnings for internal and external stakeholders.
- **Retired Legacy Background Record Check System:** In 2025, EEC retired its aging BRC system, fully shifting to a new system (BRC Navigator) that is improving efficiency and data security, and enabling a faster, more user-friendly experience for applicants and staff.



Agency Infrastructure

5-Year Goals To build on recent progress and continue strengthening the agency's internal capacity over the next five years, EEC has identified the following goals and actions:

Key Actions, 2026-30

- Implement internal diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging programming
- Expand internal programming and supports around the staff life cycle/experience
- Develop and roll out internal EEC training/professional development unit
- Improve EEC staff access to information and procedure guides

- Identify analyses and supporting research needed to understand the landscape, inform policy decisions, evaluate program effectiveness, and track progress towards goals
- Identify additional data needs and streamline data collection to minimize burden and redundancy
- Improve data quality and modernize technology systems
- Expand public access to EEC data and analyses, including residential and placement program renewals, for external accountability.
- Build and use KPIs to track progress and engagement

- Launch new Family Advisory Council
- Continue to facilitate and utilize Family Advisory Council, Workforce Council, Advisory Council, Data Advisory Commission to share information and collect feedback
- Continue to develop and utilize EEC working groups (Residential & Placement, Workforce, Policy, CCFA) to deepen understanding of key challenges and needs
- Strengthen existing engagement channels and identify additional pathways for two-way engagement with community
- Improve cadence and clarity of digital communications for all stakeholders

- Build and maintain external portals (family, educator, Learning Management System)
- Build and maintain internal information-sharing systems (intranet)
- Update and improve existing technology/systems, and explore emerging technology

Goals

Goal 1

EEC staff will thrive as members of an inclusive EEC community, and have access to resources, information, and professional development opportunities to help them succeed in their roles, advance in their careers, and incorporate inclusion and equity in their work.

Goal 2

EEC will use evidence and data to inform ongoing decision making and examine the effectiveness of its programs, policies, and investments.

Goal 3

Providers, advocates, researchers, legislators, and families will be able to engage with data and research that helps them understand EEC's work and the early education field.

Goal 4

Programs, educators, and families will have meaningful opportunities to engage with EEC and share their ideas, to better center their voices in EEC's services, policies, and initiatives.

Goal 5

EEC will have updated technology systems that improve both the internal and external user experience, reduce administrative burden, and improve the agency's access to quality data.

Outcomes/Measures

EEC does not yet track any **Agency Infrastructure** metrics on its KPI Dashboard.

Over the next five years EEC will build the capacity to measure and track progress towards the following outcomes to measure progress on its **Agency Infrastructure** goals and actions:

- Positive/increasing results on staff climate survey around feelings of belonging, support, and development opportunities
- Positive staff survey results on the extent to which data/research is informing their ongoing decisions
- Increased usership on KPI dashboard
- High/increasing results on stakeholder satisfaction surveys for EEC's technological systems



Conclusion

EEC has made significant progress over the last few years to improve access, affordability, program stability, workforce supports, program quality, and its internal infrastructure — work the agency is eager to continue and deepen over the next five years, in collaboration with its partners and stakeholders across the state. With this Strategic Action Plan, the agency has a roadmap to:

- Continue increasing the capacity of Massachusetts child care programs, especially in areas that currently lack sufficient child care seats.
- Help more families find and enroll in affordable child care that meets their needs.
- Support new and existing early education and child care programs to open and remain open.
- Elevate the workforce with improved onboarding experiences, professional development, and career advancement opportunities.
- Implement updated licensing regulations to reflect modern best practices for health, safety, and family partnerships.
- Expand access to evidence, data, and research about the early education and care sector.
- Center the voices of programs, educators, and families in EEC's services, policies, and initiatives.

Through this work, EEC will continue towards its vision, where children, youth, and families reach their full potential now and in the future.



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Early Education and Care