



Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3)

DATA BRIEF • AUGUST 2026

Since 2021, Massachusetts' Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) Grants have provided funding to early education and care and out-of-school time (OST) programs for operational costs, including workforce investments, facility expenses, and quality improvements. This brief summarizes trends in child care supply, educator compensation, program spending, and family affordability using data collected through C3.

Data from C3 monthly applications and biannual surveys provide information about the early education and care landscape. Because most of the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)'s licensed and funded programs participate in C3, these data describe trends across much of the state's licensed system. This brief provides updated findings since the last C3 Brief in April 2025 and includes data from two C3 Surveys (May and August 2025), as well as relevant recent C3 applications.¹

Key Takeaways

- The number of programs participating in C3 has remained mostly steady, while the overall number of licensed and funded programs has grown.
- Workforce investments remain the majority of programs' C3 spending, accounting for 70% of expenditures in FY25.
- Participating programs reported using C3 funding to support tuition-related decisions, including delaying planned tuition increases and reducing tuition costs for families.

The State of C3 in FY26

In October 2025, after a period of public comment, the EEC Board approved the C3 formula for FY26. This formula considers a program's licensed capacity and the ages of children enrolled and applies an equity adjustment that incrementally increases funds for programs serving low-income families and/or communities with fewer resources for children.

Beyond the formula, EEC implemented two new C3 requirements in November 2025. First, center-based programs are expected to spend at least 50% of their C3 funding on workforce investments. Of note, a majority of programs would already meet this requirement based on their reported C3 funding allocations in FY25. Second, all programs must attest to their willingness to enroll a child with a child care financial assistance (CCFA) voucher if a family expresses interest in enrollment and a seat is available. In the November 2025 application, which incorporated this requirement for the first time, a very small number of programs (58) did not attest to their willingness to enroll CCFA children and therefore did not receive C3 funding this year (November 2025 – November 2026).

As of November 2025, 7,544 early education and out-of-school time (OST) programs participate in C3. This reflects an increase of 9% over three years. While the number of programs participating in C3 has increased over time, the portion of all EEC licensed and funded programs participating in C3 has recently decreased — as **Figure 1** shows, 90% of all programs received C3 funding in 2022 compared to 83% in 2025. This trend is largely attributable to recent growth in the overall number of EEC licensed and funded programs while C3 funding has remained level at \$475 million for the past two years.

¹The May 2025 survey focused on workforce and family access and received responses from 7,721 programs, representing 86% of all EEC licensed and funded programs statewide at that time. The August 2025 survey focused on programs' C3 spending and received responses from 7,749 programs, also representing 86% of all EEC licensed and funded programs.



Over Two-Thirds of C3 Funds are Spent on Workforce and Occupancy-Related Expenses

Workforce investments — including salaries, benefits, and other supports for educators — accounted for 70% of reported C3 expenditures in FY25, up from 68% in FY24 and 66% in FY23. Outside of workforce investments, the largest portion of funds (13%) go to occupancy-related expenses such as rent or mortgage payments.

Centers spend the largest share of their C3 funds on salaries (see **Figure 2**), while family child care providers (FCCs) allocate the largest portion of their C3 funds to rent (see **Figure 3**). FCC providers are often self-employed with minimal staff, and therefore compared to center-based programs, often report allocating a larger share of C3 funding to non-personnel business expenses than to salaries and benefits.

