



Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force Year 1 Report: Community & Executive Branch Engagement on Early Education and Child Care in Massachusetts March 2025

Dear Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll,

Access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care is foundational to so many critical elements of both the current context and future of Massachusetts. First and foremost, there is long-standing unanimity in research declaring that birth through age three are the most critical years of brain development in children. By extension, the early education and child care experience spans some of the most important years in a child's education. We also know that early education and child care has significant implications on the workforce and economic well-being of our state, as it creates the essential opportunities for parents and caregivers to participate in our workforce or pursue job training or higher education. The Massachusetts economy is strong because companies need capable talent—and talented people are in the state because of the high quality of life, including the high-quality early education and child care programs here. Moreover, every dollar invested in high-quality, birth-to-five early education yields a remarkable 13% return-on-investment in improved life outcomes, across health, income, reduced crime, success in school, and the increase in family income from caregivers returning to work.¹

For these reasons and more, the Healey-Driscoll Administration has named early education and child care one of its priorities. By virtue of Executive Order 625, Governor Healey has called on the whole of state government, tasking every secretariat in the Governor's Cabinet to collaborate on solutions to strengthen Massachusetts's early education and care sector. As secretaries of Education, Labor and Workforce Development, and Economic Development, we have the great honor of co-chairing this effort.

Since the signing of the executive order, we hit the ground *learning*. We have focused intently on:

- Establishing a standing task force with leadership representing each secretariat.
- Ensuring that leadership across state government has a working understanding of the early education and child care sector and the nature of the challenges we face in Massachusetts.
- Deepening communication and collaboration within state government, as we seek to break down silos and any barriers between secretariats and the agencies therein.
- Standing up a process to ensure that every Secretariat in the administration is working to address challenges to access and affordability of early education and child care, while safeguarding quality.

To support our collective work and whole of government approach, we have first prioritized surveying the effective efforts and solutions from other states and nations and hearing ideas and feedback directly from local experts in Massachusetts: providers, families and caregivers, educators, and other stakeholders in the early education and child care sector. In recent

¹ Heckman, James. "13% ROI Research Toolkit." *The Heckman Equation*, 2023.

months, we conducted comparative research and had more than 1,100 community engagements leading to the enclosed report.

We believe deeply that sustainable change is a process, not an event. At the same time, we are leading with urgency to deliver an affordable, accessible, and high-quality early education and child care system that supports Massachusetts's youngest learners as well as families, caregivers, workers, and employers in all regions of the state. We are the only state in the nation that has sustained child care stabilization funding via the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program at the same level the federal government did when the federal funds ended. Massachusetts is also the sixth state now approved by the federal government to move forward with using the cost of providing care when setting child care financial assistance rates. This has allowed us to better cover the cost of providing care for providers. We have made progress, but we also know that more needs to be done to help families afford care, for educators to be fairly compensated, and for providers to become more financially sustainable.

Governor Healey recently filed her Fiscal Year 2026 budget, which maintains and expands key areas across the pillars of the Gateway to Pre-k agenda, continuing progress on improving access, affordability, and sustainability of early education and child care.

With our partners and colleagues in the administration, we have embarked on these efforts to engage the community, survey state and international practices, and develop the enclosed recommendations. We look forward to tackling more work that is ahead and in collaboration with you.

Respectfully,



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Economic Development



Lauren Jones
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Patrick Tutwiler
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Executive Summary

As part of the Healey-Driscoll Administration's 'Gateway to Pre-K' agenda to make early education and child care ("EECC") accessible and affordable for all families in Massachusetts, Governor Maura Healey signed [Executive Order 625](#) that established an 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 is comprised of leadership representing each secretariat.

During the last year, the Task Force surveyed effective efforts from other states and nations and heard ideas and feedback directly from local experts through 14 listening sessions. The comparative research and feedback from community members are included in this report.

Eight key themes emerged from the Listening Sessions:

- There is a strong sense of commitment to expand and deepen system-wide solutions on EECC across Massachusetts.
- Affordability is a pressing issue for families across the state.
- Accessible early education and child care is a challenge – including availability of program seats, convenient locations and times of care for working caregivers, and access to special education services for children in community-based settings.
- Providers are struggling with high operating costs, which impact their ability to run sustainable businesses and attract talent, often operating with slim margins. State funding supports, such as C3, have been critical in stabilizing finances for providers, but programs still face high costs.
- There is an important opportunity to build the public's appreciation and respect for the critical role early educators play in the healthy development of young learners, as well as strengthen their career development opportunities.
- Expansion of universal access to preschool needs to continue through the mixed-delivery model, in order to create true equity in opportunity, maximize family choice and maintain financial stability for programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- Participants described the need to continue to reduce administrative burdens, modernize systems, and improve communication for families, programs and educators interacting with EEC.
- Mental and behavioral health support is critical for children, caregivers, and providers.

This report also sets forth 29 cross-secretariat recommendations within these five key priority areas:

- Ensure broad access and availability of EECC for families with young children.
- Support high-quality EECC programming.
- Foster sustainable business conditions for all types of programs with fewer barriers to entry.
- Make EECC affordable for all families, prioritizing those with the highest needs.
- Build a robust workforce ecosystem that supports the growth and wellbeing of educators and providers.

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Context For This Effort

In January 2024, Governor Maura Healey laid out her ‘Gateway to Pre-K’ agenda to make early education and child care (“EECC”) accessible and affordable for all families in Massachusetts. This included four core components: a) delivering universal, high-quality preschool access for four-year-olds in all Gateway Cities by the end of 2026; b) increasing child care financial assistance eligibility from 50 percent of the state median income to 85 percent and reaching more low-and moderate-income families; c) continuing the Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) program; and d) signing [Executive Order 625](#) to ensure the state “leads the nation in early education and child care access, affordability, equity, and quality,” and establishing the Inter-Agency Early Education and Child Care Task Force.

*[Early education and child care] is **central to the success of our entire state** – for affordability, education, workforce, equity, and our economic potential – and together we are taking important steps toward solutions.*

**Governor Maura Healey,
March 2024**

This agenda builds on the significant efforts the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) has been undertaking to build a more modern, flexible, and dignified EECC system, as well as the historic state increases in early education and care funding (i.e. EEC’s budget has increased from \$819 million in fiscal year 2022 to \$1.52 billion in fiscal year 2025).

The Task Force was directed to examine the current state of EECC and identify solutions to achieve this vision. The Task Force’s work is guided by four core values: Child-Centered, Innovative, Equitable, and Results-Oriented; and is committed to keeping the well-being, learning, and development of children at the heart of this effort, address long-standing inequities, and leverage the creativity of the entire executive branch to achieve transformational change for children, families, educators, and providers.

This Task Force is co-chaired by the Secretaries of Education, Labor and Workforce Development, and Economic Development, and consists of leaders from every Secretariat in the Cabinet in recognition of the impact of EECC and its relevance to critical facets of the State’s competitiveness, including educational outcomes for students and economic opportunity for families and communities. Together, the Task Force is charged with:

- Surveying practices of other states and nations regarding EECC.
- Assessing opportunities for better coordination among state agencies, including to support family access to EECC.
- Identifying resources for building sector capacity and increasing affordability.
- Identifying strategies to recruit, train, upskill, and retain EECC workers and pipeline of educators.
- Reviewing existing assets to identify potential locations to establish EECC facilities.

This report represents the first year of the Task Force’s work, highlighting input and ideas from the community (shared through Listening Sessions and responses to the public survey), some of the innovative approaches to EECC being advanced in other states and nations, the current state of EECC in Massachusetts, and recommendations for moving forward.

Task Force Community Engagement

Between July 16 and August 7, 2024, the Task Force hosted a series of 14 Listening Sessions to inform recommendations and a broader strategy for moving towards a more accessible, affordable, high-quality EECC for all families in Massachusetts.²

The sessions took place across the state, including nine in-person sessions and five virtual (one of which was led in Spanish).³ The Task Force sought to hear from parents and caregivers, EECC providers and experts, industry and business leaders, organized labor, health services, housing and planning experts, and all other interested community members. To facilitate equitable access to the sessions, live interpretation in six languages was provided.⁴ Participants could share feedback via an online survey in addition to, or in place of, attending a session.⁵ Written comments at the sessions or submitted through email were also welcomed and encouraged.

Guiding questions for community feedback were as follows:

- What are the biggest challenges you face or observe related to EECC?
- What are the biggest opportunities to ensure that high-quality EECC is accessible and affordable across the Commonwealth?
- What are the biggest opportunities to ensure enough supply of high-quality EECC in multiple formats (e.g., home-based, center-based, employer-provided, district-based)?
- What are the biggest opportunities to ensure that we have a properly certified, trained, and supported EECC workforce?
- Are there best practices from outside of Massachusetts that you believe are critical for the Task Force to consider as part of this work?
- Is there anything else that you would like the Task Force to consider?