FIGURE 1: EEC Licensed and Funded Program Participation in C3 Over Time

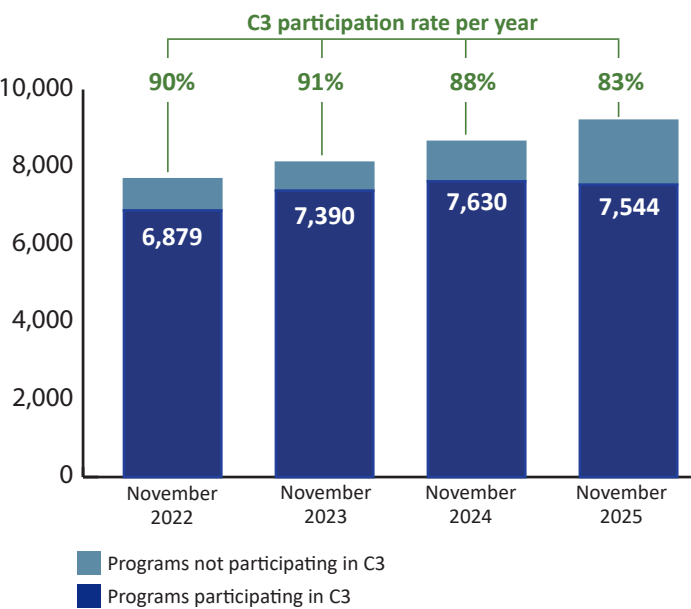


FIGURE 2: FY25 Allocation of C3 Funds by Centers

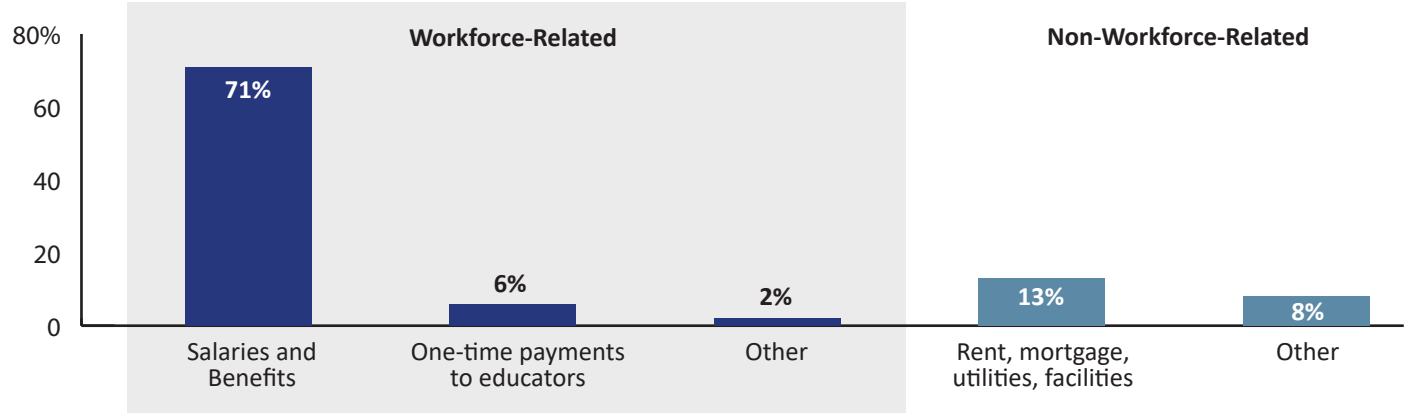
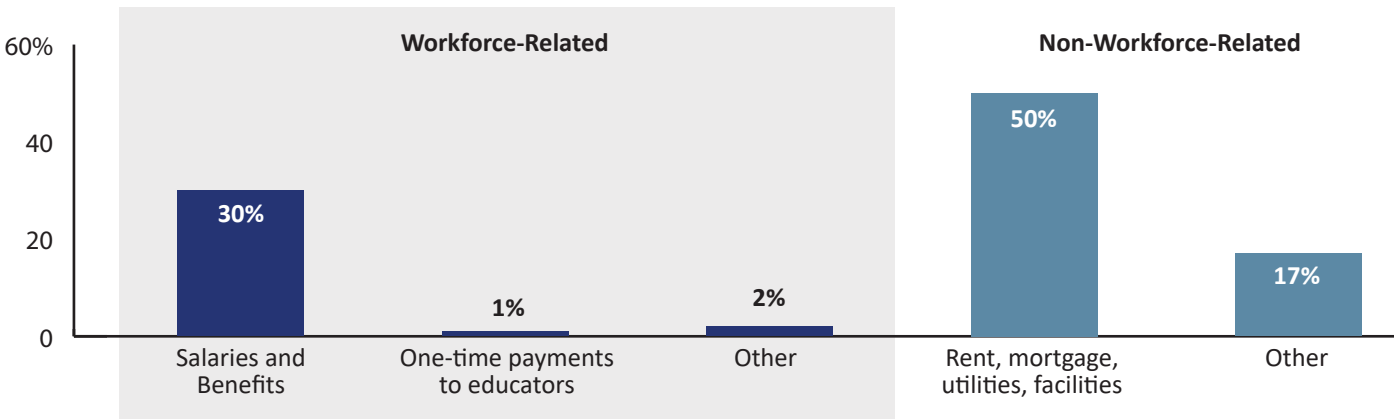


FIGURE 3: FY25 Allocation of C3 Funds by Family Child Care Providers



Center-Based Educator Wages Continue to Rise Alongside Declining Educator Turnover

Among centers, the average wages of directors and educators have increased significantly since the beginning of the C3 program in 2021 (see **Figure 4**). Still, wages across the early education and care sector remain low.

The annual educator turnover rate among center-based programs has decreased to 22% as of May 2025 from 32% three years prior. Programs most frequently reported that educators who left their positions transitioned to another sector, though some programs also reported educators leaving their positions to transition to other roles in the education sector (see **Figure 5**).

System Capacity Continues to Increase

The state's child care system continued to increase in licensed capacity over the past year, with Massachusetts adding more than 7,500 child care seats between November 2024 and November 2025. This increase was smaller than the increase during the same period in the previous year, when the state added almost 9,000 seats. The overall number of programs also grew: there were 58 more center-based programs and 388 more FCCs in November 2025 than in November 2024.

While the system has capacity to serve more children than in previous years, around one in ten centers that participate in C3 reported classroom closures as of May 2025. Approximately 700 out of 16,000 center-based classrooms were closed. Infant and toddler classroom closure rates were higher (7% for each) compared to preschool (4%) and school-age (2%) classrooms.

FIGURE 4: Average Hourly Wage for Center-Based Staff

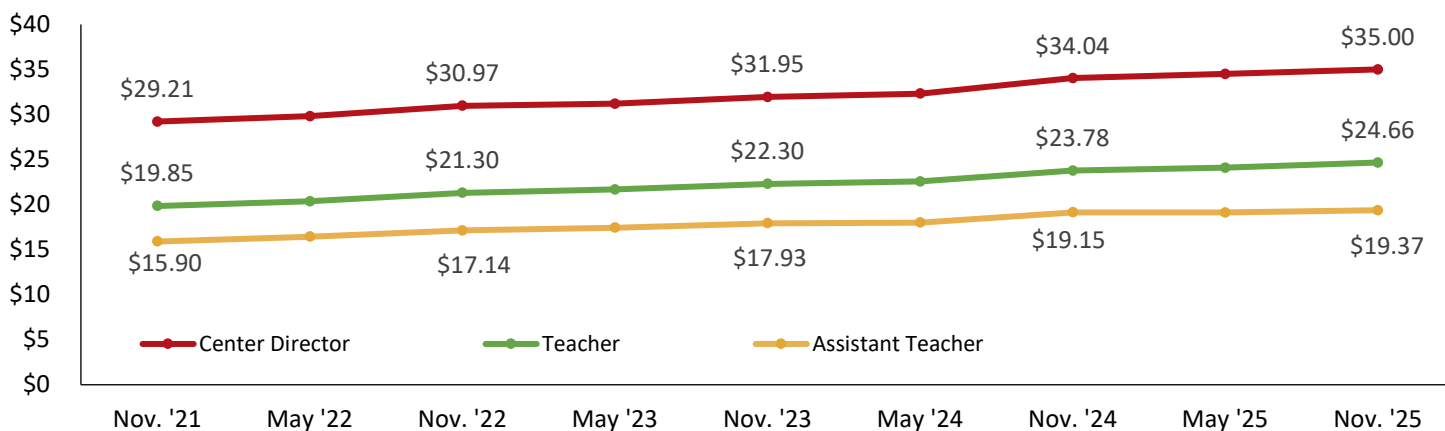
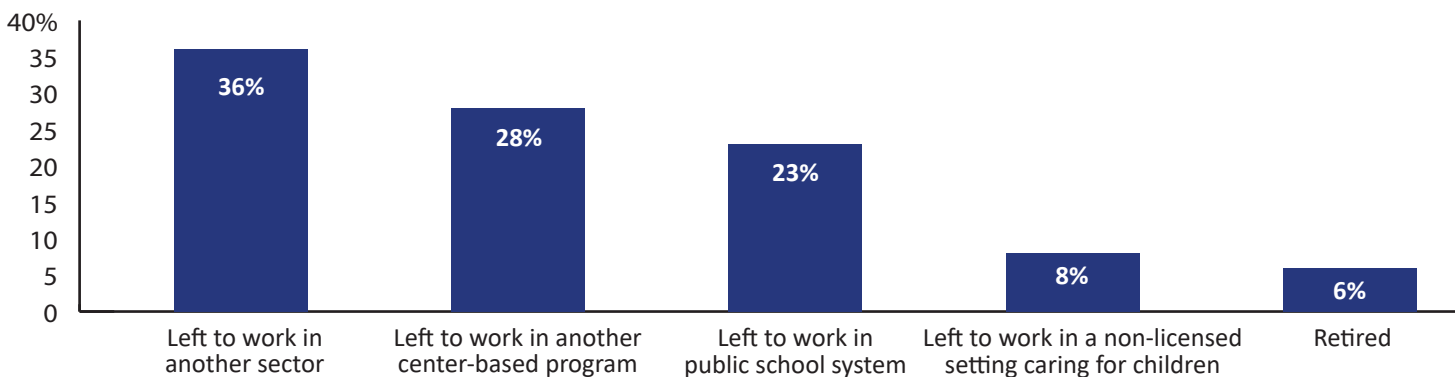


FIGURE 5: Programs' Reported Reasons for Center-Based Educator Turnover



Note: Respondents could select more than one option and could also select "Other" and "I don't know."