Overall, there were more than 1,100 community engagements with the Task Force through participation in Listening Sessions and written submissions:

- **More than 750 people** attended the Listening Sessions.

² To learn more about the Listening Sessions, please see: [Mass.gov/ChildCareTaskForce](https://mass.gov/ChildCareTaskForce).

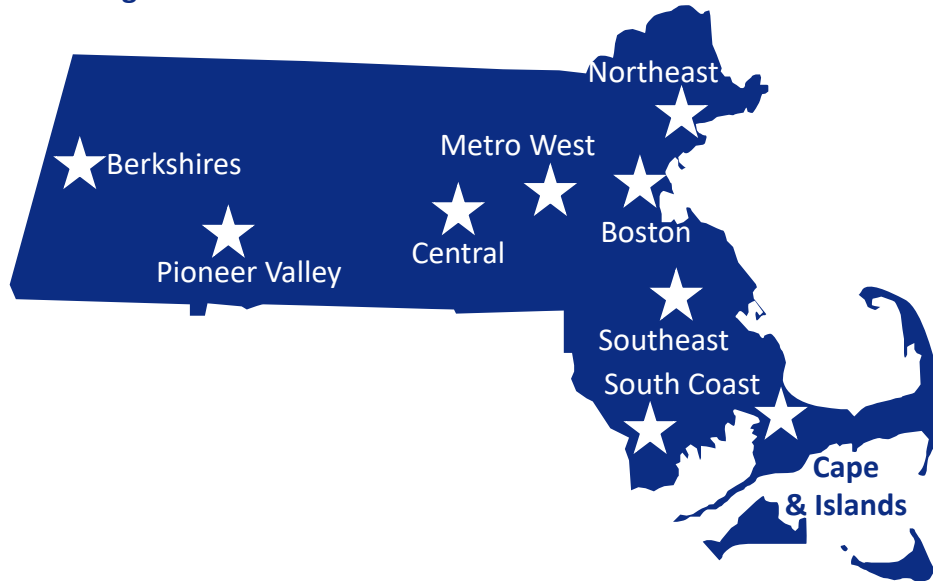
³ Berkshires, Pioneer Valley, Central, Metro West, South Coast, Cape and Islands, Southeast, Northeast, and Boston.

⁴ Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, and American Sign Language

⁵ The online survey had similar questions to those presented in the Listening Sessions. Participants were asked to identify as one or more of the following categories: Family (e.g., parent, caregiver), Child care center director, Teacher, Family child care provider, Real estate developer, Employer, Employee with non-standard hours, Veteran, Institution that educates and trains teachers (e.g., colleges), Advocacy group, Non-profit, Government, Other

- **Received more than 350 written submissions** from the survey, emails, and at in-person sessions.

Locations of Listening Sessions



The Task Force is grateful for the number of people who took time out of their personal and professional lives to share their perspectives and ideas. The Task Force learned a tremendous amount about the successes, challenges, and opportunities in EECC as relayed directly by those who participate in, or are impacted by, the sector. It was inspiring to hear about the extraordinary commitment that early educators are making every single day to support young learners and the families who rely on them. Early educators are the workforce behind the workforce. The Task Force sees you and hears you.

While the Task Force sought to include all representative populations of the state, it is likely that not all groups had the opportunity to participate. The Task Force will continue to prioritize engaging all communities in its efforts as the Task Force continues its work.

What the Task Force Heard from the Massachusetts Community

These are the key themes the Task Force heard during the Listening Sessions:

1. There is a strong sense of commitment to expand and deepen **system-wide solutions on EECC** across Massachusetts.
 - Representatives from the business community highlighted that limited access to affordable EECC is a **significant workforce and business development issue**, impacting **talent acquisition and retention** in the state. **Public-private partnerships** could support cost-sharing models for long-term sustainability.
 - **Philanthropic partners are eager and willing** to invest in new ideas and innovations to inform scalable statewide solutions.
 - **Independent pilots and initiatives are underway** to develop localized solutions to challenges (see “Community Feedback by Region” for select examples).
 - **Participants acknowledged ongoing state efforts to strengthen the EECC sector**, such as the transformative role of the C3 program, recent increases in Child Care Financial Assistance reimbursement rates to move closer to the cost of providing care, and the creation of the Task Force.
2. **Affordability is a pressing issue for families** across the state.
 - **The high cost of EECC contributes to many families living paycheck to paycheck**, described as comparable to or even surpassing mortgage or rent payments, and as having an impact on major life decisions such as whether parents—especially mothers—**choose to remain in the workforce or whether they choose to have more children at all**.
 - **Moderate and middle-income families are struggling to afford** the cost of EECC without financial assistance.
3. **Accessible early education and child care is a challenge** – including availability of program seats, convenient locations and times of care for working caregivers, and access to special education services for children in community-based settings.
 - There is an **insufficient number of early education and child care seats**, especially for infants and toddlers, and waitlists of up to 12+ months for seats at certain programs. Many families report having to travel long distances to find spots or settle for less ideal options. It is particularly challenging to find seats for children with disabilities.
 - There is a **need to improve the availability of and access to special education services through partnerships between school districts and community-based programs when children are enrolled in community-based settings**. The hours special education services are available through public settings make it difficult for parents who need

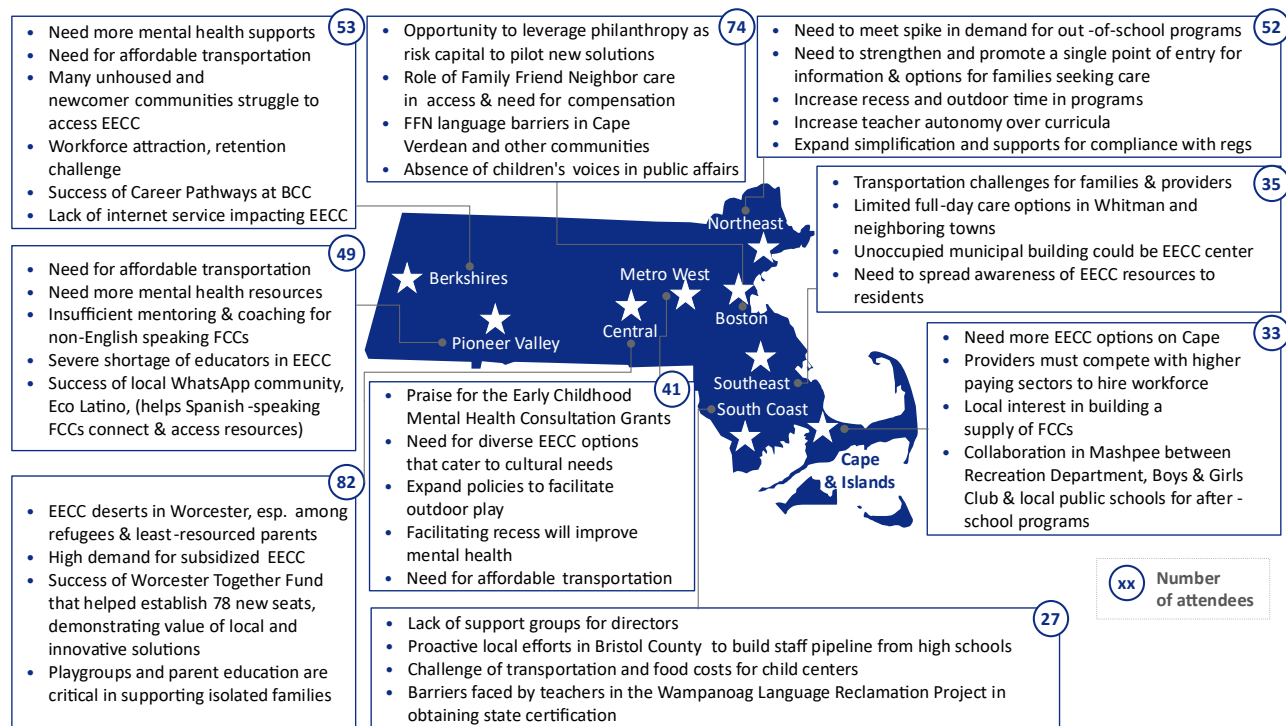
longer hours of care or cannot drive their children to and from appointments in the middle of the day.