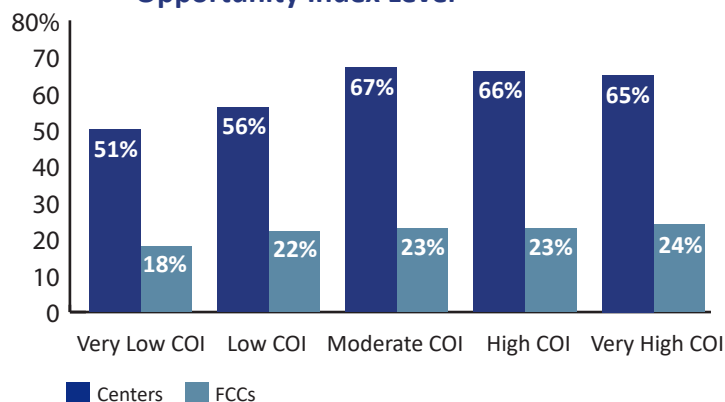
C3 Continues to Support Family Affordability

In addition to the supply and availability of care, private tuition rates are an important factor affecting families' ability to access and afford child care. More than three-quarters of programs reported that C3 funding factored into their decision-making regarding tuition increases and family access (see **Figure 6**). As a result of C3 funding, nearly half of both centers and FCCs reported delaying planned tuition increases, while around one-fourth of centers and FCCs reported reducing costs for families in some other way. A smaller proportion of centers (15%) reported providing additional program scholarships for some children and families.

About one-third of all programs reported raising tuition rates in the past year, with slightly more than half of these programs raising tuition by 5% or less.

FCCs, which generally have lower private tuition rates than centers, reported raising tuition rates less regularly — 21% of FCCs, compared to 62% of centers, raised tuition rates in the past year. About half of these FCCs raised their rates by 5% or less, while three-quarters of these centers raised their rates by 5% or less. Finally, a greater proportion of programs in communities with a higher level of resources for children (as measured by the Child Opportunity Index)² reported raising their tuition rates (see **Figure 7**).

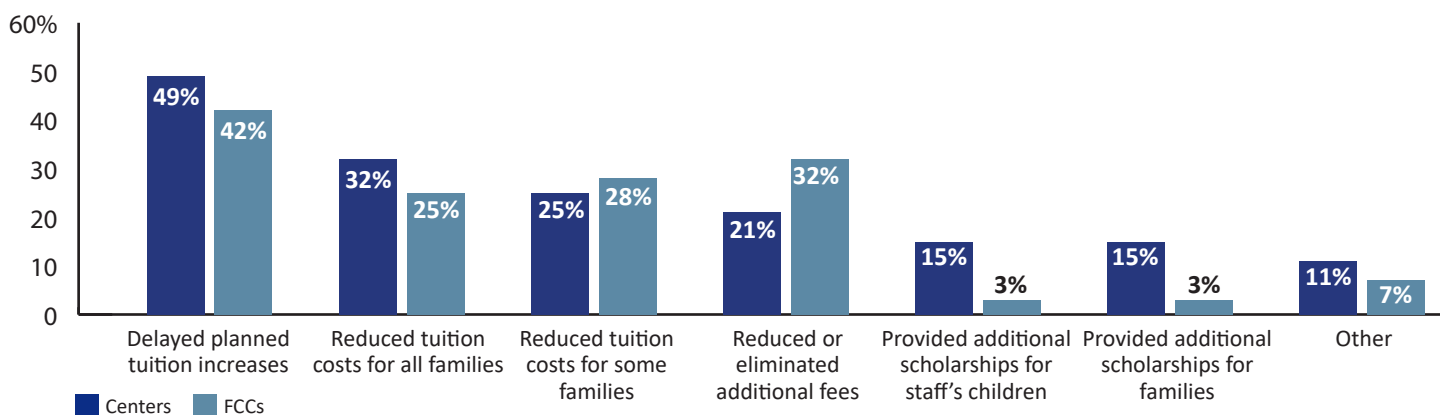
FIGURE 7: Tuition Increases by Community Child Opportunity Index Level



Looking Ahead

C3 funding continues to serve as a key lever for early education and care program and workforce stability in Massachusetts, helping the state's child care system to grow its capacity, support its educators, and promote affordability for families. Survey findings indicate that programs continue to report using C3 funding to support a range of operational priorities, including staffing and tuition decisions. At the same time, the state's capacity growth may mean increased demand for C3 resources. EEC will continue to track funding and interest in participation to identify potential opportunities to support new programs. Alongside this, EEC will continue to assess the efficacy and equity of its funding formula to inform potential adjustments and future program administration and funding decisions.

FIGURE 6: Programs' Family Affordability Supports Due to C3 Funds



²The Child Opportunity Index (COI) is an asset-based, child-centric measure of the level of resources to support the conditions that matter to a child's healthy development. See diversitydatakids.org for additional information.