- **There is limited availability of full-day programs and aftercare options** that align with work schedules for parents who need full-time care or those who work non-traditional hours.
 - **Limited public transportation options coupled with high commuting costs** are an access barrier, particularly among rural and low-income communities.
4. **Providers are struggling with high operating costs**, which impact their ability to run sustainable businesses and attract talent, often operating with slim margins. State funding supports, such as C3, have been critical in stabilizing finances for providers, but programs still face high costs.
- Though significantly increased in recent years, **reimbursement rates for state child care financial assistance still do not cover the full cost of providing high-quality care**, which results in providers subsidizing the cost of care for families by sacrificing in other areas, such as teacher compensation, or imposing higher tuition fees on families not participating in financial assistance.
 - **Providers find it hard to pay living wages and offer competitive benefits**, which affects the quality of care and puts them at risk for closures due to staffing shortages.
5. There is an important opportunity to **build the public's appreciation and respect for the critical role early educators play** in the healthy development of young learners, as well as **strengthen their career development opportunities**.
- **Providers cited the need for better compensation and benefits** such as health care and retirement, and other offers K-12 educators are eligible for (e.g., discounts for school supplies), in order to improve recruitment and retention of EECC educators and staff. The **economic mobility of Family, Friend and Neighbor Care** providers also needs to be improved, through better communication on these care options and greater state support.
 - Providers cited the need for increased access to **career advancement opportunities through education and training, business development and information technology support**, especially among Family Child Care Providers.
 - **Participants shared the need for a culture shift or branding** to acknowledge and elevate the value of early childhood educators to the state.
6. **Expansion of universal access to preschool** needs to continue through the **mixed-delivery model**, in order to create true equity in opportunity, maximize family choice and maintain financial stability for programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

- Providers also expressed that **“play” needs to be a central component of recognizing the value of early education and care and the expansion of universally accessible preschool, regardless of setting.**
7. Participants described the need to **continue to reduce administrative burdens, modernize systems, and improve communication for families, programs and educators interacting with EEC.**
- **There is uncertainty over where families can find information about EEC options,** particularly for non-English speaking communities that experience language barriers. **Parents also described difficulty in navigating** multiple sources of information and administrative processes for access to EEC; there is currently not a single point of entry into the system.
 - **Providers find some regulatory requirements and administrative processes to be complex and not always reflective** of running an EEC program.
 - **EEC programs providing transportation highlighted complex regulations and increased costs** that have reduced transportation capacity and revenue and highlight the need for more coordination across state agencies.
 - Providers are eager for **timely and consistent communication around public funding and policy changes.**
8. **Mental and behavioral health support is critical for children, parents and caregivers, and providers.**
- **Providers feel they do not have the resources or supports** needed to successfully serve children who have experienced trauma or who have challenging behaviors, developmental delays, and other needs, which have become more pronounced post-pandemic, impacting recruitment, retention and staff morale.
 - **Directors are experiencing burnout and significant stress,** including from juggling multiple operational and administrative responsibilities and challenges in hiring and maintaining staff.

Community Feedback by Region

While many common themes emerged during the listening sessions, specific regional challenges, opportunities, and pilots were also shared during the listening sessions:



Please see Appendix C for ideas brought to the Task Force by the community.

Surveying Other States and Countries

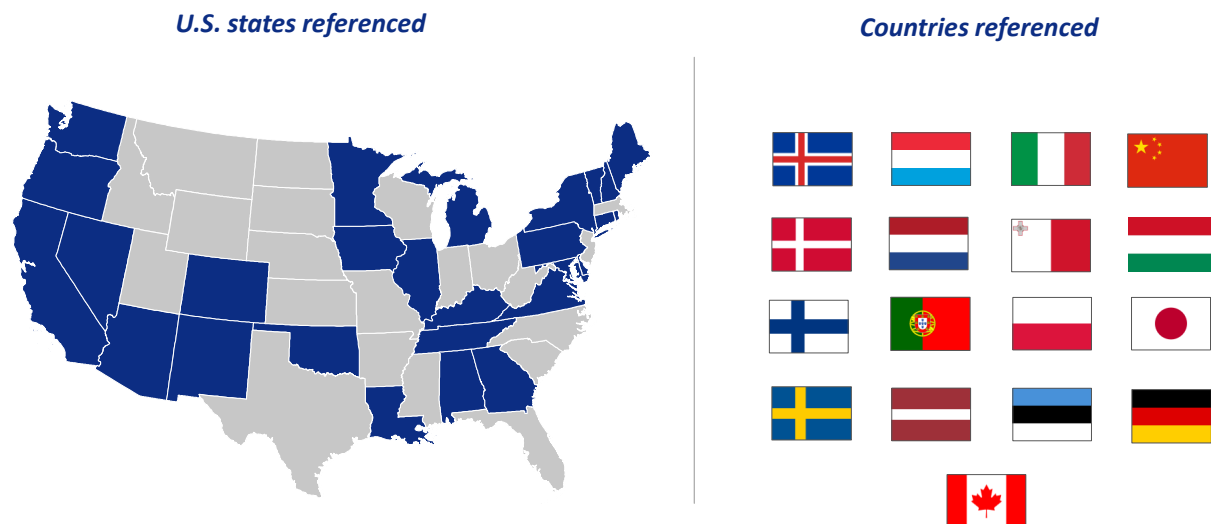
Massachusetts and the administration have been a leader in many EECC areas, including through being the first state in the nation to create a separate independent, consolidated department with a primary focus on early childhood learning and care in 2005, making the C3 program permanent, and transforming Child Care Financial Assistance rates.⁶ Building on the Legislature's Economic Review Commission report,⁷ Governor Healey's Executive Order 625 charged the Task Force with surveying practices of other states and nations in reducing costs, increasing capacity, and improving the quality of EECC that will help the state to identify new innovations and opportunities to deepen these efforts.

The Boston Consulting Group and Neighborhood Villages were contracted by the Commonwealth Corporation Foundation to support the Task Force and its work. They created a resource guide for the Administration that focused on best practices in more than half of the

⁶ The paper entitled, "[A Case Study of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care](#)" (*Strategies for Children*, April 2008) documents the creation of EEC.

⁷ Special Legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review Commission, [Final Report](#) (March 2022).

U.S. states, including neighboring New England states and states recognized for their innovations and achievements in EECC,⁸ as well as other countries that have well-known innovative approaches to EECC.⁹ The guide can be found online at Mass.gov/ChildCareTaskForce.



Healey-Driscoll Administration's Vision for EECC and Progress So Far

Motivation: The Value of Early Education and Child Care

In addition to its profound impact on children's academic and social trajectories, a high-quality EECC system is critical to economic wellbeing and competitiveness—locally and globally. When children receive quality early education, they develop the skills to succeed in school and beyond. On average, children who receive high-quality early education:

- Are 25 percent more likely to graduate from high school;¹⁰
- Are four times more likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher;¹¹

⁸ These states were examined: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, Washington, DC.

⁹ These countries were examined: Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden.

¹⁰ Schweinhart, Lawrence J., et al. "Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40." HighScope Press, 2005.

¹¹ Campbell, F.A., Pungello, E.P., Burchinal, M., Kainz, K., Pan, Y., Wasik, B. H., ...Ramey, C. T. "Adult Outcomes as a Function of an Early Childhood Educational Program: An Abecedarian Project Follow-Up." *Developmental Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0026644, January 2012.

- Earn up to 25 percent more in wages as an adult.¹²
- Experience benefits for their health, including improved cardiovascular and metabolic health.¹³

Research on outcomes for participants in Boston's universal pre-k program found positive impacts on children's language, literacy, mathematics, executive function, and emotional development outcomes.¹⁴

Caregivers (e.g., parents, guardians) also see immediate positive economic gains from investments in EECC. Research has found that families who receive financial support in order to enroll their children in EECC will improve their own earnings and increase their health and longevity.¹⁵

A high-functioning EECC system is also key to a state's economic health, directly impacting workforce participation and supporting economic activity. High-quality birth-to-five programs can deliver a 13% per year return on investment, through improved outcomes in education, employment, health, and foregone future remediation.¹⁶ The US Census Bureau and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics have found that 5.5 million caregivers report being underemployed because of child care constraints.¹⁷ One estimate for Massachusetts—specifically, of working-¹⁸—is that 30,000 are underemployed. Without a stable, thriving EECC system, individuals remain at risk of underemployment and reduced future earnings. Looking at annual spending on early education and care, recent analyses find that the United States lags far behind other countries: while average public spending by countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is .74 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—and up to 1.3 percent in some countries—the U.S. ¹⁹spends about .33 percent of its GDP on early childhood education, relying more on parents' ability to pay.²⁰

¹² Gertler, Paul, et al. "Effect of the Jamaica Early Childhood Stimulation Intervention on Labor Market Outcomes at Age 31." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, no. 29292, Sept. 2021.

¹³ Gabriella Conti, James J. Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto. "[The Effects of Two Influential Early Childhood Interventions on Health and Healthy Behaviour](#)." *The Economic Journal*, Volume 126, Issue 596, October 2016.

¹⁴ Weiland, Christina, et al. "Associations between Classroom Quality and Children's Vocabulary and Executive Function Skills in an Urban Public Prekindergarten Program." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2013, pp. 199-209.

¹⁵ Hartley, Robert Paul, et al. "A Benefit-Cost Analysis of Child Care Subsidy Expansions: The New York State Case." *Working Paper*, Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 31 Dec. 2022.

¹⁶ Heckman, James. "13% ROI Research Toolkit." *The Heckman Equation*, 2023.

¹⁷ "[This is How Much Child Care Costs in 2024](#)." *Care.com*, 17 Jan. 2024.

¹⁸ Rubin, Jerry, and Ayanna Warrington. "Addressing the Labor Shortage in Massachusetts: Engaging Untapped Talent." *Harvard Project on Workforce*, Sept. 2023.

²⁰ Davis, Elizabeth E., and Aaron Sojourner. "Increasing Federal Investment in Children's Early Care and Education to Raise Quality, Access, and Affordability." *Brookings -- The Hamilton Project*, May 2021.

Massachusetts' EEC System

The EEC sector in Massachusetts is diverse and multi-faceted, inclusive of formal licensed early education and care for children from birth to age 13, provided by educators and caregivers in a variety of settings (e.g., early education centers, family child care providers, public preschools, after- and out-of-school time programs) and with various programmatic goals. Many families also use “informal care” arrangements, sometimes called family, friend and neighbor care, which may be paid or unpaid. This report’s primary focus is on the part of the sector that educates and cares for children from birth to age five but notes that out-of-school time programs are a critical part of the system and that families of school-age children and the programs that serve them are facing many of the same challenges outlined here and that investment in these programs will also yield high returns in educational and economic outcomes.

The number of providers and programs, as well as the percent and number of children enrolled in formal care, [is available on EEC’s website](#). Meeting the demand for EEC depends on a variety of factors, including personal characteristics (e.g., age, developmental needs, and home languages), practical considerations (e.g., geographic proximity, hours and days of the program, ability to pay) and curriculum needs and preferences (e.g., culturally competent educators, preference for certain pedagogical approaches). The ability of the sector to meet this demand depends on both the total level of provider capacity, as well as the amount of specific provider offerings that exist.

While EEC licensed programs are run independently, more than 90 percent of these programs are at least partially publicly funded through EEC grants and 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 3- and 4-year-olds. While some of these programs offer seats exclusively within district public schools, many utilize the “mixed delivery system,” offering publicly funded spots at both public schools and EEC licensed community-based providers. Many of these programs also partner with EEC licensed providers and local community organizations to provide care after the traditional K-12 school day, usually at an additional expense to families.

Progress in Massachusetts

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the EEC system was fragile—with programs long struggling to balance affordability for families with providing sufficient wages for staff and investing in critical quality supports. The pandemic deeply and profoundly disrupted this precarious balance, exacerbating many of those persistent issues.

The unique challenges that arose throughout the pandemic required a collaborative response from all aspects of the early education and care field—as well as the federal, state, and local levels—leveraging innovative thinking and creative problem solving from across the country and

here in Massachusetts. Under this administration, and in partnership with the Legislature, Massachusetts has made progress on multiple fronts:

- **State investments in EECC:** Massachusetts has more than doubled EECC funding in the past five years, increasing from \$687 million in fiscal year 2020 to \$1.5 billion in fiscal year 2025. This has mainly been through state funding for C3 and increases in child care financial assistance, as well as some increases for universally accessible pre-k through CPPI.
- **EECC system stabilization and expansion:** The licensed capacity of the child care system continues to grow and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels, with the capacity to serve 45,054 more children (23% increase) as of November 2024 compared to the pandemic low in the Spring of 2021. The number of licensed programs has also increased by 24%, with 1,666 more programs in November 2024 compared to the pandemic low in the Spring of 2021.
- **Made the C3 program permanent:** Congress approved nearly \$53 billion in relief funding to stabilize the early education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, of which Massachusetts received \$687 million and created the C3 program.²¹ Massachusetts has continued this program with state dollars when the federal funding ended and made it permanent, subject to appropriation, in the fiscal year 2025 budget. C3 supports early education and care providers' 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. It has effectively helped to stabilize the state's child care system, enabling early education programs to remain open, and is supporting system-wide growth through investments in workforce, quality, and affordability.
- **Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) reforms:** EEC, through approval from the Board of Early Education and Care, in 2023 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. Also, the Board of Early Education and Care approved transformational changes to CCFA provider reimbursement rates in 2024, making significant progress on addressing long-standing inequities in rate levels by geographic region and age group of children served. Massachusetts used the cost of providing care as a metric for setting rates for the first time, one of the first six states to receive federal approval to do so. EEC in 2024 further re-procured the state's CCFA contracts with child care providers for the first time in 15 years, prioritizing subsidized seats statewide for infants and toddlers and in areas where there is more demand for seats than seats available, as well as for families with the most needs. The re-procurement also instituted consistent staffing expectations for programs and staff, set training and professional development criteria,

²¹ Smith, Linda et. al. "[COVID-19 Relief Bolstered U.S. Child Care Programs in Crisis.](#)" *Bipartisan Policy Center*, 29 Sep. 2022.

and introduced Key Performance Indicators and a collaborative approach to monitor performance, program effectiveness, and compliance with core service requirements. Through Governor Healey's FutureTech Act, EEC additionally is working to design and develop a new family portal and case management system for the CCFA programs, building a more modern, mobile-friendly, accessible, multilingual, and dignified technology system, and making it easier for providers to administer the programs.

- **Expanded universally accessible pre-k through the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI):** As a key part of Governor Healey's 'Gateway to Pre-k' agenda, EEC expanded in 15 participating CPPI districts in Spring 2024, adding 42 new preschool classrooms that represent an additional 747 seats across public schools, family child care, YMCAs, Head Start and other community-based preschool programs. EEC also awarded new CPPI grants to Chicopee, Taunton, Fitchburg, Quincy, Pittsfield, Worcester, Barnstable, Wareham, and the Gateway Regional School District to start planning how they will expand pre-k access. CPPI establishes a district-wide preschool program across classes in public and community-based EEC programs, leveling the playing field for kindergarten readiness. Through CPPI funding, participating families can enroll in a preschool classroom at no or low cost. Funding may also be used to provide full day/full year services to families who need it. CPPI further helps communities coordinate, intentionally align, and strengthen curriculum, policies, assessments, professional development and job-embedded supports for educators across settings. This program additionally promotes equitable access to special education to ensure full inclusion of children with disabilities across all settings.
- **Boosted early literacy supports for preschoolers:** Governor Healey established Literacy Launch: Reading Success from Age 3 through Grade 3 that was funded at \$20 million in the fiscal year 2025 budget. Literacy Launch is a multiyear, cross-Secretariat initiative to provide Massachusetts preschool programs, schools, educators and students with access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction through literacy materials, technical support, coaching and professional development for educators. EEC is also working to identify preschool language and literacy assessments for preschool programs to use, is creating a Preschool to Kindergarten Transition Toolkit and is assessing preschools to better understand the supports programs need.
- **State-wide investment and emphasis on improving mental health:** The administration increased EEC's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services grants from \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2023 to \$5 million in fiscal year 2024 which is used to train providers and improve program processes to promote the developmental, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being of infants and young children. Also, the administration secured \$5 million in the fiscal year 2025 budget to develop a Mental Health Framework from birth to college.

- **Established a family child care capital grant program:** EEC, in partnership with MassDevelopment, established the first dedicated family child care capital grant program in 2024 utilizing \$7.5 million from the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. Through the first pilot application process, providers could apply for up to \$25,000 to support space improvements and build program capacity, supporting family child care programs' unique capital needs as small businesses.
- **Expanded center-based Early Education and Out of School Time (EEOST) capital grants:** EEOST capital grants are financed through the state's capital budget and leverage private investments with matching funds. They are administered by EEC in partnership with the Children's Investment Fund, an affiliate of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation. The administration's FY24 - FY28 Capital Investment Plan increased these grants by \$4 million a year for 4 years to \$10 million a year. In addition, through \$7.5 million in Early Education & Care Provider Capital funding provided separately in the fiscal year 2024 budget, EEC expanded capital funding to for-profit child care centers and out-of-school time programs that served at least 50% of children who receive CCFA. In coordination with the Governor's Office of Climate Innovation and Resilience, EEC prioritized projects that focused on clean energy and decarbonization, as well as projects that include security enhancements to prevent and respond to potential threats.
- **Deepened apprenticeship opportunities:** In collaboration with EEC, EOLWD awarded more than \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2024 for 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 family child care programs. Intermediaries support workforce development pathways, including apprenticeship programs, in recruiting apprentices and connecting them to employers, as well as assisting in the administrative tasks of managing pathways and requirements for registered programs. Further, intermediaries can provide participating child care program employers with funding to cover costs for mentor stipends and wages for apprentices.

While Massachusetts has made significant progress in EECC, challenges common across states remain, including the impacts of COVID-19 and inflation. There are still too few seats to meet demand; it is estimated that only 52 percent of children in Massachusetts who are below kindergarten age are enrolled in a formal child care setting.²² EECC remains too expensive for many families, while educators are still often paid below living wages, and the financing and operating model for many programs is unsustainable.

²²Liebman, Jeffrey. "An Economic Analysis of the Child Care and Early Education Market in Massachusetts." *Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston Working Paper*, Oct. 2024.

By building on the significant progress underway and bringing additional resources, creativity, innovation and commitment from across the whole of government—and beyond—Massachusetts is well positioned to continue leading the nation in addressing the needs and maximizing the potential of the early education and care sector.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Accomplishing the Task Force’s goals and realizing the vision of high-quality EECC for all families in Massachusetts requires immediate steps, including continuation of and investment in the work already underway at EEC, as well as intermediate initiatives that can be spearheaded by other agencies across the Governor’s Secretariats. Underneath each of the goals—as rearticulated in the remainder of this section—are newly-identified programs and initiatives that the Task Force is committed to advancing.

In addition, the philanthropic community has been an essential partner in supporting the EECC sector and the Task Force looks forward to continuing to engage philanthropy in year two and beyond. The Task Force anticipates ongoing opportunities for partnership on additional research and innovative pilot programs emanating from the recommendations below.

Recommendations to ensure broad access and availability of early education and child care for families with young children

Vision

The Task Force envisions that all families are able to access the early education and care options that meets their needs, inclusive of hours, location, and program characteristics.

How we will get there

Continue existing programs and implement existing proposals

Expanding access and availability requires a focus on the fiscal sustainability of current child care businesses as well as the ability to attract new businesses. As described earlier in the report, the following initiatives support ongoing progress in building access and availability of EECC statewide:

- The Governor’s Gateway to Pre-K agenda coordinates investments across multiple programs to support expanded access for children in gateway cities, rural communities and other high need communities:
 - Expand access to CCFA for more families, especially staff working in EECC settings;
 - Maintain and refine the C3 program, which supports a stable business model, with a focus on educator compensation and other critical quality investments;

- Expand universally accessible high-quality preschool opportunities—for all children and families—within the mixed delivery system, supporting strong partnerships with local school districts through CPPI.
 - Additionally, several municipalities have taken the lead on developing local models of funding and governance to achieve free and universal preschool for their youngest residents, including Boston, Cambridge and Somerville.
- Continue capital grants for center-based and family child care programs to promote ongoing investment and improvement of new and existing facilities.

Move forward with inter-agency solutions in the near-term

Given the spirit and intent of the Interagency Task Force, it will be pursuing some near-term initiatives for the **strategic use of space** and to **improve access for families**. These are:

- The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' Office of Outdoor Recreation will work with EOE and EEC **to help connect children, families, and programs to nature and resources to support the exploration of the outdoors and natural world**, while also exploring regulatory changes to facilitate that exploration.
- The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) will explore opportunities to **create and expand capacity for child care within affordable housing projects**, including the possibility of on-site center-based and family child care in new and existing housing developments, as well as **explore housing policy changes to facilitate family child care provider operations**.
- EOHLC will **explore incentives to encourage construction projects for housing renovation and new buildings that include spaces for EECC programs**.
- EEC, in partnership with EOE and EOTSS, will **continue to build out a more robust family-facing EECC portal that prioritizes usability and facilitates access to information about EEC and specifically CCFA for eligible families**.
- EEC and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), with support from EOTSS, will **spread awareness of Family Resource Centers and provide education on existing resources for families and caregivers**.
- The Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), EOE and EEC will **explore opportunities to repurpose public physical space** (e.g., in public higher education) **to expand EECC programs**.
- The Mass Cultural Council will explore a partnership with EEC to **leverage art program resources to expand the capacity of EECC programming to include art**.

The Task Force will also be pursuing initiatives to accomplish in the longer-term. These initiatives may be more complex in nature, and thus require more time, but would similarly

have a significant positive impact on access and availability of EECC through the **strategic use of space** and to **improve access for families**. These are:

- EOHLC and EOHHS will work with municipalities to **assess the impact of local zoning and health regulations on EECC providers and explore potential improvements or options to eliminate barriers**.
- EOHHS and its agencies with EEC will **work towards integrated eligibility across CCFA and other public benefit programs, such as SNAP and MassHealth, as well as to facilitate simpler enrollment in these programs with the support of MyMassGov’s universal profile, an initiative of EOTSS**.
- EEC and EOE, with the support of EOTSS, will **enhance the public online electronic search function for child care**.

Recommendations to support high quality early education and child care programming

Vision

The Task Force envisions that EECC programs in Massachusetts will have the resources they need to provide high-quality care including experienced and qualified educators, effective implementation of strong curricula, and ongoing support for professional learning and continuous quality improvement.

How we will get there

Continue existing programs and implement existing proposals

Massachusetts’s strong licensing requirements²³ 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.

- EEC is currently undergoing a review and revision process of its licensing regulations, including to:
 - Promote quality and ongoing improvement by incorporating a greater focus on technical assistance and continuous quality improvement planning into the licensure and monitoring process;
 - Simplify regulatory standards in easy to use and accessible policies and procedures with a focus on technical assistance and collaboration with partners;

²³ Massachusetts is one of only three states to require that all licensed child care providers meet a 1:3 educator-to-child ratio for infants. See: [CLASP](#) and [ChildCare.gov](#)

- Ensure regulations are observable, measurable, and verifiable; remove ambiguities; ensure language is easy to understand and has clear, transparent expectations; and
- Clarify teacher qualification requirements and align with educator credentialing and supports.

Massachusetts also recognizes that program quality is directly tied to the knowledge, experience and skills of the EECC workforce.

- EEC is in the process of developing a new credentialing system that clarifies the expectations for educators at different levels of expertise and aligns with the quality expectations for programs.
 - This new system will include explicit support for educators at all levels—from novice to educational leader—and across settings from center-based and family child care to out-of-school time.

Further, EEC will leverage their on-going initiatives to enable programs to create conditions that support high-quality practice and ongoing continuous quality improvement:

- Regional Professional Development Centers and statewide Academy provide a robust infrastructure that includes training on the Pyramid Model, educational leadership skills and other core practices, including upcoming trainings in managing ongoing continuous quality improvement.
- The Early Childhood Support Organizations provide intensive coaching and training to educational leaders in managing and investing in the ongoing professional learning of their staff.
- The Early Childhood Mental Health Grantees 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.
 - Through funding in the fiscal year 2025 budget and a new partnership with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) Center on Trauma and Child Wellbeing, EEC is increasing investment in early educators' training in trauma-informed care.
- There is growing investment in EEC regional staff, including quality specialists and behavioral health specialists, to provide ongoing technical assistance and support to programs, including support for ongoing continuous quality improvement.
- Continue Literacy Launch and CPPI early literacy supports for preschool programs, including professional development, coaching, and technical assistance around preschool language and literacy assessments and high-quality preschool curriculums that integrate evidence-based practices in early literacy.

Finally, effective educator recruitment and retention is essential for programs to have success in advancing educator professional learning to achieve quality services. The fiscal year 2025

budget charged EEC with developing the state's first early education and care career ladder and salary recommendations, aligned with public school expectations, which are both underway.

Move forward with inter-agency solutions in the near-term

The Task Force will be pursuing near-term initiatives to improve the quality of care in existing EECC programs. These are:

- EOE and EEC, in collaboration with EOHHS and its agencies, will **identify opportunities and leverage ongoing work to improve access to mental and behavioral health supports for families enrolled in and educators employed in EECC settings.**
- EOE, EEC, and DESE will **explore and identify effective and equitable ways to ensure young children with disabilities are receiving the services for which they qualify.**

The Task Force also recommends initiatives to accomplish in the longer-term, which would further contribute to high-quality EECC offerings.

- Led by EOE and supported by EEC, DESE, and the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and in collaboration with EOHHS and its agencies, EOE will **continue to explore both strengthening the pipeline of mental and behavioral health professionals and enhancing mental and behavioral health resources to meet the needs of children in EECC.**

Recommendations to make early education and child care affordable for all families, prioritizing those with the highest needs

Vision

The Task Force envisions that all families have access to EECC options that they can afford, and that current CCFA programs are expanded to reach more families earning up to 85 percent of state median income over time.

How we will get there

Continue existing programs and implement existing proposals

The administration has made progress in making EECC more affordable:

- More families are receiving CCFA, especially staff working in EECC settings. State funding for CCFA has increased by 27% since 2022 (\$687 million in FY22 compared to \$872 million in FY25).
 - Governor Healey's Gateway to Pre-k agenda and the Legislature's commitment to child care included increasing CCFA eligibility from 50 percent of the state median income to 85 percent. This was included in the fiscal year 2025 budget that also laid the groundwork to expand eligibility for families with incomes eventually up to 125 percent. The Board of Early Education and Care will be

taking up this regulation change in 2025. Additional resources will be needed to reach more low-and-moderate-income families.

- Maintaining and refining the C3 program, with a focus on educator compensation and other critical quality investments, will be essential to advancing affordability.
 - Almost half of EECC programs receiving C3 funding reported in 2023 that C3 allowed them to delay tuition increases. One quarter reported that it allowed them to reduce tuition costs for at least some families, with 25% of family child care programs reporting they reduced tuition costs for all families. Also, 32% of family child care programs reported that C3 allowed them to eliminate or reduce additional fees.²⁴

The fiscal year 2025 budget also included \$2.5 million for a pilot program with employers that has the potential to demonstrate how employers can contribute to their employees' EECC needs by directly or indirectly reducing out-of-pocket costs. This initiative is being developed by EEC, EOLWD, and EOED, with input from the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education and the Massachusetts Business Roundtable.

Move forward with inter-agency solutions in the near-term

Affordability is a complicated issue for which collaboration across the state is important. The Task Force believes the following initiatives across agencies can be accomplished in the near-term:

- EOLWD and EOED will **engage employers, business community partners and philanthropy to improve support for working families** across all sectors of the economy, with a focus on employers with a high percentage of low-wage workers and working families.
 - For example, and in partnership with the Mass Caregiver Coalition, Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), and the Massachusetts Human Resources Division (HRD), the state will **work with employers across the state to create an employer designation signaling a “family-friendly” workplace, and/or incentives for family-friendly policies**. One such existing designation is for “Best Places for Working Parents Massachusetts” which AIM established as the Commonwealth’s chapter of the national organization of the same name. This effort may result in policies that have the impact of reducing families’ out-of-pocket costs on EECC.

The Task Force will also pursue other initiatives in the longer-term. These include the following:

- EOED and EEC, with input from the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, and employers, will **further explore**

²⁴ New Department of Early Education Data Shows Massachusetts Child Care System Has Rebounded, Now Exceeds Pre-Pandemic Capacity: <https://www.mass.gov/news/new-department-of-early-education-data-shows-massachusetts-child-care-system-has-rebounded-now-exceeds-pre-pandemic-capacity>

incentives for employers to create sponsored EECC programs and thereby expand capacity to high-quality affordable programs.

- The state will **explore options to encourage employer participation in cost deferring care options for employees** (e.g., Dependent Care Assistance Program).
- In collaboration with MassDOT, EOPSS, and municipalities, EOE and EEC will **explore opportunities to provide traffic safety measures and signage to ensure the safety of children, families, staff and educators of providers** in a manner similar to how K-12 schools are treated.

Recommendations to foster sustainable business conditions for all types of programs with fewer barriers to entry

Vision

The Task Force envisions that early education and care providers receive adequate operational funding and administrative support to maintain and grow thriving businesses and new entrants to the sector have the support they need to develop their programs.

How we will get there

Continue existing programs and implement existing proposals

Expanding access and availability requires a focus on the fiscal sustainability of current child care businesses and the ability to attract new businesses. As described earlier in the report, the following initiatives support ongoing progress in building access and availability of EECC statewide:

- The Governor's Gateway to Pre-K agenda coordinates investments across multiple programs to support expanded access for children in gateway cities, rural communities and other high need communities:
 - Expand access to CCFA for more families, especially staff working in EECC settings;
 - Maintain and refine the C3 program, which supports a stable business model, with a focus on educator compensation and other critical quality investments; and
 - Expand universally accessible high-quality preschool opportunities—for all children and families—within the mixed delivery system, supporting strong partnerships with local school districts through CPPI.
- Continue capital grants for center-based and family child care programs through ongoing investment and improvement of new and existing facilities.

Move forward with inter-agency solutions in the near-term

In addition to ongoing investments in C3, administrative and business assistance will help providers sustain their operations. The Task Force will be pursuing the following initiatives.

- Under the leadership of EOED, the state will **open The Business Front Door (a one-stop shop for all EOED programs) to for-profit EECC providers**. This includes access to programs such as small business and commercial lending, Mass Growth Capital Corp. (MGCC) microloans, small business technical assistance, and more.

The Task Force will also pursue initiatives in future years that will further strengthen support for EECC programs as small businesses. These include:

- Under the leadership of EOED, the state will **maximize and focus small business resources offered by EOED, and their agencies, to support center-based and family child care programs**, including exploring the expansion of some business development programs to non-profit EECC providers.
- The state, under the leadership of EEC, EOHLC, and EOED, will pursue **providing start-up support, including shared workspaces for aspiring family child care entrepreneurs**, to address limited space and a lack of affordable housing.
- In collaboration with EOED, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, and EOTSS, the state will extend existing efforts **to expand access to broadband to support early education and care programs** in areas of the state that are unserved and underserved by affordable, reliable high-speed internet.

Recommendations to build a robust workforce ecosystem that supports the growth and wellbeing of educators and providers

Vision

The Task Force envisions a robust workforce ecosystem where there are supported pathways to enter and meaningful growth opportunities to remain in the field, and where early education and care professionals are compensated competitively and commensurate with their skills, qualifications, and impact in educating young children.

How we will get there

Continue existing programs and implement existing proposals

EEC has been working on several initiatives to better support the EECC workforce:

- Launched a pilot in January 2023 to provide priority access to CCFA for income-eligible staff working in licensed or funded EECC programs.
 - This pilot also increased eligibility for any EECC staff from a household income of 50 percent state median income up to 85 percent. EEC's 2023 regulation changes made this program permanent. The program has reached hundreds of

educators and their families, supporting workforce retention, with many still on the waitlist for funding.

- As discussed earlier in the report, EEC is currently developing a new credentialing system to attract and retain educators, provide clear pathways to advancement, and support ongoing professional learning across the field.
 - The system aims to clearly define competency expectations to guide educators from point of entry to expert practices within the profession and is designed to provide opportunities for continuous professional development relying on both higher education and job embedded professional learning options.
 - The structure of the credentialing system is aligned to support the development of ECE apprenticeship programs and offers relevant and supportive training for career changers.
 - To facilitate the administration of the new system, EEC is procuring the IT support necessary to build a new educator portal.
 - EEC currently funds a statewide network of professional development centers as well as maintains a learning management system that makes self-paced courses broadly accessible in multiple languages, which will both support this new system.
- Working closely with all Massachusetts community colleges to develop a standardized early childhood education certificate. This sixteen-credit ECE Foundational Certificate will form the backbone of the higher education pathway for educators early in their career and is aligned to promote future degree attainment and transfer across the state for advanced degrees.
- EEC's Career Pathways Programs through all 15 Massachusetts community colleges and Urban College allows current or aspiring educators to take free courses and provides additional supports such as textbooks, mentoring, and career counseling.
- Since 2006 EEC and DHE's have been collaboratively administering the Early Childhood Educator Scholarship program. During FY24 and FY25 the agencies worked together to simplify the application process, expand eligibility, increase funding available and better promote the program.

As discussed earlier in the report, EOLWD's Division of Apprentice Standards, in partnership and collaboration with EEC, is actively developing and expanding apprenticeship programs, funding six center-based early education registered apprenticeship programs in 2024 to train and place 275 individuals.

- In addition, EEC has recently funded regional intermediaries for center-based and family child care programs to support workforce development pathways, including apprenticeship programs.
- These cross-agency approaches, supported through collaboration through the Workforce Skills Cabinet, is designed to promote sector-based training and build and strengthen

partnerships among employers and educational institutions. They focus on the alignment and support needed for a set of high-demand sectors, upskilling individuals for employment, and as a means of reinforcing and expanding the workforce.

Early Education and Care is one of the recognized Chapter 74 Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

- Comprehensive high schools and dedicated CTE schools can administer CTE programs, providing students with high quality learning experiences that enable them to see and understand their future career paths, and seeing they graduate with the skills and learning experiences that best prepare them in their field.
- DESE has expanded CTE programs, including in early education and care, adding more seats to existing programs and adding new programs.

The state also launched this academic year one of the most accessible, equitable and comprehensive free community college programs in the country for full-time and part-time students, regardless of income, which will further contribute to defraying the costs of education for current and future educators.

- This builds on the first successful year of Governor Healey's MassReconnect program, which provides free community college to students 25 and older.
- The administration also expanded MassGrant Plus, enabling Pell eligible students (~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 (~making \$85,000 - \$100,000 a year).
- EEC will continue to work with DHE to ensure new and existing efforts are responsive and aligned with the needs of the early education and child care workforce.

Move forward with inter-agency solutions in the near-term

The Task Force will be pursuing commitments to improve the compensation of the EECC workforce, as well as ways to bolster their professional development. These include:

- EEC, EOHHS, and EOED will conduct information-gathering to understand the gap in benefits for the EECC workforce and identify resources to connect them to under-accessed benefits.
 - EOHHS will **explore opportunities to expand enrollment in affordable health care among the early education and care workforce.**
 - EEC, in partnership with EOED, will conduct research regarding potential **options for access to retirement benefits** for EECC staff working in program that do not currently offer these benefits.

- EOE and EOED, in partnership with business associations, will **work with the business community to provide early education and child care staff with access to discounts**—including individual and business discounts—similar to what is available to K-12 educators, as a way to support educators and retain the workforce.
- EOLWD, and its agencies, will work to continue to **ensure the formal workforce system is responsive to the early education and care workforce**, including engaging MassHire Career Centers to support career guidance for this industry, connect jobseekers and employers through MassHire’s JobQuest platform, and promote sector-based training programs administered by Commonwealth Corporation.
- DHE, with support from EOLWD, EOE, and the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) and EEC—and in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges—will **call attention to higher education opportunities facilitated by EEC, as well as create an institutionalized pathway to such opportunities, including for veterans, and make sure MassReconnect and MassEducate support the needs of the EECC sector**.
- EOLWD, including the Division of Apprentice Standards and EEC, will explore strategies to **leverage and scale registered apprenticeship as a workforce tool to build the pipeline of educators and advance and upskill existing educators**.

The Task Force also will pursue some initiatives to tackle over the longer term.

- In addition to continuing the administration’s investments in C3, CCFA, and provider reimbursement rates, which support programs to invest in educators, Massachusetts will **identify additional opportunities to increase compensation for EECC educators**, including and not limited to salary scale guidance aligned with a new credentialing system access to affordable health and retirement benefits and reduced cost child care for EECC staff.
- EOE will **explore collaboration with municipalities to extend offerings of local discounts for K-12 educators to members of the EECC field**.
- As part of a recruitment and retention strategy to build the EECC workforce, **EOLWD in collaboration with the Commonwealth Corporation Foundation and other philanthropic partners will explore developing a stipend resource for trainees participating in state funded workforce development programs** administered by Commonwealth Corporation.

What's Next

The key themes and learnings from the listening sessions this summer, along with the review of other state and international early education and child care practices, provided critical insight and foundational knowledge for the Task Force as it developed these recommendations. In year two, the Task Force will shift toward implementing the immediate term recommendations while continuing to employ robust inter-agency collaboration to identify additional opportunities to deliver transformational change.

The administration aims to build on its dramatic investment in EECC in recent years. Governor Healey recently released her [Fiscal Year 2026 budget](#), which maintains and expands key areas across the pillars of the administration's Gateway to Pre-k agenda. In partnership with the Legislature, the Task Force intends to continue to work towards an early education and child care system that is affordable and accessible for families, that compensates and honors the educators for their important service, and helps providers create sustainable businesses that, in turn, create stability for Massachusetts's broader workforce and economy.

Appendix

Appendix A: Acknowledgements

The preparation of this report involved the collaborative efforts of both members of the Inter-Agency Task Force and subject matter experts on the early education and child care field. The Task Force members:

- Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler
- Secretary of Economic Development Yvonne Hao
- Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Lauren Jones
- Commissioner of the Department of Early Education & Care Amy Kershaw
- Governor's Office Policy & Cabinet Affairs Liaison Amanda Dew
- Executive Office of Technology Services and Security, Chief Digital Officer Devyn Paros
- Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Fiscal Policy Analyst Jake Rooney
- Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Deputy Chief of Staff Jeremiah Hay
- Department of Transportation, Chief Human Resources Officer Matthew Knosp
- Executive Office of Veterans' Services, Deputy Chief of Staff Cory Azmon
- Executive Office of Public Safety & Homeland Security, Deputy Director of Human Resources Monica Munoz-Perkins
- Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation Paul Jahnige
- Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, Associate Director of Housing Stabilization Alvina Brevard
- The Task Force is coordinated by Undersecretary & Chief Operating Officer Mark Reilly of the Executive Office of Education with project management, data analysis, and benchmarking support from Boston Consulting Group and Neighborhood Villages.

The Task Force appreciates the Listening Sessions hosts: Berkshire Community College; Bristol Community College; Bunker Hill Community College; Massasoit Community College; MassBay Community College; North Shore Community College; Springfield Technical Community College; Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical High School; and Worcester State University.

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Appendix B: Listening Section Details

| Session | Date | Time (PM) | Region | Location |
|---------|------|------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 7/16 | 1-3 | Northeast | North Shore Community College - Lynn Campus |
| 2 | 7/17 | 6-8 | Virtual | |
| 3 | 7/18 | 1-3 | Cape and Islands | Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical High School |
| 4 | 7/20 | 10-12 | Virtual (Weekend) | |
| 5 | 7/22 | 7-9 | Virtual | |
| 6 | 7/23 | 12:30-2:30 | Southeast | Massasoit Community College - Brockton Campus |
| 7 | 7/24 | 12:30-2:30 | Metro West | MassBay Community College - Framingham Campus |
| 8 | 7/25 | 7-9 | Virtual, Spanish Led | |
| 9 | 7/29 | 6-8 | Virtual | |
| 10 | 7/30 | 1-3 | Central | Worcester State University |
| 11 | 7/31 | 12:30-2:30 | Berkshires | Berkshire Community College |
| 12 | 8/5 | 10-12 | Pioneer Valley | Springfield Technical Community College |
| 13 | 8/6 | 10-12 | Boston | Bunker Hill Community College - Charlestown Campus |
| 14 | 8/7 | 1-3 | South Coast | Bristol Community College |

Appendix C: Community Ideas

Community members also shared during the community engagement portion of the Task Force efforts their ideas about how the state could potentially address the current challenges and build on where the system is working well:

Access and
availability

Quality

Affordability

Sustainable
business
conditions

Workforce

Support programs like C3 for consistent funding, which impacts all areas

Further simplify application process for EECC financial assistance
Foster public-private partnerships to create innovative solutions and expand capacity
Conduct targeted outreach to more families and communities of color

Explore funding and support for unique approaches to **maintain innovation and quality**
Examine integration of EECC with other services like health care, mental health, and social services

Reach more families, including **moderate/middle income families** through financial assistance
Explore additional financial assistance or grants for out-of-school time, including summer care

Assess financial/administrative barriers for providers, particularly small and medium-sized businesses and nonprofits
Explore tax benefits for EECC provider options
Explore a centralized state resource for FFN care in multiple languages

See EECC educators more **comparable to K-12 educators**, including wages/benefits
Examine strategies to **bring back experienced educators**
Explore ways to expand and strengthen **early childhood mental health consultant and clinician services**

Appendix D: Glossary of Key Terms

| Term | Definition/Description/common usage |
|--|---|
| Early education and child care (EECC) | The sector/system involved in the education and care of young children |
| Seat | Placement for a child in an EECC program |
| CCFA (child care financial assistance) | Financial assistance provided to families to help cover the costs of licensed family or center-based child care. Eligibility is available online at Mass.gov/CCFA |
| Low-income | Descriptor of financial status of a community or family with insufficient or minimal resources to meet needs |
| Provider | The organization, company, or individual that sponsors or runs an EECC program. |
| Program | A unique location delivering EECC (many providers offer only one program; however, EEC counts individual programs of “umbrella providers”—those with multiple sites—separately) |
| Caregiver | The custodial/guardian adult raising a child. |
| Educator | Inclusive of all EECC program staff that have an instructional role, including teachers, directors, coaches, etc. |
| Preschool | Programs for children 2 years and 9 months old until kindergarten; typically serving 3- and 4-year-olds |
| Pre-K | Programs serving children the year before they enter Kindergarten; typically 4-year-olds |
| Cost to provide care | The sum of all the expenses borne by a provider in order to serve a child |
| Price/tuition | The out-of-pocket fee families pay for EECC |
| Credential | Workforce qualification required for a given level of employment |
| Wraparound | In the context of EECC, the services that are not directly related to the provision of care in the classroom, but which support children’s healthy development (e.g., mental health supports, food, transportation) |
| Family supports | Any resources/supports given directly to parents/families, which indirectly support their access to care (e.g., child tax credits, PFML) |
| EECC sector, ecosystem | The area of the economy associated with the provision of EECC, comprised of providers and the workforce |
| EECC system | The interconnected collection of providers, state agencies, families, children, and all other parties involved in provision or receipt of EECC and EECC |

| Term | Definition/Description/common usage |
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| | supports |
| Informal care | Non-parental child care, both paid and unpaid, provided by friends, families, neighbors, and others outside of the licensed and licensed exempt sector |
| Formal care | Licensed child care overseen by some administrative body, in MA, usually the EEC, and encompassing center-based care for group and school-aged (GSA), Family Child Care (FCC), and funded programs |
| FFN (family, friend, and neighbor) care | FFN care is non-parental care provided inside or outside a child's home through an arrangement the caregiver has made with a family, friend, or neighbor. FFN may be paid or unpaid. Some FFN providers receive reimbursement from MA for their care, at a different rate from that of licensed providers. FFN care is, by definition, not licensed care |
| Center-Based Care (CBC) | One of the main forms of licensed child care in MA, center-based care takes place outside of the home for children grouped by age, 0-13. Classrooms are typically grouped as follows: infant, toddler, preschool, and school-aged. Center-based care can be licensed for a minimum of 6 children and has no maximum (some programs serve over 100 children) |
| Family Child Care (FCC) | Family Child Care programs are programs where a child care provider cares for children within their own home. In Massachusetts FCC programs can be licensed for 6, 8 or 10 children. |
| Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) | Direct-to-provider operations grants program that was initially funded with federal dollars in 2021 through ARPA, and which Massachusetts has made permanent and now funds with state dollars. EEC licensed and licensed exempt programs are eligible and receive grants monthly, based on their capacity, size of staff, and the population of children served. |
| Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) | A competitive grant program overseen by EEC that funds Massachusetts municipalities to develop partnerships between school districts and local early education and child care programs to expand access to high quality preschool within the district. The objective is to provide 3 and 4-year-olds in a district with equitable access to high quality preschool, while ensuring families have multiple provider options to choose from across public and community-based classrooms. |
| Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) ²⁵ | "Universal pre-k" ensures any family who wants to enroll their preschool-aged child in a publicly-funded, pre-kindergarten care and education program has the opportunity to make that choice. Such programs provide early education the year before children enter kindergarten, while some also serve three-year-olds. There are a variety of funding mechanisms—federal, state, |

²⁵ Early Childhood Success. "[What is Universal Pre-K?](#)" *The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading*, Early Childhood Success, 2023.

| Term | Definition/Description/common usage |
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| | and local—that support universal pre-k. Unlike in the traditional public education systems in most states, many states allow programs outside the public school system (e.g., CBC and faith-based child care centers) to participate in Universal Pre-K as community-based providers. |
| Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) | QRIS, also known as quality improvement systems, assign ratings and support improvements to child care programs. EEC developed the Massachusetts QRIS in 2011 to improve the quality of EEC programs in the state. The system was paused due to the pandemic to allow programs to focus on health and safety practices. EEC has not resumed QRIS as it develops a new overall quality improvement framework. |
| After-School and Out of School Time (ASOST) | Programs designed for the education and care of school-aged children during the hours during which public schools are not formally in session. ASOST programs may be provided by EEC providers who also care for children 0-5, by organizations dedicated to ASOST, or by other providers and is inclusive of before-school, after-school, vacation and summer programming hours beyond school time. |
| K-12 | Public Schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade |
| EEC: Department of Early Education and Care ²⁶ | EEC is part of the Executive Office of Education and also governed by the Board of Early Education and Care that sets policies and regulations related to early education and child care programs and services in Massachusetts. EEC includes formal programs for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children during out-of-school time; group homes; foster care and adoption placement agencies; and residential schools for children with disabilities; as well as programs in informal settings such as home visiting, and community-based family engagement networks. EEC also provides technical assistance to licensed programs and assists programs in advancing to higher levels of quality through a system of standards and support. |
| EOE: Executive Office of Education ²⁷ | The Executive Office of Education works with the Department of Early Education and Care, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (K-12), Department of Higher Education, Children’s Trust, and the state’s 29 public colleges and universities to connect programs and policies across the entire public education system. |
| EOLWD: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce | EOLWD supports Massachusetts jobseekers, workers, and employers to cultivate a skilled workforce for a range of industries throughout Massachusetts; supports economic stability for impacted workers following a job loss, injury, or illness; and protects the rights, health, safety, wages, and |

²⁶ Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. "[About the Department of Early Education and Care \(EEC\)](#)." *Mass.gov*, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, 2024.

²⁷ Executive Office of Education. "[Executive Office of Education](#)." *Mass.gov*, Executive Office of Education, 2024.

| Term | Definition/Description/common usage |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Development ²⁸ | working conditions of workers. |

²⁸ Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. "[Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development](#)." *Mass.gov*, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2024.

Appendix E: Core State Agencies Involved in Early Education and Child Care in Massachusetts

The state's role in supporting child care in Massachusetts is primarily played by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), in close cooperation with the other departments under the Executive Office of Education, which include the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and Higher Education (DHE). Each of the Departments under the Education Secretariat supports the early education and care system in various ways. Specifically, DESE is responsible for early childhood special education for children aged three and older (IDEA Part B), in addition to preschool programs that are part of public PreK-12 school systems. In addition to the Education Secretariat, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services plays an important role, including its Department of Public Health, which is responsible for early intervention for children aged birth to three (IDEA Part C). Further, the system is intersectional, including additional considerations for workforce, social services, and small business support, which are responsibilities shared across several Commonwealth departments and secretariats external to education.

| State Office | Role in Massachusetts Early Education and Child Care |
|---|---|
| Executive Office of Education (EOE) | Includes Department of Early Education and Care, Children's Trust, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Department of Higher Education. |
| Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) | EEC oversees licensing for early care programs and educators, spearheads creation of early care and education policy, and administers key programs including financial assistance for families and programs and professional development for employees in the early care field. |
| Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) | DESE oversees the public K-12 school system in the Commonwealth. Specific to early education, DESE oversees the licensing and standards for public school districts with public pre-kindergarten programs and is responsible for special education services for children ages 3 and older (IDEA Part B). Major programs include administering Chapter 70 funding to public K-12 school districts and services falling under Part B. |
| Department of Higher Education (DHE) | DHE oversees institutes of higher education in Massachusetts, and offers training, advanced degrees, and credentials for early education teachers, as well as the Early Childhood Educators (ECE) Scholarship to assist current educators or providers in obtaining a degree. |

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| Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) | EOHHS provides wraparound supports to increase accessibility to early education and care for families, such as the Get Child Care and Transportation Help program, as well as early Intervention services for children 0-3. The Department of Transportation and Department of Children and Families works closely with EEC to design and administer CCFA subsidies. |
| Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) | DTA serves low-income residents of the Commonwealth with various economic assistance, including referrals to early education and child care. Parents or other caregivers receiving TAFDC for themselves and parents receiving SSI receiving TAFDC for children are eligible for free child care as long as they meet certain eligibility requirements. Eligible families referred by DTA to EEC's CCFA do not have to go on the waitlist and do not have to pay a fee for early education and care. |
| Department of Children and Families (DCF) | DCF works in partnership with families and communities to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. Families with an active case with DCF may receive a referral to EEC for CCFA and do not have to be on the waitlist. |
| Department of Public Health (DPH) | DPH houses the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition, whose Early Intervention Division is responsible for Massachusetts Early Intervention (EI) -- a program for infants and toddlers (birth to 3 years old) who have developmental delays or are at risk of a developmental delay. |
| Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) | EOED offers programs to support provider sustainability, including navigation to grant programs existing in the Commonwealth for small businesses (e.g., MGCC's Biz-M-Power Matching Grant Program, Real Estate Enhancement Financing Program, Underutilized Properties Program in the Community One Stop for Growth, advising through Mass Small Business Development Center and more). |
| Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) | EOLWD administers paid family leave (through the Department of Family and Medical Leave) and workforce training programs for early care and education professionals (e.g., Education Registered Apprenticeship Programs, Workforce Training Fund Programs). |

Other agencies are also involved in the early education and child care ecosystem, by providing wraparound supports like free or subsidized public transportation (e.g., Transportation), or small business support (e.g., Mass Development).